ANDROMEDA

The Greco-Roman Andromeda

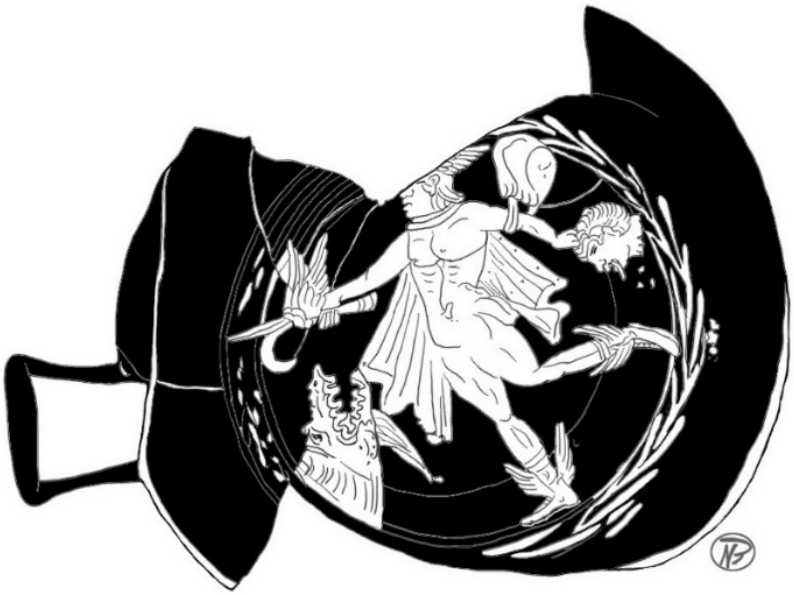
Perseus' life and his actions were linked to three women, who all had one trait in common-all of them were beautiful, a fact for which they had to pay an extraordinary price. The hero's mother, Danae, becomes a refugee simply because she appeals to Zeus. Andromeda was supposed to die because of her mother's boasting about her own beauty or that of her daughter. In Greek art, the story of Andromeda appears in the 6th century BC, later than the depictions of Perseus and Medusa but before the scenes with Danae.[1] Visual artists initially experimented – on the oldest representation, where all the characters are named, we find a scene for which we have no analogies (**112**). On the right, we see Andromeda with her hands in an unnatural position, probably still tied. On the left Perseus fights the monster; the waves between them indicate that the monster is attacking from the water. Perseus has a winged boot and, on his hand, hangs a kibisis with the head of Medusa; however, he fights the sea monster with stones, which are heaped at his feet. Perseus had the most destructive weapon of all time, the head of Medusa – why then does he waste his time here by fighting in this primitive fashion?

112. Perseus fights the dragon. Corinthian amphora, around 560 BC.

The oldest evidence that Perseus used the head of Medusa to kill the dragon is on the Etruscan vase painting of the 4th century BC (**113**). Perseus strikes the dragon with a harpe in his right hand. In his left hand, he holds the head of the Medusa, which he has taken out of the kibisis. However, this depiction lacks logic. If Perseus killed the monster with the head of the Medusa, why does he attack it with a harpe? Ovid in his Metamorphoses describes Perseus' long and arduous fight with the sea

[1] Kyle M. Philips Jr., "Perseus and Andromeda," *American Journal of Archaeology* 72 (1968): 1–23; Konrad Schauenburg, "Andromeda I," in *Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae, I/1* (Zürich: Artemis, 1981), 774–790.

dragon. Perseus fights with the harpe the whole time, but Medusa's head is obviously in his hand during the fight. Ovid's account of what immediately followed the struggle is quite clear. The hero goes to wash his bloody hands, but before he can he has to lay down the head of Medusa.[2] The ancient Greeks and Romans continually surprise modern man with their almost complete lack of interest in the technical aspect of the mythical actions that eminently interest us. [3] Therefore, the ancient scenes and literary descriptions of the rescue of Andromeda must not be taken literally as an illustration of real action. Just as in the case of the triumphant Perseus with the head of Medusa, it is above all the evocation of a mythical situation and the celebration of a hero.



113. Perseus fights the dragon. Etruscan cup, 4th century BC.

In literature, Perseus and Andromeda appear later than in the visual arts; the earliest documents are from the 5th century BC. Sophocles, Euripides and Aristophanes wrote theatre plays inspired by the myth of Andromeda, none of which have survived.[4] From a fragment of Sophocles' play, we learn of a vital circumstance: Andromeda's mother, Cassiopeia, boasted that she was more beautiful than the daughters of the marine god Nereus. Therefore, the sea god Poseidon punished Cassiopeia's city by sending a terrible sea dragon there. [5] Scholars associated Sophocles' Andromeda with a series of scenes that appeared in the Athenian vase painting at the time of its premiere, which was around the middle of the 5th century BC. In these depictions, Andromeda is in Oriental dress with trousers, and servants

[2] Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 4, 740–743.
[3] In classical antiquity, for instance, no one was interested in what the dragons in many myths looked like, cf. Daniel Ogden, *Drakōn: Dragon Myth and Serpent Cult in Greek and Roman Worlds* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).
[4] Rainer Klimek-Winter, *Andromedatragödien. Sophocles, Euripides, Livius Andronikos, Ennius, Accius. Text,* Einleitung und Kommentar (Stuttgart: Vieweg und Teubner, 1993).
[5] (Eratosthenes), *Catasterismi*, 16, 36.

are sometimes depicted as Africans as indicated by their physiognomic features. Andromeda has theatrically stretched hands, which are tied to two poles planted in the ground while Perseus looks on from a distance. We know very little about Sophocles' play, including whether it was a tragedy or comedy. There are only two things that link this theatrical play to the vase paintings. The first is that the image type of Andromeda with her hands tied to poles appears without any precursors and in already-completed form. The second is that the figure with the unnaturally raised and stretched arms attached to the poles would have looked magnificent on the stage and may have been created for this very reason. However, it may not have been Sophocles' play that provided the stimulus for creating this pictorial type; it could have been some other dramatic or literary work that is now lost.[6]

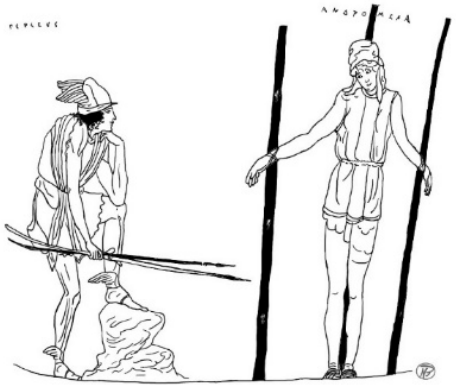
The scene with poles is shown in the Athenian vase painting from about 440 BC (**114**). In the centre, we see Andromeda in oriental dress supported by servants; on the right, other servants are preparing the poles to which they will fasten the princess. On the far right, Cepheus sits on the rocks, and Perseus stands behind him. On the left we see servants carrying various objects; the first one carries a stool and holds a belt in his outstretched hand, the second holds a mirror in one hand, and the third holds another typically feminine item – an exaleiptron, which was a vase for perfumed ointments or liquids. The third one in his left hand carries an alabastron, which is another typical female ceramic object also used for aromatic oils, and in his right hand he holds a toilet casket. The slaves ceremonially bring in Andromeda's dowry. In this case, it has become funeral equipment, as this was the custom in ancient Greece at funerals of unmarried women.

114. The chaining of Andromeda. Athenian hydria (detail), around 440 BC.

On a vase in Basel from the mid-5th century BC, Perseus is leaning forward, with one hand resting on his leg, which is stretched forward and bent at the knee. He has the harpe in his hand and the winged cap on his head and is, therefore, invisible

[6] Oliver Taplin, *Pots and Plays: Interactions between Tragedy and Greek Vase Painting of the Fourth Century* (Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum, 2007), 175.

(**115**). Andromeda's hands are fastened to poles, but she turns her head to the hero as though she suspects his presence. On the left is Cepheus, with an Oriental turban on his head. The king leans on a walking stick, which is the counterpart of his daughter's poles. He hides his face with his right arm as if to show that he does not want to see his daughter's tragic end. In this, he is the very opposite of Perseus, who cannot take his eyes off Andromeda. In vase paintings, Perseus' emotions are indicated by his staring at the princess, during which he assumes a static pose (**116**). Andromeda's beauty has done what Medusa could not achieve.



115. Chained Andromeda. Athenian calyx krater, 475–425 BC.
116. Perseus and chained Andromeda. Athenian white lekythos, 450–445 BC.

117. Chained Andromeda. Lucanian bell krater, beginning of the 4th century BC (fragment).
118. Naked Andromeda. Campanian hydria, 340–330 BC.

Around 400 BC, Greek artists began to represent not only Andromeda's face but also her naked body. We observe a similar change in other mythological themes, as Danae also begins to undress in the scenes with the golden rain. Andromeda's exposure was not necessarily voluntary, as evidenced by the scene on the fragment of the vase from the beginning of 4th century BC (**117**). Andromeda is trying to hide her impending nudity – as she has her hands tied to the poles, she must use her teeth to hold the rim of her dress, which is slipping from her shoulder. The maid holds a flat box with a tainiai, a ribbon with which she decorates the pole. Tainia was used in funeral rites, and Andromeda's pole is thus likened to a gravestone. In the 4th century BC, the first vase paintings were created, on which Andromeda, who is

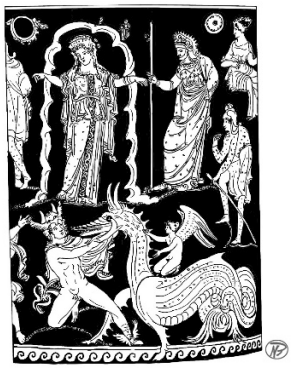
characterised by her physiognomy as a black woman, is completely naked (**118**). The princess is wearing only her jewellery, a wreath on her head, a necklace, an amulet hanging over her shoulder, and a bracelet on her hands and leg. The funeral context is emphasised by the tainiai in the background. The stone tombstone with sacrificial offerings, which we see on the left, indicates Andromeda's tragic fate.

In 412 BC, Andromeda first appeared bound to the rock with her arms outstretched. We know the precise date because in that year Euripides' play Andromeda premiered, which we know only from fragments. The audience was greatly impressed by its innovations. One year after the premiere, Aristophanes produced a parody of this theatre play. In the following centuries, Euripides' Andromeda was very popular. At his last banquet, Alexander the Great recited from memory entire passages from this play.[7] Lucian recorded the history of the crowd's madness that seized the city of Abdera at the beginning of the 3rd century BC after seeing a performance in which the famous actor Archelaos played Andromeda.[8] The beginning of Euripides' play was spectacular; he dropped the traditional prologue and showed the audience an imposing scene – Andromeda laments over her fate while fastened to the rock, which plays a significant role in the play. The rock creates a striking acoustic effect, which highlights the loneliness of the place. Euripides used the echo of Andromeda's words, which resounds from the depths of the cave before which she is chained. In the cave, the nymph Echo repeats every one of Andromeda's words.[9] Another innovation by Euripides was the role of Eros, who dominated the play. Perseus commented on his situation in a monologue that began with the following words: "Eros, the mighty ruler of gods and people."[10] Perseus asked Eros to inspire his passion for Andromeda and thus give him the strength to overcome the sea dragon.

We may link several vase paintings of Andromeda chained to the rock with Euripides' Andromeda (**119).** The rock indicates the wave lines behind which vegetation protrudes. The princess' non-Greek origins are indicated by her embroidered Oriental clothing and a tiara. Aphrodite crowns Perseus, a clear sign that he already loves Andromeda. The counterpart of Aphrodite is Perseus' divine protector Hermes, whom we see to the left of Andromeda. This painting from the beginning of the 4th century BC is the last depiction of the liberation of Andromeda in Athenian art; all other representations come from southern Italy, where the theme was common in the 4th century BC. On one of these representations, Andromeda wears a richly decorated garment and tiara, which characterise her as a bride (**120**). Next to her is her father, King Cepheus; below Perseus attacks the sea dragon. Eros sits on the dragon, probably instructing Perseus to kill the dragon by striking its eye with the harpe, which he does. Perseus has winged boots and a winged cap in the form of a fantastic bird head. In the 4th century BC, Cassiopeia, who caused Andromeda's tragedy, accompanies Cepheus.[11] On some vase paintings, she sits on a

[7] Athenaeus, 12, 53.
[8] Lucian, *How to write history*, 1.
[9] Euripides, fr. 118 TrGf.
[10] Euripides, fr. 136 TrGF.
[11] Jean-Charles Balty, "Kassiepeia," in *Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae,* VIII/1 (Zürich : Artemis, 1997), 666–670.

throne. On one Apulian vase, we find Andromeda sitting on the throne with stretched arms, which are tied to it, and Perseus standing next to her (**121**).


119 (left). Andromeda chained to a rock. Athenian calyx krater (detail), 400–390 BC.
120 (middle). Perseus fights the dragon. Apulian loutrophporos, 350–340 BC.
121 (right). Andromeda on a throne. Apulian oinochoe, 325–340 BC.

The popularity of Euripides' Andromeda apparently contributed to the popularity of Andromeda in Roman art, in which we find her bound to the rock, which in the Roman literary tradition appeared for the first time in Ovid's Metamorphoses. The poet looked at Andromeda with Perseus' eyes. The flying hero saw the poor girl below him with her arms clutched to the hard rocks with sharp edges, and instantly fell in love with her.[12] There are several versions of this scene in Pompeian wall paintings that were created before 79 AD; the background is always a rock cliff. Perseus either flies to the sea dragon with Medusa's head in hand,[13] or he fights him in the water.[14]

The highest-quality painting is, without doubt, a wall painting from a villa in Boscotrecase, which belonged to a member of the imperial family (**122**). The image follows Ovid's version closely. In the middle, we see Andromeda tied with her hands spread over the rock. Perseus arrives from the left, and his raised hand indicates that the beauty of the princess has struck him. He has fallen in love with her immediately; firstly, however, he goes to see her parents. At the top right, we see the meeting between Perseus and Andromeda's parents in front of the royal palace. Below is the sea with the monster opening its terrible maw.

Perseus, flying with the head of Medusa in hand, was also used as a magical symbol. On the gem of the imperial epoch with this pictorial type, the inscription reads: "Get out of here, Podagra, Perseus goes after you."[15] The owner of the gem blamed a demon for his disease; just as Perseus overcame the Medusa, the ring with this magical stone was intended to overcome the illness. In ancient Greece and Rome, the permanent relevance of myths was thanks to their pragmatic function; they differed from all other forms of narrative in their functionality. Myths were never narrations used to fill the silence of a moment, but always a strong argument for

[12] Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 4, 672.
[13] Pompeii IX 7, 16 (a).
[14] Naples, Archaeological Museum, 9477.
[15] Petersburg, Hermitage museum, 1517.

something or against something.[16] The selection of mythological themes depicted in Greek and Roman art was always directly related to what was most topical at that time, which we can demonstrate using the myth of Andromeda.

122. Perseus liberates Andromeda. Roman wall painting from the villa in Boscotrecase, 21 BC.

The Apulian vase from about 330 BC belongs to a small, temporally and spatially limited group of Greek vases and shows the reconciliation of Andromeda and Cassiopeia (**123**).[17] The princess with a tiara on her head sits on a throne, and her mother kneels at her feet. Andromeda has forgiven Cassiopeia for offering her to the

[16] Claude Calame, *Greek Mythology: Poetics, Pragmatics and Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ Press, 2009).
[17] Taplin, *Pots and Plays*, 176, 181–183.

