Myth of Perseus and Images

From the Beginning to Today

Jan Bažant

Propylaeum
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Translated by Skyland Václav Kobylak

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INTRODUCTION

Myth and Image

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

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

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[1] The publication of this book was supported by the Czech Academy of Sciences Strategy AV21 Programme "Europe and State: Between Barbarism and Civilization" researched at the Centre for Classical Studies, Institute of