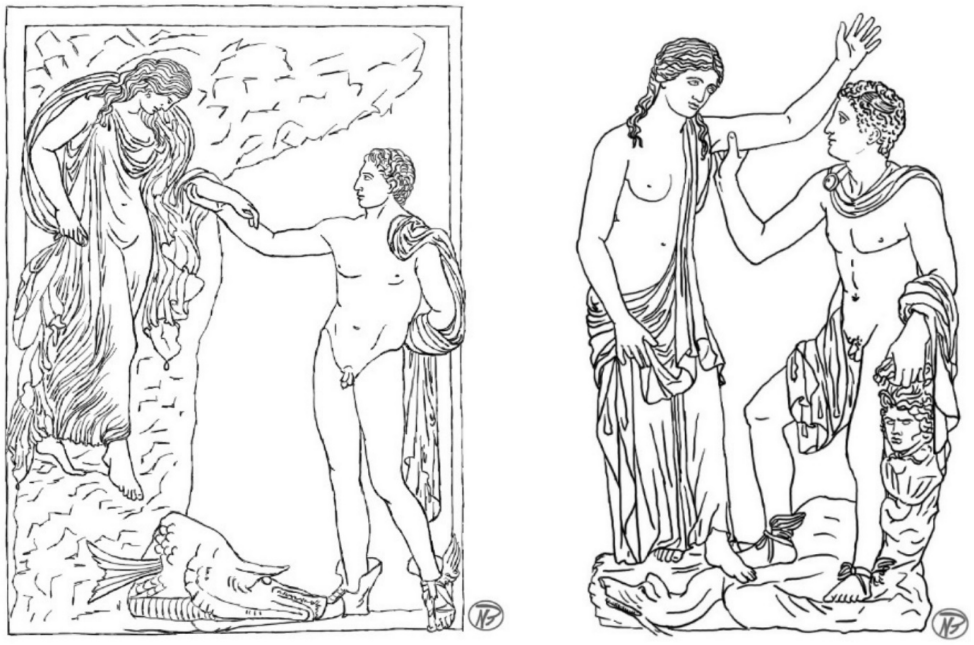
dragon, because she stands behind her throne, leaning against Homonoia, the personification of accord whom Eros is crowning. She has received Cassiopeia's apology, and therefore Homonoia turns away from the pair of women; she stands relaxed with her legs crossed and her elbow leaning against the back of the throne. This reconciliation will have practical consequences, which is suggested by the group on the right, where Perseus stands next to Cepheus, negotiating the final details of Andromeda's wedding treaty. Future marriage is suggested by another Eros, who floats between the young couple with his arms outstretched, indicating their union. Everything happens under the patronage of Aphrodite, who stands above Andromeda. The wedding of Perseus and Cassiopeia also indicates two women with travel bags and toilet utensils at the top right; in Greece the bride always left her native house to move to the groom's.

123. The closing scene of Euripides' Andromeda. Apulian pelike, around 330 BC.

The reconciliation of Andromeda and Cassiopeia also had a significant political dimension because it was the union of two completely different nations. Cassiopeia, Andromeda and her servants have a Greek appearance, suggesting that they will go with Perseus to Greece, but Cepheus and the young man standing beside him are wearing turbans and oriental garments, while two more Orientals with a typical sun umbrella are found at the top left. The vase image is the oldest representation of Homonoia and the reconciliation of Andromeda and Cassiopeia. It was created when Alexander the Great conquered the Persian Empire. At that time, the peaceful coexistence between the Greeks and Barbarians was a highly topical

issue not only in the East but also in Southern Italy, where the vase image originated.[18] Alexander the Great's uncle, the king of Epirus, Alexander Molossus, led a campaign on the Apennine peninsula, and in 332 BC concluded a peace treaty with the Romans. The reconciliation of Andromeda and Cassiopeia could have been part of this story from the outset, but its first representation appears at the time when the reconciliation between the Greeks and their neighbours became a major political issue in both the east and west.

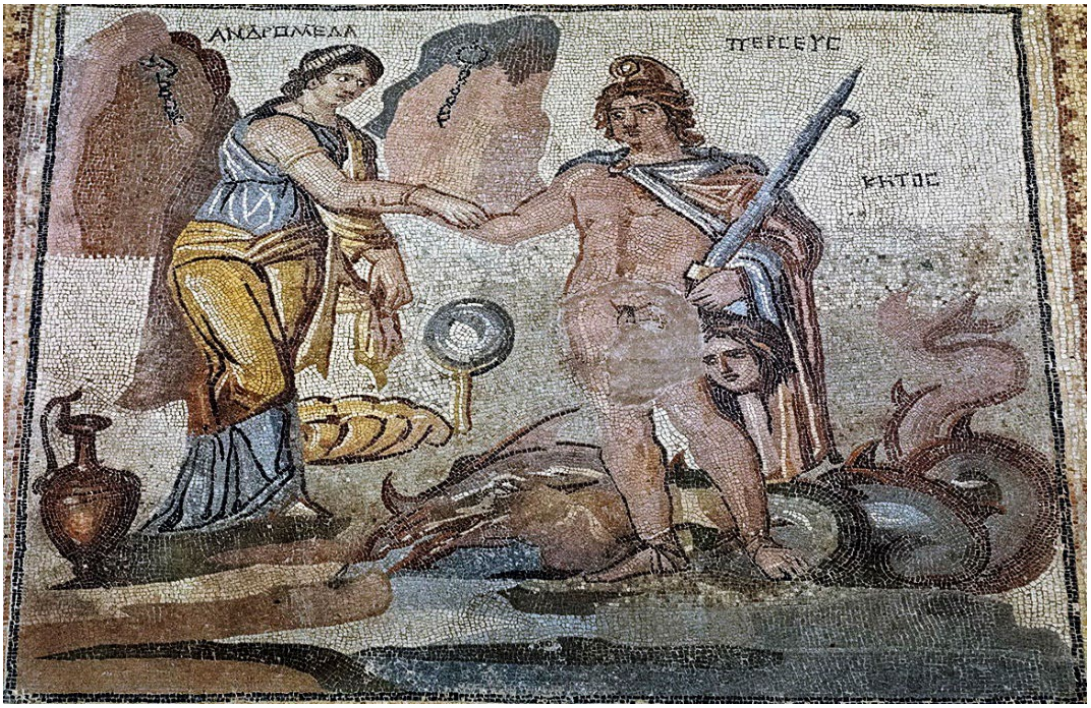
While Greeks paid the maximum amount of attention to Medusa, the Romans preferred the story of Andromeda. Perseus, who releases the enchained Andromeda, appears in classical Greek art only in one representation.[19] In Roman art, the most popular pictorial type of the Perseus myth was the hero who courteously helps Andromeda descend from the rock wall to which she was bound.[20] We know the image type in many specimens and a full range of art genres – a wall painting, a relief, and a freestanding statue (**124–125**). On these representations, Andromeda is dressed, and she stretches one hand to Perseus, who approaches the princess, so that their hands are touching. The hero is naked, holding a harpe and the head of the Medusa; at his feet lies the dead dragon. In a mosaic from the turn of the 2nd and 3rd centuries AD, we find some details that characterise Andromeda as a bride. After her rescue, Andromeda's funeral equipment turns into wedding equipment.



124 (left). Perseus unchains Andromeda. Marble relief 130–140 AD.
125 (right). Perseus unchains Andromeda. Roman marble statue, copy of a Greek original.

[18] Pascalle Linant de Bellefonds and Évelyne Prioux, *Voir les mythes : Poésie hellénistique et arts figurés* (Paris: Picard, 2017), 223.
[19] Taplin, *Pots and Plays*, 181–182.
[20] 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), 60–66.

From Antioch in Turkey comes a depiction of the rescued Andromeda, which is characterised by a wool basket at her feet, a typical female utensil.[21] From Bulla Regia in Tunisia comes a representation in which we see next to Andromeda a column on which a chest is placed.[22] The Mosaic from Zeugma in Turkey is the most detailed (**126**); on it we see an oinochoe (a pitcher) on the ground at Andromeda's feet, and a mirror and a vase in the form of a shell. On this mosaic, Perseus wears a Phrygian cap on his head. The stereotypical nature of these mosaics suggests that some unknown masterpiece from classical Greece served as the pattern for all of them. From the literary tradition, we know that the famous painter Nicias painted Andromeda in the 4th century BC, but we know nothing about its theme and therefore cannot assume that it was the model of Roman representations.[23]



126. Perseus unchains Andromeda. Roman mosaic, 2nd–3rd century AD.

We know from Heliodorus' novel, which he wrote in the 3rd century AD, that the scene with Perseus releasing Andromeda from the rock was a common element of bedroom decoration in ancient Rome.[24] Since Andromeda was enormously popular in ancient Rome, we often encounter her in a new genre – the descriptions of imaginary images. The princess bound to the rock appears in one of the first works of this kind, Lucian's The Hall from around 170 AD.[25] The image of Perseus rescuing Andromeda, which was described by Philostratus the Elder, was situated in Africa, just like classical Greek vase scenes, which were inspired by the staging practice of

[21] Doro Levi, *Antioch Mosaic Pavements I–II* (Princeton, NJ. Princeton University Press, 1947), I, 150–156; II, pl. 39 b, c.
[22] Mohamed Yacoub, *Catalogue du Musée du Bardo* (Tunis: NAEP, 1993), inv. A 390 p. 47 and fig. 39.
[23] Pliny the Elder, *Natural history*, 35, 132.
[24] Heliodorus, *Ethiopica*, 4,8.
[25] Lucian, *The hall*, 22.

theatres of that time.[26] Philostratus' Andromeda, however, was a white woman, as he explicitly emphasises. [27] Achilles Tatius wrote that he saw the picture of the liberation of Andromeda in the Temple of Zeus in Egyptian Pelusium, where its counterpart was a scene with Hercules and Prometheus. The contrasting pair of scenes connected the motif of bondage. The author emphasises that Andromeda was fixed to the rock so that she could not move, and thus she was likened to a stone statue.[28] This was one of the principal motives of the Perseus myth. While Medusa changed everyone into a statue, and the hero did the same thing with her severed head, Andromeda was transformed into a statue only temporarily. Perseus revived her by killing the monster and unfettering the princess.

In his description, Achilles Tatius highlights the contrasts on which this pictorial type was built and to which it owed its tremendous popularity. The rock is likened to a tomb, and Andromeda is dressed as a bride. The image of the chained Andromeda attracted viewers with its racy combination of horror and beauty, which conveyed an important message. According to Achilles Tatius, the depiction of chained Andromeda was a unity of contradictions. Fear distorted her face and "her hands hung loosely at the wrist like clusters of grapes. Her eyes radiated beauty although the shadow of death fell on them, like violets that had just begun to quench." In a similar vein, Manilius described Andromeda in his poem about astronomy, which was created around the year 20 AD: "her soft arms are stretched out on the hard rocks, and there to die on her virgin cross the maiden hung. Even in the hour of sacrifice, she yet preserves a modest demeanour: her very suffering becomes her, for, gently inclining her snow-white neck; she seemed to have full charge of her pose. The folds of her robe slipped from her shoulders and fell from her arms, and her streaming locks covered her body."[29]

Another sequence in the Perseus story represents scenes where the hero shows Andromeda the head of Medusa, which is mirrored on the surface of the water. This series of Roman scenes has already been discussed above. In Roman art, however, there were other types of images emphasising the indissoluble unity of Perseus and Andromeda. On a mosaic from Rome, we see the naked Perseus, who leans casually on a column immersed in a seemingly endless conversation with the sitting Andromeda, who puts her hand over her heart. [30] In Pompeii, we find Perseus and Andromeda embracing each other, calmly standing and looking at the sea monster that he has petrified. [31] In the house of Vettii, there is a wall painting preserved in situ depicting Perseus and the half-naked Andromeda dancing together.[32] The couple on the painting is reminiscent of Dionysus and Ariadne, who in the Roman imagination

---

[26] Tomasz Polanski, *Ancient Greek Orientalist Painters: The Literary Evidence* (Krakow: Ksiegarnia Akademicka, 2002), 89–116.

[27] Philostratus, *Imagines*, 1, 29

[28] Achilles Tatius 3, 7, translated by John Winkler. Cf. Jaś Elsner, *Roman Eyes: Visuality and Subjectivity in Art and Text* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 5–7.

[29] Manilius, *Astronomica*, 5, 540–557, translated by G. P. Goold.

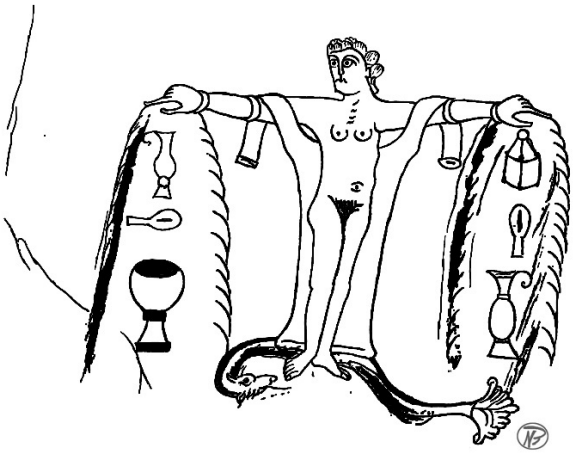
[30] Maria Concetta Laurenti, "Un pavimento a mosaico con due emblemata sotto la basilica di S. Susanna a Roma," *Colloque de la Mosaïque Gréco-Romaine* 9, vol. 1 (2005): 321, fig. 8c, cover of the volume 2.

[31] Pompeii, I, 3, 25; VIII, 3, 14

[32] Pompeii, VI, 15, 1.

evoked life after death and eternal bliss.[33] Perseus overcame both Medusa and the sea dragon, repeatedly winning over death, which made him a pre-figuration of Jesus Christ and secured him a second life in a post-ancient Christian Europe.

In the Middle Ages, ancient myths continued not only in the verbal tradition but to a limited extent also in the pictorial tradition. In depictions of constellations, the pictorial types that were used in classical antiquity continued uninterrupted, even those depicting naked women (**127**).[34] For the reception of the Perseus myth, it was important that the constellations of its protagonists dominated the stars of the northern sky. At its centre, there is the constellation of Perseus; the hero holds a harpe in his raised right hand and the head of Medusa in his lowered left hand. On the left, near the head of Perseus, Cassiopeia sits on the throne. Above her is Andromeda with her chained arms outstretched. Above Andromeda, there is a sea dragon. To the right of Perseus, the series continues with the constellation of Pisces, a reference to the seashore to which Andromeda was bound. We take the figures from the ancient myth in the northern night sky for granted, but why and how did they get there? Why the myth of Perseus? Why the episode with Andromeda? One thing is sure – the northern night sky is not dominated by individual mythical figures but an entire mythical situation. Next to Andromeda are Pisces, which only evoke the environment in which her liberation took place. Next to the noble saviour Perseus, there is also the evil dragon which he has slain. Why do the dragon and fish deserve to shine throughout the ages in the night sky? It looks as if someone simply projected a pivotal scene from the story of Perseus onto the northern night sky, portraying all the characters there regardless of their importance and merit.



127. Andromeda, Carolingian book illumination, Limoges c. 900–930.

Moreover, is the dragon a carcass? Or more precisely the stone into which Perseus transformed the monster? Did the dragon rise from the dead? In his

[33] Bairrão Oleiro 1992, 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), 70–71.

[34] Fabio Guidetti, "A Sky without Myths? Pagan Imagery in Early Medieval Astronomy," in *Mittelalterliche Mythenrezeption. Paradigmen und Paradigmenwechsel,* ed. Ulrich Rehm (Cologne: Böhlau, 2018), 71–73.

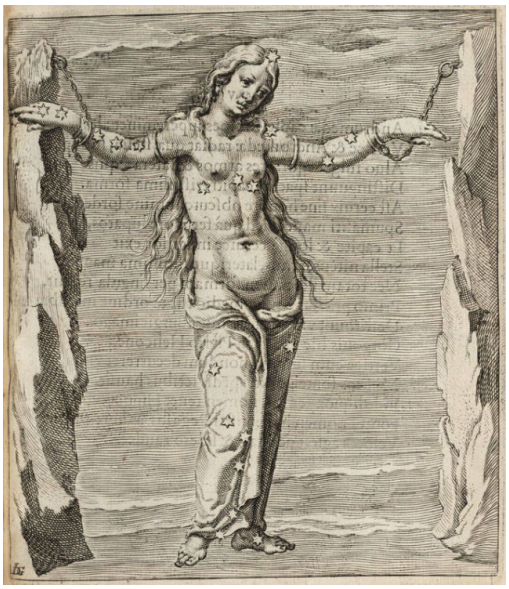
Metamorphoses Ovid repeatedly describes how the gods placed mortals among the stars after the end of their life story. Perseus and Andromeda, however, did not stay where the hero saved the princess but went to Greece, where they lived out the rest of their lives. In what form do mythical figures exist in the night sky? This question is not an inappropriately modern one. It was already asked by Nonnus in the 5th century AD. It struck him how cruel this was for Andromeda, who must forever look at the sea dragon who came to kill her. Nonnus also felt sympathy with Cassiopeia, who must descend again and again below the horizon so that she would eventually dive into the sea among the hated Nereids, who were responsible for the misfortune of her daughter.[35]

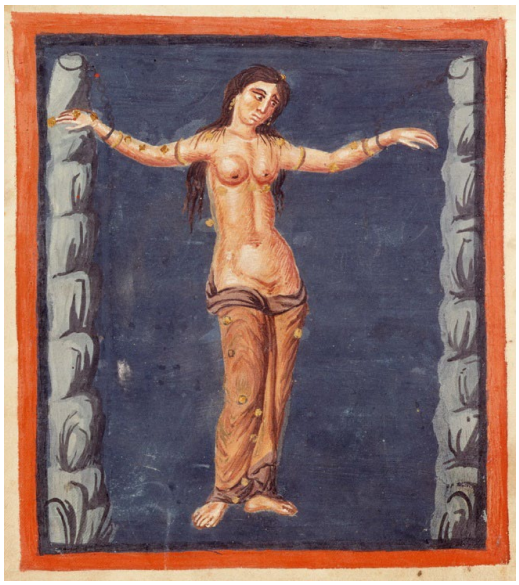
Homer already knew the constellation, but around 360 BC, Eudoxus from Cnidus created the first Greek star globe with images of constellations following the Babylonian designs.[36] By doing so, he positioned the constellations on the night sky as we know them on the star globes. We may also presume that the series of mythical beings on the northern sky corresponds to the final scene of the Euripides' lost tragedy Andromeda of 412 BC. At the end of this play, Aphrodite may have descended from heaven and predicted that all the participants would travel to the night sky. The echo of this theatre scene can be seen on the vase painting mentioned above of the reconciliation of Andromeda and Cassiopeia (**123**). At the top and centre is Aphrodite, poetically dubbed "a Cypriot," which is a literary name indicating a theatre play. Perseus is depicted with his bare sword raised above his head as we know it from the constellation.

Eudoxus' Phaenomena have survived only as an echo in Aratus' work of the same name from 276–274 BC. In it, we read that the heavenly Andromeda stretches out both chained hands; consequently, she is shown from the front with her arms wide open.[37] Andromeda's constellation is described similarly in the anonymous work Catasterismi from the 3rd to 2nd centuries BC. The pictorial type of Andromeda, with raised hands attached to the posts, first appeared around the middle of the 5th century BC on a series of Athenian vase paintings. As a picture of the constellation, this pictorial type could have been used between 360 BC, when Eudoxus created the first globe with images of the constellation, and the 1st century BC when Andromeda started to be represented with her arms extended to the rock.[38] The first preserved depiction of the Andromeda constellation with her raised hands attached to the poles appears in illustrations of 9th-century astronomical tracts, which are assumed to reproduce ancient Greek and Roman illustrations. Thanks to Carolingian astronomical writings, the image of Andromeda with her arms tied to the poles passed into European medieval and renaissance art. In the Latin translation of Aratus' work published in 1600 (**128**), Jacques de Gheyn II closely followed an illustration from almost one thousand years later in a Carolingian illustrated copy of the same work (**129**). The only deviation is that the trees are represented so that they look more like two rock walls.

---

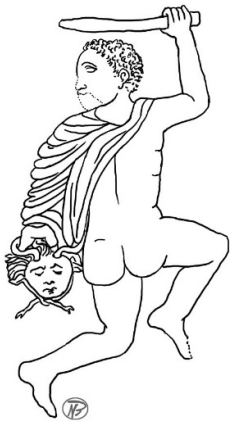
[35] Nonnus, *Dionysiaca*, 25, 123–142.
[36] Homer, *Iliad*, 18, 485–487.
[37] Aratus, *Phaenomena*, 200–204.
[38] (Eratosthenes), *Catasterismi*, 1, 17.





128 (left). Jacques de Gheyn II., chained Andromeda. Woodcut, 1600.
129 (right). Chained Andromeda. Carolingian book illumination, around 816.

At the end of the 1st century BC, Vitruvius described the star globe in detail.[39] The oldest preserved specimen is perhaps one hundred years older. Already on this globe, Perseus flies with his cap and ailerons, holding Medusa's head and lifting the harpe above his own head (**130**). It is a variation of an ancient pictorial type of the victorious Perseus. From the Farnese collection from the 2nd century AD, which reproduces the late Hellenistic original, Atlas carries on his back the celestial globe with the constellations (**131**). Two Roman maps of the starry sky, the fragment in the Salzburg Museum, and the star copper globe in the Mainz Museum have also been preserved.



130 (left). Perseus on a silver globe. 2nd century BC (or later).
131 (middle). Perseus on the globe of Atlas Farnese. Roman marble copy after Greek late Hellenistic original.
132 (right). Perseus on Přemyslid globe. 13th century.

[39] Vitruvius, 9, 4, 2.

The oldest globe with constellations made in Christian Europe is the Přemyslid globe from the second half of the 13th century. It originated in the Sicilian court of Emperor Frederick II, as this was the only place where we can assume exact knowledge of ancient astronomy needed to construct such a globe. The globe was presumably made for Přemysl Otakar II as an expensive and prestigious object, expressing the high political ambitions of the Czech kings of this dynasty. The globe remained in possession of Czech sovereigns until 1444, when it was bought by Nicholas of Cusa. On this globe, constellations reproduce ancient pictorial types. Cassiopeia sits on an armchair, which is markedly inclined. Hyginus wrote that she was dragged down by the rotation of the sky because she boasted of having surpassed the beauty of the Nereids.[40] Perseus follows the type of the victorious hero (**132**).[41] Nevertheless, the medieval pot helmet replaced his hat of invisibility, which likened him to the King Přemysl Otakar II. Andromeda has one raised hand, which indicates her attachment to the rock, but she is depicted in the majestic pose of a seated queen. Her long robe and a diadem on her head are in line with her royal appearance. Perseus and Andromeda are thus portrayed as a Christian King and Queen on the Přemyslid Globe, whereby Přemysl Otakar II could be celebrated as the second Perseus and his wife as the second Andromeda.

The appearance of the constellations was carefully passed down from generation to generation, as it was an essential part of astrology. In the 13th century, St Albert the Great not only knew what the ancient image of the victorious Perseus looked like, he also knew how this constellation affected life on earth. He wrote that Perseus, with the sword in his right hand and with the head of Gorgon in the left, protects against lightning, thunderstorms and spells.[42] The significance of the constellations increased after Europe became familiar with Arab astrology in the 15th century. Arabs had created a sophisticated astrological system in which the conjunction of planets in constellations was the main factor. Its advantage over ancient Greco-Roman astrological tradition was that the conjunctions in constellations, unlike the unusual celestial phenomena, are very frequent, and the extent of a constellation is always ambiguous. In the 15th century, astrology provided good reasons for everyone to be interested in constellations. Perseus and other mythical characters, as known by the ancient Greeks and Romans, thus entered the general consciousness. Aby Warburg emphasized this; he was one of the first to begin to scientifically address the renewal of ancient pictorial types in European Renaissance art.[43] In the 15th century, printed astrological calendars, which appeared in southern Germany, quickly gained immense popularity. Eager readers found pseudo-mathematical laws for the influence of the planets on each person's life.

---

[40] Hyginus, *On Astronomy*, 2,10.

[41] Alena Hadravová and Petr Hadrava, *Sphaera octava. Mýty a věda o hvězdách, I–IV* (Prague: Artefactum, 2013), vo. IV, 276–357.

[42] Albertus Magnus, *De Mineralibus*, 2, 3, 5.

[43] Aby Warburg, "Italienische Kunst und internationale Astrologie im Palazzo Schifanoja zu Ferrara," in *L'Italia e l'arte straniera*, ed. Adolfo Ventura (Roma: Maglione e Strini, 1922), 179–193.

The Religious Emblem

An illustration of L'Epistre Othea by Christine de Pisan from around 1412 is one of the oldest depictions of Perseus, who saves Andromeda from the back of Pegasus (**133**). Andromeda stands on a rock, as she was depicted in ancient Roman art. However, she is not tied up, but kneels in the traditional pose of Christian saints waiting for a martyr's death. Perseus is a medieval knight in armour, with the harpe in the form of a scythe. According to Christine de Pisan, the Pegasus on which Perseus rides embodies a "good reputation." Ancient Greeks and Romans exclusively told the story of the hero Bellerophon on the back of Pegasus. Bellerophon tamed the winged horse and on his back, he overcame the monster Chimaira.[44] Perseus appears on the back of Pegasus and attacking with a spear only in medieval Europe. The first Vatican mythographer considered Perseus and Bellerophon to be one person.[45] Ovidius moralizatus explicitly states that Perseus mounted Pegasus as soon as the winged horse was born of Medusa's blood. Perseus' flight to the heavens on Pegasus was perceived as a prefiguration of the ascension of Christ. The Christian Pegasus embodied Fama, which spread the glory of Perseus' struggle with the devil (the sea dragon) for the human soul (Andromeda). Boccaccio also wrote about Perseus riding Pegasus.[46] In the illustration of the German translation of Boccaccio's Genealogy of the Pagan Gods, Perseus arrives in medieval armour on Pegasus; on the left are Medusa and Poseidon, and next to them Pegasus is shown again (**135**).

133 (left). Perseus liberates Andromeda. French book illumination, around 1412.
134 (right). Perseus on Pegasus. German woodcut, 1474.

In the ancient myth, Pegasus left Perseus immediately after its birth and never encountered Perseus again. In medieval Europe, the winged horse became the primary attribute of the hero-liberator. Why did post-ancient Europe imagine

[44] Anne Jacquemin, "Chimaira," in *Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae III/1* (Zürich: Artemis, 1986), 249–259.
[45] First Vatican Mythographer, 71 and 137.
[46] Boccaccio, *Genealogy of the Pagan Gods*, 10, 27; Boccaccio, *On Famous Women*, 20.

Perseus on Pegasus' back? The ancient depiction of Bellerophon without Chimaira may easily have been interpreted as Perseus. The more so if it was a coin, on the other side of which was Medusa with reference to Perseus, as both heroes often formed a pair in antiquity.[47] Medieval scholars may have also looked to Hyginus, who lived in the first century BC.[48] In his work, they may have read that Hermes gave Perseus the winged horse. However, this was an error of a scribe who in place of "petasos" (cap of invisibility) wrote "pegasos."[49] However, the key to the connection between Perseus and Pegasus was neither an erroneous interpretation of the ancient work of art nor a scriptural error, but the Christian reinterpretation of the pagan myth. In the 15th century, the ancient pictorial type of Perseus was restored, and by the end of this century, he was as a rule depicted as flying thanks to winged boots and a winged cap. However, since the mid-16th century, artists returned to the medieval version, which they began to favour.[50] Pegasus emphasised the link between Perseus and the Christian hero St George[51] and the glory that the winged horse symbolised in post-ancient Europe.

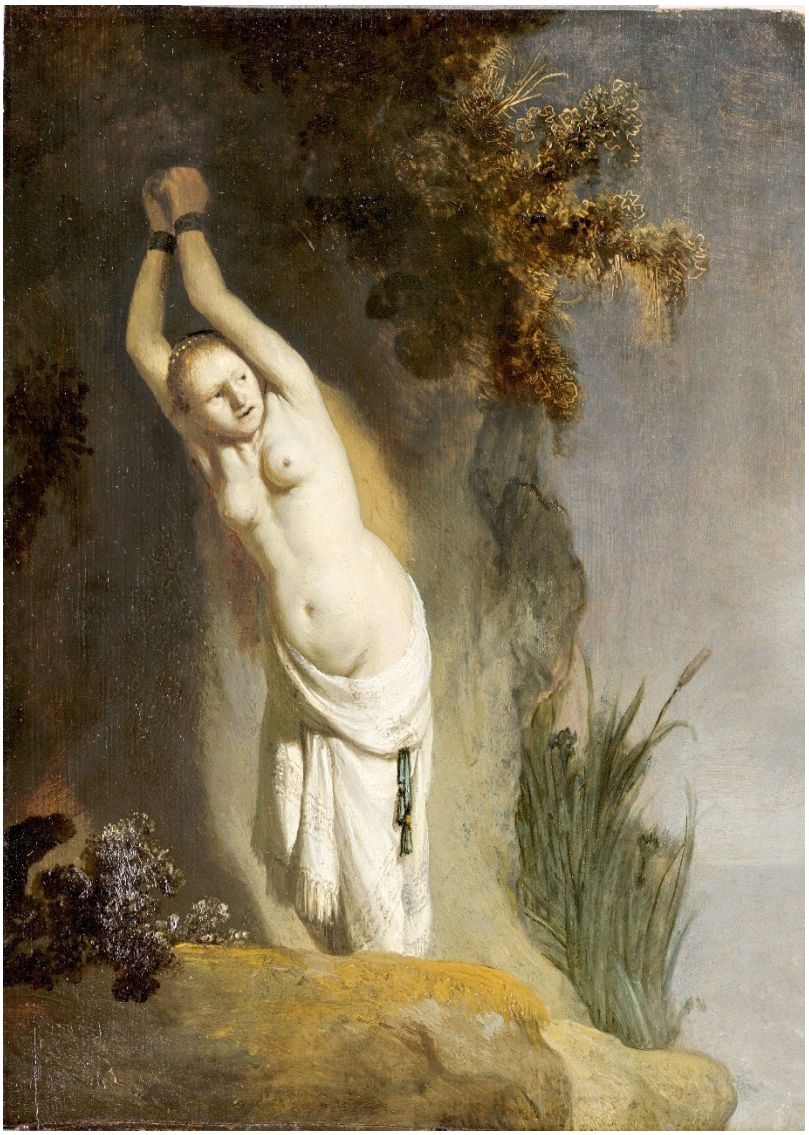
Andromeda as a Christian martyr, was represented by Rembrandt (**135**). It was his first painting inspired by ancient mythology and his first female nude.[52] In Rembrandt's time, Andromeda was portrayed mostly as a damsel in distress to be elegantly rescued by Perseus. Rembrandt, on the other hand, emphasised her unattractive posture and the rough, almost masculine features of her face. The cloak has slipped from her left hip, but she is not naked as had been the rule from the 16th century. She is lonely and scared to death, and her face and lips are strikingly white. The painter has omitted Perseus and the dragon; the princess is alone, standing on a small ridge of a cliff that falls to the sea near her feet. She looks out of the picture in horror, and her attitude suggests she would like to turn away from the horrific events taking place but cannot take her eyes off them. The intense light, a divine attribute, suggests that Andromeda is watching the cosmic battle – Perseus' struggle with the sea creature here is an analogy of the conflict between the Christian God and Satan.

The sophistication of the devil's trappings was evident in what happened to Medusa's head when Perseus killed the dragon and saved Andromeda on his way home using Medusa's severed head. The danger was far from being extinguished by this; on the contrary, it was more significant, for the hero ceased to be prudent. He needed to wash his hands after he had to kill. To perform the ritual, he had to put down Medusa's head. He did not want to damage the head by placing it on the sand, and therefore put it on the living seagrass; Medusa's head, however,

---

[47] Roman denarius, 74 BC, London, The British Museum, R.8543. Cf. Antonio Agostini, *Dialoghi … intorno alle medaglie inscrittioni et altre antichità* (Rome: Gugliemo Faciotto, 1592), 152.
[48] Hyginus, *On Astronomy*, 2, 12a.
[49] Konrad Schauenburg, *Perseus in der Kunst des Altertums* (Bonn: Habelt, 1960), 43, 298.
[50] Rensselaer W. Lee, "Ariosto's Roger and Angelica in Sixteenth-Century Art: Some Facts and Hypotheses," in *Studies in Late Medieval and Renaissance Painting in Honor of Millard Meiss*, ed. Irving Lavin and John Plummer (New York: New York University Press, 1977), 302–329.
[51] Jan Bažant, "St. George at Prague Castle and Perseus: An Impossible Encounter?" *Studia Hercynia* 19 (2015): 189–201.
[52] Sluijter, *Rembrandt and the Female Nude*, 75–97.

transformed the seagrass into inanimate corals. When the sea Nymphs saw this, they brought new seagrass and threw the corals into the sea. Ovid tells us that this is the way corals originated. [53] This theme did not appear in ancient Greek or Roman art, the only exception being perhaps the Roman relief in Paris. [54] It represents Perseus liberating Andromeda; on the ground we see Medusa's head, which does not lie, however, on the seagrass or corals.



135. Rembrandt Van Rijn, Andromeda. Oil canvas, around 1630.

In the Middle Ages, Ovid's myth about the coral was interpreted as morality, as could be expected. Giovanni del Virgilio, in his commentary on Ovid's Metamorphoses from 1322–1323, wrote: "when the sins are hidden, they multiply as corals in the sea. However, when sins are revealed, they wither and do not continue

[53] Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 4, 741–752. Cf. Robert Halleux and Jacques Schamp, eds., *Lapidaires grecs* (Paris: Les belles lettres, 1985), 111–113.
[54] Paris, Louvre, MA 1895.

to grow."[55] According to Bonsignori's text from 1375–1377, the red colour of corals originated when the seagrass was exposed to the blood of Medusa.[56] In the Renaissance interpretation of the Metamorphoses, corals were also associated with sin, but the myth was understood differently. In his commented translation that first appeared in 1522, Niccolò degli Agostini wrote: "coral multiplication means that sins spread around the world thanks to sensuality, similarly as corals which Nymphs spread and threw at the sea bottom."[57] In this allegory, the head of Medusa is the source of sin. The seagrass, which the sea Nymphs touched to Medusa's head, proves how sin is contagious.

The representation of sea Nymphs experimenting with the corals can be found in the work of Giulio Romano and Perin del Vaga, both of whom were trained at Raphael's Vatican workshop. On a drawing by Giulio Romano, we also find Perseus putting down his armour.[58] Perin del Vaga included the scene in his Perseus cycle in Castel Sant'Angelo of 1545 that was described in detail above.[59] In this wall painting, he confronts the Nymphs playing with corals with the scene of Perseus' ritual cleansing; on this he bases the painting's moral message. On the left is the pious hero washing his hands; on the right are the irresponsible Nymphs, who spread sin around them. Perseus' integrity is emphasised by the fact that there is a shield between him and the Nymphs. The hero cannot see what they are doing-otherwise, he would put to a stop their irresponsible behaviour.

An unrealised design from around 1590 for the magnificent Perseus fountain, which was to be dominated by coral decorations, was destined for the garden of Villa Medici in Rome.[60] At the top of the fountain, Jacopo Zucchi placed the headless body of Medusa, from which Pegasus has just been born and is about to take off. Blood flows out of Medusa's neck and runs down into the fountain's reservoir, where the Nymphs demonstrate its effect. The corals that rise alongside the lush vegetation and the marine fauna cover the entire surface of the fountain. In the cave under the headless body of Medusa, Perseus stands, holding a sword in one hand; with the other, he lifts Medusa's head, which bleeds profusely. Under the Perseus, we find the personification of Africa characterised by a lion and elephant. In both hands, she holds snakes that, according to the myth, were born from the drops of Medusa's blood, which fell into the sand of the desert of Africa when Perseus crossed over it.[61]

Around 1627, Nicolas Poussin painted Perseus alongside Eros, who pours water on Perseus' hands to cleanse them. We know about this painting, which is lost today, only from preserved preparatory drawings and from the description written

---

[55] Giovanni del Virgilio, *Giovanni del Virgilio espositore delle "Metamorfosi,"* ed. Fausto Ghisalberti (Florence: L .S. Olschki, 1933), 60. Cf. *Ovide Moralisè*, 4, 7048–7072.

[56] Giovanni de' Bonsignori, *Ovidio Metamorphoseos vulgare*, 42.

[57] Niccolò degli Agostini, *Tutti li libri de Ovidio Metamorphoseos tradutti dal litteral in verso vulgar con le sue allegorie in prosa* (Venice: s.n., 1522), IV, „Delli Coralli".

[58] London, The British Museum, 1895,0915.645.

[59] Preparatory drawing for a wall painting in Perseus room in Castel Sant'Angelo (Rome, 1545): Chantilly, Musée Condé, 79.

[60] Paris, Louvre, département des Arts graphiques, 4553, recto. Cf. Werner Hofmann, ed., *Zauber der Medusa: Europäische Manierismen* (Wien: Löcker, 1987), 154.

[61] Apollonius, *Argonautica*, 4, 1513–1517; Lucan, 9, 619–699.

by Giovanni Pietro Bellori.[62] Bellori wrote in 1672: "Perseus, having severed Medusa's head, held it facing the eyes of the sea monster and changed it to stone to free Andromeda, who was exposed to be devoured. Here Perseus is depicted after the fight, contaminated by the viperous locks, with Cupid pouring water from a jug for him to wash his hands. Meanwhile, the seated naiads hold the head of Medusa and gaze with pleasure as the white sea corals are stained red by the falling drops of her blood. Far away, Andromeda can be discerned, bound naked to the rock, waiting to be released by Perseus, her bridegroom and liberator, who is defended in the flight by Pallas and by her divine shield; therefore the goddess is depicted in the sky with Victory, who gathers a bough from a palm tree to award it to the victor. "[63] As with Giulio Romano and Perin del Vaga, on Poussin's picture the moral message of the motif of the Nymphs experimenting with the coral was based on its confrontation with Perseus' ritual cleansing. It can be assumed that the Nymphs stood for the multiplication of sin.

Around 1674, Gellée (Le Lorrain) created an oil painting with the same theme, where the scene takes place in the Gulf of Naples. Gellée most likely knew Poussin's composition because the characters are depicted in virtually the same stances. The painter's patron, Cardinal Camille Massimo, held Poussin's preparatory drawing for this painting in his collection.[64] It is likely that he also consequently commissioned the painting. The paintings of Poussin and Gellée do not follow Ovid's Metamorphoses, but their Italian rewriting, which was first published by Giovanni Andrea dell'Anguillara in 1561. The book immediately became the main source of inspiration for painters, although it differs significantly from the original. According to Ovid, Perseus first unchained Andromeda and then cleansed himself.[65] According to Giovanni Anguillara, Perseus did not want to appear on the seashore stained with blood, so after killing the monster, he sailed to a nearby island where he tied Pegasus to a palm tree and thoroughly washed himself. Anguillara repeatedly emphasises Perseus' piety and restraint, which he highlighted by the strange reversal of actions – the hero left his bride in chains on the seashore and sailed away to cleanse his body.[66]

Poussin's painting was inspired by Sebastien Bourdon's oil painting from 1637–1647 (**136**). Bourdon combined both sources, Ovid and Giovanni Anguillara. In his rendering, Perseus' purification is not situated on the island, but on the seashore where Andromeda was meant to be sacrificed to the monster. The princess has already been stripped of the shackles that are displayed on the rock, and she walks with her dress pressed against her chest. When Eros draws her attention to Perseus, she turns to him. However, Perseus does not pay notice to her and continues to wash his hands. In the middle of the scene, we see a great palm, the symbol of Perseus' victory. The Nymphs do not attach corals to Medusa's head, but to the relief on Perseus' shield. This is an erudite allusion to the later fate of Medusa's head, which

---

[62] The Windsor Castle, The Royal Library, RCIN 911984. Royal Collection Trust.

[63] Bellori, *The lives of the Modern Painters*, 326.

[64] London, The British Museum, Oo,8.260. Cf. Linda Lee Boyer, "The Origin of Coral by Claude Lorrain," *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* 26 (1968): 370–379.

[65] Ovid, *Metamorphoses,* 4, 738–740.

[66] Giovanni Andrea dell'Anguillara and Gioseppe Horologi, *Le Metamorfosi di Ovidio ridotte in ottava rima* (Venice: De'Franceschi, 1563), 71r.

Perseus gave to the goddess Athena who then placed it on her shield. Bourdon's picture served as a model for the liberation of Andromeda painted by Cosmas Damian Asam in the prelature of the Břevnov Monastery in Prague, which will be discussed below. A simplified variation of Bourdon's composition can be found on Kraus's engraving from 1694; on the left we see Perseus washing his hands, and behind his back are the Nymphs experimenting with the corals.[67]

136. Sebastien Bourdon, Perseus washes his hands. Oil canvas, 1637–1647.

Pierre Mignard, who was the most famous French painter of the 17th century beside his rival Charles Le Brun, also included Medusa's head and corals in the scene of the liberation of Andromeda (**137**).[68] Medusa's head is shown here near the dead dragon at the feet of the victorious hero. As the Nymphs are missing, this can be considered to be an inspiration taken from Giovanni del Virgilio, for whom the coral was an allegory of revealed sin that can no longer be spread. In this painting, Perseus has not only humbled the evil symbolised by the dead dragon but has also prevented its propagation, which is symbolised by the head of Medusa that creates the corals. The painting comes from the time when King Louis XIV was at the height of power, which corresponds to the absence of erotic allusions. Although the princess is

[67] Johann Ulrich Kraus, *Die Verwandlungen des Ovidii in zweyhundert und sechs und zwanzig Kupffern* (Augsburg: Krauss, 1694), 33 pl. 62.
[68] Jean-Claude Boyer, *Le peintre, le roi, le héros, l'Andromède de Pierre Mignard* (Paris: Réunion des musées nationaux, 1990).

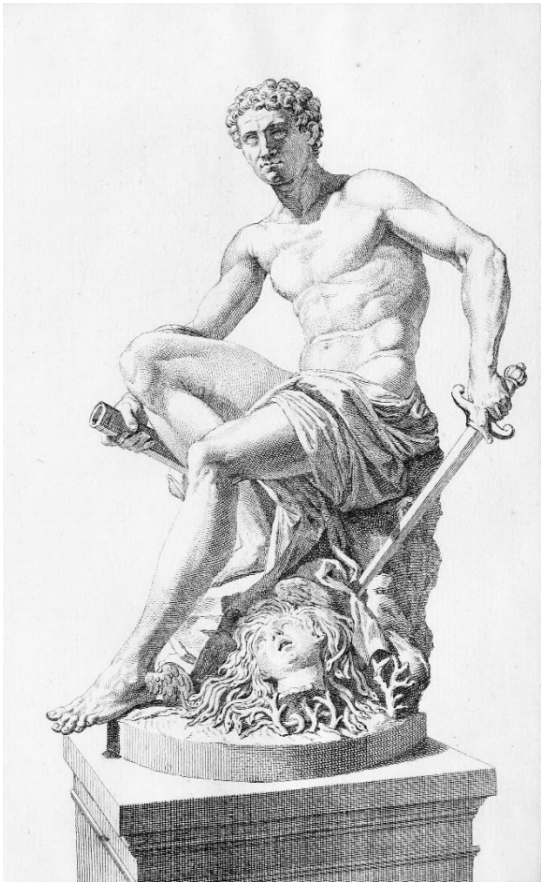
partially naked, she is pushed to the edge of the picture. In addition, a woman with a cloak rushes from the left toward the naked princess, so that her nakedness will soon be covered. The painting was commissioned by Louis, Grand Condé, the second most powerful man in the French kingdom. At that time, Grand Condé, as he was called, had finished his brilliant career as an invincible general and retired to his castle in Chantilly. He chose the theme personally, so there is a hypothesis that the work also had a political subtext. The picture could suggest that he should be rewarded for his merits by France as generously as Perseus, who won the princess' hand and the kingdom. In any case, Perseus is in the axis of the image, and thus is its main hero. He is represented as a generous liberator who announces that he did not save Andromeda for himself but for her parents. He turns away from the girl and encourages her parents to take her.

137. Pierre Mignard, Perseus liberates Andromeda. Oil canvas, 1679.

The privileged position of Perseus in early modern Europe is evidenced by the marble statue created by the French sculptor Lambert Sigisbert Adam, who acquainted himself thoroughly with classical sculpture during his stay at the French Academy in Rome. In his statue of Perseus, Adam used ancient fragments that arrived to Paris in 1732 along with other antiquities acquired by Cardinal Melchior de Polignac in Rome, where he worked as French ambassador. In 1755, Adam offered up the ancient statues that he had restored for Cardinal de Polignac for sale as authentic classical antiquities, even though he had transformed them radically (**138**).[69] In the Perseus statue, Adam's additions were all the attributes of Perseus –

[69] Cf. Guillaume Faroult, ed. *L'antiquité rêvée: Innovations et résistances au XVIIIe siècle* (Paris: Gallimard, 2010), 100–101.

the right arm with a bare sword, legs with wings, and above all the head of the Medusa on corals, to which his sword points. This composition is a variation on the statue of Mars from the Ludovisi collection in Rome, which is today in Rome's Museo Nazionale Romano. Adam knew the statue very well, as in 1726–1729 he made a copy of it for Louis XV, who later handed it over to Frederick II the Great and is today in the Sanssouci palace in Potsdam.



138. Lambert Sigisbert Adam, Perseus. Engraving after marble sculpture of 1755.

In the ancient statue of Mars Ludovisi, Amor sits at the foot of the god of the war. In his Perseus, Adam replaced Amor with the head of Medusa with her eyes closed, a painful expression on her face with, and an opened mouth. The famous Italian sculptor Gian Lorenzo Bernini restored and partially completed Amor on the statue of Mars Ludovisi. Adam, the new Bernini, admits his allegiance to his great predecessor and at the same time distances himself from him. In the new concept of antiquity that Adam helped to create, a tragic pathos is highlighted, emphasising the moral message of the work. Medusa's head does not lie on the seaweed, but the coral seems to grow out of the earth soaked with the blood of the monster. Adam created corals pushing upward against Medusa's hair, which hangs downward, thus following the medieval interpretation of the Perseus myth. He pointed out that the struggle was not complete; the hero has killed the monster and her snakes, but sin continues to spread through the coral.

We can use the example of the representation of Perseus' myth in a Baroque monastery to demonstrate that the medieval concept of Perseus as a warrior against

evil spirits and the hedonism of the human race survived in full force until the 18th century. Perseus as a pagan counterpart to the Christian ascetic can be found in the Baroque fresco created by the prominent Bavarian painter Cosmas Damian Asam.[70] The fresco, which depicts the miracle of St Gunther of Bohemia, was created in 1728 on the ceiling of the prelature hall of the Benedictine Archabbey in the Břevnov district of Prague. The hero of the fresco, the hermit Gunther, enjoyed great respect among the Benedictines. According to legend, he died in the forest in South Bohemia in 1045, but he expressed the wish to be buried in the Benedictine monastery in Prague before his death. The ceiling painting was part of the magnificent restoration of the monastery of Abbot Otmar Zinke. Břevnov Monastery was the oldest male monastery in the Czech state founded in 993, but it was burned down during the Hussite revolution and took several centuries to recover from this disaster. The goal of Zinke's rebuilding was to return the former glory to the monastery. In 1716, the remains of St Gunther were solemnly returned to the monastery. The ceiling painting was to celebrate not only the return of the saint but also to commemorate the period in which the monastery belonged to the most important religious, cultural and political centres in the country. The reference to the ancient myth of Perseus was meant to endorse the status of the monastery.

The miracle of St Gunther took place at the court of the King of Hungary, where a roast peacock was presented to the saint, who was fasting. According to the legend of the 13th century, St Gunther did not dare to reject the kingly invitation to the feast. Asam portrayed the royal couple opposite St Gunther, who is dressed in a black Benedictine robe. The saint turned away from the baked peacock lying on the table in front of him, turned his gaze upward and prayed to God with his hands clasped. God listened to his request, and the roasted peacock flew away from the table. The banquet took place in an oval pavilion, the dome of which had a circular opening in the middle. The classical character of the building is highlighted by three medallions with the myth of Perseus that decorate the walls of the dome and comment on the Christian legend.

The northern medallion depicts the liberation of Andromeda (**139, above**). The naked princess is depicted on the seashore in a position that was customary in art at the turn of the 17th and 18th centuries. Her legs and hands are stretched and tied to the rock, but otherwise she is lying in a comfortable position, stressing the beauty of her fully developed naked body. A sea dragon with wide-open jaws floats to Andromeda from the left, apparently unaware that Perseus is approaching from above. The hero in full armour sits on Pegasus and is about to attack the monster beneath him. The composition of Andromeda and the dragon was taken over by Asam from the engraving that decorated the playing cards that Cardinal Mazarin had commissioned.[71] Mythological cards, together with geographical cards or cards of the famous queens and French kings, were designed to serve as a teaching aid for the young Louis XIV.

---

[70] Jan Bažant, "Andromeda's Liberation in Monastery: Kosmas Damian Asam's Fresco Painting at Břevnov (1726), Revisited," *Eirene* 46 (2010): 234–249.

[71] London, The British Museum, 1856,0510.837.

139. Cosmas Damian Asam, ceiling painting with the miracle of St Gunther of Bohemia, 1726.

The southern medallion is the most interesting in terms of our theme, i.e. the Christian interpretation of the Perseus myth (**139, below**). The plot takes place on the seashore, where the hero saves Andromeda. Below is the carcass of the dragon. On the right are the empty handcuffs hanging on the rock, next to which Pegasus stands waving its wings, indicating that the fight ended only moments ago. Andromeda has picked up her clothes and covers her nakedness; she walks to the left towards her royal father who gladly raises his hands to greet her. However, the princess does not look at him and turns back to Perseus. Behind Andromeda, we see Eros with a bow in his hand; he is looking at Andromeda and pointing to Perseus. The hero does not, however, notice Andromeda, Eros, or the king. He kneels on the ground with his head bowed and washes his hands. The rejection of pleasures of the body is typical for this hero in Renaissance and Baroque art. The nudity of the female body has frightened Perseus no less than the sight of the monster Medusa. In both the

figurative and literary tradition, we never encounter the slightest mention of Perseus engaging in premarital sex. Andromeda was similarly characterised, and in their later life, there is no mention of Andromeda's lovers or Perseus' mistresses.

Asam's medallion with Perseus washing his hands was in line with the concept of Perseus in Ovid's Metamorphoses. The poet emphasises that the princess was both the prize and the meaning of his great deed and that the hero fell in love at first glance.[72] However, once the hero kills the monster, he ostentatiously disregards the attractive prize. He ignores the wishes of Andromeda's royal parents, with whom he had previously negotiated the marriage to the princess in detail. He turns away from the princess and the royal couple and washes his hands; later, he prepares a sacrifice to the gods who have helped him in his victory.[73] This unexpected reaction made Ovid's Perseus a suitable counterpart to St George, who was not interested in a princess, but in her people, whom he converted to the Christian faith by liberating her.

In Asam's fresco, Perseus is likened to St George by his restrained attitude to Andromeda. St Gunther does not look at the miracle he has induced. His gaze is directed backwards to a medallion showing Perseus washing his hands. The putti, who have flown from the heavens on the edge of the oculus in the dome of the pavilion to see the hero washing his hands, point to Perseus, the counterpart of the Christian saint. The western medallion shows Helicon with Pegasus and the Muses. Because the hero kills the dragon, peace can be restored and world harmony is reinstated under Apollo's patronage. To the left is Pegasus standing on its hind legs with wings spread. Above it is a circular temple at the top of the mountain; in the middle is a palm grove and on the right is a group of seven Muses. In the middle is Clio, Muse of history, sitting with her elbow resting on a column of books. Below her is Melpomene, Muse of tragedy with a mask in hand. Above is Urania, Muse of astronomy, observing the sky with a telescope. Because of her relation to the sky, Urania embodied spirituality in Christian writings. Asam placed an emphasis on the Muses, who were important to the central theme of the ceiling fresco. As it shows a historical subject with a serious message, Clio, Melpomene, and Urania were singled out.

The characters we see in the circular opening in the dome emphasise the Christian interpretation of the Perseus myth. In the middle of the symbolic cross that forms the medallions on the walls of the illusive dome, we find a female figure, a personification of sensuality, and therefore a counterpart of the naked Andromeda, depicted on the eastern medallion. The woman has her arms extended; her left-hand stretches toward a basket full of fruit, and her right stretches to a tray of roast poultry that is carried by a small devil with goat legs. A putto serves himself from the tray of poultry, while behind him another putto is drinking red wine from a glass. On the right, a little horned devil is kissing his companion. The sensual woman prefers the fruit over the roasted poultry, but completely ignores the third option, which is the only right choice. At the feet of the putto holding a basket of fruit just above the head of St Gunther is a pitcher with a loaf of bread on top of it. Bread with water is a part

[72] Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 4, 739 a 675–676.
[73] Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 4, 740 a 753–756.

of the scene with the personification of sensuality, but this motif simultaneously materialises St Gunther's ideal when he refused the roasted peacock. In the Břevnov Monastery, Perseus was introduced as the forerunner of this Christian saint. Just as St Gunther rejected the roasted peacock, Perseus postpones his meeting with Andromeda, both of them defying royal will.

The central motif of the miracle of St Gunther – a baked but revived peacock – is represented as flying towards Pegasus and Perseus, who is ritually cleansing his hands. The winged horse, which has flown out of the body of the dead Medusa, is the counterpart of the dead peacock, which flew from the tray before St Gunther. Classical mythology and Christian hagiography were thus interconnected. The southern medallion celebrates Perseus' heroic act of killing the monster and liberating the princess, who was imprisoned in her corporeality. It was the echo of the main scene, the liberation of the peacock, which is the symbol of the human soul. Pegasus, creating the source of wisdom and art with its hoof, is on the axis of the saint and the liberated peacock. On the axis of Perseus killing the monster, we find Perseus is washing his hands; the heroic struggle with the terrible monster is the counterpart of the struggle for one's soul. Perseus not only removes blood from his hands, but also renounces corporeality, which is emphasised by his bowed head, which turns away from the naked Andromeda. The hero rejects not only physical love but the material world in general. The transformation of the roasted peacock is introduced as the Christian counterpart of the transformations of which Ovid writes in his book. Thanks to God's intervention, the baked peacock is revived. The roasted animal rises from the dead and flies to the heavens, envisioning what awaits Christians on the day of the Last Judgment.

The Christian interpretation of Perseus' liberation of Andromeda also inspired artists in the 19th century. Frederic Leighton painted his image of Perseus and Andromeda at a mature age in 1891 (**140**). This Perseus is conceived as a solar deity. He is high on the sky in Pegasus' saddle and surrounded by a vibrant golden aura that is so intense that we do not see much of him. He has nothing in common with the material world below and he fights with the dragon in a manner appropriate for astral divinity by shooting golden arrows. The main feature of the painting is the dark wing of the dragon that separates the heavenly and earthly spheres. Under the wing is the half-naked Andromeda; she is a hostage of the dragon, and her body and white garments characterise her as a potential bride, although we do not know for whom. The dragon has placed one of his legs on the princess; her reddish hair, which flows down to her ankles, is the counterpart of the flame that the dragon spews forth from its mouth upward at the hero. Andromeda is so tightly connected with the dragon that it is not clear who Perseus is fighting against. By attacking the dragon, the hero threatens to destroy Andromeda as well, forcing her in the following moment to collapse into the water under the weight of her burden. Leighton's Andromeda is the main character of this painting, but she is more reminiscent of the sinner Eve from the Old Testament than an innocent princess from the ancient Greek myth.

140. Frederic Leighton, Perseus and Andromeda, oil canvas, 1891.

The Political Emblem

The oil painting by Cosimo (Piero di Lorenzo) in the Florentine Uffizi from 1515 depicts the rescue of Andromeda as described in Ovid's Metamorphoses (**141**).[74] The painting was famous at the time, as evidenced by contemporary copies in the Florence Museo Davanzati and Vienna. Cosimo placed a grieving group on the left headed by King Cepheus in a white turban. Above them is the half-naked Andromeda; however, her skin is not pink, but grey, indicating her exotic origin. Near Andromeda, a monster emerges from the sea; on it stands Perseus, who is depicted in a triumphant pose, his sword raised to strike a deadly blow. To the right is the sequel to the story – Cepheus and his companions rejoice in victory over the dragon and celebrate Perseus, who has liberated Andromeda. In the upper right corner of Cosimo's painting, we see Perseus with winged boots flying to the dragon. On the right in the background is a later episode of the Perseus story – a sacrifice to three gods after the liberation of Andromeda.

141. Piero di Lorenzo (Cosimo), Perseus liberates Andromeda. Oil wood, 1515.

Cosimo portrayed Perseus in his painting four times; this feature is reminiscent of the themed festivities that the artist created in Florence. The individual scenes from the mythic story that are depicted on the painting could walk one after another in a costume parade. Cosimo's painting, as well as the cycles of Perin del Vaga, which were discussed above, demonstrates that the Renaissance renewal of ancient Greek and Roman culture was simultaneously a radical

[74] Dennis Geronimus, *Piero di Cosimo: Visions Beautiful and Strange* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 108–116; Emmanuel Ussel, "Persée et Andromède de Piero di Cosimo. Entre spécularité du mythe et imaginaire du monstrueux," in *Héros grecs à travers le temps. Autour de Persée, Thésée, Cadmos et Bellérophon*, ed. Laurence Baurain-Rebillard (Metz: Université de Lorraine, 2016), 75–89.

innovation. From the beginning, Renaissance depictions of ancient myths expressed concepts that were current at the time and place of their creation. In the case of Perin del Vaga, the Perseus myth was connected with justice; in the case of Cosimo, it was connected with the idea of dynasty. Cosimo's painting is dominated by the stump of a tree to which the princess is bound; its branches have been cut but it sprouts new ones. It is a reference to the Medici dynasty, whose members were deprived of government in Florence but always regained it and renewed their power.

Giambattista (Filippo) Strozzi, who ordered this allegorical celebration of the Medici dynasty through Perseus' myth, was the husband of Clarice de Medici, the older sister of Lorenzo di Piero Medici. Three years before the painting originated, the Medici returned triumphantly to Florence from the exile they had been in since 1494. On Cosimo's painting, Perseus may therefore be considered an alter ego of Lorenzo di Piero de' Medici, who finally ended the Republican era. Perseus (Lorenzo) has killed the monster (the Republican government) and freed Andromeda (Florence). Perseus triumphs thanks to his piety, as indicated at the top right, where the hero gives a sacrifice to the gods after the battle is over. Perseus' sacrifice to Zeus, Athena, and Hermes, which is mentioned in Ovid's Metamorphoses, became the main proof of this hero's piety in the Renaissance.[75] Ethiopians were considered by Greeks to be the oldest in the world to worship the gods, and the Ethiopian Andromeda and Perseus were thus an exemplary pious couple.[76]

The tree trunk to which Cosimo's Andromeda is attached looks similar to the broncone, a Medici emblem that celebrated the indestructibility of the dynasty.[77] Even if all the branches are cut down, at least one of them will grow up again. In Cosimo's picture, the broncone is anthropomorphised like a face with a fully open mouth. The dragon does not attack the princess, but the stream of water coming out of his nose falls on the broncone. The flow of water here is symbolic and, paradoxically, the more the tree personifying the Medici dynasty is threatened, the more it grows. In Cosimo's picture, Andromeda is not bound by iron as she was in following illustrations of this story; she is tied to the stump of a tree with a ribbon. The stump of the tree is the Medici dynasty and Andromeda (Florence) is its adornment, which is indicated by the white ribbon. Laurel wreaths in the group on the right celebrate not only Perseus' victory but also the Medici dynasty, with the laurel as an allusion to Lorenzo (Laurentius).

Cosimo's painting was echoed in Prague by the Czech, Hungarian, and Roman King Ferdinand I of the House of Habsburgs. The cycle with Perseus can be found on the essential reliefs of Ferdinand's Belvedere, built and decorated by Paolo della Stella in the gardens of the Prague Castle.[78] The architecture of the villa is built

---

[75] Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 4, 754–759.

[76] Homer, *Iliad*, 23, 205–208; Diodorus, 3, 2.

[77] Janet Cox-Rearick, *Dynasty and Destiny in Medici Art: Pontormo, Leo X, and the two Cosimos* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984); Vanessa Walker-Oakes, "Representing the Perfect Prince: Pontormo's Alessandro de'Medici," *Comitatus. A Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 32 (2001): 127–146. Gabrielle Langdon, *Medici Women: Portraits of Power, Love and Betrayal from the Court of Duke Cosimo I* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006), 30–31.

[78] Jan Bažant, "Perseus as Alter Ego Ferdinand I," *Studia Hercynia* 20 (2016): 127–150; Jan Bažant, "The Allegory of Dynastic Succession on the Prague Belvedere (1538–1550)," *Acta Universitatis Carolinae.*

in classical style, as well as the rich sculptural decorations from 1538–1550. The uniqueness of the building and its decoration was linked to the exceptional political ambitions of the builder. From the very beginning of his political career, his goal was to gain the rank of Roman Emperor. Thanks to his political dexterity and sophisticated propaganda, in which the Prague Belvedere also played a role, he achieved this goal in 1558.[79] Perseus appears in Prague at the same time as the Italian cycles discussed above, but the difference is that in Italy it is a wall painting in an interior. In Prague, for the first time, the cycle inspired by a pagan myth was displayed on stone reliefs and exposed in public space. It was placed in the arcades of the north facade of Belvedere, so it was visible from behind the wall of the royal garden.

On the right side of the northern facade of the Prague Belvedere, there is a double monogram – FA, for King Ferdinand I and Queen Anne above the original entrance arcade. To the left of the monograph of the builder and his wife, three scenes summarise the Perseus story. To the left of the monogram, on the top of which the royal crown was initially placed, is a relief plate with Pegasus (**142**). The mythical horse has raised wings, but it is standing up, its right leg lifted to strike a rock with its hoof. On Helicon, Pegasus opened the Spring of Muses, which became the source of human civilisation and culture.[80] Behind Pegasus, there is a shield with a royal crown and above its head we see an eagle, the emblem of Ferdinand I, who was the King of Rome at the time the relief was sculpted.

142 (left). Paolo della Stella, Pegasus. Sandstone relief on the Prague Belvedere, 1538–1550.
143 (right). Paolo della Stella, Perseus and Atlas. Sandstone relief on he Prague Belvedere, 1538–1550.

To the left of the Pegasus relief, we find the punishment of Atlas (**143**). Perseus, with a winged helmet and shoes, changes Atlas into a rock by showing him the head of Medusa. To prevent himself from being turned into stone, the hero hides his face behind the visor, which is partly missing on the relief today. The central theme of the scene is the severed head of Medusa; Paolo della Stella depicted the anatomical details of the fatal blow including the spine and the trachea. Medusa's

Philologica 2 (2017): 269–282; Jan Bažant and Anne Markham Schulz, "Stella, Paolo," In *Dizionario biografico degli Italiani*, 94 (2019): 195–198; Anne Markham Schulz, "Paolo Stella's Belvedere: a Genoese outpost in Prague," *The Burlington Magazine* 164 (November 2022): 516-531.

[79] Friedrich Polleross, "Romanitas in der habsburgischen Repräsentation von Karl V. bis Maximilian II," in: *Kaiserhof-Papsthof (16.–18. Jahrhundert)*, ed. Richard Bösel (Wien: VÖAW, 2006), 211–220.

[80] Cf. Sextus Propertius, 3, 3, 32.

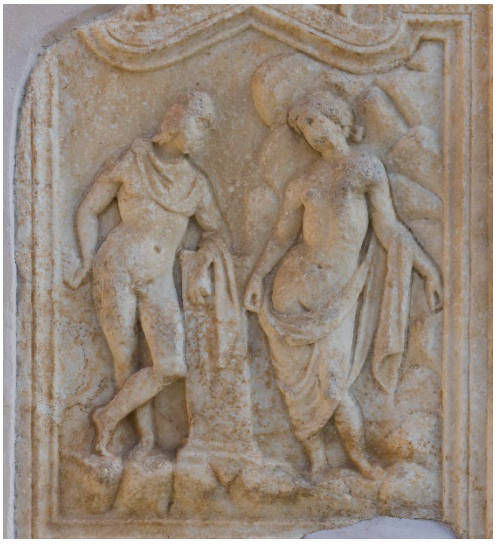
face has an expression of extreme pain, which is the counterpart of the expression of the dying Atlas. Around Medusa's head, the snakes are indicated by curves engraved on the relief background. Only the serpent that climbs from the hair of Medusa at the ear was rendered three-dimensionally. Atlas still has a human form, but the rocks behind him indicate what he will look like in the following moment. Medusa's gaze acts as a massive press that crushes the giant's body and irreversibly presses it onto the sharp rock, with which he will soon merge. This is suggested by Atlas' hair, which also seems to have grown into stone.

A series of Perseus scenes on the northern facade of the Belvedere in Prague culminates in the Andromeda scene, where Perseus is celebrated as a liberator (**144**). The hero unties the ribbons with which she was tied to the stump of the tree. Behind Andromeda we see a dead dragon lying on the ground with the sea indicated in the background. The princess is leaning forward with ribbons wrapped around her elbows. In the second quarter of the 16th century, the only known analogy for Paolo della Stella's scene with Perseus untying Andromeda is the painting by the Dutch painter Lambert Sustris, where the princess is not, however, depicted as in Prague and in the painting by Cosimo (**141**). The painting of Sustris was created around 1545 during the painter's stay in Venice and originally decorated a cassone, a wooden wedding chest. Andromeda is completely naked on Sustris' painting, and Perseus unties her hands, which are bound behind her back. Sustris has added Perseus' shield, which he placed at his feet, as Perseus needs his hands to liberate Andromeda. In both representations, the dead dragon is lying on the surface of the water. Paolo della Stella may have been inspired by Sustris' composition or vice versa, as at the end of the 1540s Sustris resided in Bavaria. It is also possible that they both drew from the same source that is unknown today.

144. Paolo della Stella, Perseus unties Andromeda.
Sandstone relief on the arcade spandrel of the northern façade of the Belvedere, 1538–1550.

The impulse to create this pictorial type could have come from the ancient literary tradition. Lucian described the action in detail: "then Perseus undid the maiden's chains, and supported her with his hand as she tip-toed down from the

slippery rock."[81] Lucian described the pictorial type we know in Roman art from many specimens, which were known to Renaissance artists. It appears also on ancient coins and in provincial Roman sculpture; one relief with this subject from the ancient city of Virunum is housed in the wall of the parish church in Moosburg in Austrian Carinthia today (**145**).[82] The half-naked Andromeda stands at the rock. Beside her is a naked Perseus; he puts his hand with the head of Medusa behind his back so as not to hurt the princess.



145. Perseus and Andromeda. Marble relief found in Carinthia, around 150 AD.

In the monumental art of post-ancient Europe, we encounter the topic of rescued Andromeda unchained by Perseus for the first time in Belvedere in Prague. Perseus is presented here as a virtuous warrior, bringing people order, well-being and cultural prosperity. However, Perseus is introduced in two roles, which are strictly related to the law, which was a crucial aspect of Ferdinand's self-representation. In the scene with Atlas, he justly punishes Atlas' violation of the law of hospitality. In a scene with Andromeda, he frees a girl unjustly sentenced to death.

In early modern Europe, the rulers often identified themselves with Perseus as it embodied both militancy and foresight, but above all piety and moral purity.[83] On the medal of Florentine Duke Alessandro de' Medici from 1533–1536, the portrait of the ruler is on the obverse side; on the reverse Perseus stands on the dragon, which turns its head toward him with open jaws.[84] The precarious situation is highlighted by the fact that the figures are in rough water. Perseus, however, is well equipped to fight – he is in full armour, holding his sword in his right hand; in the left hand he holds his shield and the head of Medusa. He knows about the deadly power of Medusa's head, and so he looks away. A Latin inscription comments on the scene:

---

[81] Lucian, *Dialogues of the Sea Gods*, 14. Translated by M. D. Macleod.

[82] Erna Diez, "Perseus und Andromeda," *Carinthia* 144 (1954): 156–164.

[83] Anne-Elisabeth Spica, "Métamorphoses de Persée dans la culture emblématique," in *Héros grecs à travers le temps. Autour de Persée, Thésée, Cadmos et Bellérophon*, ed. Laurence Baurain-Rebillard (Metz: Université de Lorraine, 2016), 91–113.

[84] London, The British Museum, G3,TuscM.147.

"So one lives safely, well and long. If we are sufficiently cautious, even the danger Perseus had to face in his fight with the sea dragon cannot jeopardise our life."

In the years 1570–1572, Giorgio Vasari elaborated the theme of Perseus untying of Andromeda in his painting for Francesco I de Medici (**146**).[85] Vasari pointed to Andromeda's nudity by placing her in the axis of the image and brightly lighting her body. Her contrapposto is exaggerated, revealing the influence of the ancient statues of Venus. From these ancient statues, he also took the one hand placed on top of her head, which was used in ancient sculptures to visualise intense emotions. Surprisingly, Andromeda turns away from her saviour, but the painter may have found inspiration in Metamorphoses for this motive. In this poem, the hero approaches Andromeda and asks her for her name, but the princess keeps silent. Ovid wrote that she was ashamed of her nakedness, which she could cover only with the tears that flooded her eyes.[86]

146. Giorgio Vasari, Perseus unties Andromeda. Oil wood, 1570–1572.

For his painting, Vasari took inspiration in the already mentioned painting Perin del Vaga from the Perseus Hall in Castel Sant'Angelo, where we find the model for the Nereids examining corals created by Medusa's blood, and the Nereids bathing in the sea. The original motif depicts the men on the shore of the sea on the

[85] Philippe Morel, "La chair d'Andromède et le sang de Méduse: mythologie et rhétorique dans le Persée et Andromède de Vasari," in *Andromède ou le héros à l'épreuve de la beauté*, actes du colloque international organisé au musé du Louvre, eds. Alain Laframboise and Françoise Siguret (Paris: Klincksieck, 1996), 57–83; Liana Cheney, *Giorgio Vasari's Teachers. Sacred and Profane Art* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2007), 187–196.
[86] Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 4, 680–684.

left, who are pulling the body of the sea dragon onto the shore with the help of a winch. On the seashore, we find work and technology on the left, while on the right-side people play music and dance. The taming and binding of Pegasus, indicated by the fact that the hero has a bridle attached to his belt, is the counterpart to the removal of the handcuffs that attached Andromeda to the rock. The scenery may have a more general meaning: by appropriating the poet's inspiration (Pegasus), man liberates his soul (Andromeda). At Andromeda's feet is the head of the Medusa, who changed life into stone. The blood that flows from the severed head into the sea turns into the corals taken by the Nereids, the theme already discussed above. The opposite of Medusa's head is the shield-mirror lying at Perseus' feet which he used to kill the monster. Now the mirror reflects the hero who liberates Andromeda. The mirror and Medusa's head are symbols of mechanical duplication. Perseus and Andromeda are the symbols of the creator and the work that is a full-fledged counterpart of the model. Like Pygmalion, who revived a stone statue, Perseus revives an immobile figure that looked like a statue. By removing her handcuffs, Perseus gives life to Andromeda.

Vasari's painting was designed for Francesco I de Medici's study in Palazzo Vecchio, Florence, where it was a highlight in the collection of natural and artistic works. The ideological program of the study's decoration, in which the myth of Medusa and corals dominated, was the work of the philologist and historian Vincenzo Borghini. The key to this program was the central painting on the ceiling, which depicted Nature giving a crystal to Prometheus. On the ground beside Nature lies the coral, a symbol of the unity of nature and art. Nature creates coral and men create art, which imitates nature. At the same time, coral was a symbol of the ruling virtue, evoking a government based on scientific knowledge. Only those who fully understand the mystery of the coral, i.e. the relationship between the natural, the human and the divine, are entitled to rule the world. From the interpenetration of these three spheres, art arises.

The role of Perseus in political propaganda illuminates the evolution of the identification of the French king with this hero.[87] Henry II was celebrated as the first French Perseus. On the medal he issued in 1549, we see his portrait on the obverse side, and Perseus liberating Andromeda on the reverse.[88] He thus celebrated the liberation of Boulogne. The English army had occupied the city, but the king unexpectedly appeared with his troops. The Greek inscription "God from the Machine" emphasises the king's miraculous appearance, which referred to God's interventions on the scene of Greek theatres, in which an actor representing God seemed to descend from the heavens. Perseus was the only Greek hero who, like the gods, could attack his enemy from the blue sky. When Henry II ceremoniously entered Paris on February 17, 1558, he was welcomed with the painting of the liberation of Andromeda. An army is depicted at the edge of the image, indicating that the scene commented on the king's successes on the battlefield. Above the scene was the inscription, "To the new Perseus, Picardy for his rescue," which explicitly

[87] Mari-France Wagner, "Le théâtre du Persée français," in *Andromède ou le héros à l'épreuve de la beauté,* ed. Alain Laframboise and Françoise Siguret (Paris: Klincksieck, 1996), 429–453.
[88] Johann Jakob Luck, *Sylloge numismatum elegantiorum* (Straßburg: Reppianis, 1620), 137.

linked it to the successes of Henry II in Picardy. Andromeda impersonated Picardy, as we read in the description of this event published in the same year.[89]

Henry IV, who received the name of his godfather Henry II, was also celebrated as the French Perseus. In order to unite France, Henry IV converted to the Catholic faith in 1593. This ended the decline of royal power in France, which lasted almost half a century, and in 1594 he solemnly entered Paris, forcing the Spanish troops to leave. Hope for the conclusion of religious reconciliation and political unity found expression in the woodcut on which the King is portrayed as Perseus.[90] He attacks the dragon to save Andromeda, who represents France. The sun, a symbol of peace, is highlighted in the upper left corner. The woodcut celebrated the victory over the Spanish League; the Princess is therefore attached to the rock by Spanish gold coins, an attribute of political corruption. Perseus has the face and beard of Henry IV and this identification with the ancient hero is stressed in a comment attached to the engraving. Louis XIII, son of Henry IV, also became the new Perseus. The identification of the French king with the ancient hero culminated in a stage production on the Seine in Paris, which celebrated the fall of the Protestant fortress La Rochelle.[91] Royal forces conquered the fortress on October 30, 1628. Andromeda impersonates La Rochelle; the sea dragon is the English army that helped the Protestants there. Perseus is the victorious French King; he emerges from the royal residence, the Louvre, to attack the sea dragon.[92]

After the conquest of La Rochelle, the goals of French politics and, accordingly, the tone and strategy of political propaganda changed radically. The struggle with outer and inner enemies has replaced efforts to consolidate the King's sovereignty. In political propaganda, which now aims to legitimise the sovereign's absolute power, the French King no longer appears as a warrior. Moreover, the identity of the King is receding in the background, as his person merges with the French kingdom, which is eternal and therefore impersonal. Perseus, with his unique life story, could not be included in this new context; he thus disappears from French political propaganda. The myth, on the contrary, was remarkably popular in late 16th and early 17th-century Dutch political pamphlets, which was due to the extreme and long-term uncertainty of political affairs in these Spanish domains. In 1581, seven Northern provinces declared independence, but they had to fight to enforce it. Under the Spanish administration, only ten southern provinces remained. In the last quarter of the 16th century, the situation changed frequently; one often very soon regretted one's public expression of support for this or that party. This explains why explicit allusions, signatures or commentaries disappeared from political prints.

On one print concerning the fight against Spanish domination, we see Patience attached to a tree in the pose of Andromeda, personifying the Dutch people.[93] On another print, we see a paraphrase of the liberation of Andromeda (**147**). The fettered princess stands in the same pose as in the previous print, but this time she is explicitly identified as the Netherlands by a shield with a lion hanging above her. On

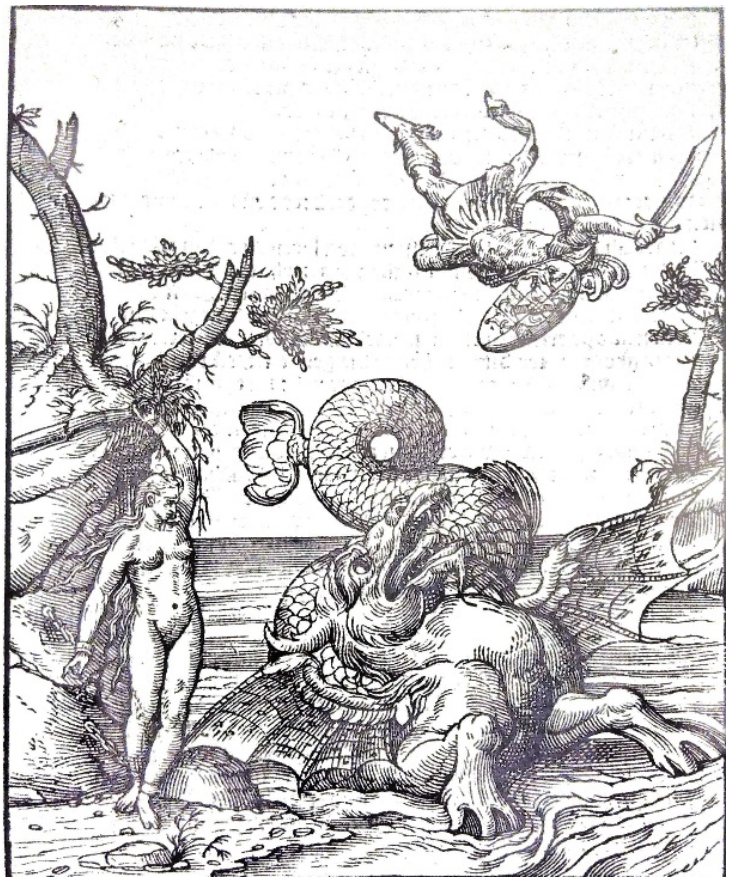
---

[89] Estienne Jodell, *Le recueil des inscriptions, figures, et devis* (Paris: s.n., 1558), 10v–11r.
[90] Paris, Bibliothèque nationale, Cabinet des Estampes, Qb' 1594.
[91] Paris, Bibliothèque nationale, Cabinet des Estampes, QB-1 (1628)-FOL.
[92] H. Morel, *Sujet du feu d'artifice sur la prise de la La Rochelle* (Paris: C. Son et P. Bail, 1628), 10.
[93] London, The British Museum, 1932,0213.303.

the first specimens of this print, the Habsburg symbols were on the dragon's chest, identifying him as Fernando Álvarez de Toledo, Duke of Alba, the Spanish governor in the Netherlands (1567–1573). The three characters with masks peeping from beneath the dragon's cloak are probably the treacherous southern provinces loyal to the Habsburgs. In the role of Perseus, the hero of the anti-Habsburg uprising, William of Orange, appears on the first copies of this print. His emblem on the shield, accompanied by the inscription "Shield of Wisdom," identify him. Above William of Orange is the hand of God, which blesses him. On the shore on which Andromeda is standing, there are representatives of sixteen Dutch provinces. The removal of explicit political allusions in a later version of the print hints at how promptly publishers responded to changes in the political situation.

147. William, Prince of Orange, as Perseus liberating the Netherlands personified by Andromeda. Copper engraving, 1577–1578.

Upon the triumphant arrival of Prince William of Orange in Brussels in 1577, Perseus' struggle with the sea monster was shown on the water in front of the city gate along with other living images. A whale-sized dragon swam in the water near a huge rock, the realistic design of which was said to have been amazing. Perseus hung in the air over naked Andromeda, chained to the rock. With one blow of his sword, the hero killed the dragon, which fell below the water level. The performance was accompanied by a declamation in which the myth of Perseus was retold, and William of Orange was finally welcomed as the second Perseus. The organiser of the festival was Jean-Baptiste Houwaert, who also wrote a book about the spectacle, which describes the performance (**148**). Leest's woodcut, which was used as the illustration, does not show a real theatre, but the pictorial type popular at that time. The only specific feature was that Perseus has a shield with the emblem of William of Orange.



148. Antonij van Leest, William, Prince of Orange,
liberating the Netherlands personified by Andromeda. Woodcut, 1579.

Andromeda also appeared in the political propaganda of the Austrian Archduke Matthias, a member of the House of Habsburg. Matthias was the younger brother of Rudolph II, who became the Holy Roman Emperor in 1576. After the victory of William of Orange, moderate Dutch Catholics persuaded the Austrian Archduke to become the head of the opposition. Matthias went secretly to the Netherlands against the will of his elder brother. He arrived without money and only with a small escort, and William Orange outwitted the inexperienced young man easily. William accepted him with imperial honours but took advantage of the absurd situation in his favour. He declared Matthias the Governor of the Free Netherlands, but the young man had to confirm in writing that he was giving up all his powers. Matthias did not affect the course of the Dutch Revolution in any way, and in 1581 he was forced to return ingloriously. Nevertheless, in 1580 Matthias issued a medal with his portrait on the obverse side with the inscription: "Matthias by the grace of God the Austrian Archduke, the governor of Belgium."[94] On the reverse is a scene with Perseus liberating Andromeda and the Archduke's motto "Victory loves toils." The French King Francis I and Francis I de' Medici had already identified themselves with this motto, a quotation from the wedding song of the

[94] Tomas Kleisener, "Amat Victoria Curam: The Devise of Archduke Matthias on His Medals," *Studia Rudolphina* 9 (2009): 87–99.

ancient Roman poet Catullus. [95] The content of the motto, namely that no one will win unless he is properly prepared, was the exact opposite of how Matthias acted.

The Matthias medal with the liberation of Andromeda was a transparent allegory of the liberation of the Netherlands from Spanish domination, which was very embarrassing for the Habsburgs on the Spanish royal throne and the imperial throne in Vienna. When the emblem of Matthias Medal was later included in the second part of Typotius' emblematic book, which was published in Prague in 1602, it had to be reinterpreted (**149**). After returning from the Netherlands, Matthias took part in the struggle with the Turks, and he is therefore titled "the supreme general of the Kingdom of Hungary." In the attached comment, we read that Andromeda is beautiful Hungary, the dragon is the Turks, and the head of Medusa is the punishment of God. Nevertheless, beyond the Habsburg Empire, the original interpretation persisted. In a history of Dutch numismatics published in Paris in 1688, we read: "the Archduke is Perseus who came to save Flanders represented by Andromeda and free them from the Spaniards." [96]

149. Aegidius Sadeler, Emblem of Archduke Mathias with the liberation of Andromeda. Engraving, 1602.

The story of Perseus and Andromeda was an ideal medium for political propaganda. The story was widely known, so it was possible to cast the roles of the mythic hero, the dragon and the rescued princess arbitrarily, and thus change the meaning of the representation at will. In 1599, Archduke Albrecht VII Habsburg became a regent in the Spanish Netherlands. On his arrival in Leuven in 1600, a play was performed that was inspired by the politically updated myth of Perseus. Andromeda impersonated Belgium, Albrecht embodied Perseus, his wife Isabel was

[95] Catullus 62, 11–19.
[96] Pierre Bizot, *Histoire Métallique de la République de Hollande, I* (Amsterdam: Mortier, 1688), 242.

Pegasus, and the evil Phineus stood for the detached Dutch provinces.[97] In the Northern provinces only six years later, a similar play was performed. Its author, Jacob Duym, dedicated it to Maurice of Nassau, the son of William of Orange. The play's name was "Nassau's Perseus, the Liberator of the Andromeda or the Dutch Girls", and the roles were divided according to the traditional pattern – Andromeda represented the Netherlands, Perseus was William of Orange and the dragon the Duke of Alba.[98] We can interpret Andromeda's liberation, which Joachim Wtewael painted in 1611, in a similar manner.[99] A live image with the liberation of Andromeda was planned for the visit of English Queen Henrietta Marie, the wife of King Charles I. The Queen was ceremoniously welcomed in Amsterdam in 1642, but the performance on the water was not realised because the Queen arrived from the mainland. In the role of Perseus liberating Andromeda (the Netherlands), another son of William of Orange, Frederik of Orange, appeared (**150**).

150. Pieter Symonsz Potter, Liberation of Andromeda
as allegory of Frederick, Prince of Orange, liberating the Netherlands. Oil painting, 1642.

On the painting, we see the usual iconographic image of Andromeda's liberation. The political character of the scene is indicated by the arrival of Frederik's fleet to Andromeda and the panorama of Amsterdam on the horizon. Perseus and Andromeda were suitable candidates for political propaganda only when it was a

[97] Jan-Baptist Gramaye, *Andromede belgica dicta* (Leuven: apud Laurentium Kellam, 1600).
[98] Jacob Duym, *Een Ghedenck-boeck ...* (Leiden: Haestens, 1606).
[99] Patrick Le Chanu, *Joachim Wtewael: Persée et Andromède* (Paris: Réunion des musées nationaux, 1999), but cf. also Joanna Woodall, "Wtewael's Perseus and Andromeda: Looking for Love in Early Seventeenth-Century Dutch Painting," in *Manifestations of Venus. Art and Sexuality*, ed. Caroline Arscott – Katie Scott (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), 39–68.

situation of extreme urgency in which the existence of the state was threatened. As already mentioned above, Perseus disappeared from French political propaganda in the era of Louis XIV, who presented himself as the ruler of a fully consolidated world superpower. In the 1660s, however, the Perseus myth reappears on the French scene in connection with the attempt to turn Paris into a second Rome. At the time, Charles le Brun proposed a series of monumental fountains in the Italian Baroque style, which was intended to dominate the new Parisian squares. Among them were fountains with Perseus changing Atlas into a mountain, Pegasus on Parnassus, or the liberation of Andromeda. None of these projects, however, was implemented. The Italian baroque was too radical for French tastes; moreover, the chateau in Versailles became the official royal residence in 1670.

In the drawing of Le Brun's Andromeda fountain, the colossal monster lying awkwardly on its back dominates.[100] Perseus attacks him from the heavens rather illogically with both the sword and the head of Medusa. To the left, naked Andromeda is attached to the rocks and raises both hands in horror. At the top of the cliff, we see Athena, who hands the shield to Perseus, but the hero does not need it. Even though Le Brune's proposal was not realised in Paris, it inspired René Fromin in his design of a monumental fountain in the garden of La Granja, Spain, in San Idelfonso near Segovia.[101] The entire fountain from 1720–1730 is made of lead; the figures are patinated to look like bronze, and the rock is white. In the new context, Perseus symbolised Philip V of Spain, Athena the Kingdom of France and the dragon the enemies of France (England, the Netherlands, and the Holy Roman Empire).

The depiction of Perseus' liberation of Andromeda also brought prestige in the 19th century. Around 1860, we find it as a group of sculptures at Lord Ward's manor house in England. William Ward, 1st Earl of Dudley belonged to a small circle of the richest men of the world at the time. He grew wealthy from coal, iron and limestone quarries, iron foundries, chemical factories, and railway construction. Through the architecture of his residence and its decoration, he presented himself as a Baroque cavalier. He built the Witley Court as a 17th-century Italian villa, the effect of which was enhanced by the monumental Perseus Fountain. Andromeda is bound to the rocks, and Perseus is likened to St George, from whom he differs only by his winged horse and nakedness (**151**). On the other end of the world, Francisco Manuel Chaves Pinheiro, a professor at the Brazilian Academy of Fine Arts, created an equally monumental sculpture in a similarly traditional style.[102] Perseus is in the axis of the pyramidal composition of his bronze sculptural group; with his right hand he protects the kneeling Andromeda, and with his left he kills the dragon with the head of Medusa. In their concept, style, allegorical meaning, and celebratory function, both group sculptures are firmly rooted in the early modern era.

---

[100] Paris Louvre, Départements des arts graphiques, 29811 recto. Cf. Marie-Caroline Janand, "Le Recueil de Fontaines et de Frises maritimes gravé par Louis de Châtillon d'après Le Brun," *Histoire de l'art* 45 (1999): 45–56; Lydia Beauvais, et al. *Musée du Louvre, Département des Arts graphiques, Inventaire général des dessins ecole française Charles Le Brun (1619–1690) II* (Paris: Réunion des Musées Nationaux, 2000), n° 2453, p. 704.

[101] Yves Bottineau, *L'art de cour dans l'Espagne de Philippe V, 1700–1746* (Bordeaux: Féret, 1960), 415–431.

[102] Rio de Janeiro, Museu da Republica, 1870–1880.

151. James Forsyth, The Perseus and Andromeda fountain. Stone, c. 1860.

The Naked Damsel in Distress

In the Italian Renaissance, Andromeda was perceived as she was in the Middle Ages, i.e. as a precursor of Christian martyrs.[103] But the medieval features were systematically replaced by ancient formulas. We see it already on a woodcut from 1497 depicting the rescue of Andromeda, which was mentioned above (**29**). Perseus did not ride Pegasus as in the 14th century, but flew with a winged cap and boots. Even more critical was that Andromeda was naked on this woodcut. Nudity was one of the most striking features of ancient statues, and thanks to this motif, the representation was given an ancient character (which was highly desired at the time) despite the fact that Andromeda was only rarely depicted naked in antiquity. Nevertheless, Lucian wrote in 2nd century AD that Perseus saw her naked: "what a beautiful sight she was! – with her hair let down, but largely uncovered from breasts downwards."[104] On the literary illustration which was created around 1470–1490, we find Perseus in knight's armour as he unchains the black Andromeda, who is completely naked.[105] In this case, the innovation was related to the fact that it was an illustration of Ovid's book The Art of Love. In the opening chapter, Ovid mentions the black Andromeda, whom Perseus brought from India as an example of a lover from far abroad. According to the poet, it is not necessary to go to the end of the world for exotic beauties, because there are enough beautiful women at home (i.e. in Rome).

In the second quarter of the 16th century, Andromeda's desperate situation began to be expressed through dramatic gesticulation. On the woodcut from 1497 mentioned above, Andromeda stands upright with her arms pressed to her body and tied behind her back, highlighting her helplessness. In the drawing by Giulio Romano, which was created after 1541, she has been unchained; her right hangs

---

[103] Anne-Lott Zech, "'*Imago boni Principis.' Der Perseus-Mythos zwischen Apotheose und Heilserwartung in der politischen Öffentlichkeit des 16. Jahrhunderts* (Münster: Lit, 2000), 213.
[104] Lucian, *Dialogues of the sea gods*, 14. Translated by M. D. Macleod.
[105] London, Sotheby's 56, 22. června 1982, s. 66–69. Cf. Elizabeth McGrath, "The Black Andromeda," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 55 (1992): 1–18.

downward but her left hand is lifted high.[106] Titian took the next step and draws the viewer's attention to Andromeda's mental state, which he has indicated by the contrast of her bent arms; she raises one while lowering the other.

152. Titian, Andromeda, oil canvas, 1554–1560.

In a series of mythological images that Titian painted for the Spanish King Philip II nudity played a central role.[107] Titian painted altogether six paintings for the king - Danae and the Golden Rain, Venus and Adonis, Perseus and Andromeda, Kidnapping of Europa, Diana with Actaeon, and Diana with Callisto. The painter created the series over the course of ten years, from 1553 to 1562. Ovid's Metamorphoses inspired all these paintings, which Titian called "poesie," or poetry in paint. The paintings are meditations on fate, faith, restoration, and salvation, but their erotic charge was undoubtedly a key part of their message. In the depiction of Andromeda's liberation, the main character is the princess; Perseus' duel with the dragon takes place in the background. Andromeda's nude figure is brightly lit and floats in space with her arms outstretched, thus evoking the constellation of the night sky into which she later turns (**152**).[108] Most important, however, is the very fact of exposure of the naked female body.

In addition to being tied, the princess has unnaturally twisted S-shaped hands, another innovation by Titian. The painter successfully adapted to Andromeda the attitude of the desperate Laocoön from the famous ancient statue, which was from the beginning of the 16th century the highlight of the Vatican collections. This

---

[106] Hamburg, Hamburger Kunsthalle, 21349.

[107] Anne J. Cruz, "Titian, Philip II, and Pagan Iconography," in *Signs of Power in Habsburg Spain and the New World*, ed. Jason McCloskey and Ignacio López Alemany (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2013), 4–25; Marie. Tanner, *Sublime Truth and the Senses: Titian's Poesie for King Philip II of Spain* (London: Harvey Miller Publishers, 2019).

[108] Thomas Puttfarken, "Aristotle, Titian, and Tragic Painting," in: *Art and Thought*, ed. Dana Arnold and Margaret Iversen (Malden: Blackwell, 2003), 9–27; Hosono 2004; Hans Ost, "Tizians Perseus und Andromeda. Datierungen, Repliken, Kopien," *Artibus et Historiae* 27, no. 54 (2006): 129–146.

expressive formula implied the alternation of despair and hope, which is characteristic for extreme emotional excitement. In the following centuries, Andromeda appears in this pose on most of the scenes depicting Perseus' battle with the dragon. The gesture of the left hand at the same time indicates the revelation of the veil, which was an attribute of the bride in ancient art, which Titian could have known from countless ancient images. Andromeda knows that when the hero kills the monster, she will become his wife. On Titian's painting, Perseus flying down to the sea monster serves as the overturned counterpart of Andromeda. In his representation, Titian quoted Ovid, who compared the hero to an eagle descending head down to a snake he had seen beneath him.[109] The painting could only be fully appreciated by one who knew Metamorphoses, which Titian also adhered to by depicting the hero fighting with a harpe.[110]

After Philip's death, his son and successor Philip III hid Titian's paintings so as not to offend the queen and the ladies of her court. From 1640, it was made illegal in the Kingdom of Spain to create, import and own images of naked human bodies.[111] At the same time, the first "sala reservada" appeared in the royal residence, which only the sovereign and chosen guests could enter. Philip IV set it up and placed nine of Titian's paintings of naked women in it. Titian's paintings for Philip II ostentatiously ignored the social conventions of the time, which increased the prestige of the owner greatly. Their eroticism was not only a means of self-celebration and the identification with the classical past, but above all the identification with figures depicted in these paintings. In them, Zeus longed for the beautiful Danae, Europa and Callisto. Perseus longed for Andromeda, whom he saw naked on the seashore chained to the rock.[112]

The unions from which famous descendants emerged would never have taken place had it not been for the sex-appeal of their female participants. Thus, these paintings were also closely connected with the dynastic idea. Danae gave birth to the greatest hero Perseus, Europa to famous king Minos, Callisto to Arcas, whom Arcadia was named after, and Andromeda to Perses, the ancestor of the Persians. The only exception, which proves the rule, was the scene with Diana and Actaeon, the tragic inversion of these success stories. The nudity of Diana frightened Actaeon, because he knew that this look would cost him his life. In this case, the sexual excitement of the male visitors to the "sala reservada" was undoubtedly even greater. Unlike the poor Actaeon, the visitors could appreciate the naked Diana to the fullest without fearing repercussions.

In 1557 in Lyon, Jean de Tournes published richly illustrated rewritings of Ovid's Metamorphoses in French and Dutch versions. In a woodcut representing the rescue of Andromeda, the princess has the same posture as on Titian's painting, with pronounced contrapposto and arms stretched up and down (**153**).[113] In the woodcut,

---

[109] Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 4, 714.

[110] Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 4, 666.

[111] Antonius Sotomaior, *Index Novissimus librorum prohibitorum et expurgandorum ... pro catholicis Hispaniarum regnis Philippi IV* (Madrid: Diaz, 1640), rule XI. Cf. Thomas Loughman, et al., eds., *Splendor, Myth and Vision: Nudes from the Prado* (Williamstown: Yale University Press, 2016).

[112] Ovid, *Metamorphoses,* 4, 673–675.

[113] Peter Sharratt, *Bernard Solomon, illustrator Lyonnais* (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 2005), 192.

the medieval Perseus riding on Pegasus reappears. This variant later prevailed and emphasised that Perseus' victory was above all the allegory of the path to God embodied by the winged horse. Elements taken from the medieval image tradition included a spear that the hero used to attack the sea monster, and a rock projecting from the sea to which the princess was tied. On the island on the right there is a group of viewers who represent the royal parents of the princesses and their court.

153. Bernard Salomon, Liberation of Andromeda. Woodcut, 1557.

The tremendous success of the Lyon version of "Metamorphoses" was due to the fact that it was a pocket edition in which the mythic stories and image types were simplified into animated and easily memorable abbreviations.[114] On every page, the reader sees a summarising title at the top and a short text at the bottom; in between is a woodcut illustration by Bernard Salomon. In the German adaptation that was published in 1563, free copies by Virgil Solis replaced Salomon's woodcuts. Further adaptations of texts and illustrations were then published in a dense series until 1650. These publications significantly increased the popularity of ancient myths and related pictorial types, but the variety of compositions was reduced to one single formula that was then repeated indefinitely.

In 1581, Nicolaus Reusner illustrated his emblem book with Solis' woodcuts (**154**). The emblem is called "Picture of the Good Governor" and was dedicated to Duke George, who fought against the Turks in the Imperial Army. In the dedication and then explicitly in the commentary, Perseus is identified with St George while Andromeda is identified with the holy Church. In 1588, Karl van Mander provided a story of Andromeda with an elaborate moral lesson (**155**). His engraving is full of allusions to Ovid's version of the Perseus myth. In the foreground, we find the Nereids, the beauty of which Andromeda's mother wished to match. The nymph on the left tears the seagrass, which played an important role in the story of corals. The

[114] Jean de Tournes, ed., *La métamorphose d'Ovide figurée* (Lyon: Ian de Tournes, 1557).

Latin inscription comments the engraving: "No form of violence turns out well if you handle it unwisely: Perseus in the case of the maiden Andromeda." [115]

154 (left). Nicolaus Reusner, Picture of the Good Governor. Woodcut, 1581.
155 (right). Karel van Mander I, Perseus and Andromeda. Engraving Jacques de Gheyn II, 1588.

Post-ancient Europe did not know Perseus' fight with the sea dragon only as a static two-dimensional image, but also as a theatre spectacle. In theatrical realisations, sophisticated machines were used to show how the hero arrives on Pegasus, which waved its wings and circled in the air over the dragon. A play about Perseus by Calderón de la Barca was presented at the Coliseo of Buen Retiro palace in Madrid in 1653. The theatrical design indicates Pegasus' circular descent with Perseus in the saddle.[116] Coliseo was then a modern theatre with advanced Italian theatre technology, and the flying Perseus must have been breathtaking. Calderón understood the myth about Perseus allegorically; the hero was Jesus Christ, Andromeda personified nature, and Medusa sin. On the theatre stage at the Coliseo, Andromeda had to be clothed, but in paintings and engravings, she was depicted naked.

Hendrick Goltzius created several engravings with Andromeda, portraying her as a saint and erotic subject. This created a tension that became the chief bearer of the meaning of these depictions in the following two centuries. On the engraving of 1583, he represented naked Perseus on Pegasus, armed only with a sword and a shield with the head of Medusa (**156**). Andromeda's beautiful curves dominate the engraving, but Goltzius also emphasises the depth of her emotions; the princess' brow is constricted into a painful grimace, with her gaze facing the sky. In his

[115] Marjolein Leesberg, et al., eds., *The New Hollstein Dutch and Flemish Etchings, Engravings and Woodcuts 1450 – 1700: Karel Van Mander* (Roosendaal: Koninklijke Van Poll, 1999), lxxxii.
[116] Houghton Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass. MS Typ 258, p. 88. Pedro Calderón de la Barca, *Andrómeda y Perseo*, ed. José M. Ruano de la Haza (Kassel: Edition Reichenberger, 1995), 267.

engraving of 1601, he explicitly likened her to Mary Magdalene or a Christian martyr by placing a skull and bone at her feet (**157**). The engraving was created after Goltzius returned from Italy, where he carefully studied the ancient statues. In Rome, Goltzius drew the famous ancient statue of Venus Felix, which was in the Vatican collections. Goltzius took the overstated contrapposto from the ancient statues of Venus, making his suffering Andromeda look similar to a belly dancer. [117]

156 (left). Hendrick Goltzius, Andromeda. Engraving, 1583.
157 (right). Hendrick Goltzius, Andromeda. Jana Saenredam, engraving, 1601.

Natale Conti, whose book Mythologiae was published in 1567, emphasised Andromeda's virtue: "Andromeda was an example of the terrible things that can happen to a person who is related to someone that scorns God's worship … Andromeda was put in a life-threatening situation because of her mother's headstrong behaviour. However, in the end, the immortal gods were kind enough to sidetrack Perseus so that he could not only liberate her from danger but also make her a much happier woman because she had borne her lot so patiently." [118] Giuseppe Cesari, a prominent artist in the court of Pope Clement VIII, held to this tradition. His Andromeda from 1602 is naked and bound, but the painter has radically abandoned the dramatic atmosphere that prevailed in the 16th century. His Andromeda is calm because she has wholly surrendered herself to the will of God. [119] In the collection of emblems entitled Throne of Cupid from 1620, the engraving with Andromeda's silent wait for liberation by Perseus was accompanied by verses in which we read

[117] Cf. Norbert Michels, *Hendrick Goltzius (1558–1617): Mythos, Macht und Menschlichkeit* (Petersberg: M. Imhof, 2017), n. V, 19; Bažant, *Statues of Venus*, 112, 169 note 26.
[118] Natale Conti, *Mythologiae, I–II,* translated by John Mulryn and Steven Brown (Tempe: ACMRS, 2006), 804–806.
[119] Wien, Kunsthistorisches Museum, GG 137.

about the enamoured Perseus, whom love made courageous so he feared no danger.[120] Consequently, the calm Andromeda could visualise the prize that awaited Perseus after accomplishing his task. The calm Andromeda is also represented on the relief in the courtyard of the Old Town Hall in Vienna, which was created by Georg Raphael Donner in 1741. The relief forms the backdrop of the fountain; from the monster's mouth water flows onto Andromeda, who also retains her icy calm as she knows Perseus is coming.[121]

158 (left). Agostino Carracci, Frightened Andromeda. Engraving, 1590–1595.
159 (right). Agostino Carracci, Calm Andromeda. Engraving, 1590–1595.

Nevertheless, the calm Andromeda has also been depicted in contexts that do not depict her as an example of piety. We can see her depiction in Agostino Carracci's series of erotic prints called Lascivie (Lasciviousnesses). The series includes explicitly erotic scenes and several mythological scenes whose erotic character suggests only minor deviations from standard iconographic types. In the image of the liberation of Andromeda, Carracci has omitted Perseus and represented the princess in unusually close contact with the ugly sea dragon (**158**). On another print from this series, she is bound to the rock by a sturdy iron fitting and her position, in which she nearly hangs above the sea, must be quite painful (**159**). Nevertheless, she is relaxed and calm, and the scenes perhaps reminds us of the intimate moment that Hollywood star Ann Darrow enjoyed with King Kong.

In the preface to his tragedy Andromeda in 1651, Pierre Corneille criticised the widespread vice of representing the myth of Andromeda as an excuse to show a naked female body, but did so in vain. The erotically attractive Andromeda can be found, for example, in the engraving by Bernard Picart, incorporated in his 1754

[120] Willem Jansz Blaeu, *Thronus Cupidinis* (Amsterdam: apud Wilhelmum Iansonium, 1620), 24.
[121] Claudia Diemer, *Georg Raphael Donner. Die Reliefs* (Nürnberg: s.n., 1979), no. 31.

bestseller, in which the engravings inspired by ancient myths were accompanied by a scholarly commentary (**160**). Andromeda is represented here as an Ethiopian princess, i.e. a black woman. The erotic character of the engraving is visible in the way Andromeda's body is shown and by Eros at her feet, releasing her from the handcuffs.

160. Bernard Picart, Perseus and Andromeda. Engraving, 1754.

This portrayal of the enchained Andromeda was to some extent analogous to today's glamour photos, which are not pornographic, but always give rise to erotic tension. The same is true of the following sequence in the story of Andromeda's liberation, when Perseus, having slain the dragon, descended from heaven to the princess to unbind her. Following the example of Vasari's image (**146**), the sexual passion of the saviour and the rescued girl become the central theme of most of the scenes of Andromeda's unfettering. Bartolomeo Passarotti, in his painting from 1572–1575, retained Vasari's composition, but placed Perseus and Andromeda facing one another (**161**). Passarotti reduced the secondary motives to focus the attention of the viewer entirely on the mutual relationship of both protagonists. Around the enamoured couple are the essential attributes of the mythical story – on the left is the hero's magical shield, next to which Medusa's head lies. Like on Vasari's painting, she has male features and normal hair. On the right, we find Pegasus' head and the head of the sea monster. Except for Medusa, everyone – Perseus, Pegasus and the Sea Monster – look at Andromeda. Her erotic attractiveness is the main message of the painting.

161. Bartolomeo Passarotti, Perseus unties Andromeda. Oil canvas, 1572–1575.

Rubens repeatedly returned to the theme of Perseus unshackling Andromeda. In the Berlin painting of 1620–1622, Andromeda lowered her eyes and tried to cover herself with the cloak; Perseus in his ancient armour looks at her admiringly and unties the ropes that were fastened to the rocks.[122] His feelings are expressed by the presence of the Erotes, who help him to untie the ropes. The other Erotes care for Pegasus. In classical antiquity, Eros was part of this pictorial type, which is also known from Philostratus' description of the wall painting that the author allegedly saw in the 3rd century AD.[123] On Rubens' picture in the Hermitage in St. Petersburg, Andromeda is already untied, and Perseus takes her hand (**162**).[124] On the right is Pegasus, who has a raised front hoop and announces his flight to the mountain of Muses, where he will open the spring of poetic inspiration. At the bottom lies the dying dragon, who tries to turn its head toward its vanquisher. The head of Medusa, which Perseus has attached to his shield, also tries to see the hero. Eros, who holds the shield of Perseus from below, looks out of the picture to draw the attention of the viewer to Medusa. The evil to which the dragon and Medusa point is temporarily overpowered, but not annihilated definitively.

---

[122] Berlin, Gemäldegalerie, 1622.

[123] Philostratus, *Imagines*, 1, 29.

[124] Jeffrey M. Muller, "The 'Perseus and Andromeda' on Rubens's House." *Simiolus* 12 (1981 –1982): 131–146; John Beldon Scott, "The Meaning of Perseus and Andromeda in the Farnese Gallery and on the Rubens House," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 51 (1988): 250–260.

162. Peter Paul Rubens, Perseus unties Andromeda. Oil canvas, around 1622.

A copy of this painting decorated the garden facade of Rubens' Palace in Antwerp. In this context, another aspect of the symbolism of Medusa's head is stressed. Here, it appears above all as an emblem of art, as many clues indicate. Perseus is not unchaining Andromeda, but only touches her arm as if he wanted to assure himself, she is a real girl and not a work of art. This is a scholarly allusion to Ovid, who wrote that from afar Andromeda looked like a statue.[125] Thus, the painting pays tribute to Rubens as artist and classical scholar. The love scene is elevated to an allegory of artistic creation by including the goddess of victory over the hero who decorates him with a laurel wreath. It did not have an analogy in representations of Perseus' myth, but it was commonplace in the celebration of artists in early modern Europe. Perseus' gesture means that Rubens, in the role of Perseus, demonstrates to the viewer that Andromeda is not a real girl, but only the painting he has created.

The whole garden facade of the Rubens Palace was conceived as a demonstration and proof of his artistic mastery. The copy of the picture was not framed; thus, from a distance, it could easily be confused with the freshly painted canvas that the master of the house had put out to dry in the fresh air. The copy of the painting with Perseus unchaining Andromeda was not the only tromp l'oeil on the wall of the façade. The whole piano nobile with arcades that were partially covered by the "hanging" picture was a tromp l'oeil wall painting. Rubens guests were confused not only by the paintings on the canvas, but also by the painted figures standing by the railing arcades, the birds sitting on its sill, or the cat walking

[125] Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 4, 663.

on the cornice. In this context, the mythical theme became an allegory of art. Rubens was the second Perseus, who on the back of Pegasus, from which all artistic inspiration is derived, comes to save the beauty personified by Andromeda. To accomplish this, he had to kill the dragon, which stands for ignorance, jealousy and defamation and attempts to stop artistic creativity.[126]

In 1639–1641, just before his death, Rubens painted another version of the theme of Andromeda's unchaining.[127] On this painting, Perseus unties Andromeda's bonds. A spark of love is suggested by the expressions in the face of both protagonists and Eros, who gestures for Perseus to come closer to the girl. Behind Eros, there is Hymen with a torch, the personification of the wedding that brings a happy ending to the story. King Philip IV of Spain commissioned the painting for the New Hall at the Royal Palace in Alcázar. Perseus is uncommonly represented in post-ancient armour. The modernisation of the ancient hero suggests that he should be perceived as the king's alter ego, the allegory of the invincibility of the Spanish kingdom. At the same time, Perseus' armour likens the ancient hero to St George. In the background of the painting is the shore of the sea, on which we find a dark dragon and white Pegasus; the symbol of good is thus confronted with the symbol of evil. Pegasus turns its head to the dragon, which has been overpowered and lies unconscious on the ground, but its eyes still shine angrily. Thus, it is necessary to be always on guard against evil, and the struggle with the forces of darkness continues. This is suggested by the head of Medusa, who lies at Andromeda's feet under Perseus' shield. Her face is shrouded in deep shadow, but one of her snakes climbs into the light and dangerously approaches Andromeda's foot.

In one of Rubens' last works, the erotic dimension of Andromeda dominates (**163**). The princess does not look at the sea monster approaching from the left; neither does she look for Perseus. Her attention is fully occupied by Eros, with the torch of love, which indicates the arrival of her rescuer and future husband. The popularity of the work in the 1640s is suggested by the fact that it is known from three copies, and a total of seven are assumed to have existed. Andromeda weeps, and her eyes are turned to the heavens, which was then a common pictorial type for the saints. The princess, however, simultaneously exposes her ample body, which fills a large part of the image area. Andromeda is tied to the rock on the seashore and must hold her hands over her head; her nakedness is concealed only by the tip of the cloak which, thanks to the wind, partially covers her lap. Her body, with its emphasised contrast, is a clear reference to the ancient statue of Venus. We know that the painter several times drew the ancient statue of Venus in Florence's Uffizi.[128] The raised hands above her head, the twist in her upper body, and the inclination of her head may have been inspired by another classical monument, the often-imitated Maenad holding a tambourine above her head on an ancient Roman sarcophagus.[129]

---

[126] 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), 37.

[127] Madrid, Museo del Prado, P01663.

[128] Marjon Van der Muelen, *Copies after the Antique* (Corpus Rubenianum Ludwig Burchard, XXVIII), I2II (London: Harvey Miller, 1994), vol. II, 71–74 nos. 48–59.

[129] Bober and Rubinstein, *Renaissance Artists and Antique Sculpture*, no. 83.

163. Workshop of Peter Paul Rubens, Andromeda. Oil on canvas, about 1640s.

Sculptures depicting Perseus releasing Andromeda tethered to the cliff on the shore became a favourite feature of aristocratic gardens in the 17th and 18th centuries. Pierre Puget, the most celebrated French Baroque sculptor, celebrated Perseus' heroic act in his statue from 1678–1684 (**164**). The hero ignores the naked princess ostentatiously and devotes himself to the chain with which she was bound. His upward gesture is justified by the fact that he must release the end of the chain above Andromeda's head. However, the high position of the chain's end has no logic other than Puget's intention to characterise Perseus with an almost vertical upward movement. In this statue group, Andromeda plays a secondary role; the central theme is Perseus' heroism underlined by Medusa's dead head with an expressively ugly face lying on the ground (**164–165**).

164. Pierre Puget, Perseus and Andromeda. Marble group sculpture, 1678–1684.

165. Pierre Puget, Perseus and Andromeda, detail with Medusa's head.

At the end of 1759, an ancient monumental sculptural group of Perseus was found in Rome. The sculptures represent Perseus helping Andromeda leave the rock to which she has been fettered. Bartolomeo Cavaceppi restored and completed the statue group, reviving interest once again in this ancient pictorial type.[130] In 1777, Franz Anton Zauner finished a plaster statue[131] and Anton Raphael Mengs a painting in a spirit similar to the sculptures. [132] In 1786, the Academy of St Luke in Rome

[130] 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), 137–144.
[131] Vienna, Unteres Belvedere, 1759.
[132] St. Petersburg, The Hermitage, ГЭ-1328 .

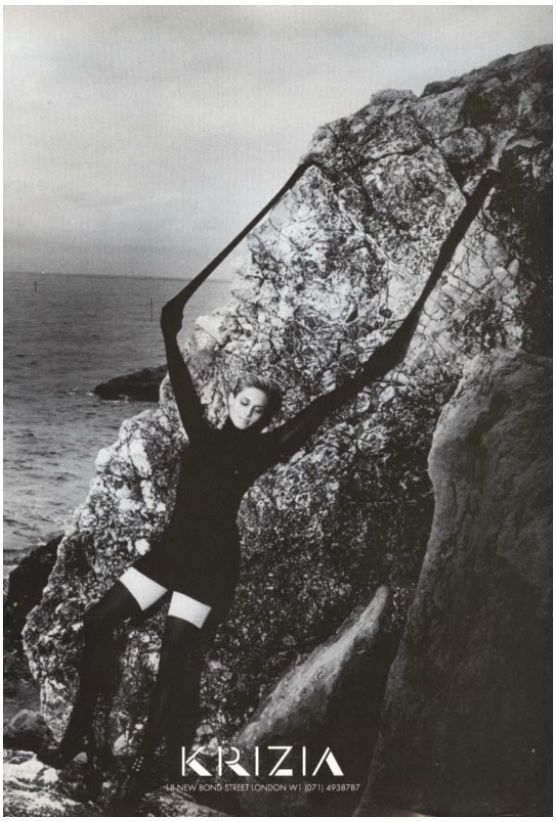
announced a contest for a sculptural group, the description of which, as was to be expected, corresponded to this revived ancient pictoral type. The Lyon sculptor residing in Rome form 1784, Joseph Chinard, won the medal (**166**). In his work, Chinard combined the study of ancient sculptures using living models, which undoubtedly contributed to the erotic appeal of his Andromeda, who dominated the sculptural group. In his version, the princess plunges into the arms of the hero. In Chinard's time, allegorical interpretations of ancient myths had gone out of fashion; therefore, he focused on Andromeda's grace, which Perseus admires. In keeping with this new tendency, Medusa's head lying at the hero's legs has a beautiful face, radiating peace. At the end of the early modern epoch, a new concept of Medusa emerged that went on to dominate in the 19th and 20th centuries.

166. Joseph Chinard, Perseus and Andromeda. Terracotta sculpture, 1791.

From the 16th to the 18th centuries, the enchained Andromeda was one of the most frequently depicted themes. The environment of the rock on the seashore created an exciting backdrop for the female nudity. Three contrasting protagonists met in this wild natural frame – the naked girl, the warrior and the dragon. On these works of art, the naked or half-naked Andromeda is in the foreground as a rule, firmly attached to the rock so she cannot move. Consequently, her posture and facial expression play an even more important role. This pictorial type was modified with different content. Its meaning oscillates between political or Christian allegory and the erotic attractiveness of the image of a naked woman in chains, but Andromeda's sex appeal usually dominates.

In modern Western culture, Perseus and other figures of ancient myths are rare guests. The early modern tradition of representing the ancient myth of Perseus and Medusa continued to a limited extent in 19th century art, but in the following century, it was mostly only a personal choice of the painter or sculptor. The synthesis shared by an entire society, which dominated in previous centuries, was replaced by

individual analysis. If a modern artist ever represents an ancient myth, he expresses his personal opinion of its essence.



167. Helmut Newton, Krizia advertisement, 1994.

Today, we encounter Perseus, Medusa, Danae, and Andromeda rarely, but they have not disappeared altogether. In 1994, women's magazines featured a photograph of Helmut Newton as a Krizia knitwear advertisement (**167**).[133] On a rock above a turbulent sea, there is a young woman with raised hands. She is wearing a knitted dress, the sleeves of which are fastened to a rock high above her head. The sleeves are absurdly stretched and are longer than the arms that are hidden in them. The dress is short, so the woman's legs are exposed to the wind as the sea waves wet her high-heel shoes – nothing pleasant for a lightly dressed young woman. Despite the hostile environment and the incredibly awkward position, however, her well-groomed face is calm and her eyes closed, as she knows her rescuer and future groom is close. Young women who recognised the Andromeda waiting patiently for Perseus could better imagine themselves in Krizia's knitted dress and realise it would catapult them to elite excellence. Helmut Newton and the leadership of Krizia were convinced that ancient mythology had still not lost its aura, and they were right.

[133] Karelisa V. Hartigan, *Muse on Madison Avenue*: *Classical Mythology in Contemporary Advertising* (Franfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2002), 122–123. Mariuccia Mandelli founded Krizia in 1954; the name refers to Plato's dialogue Kritias.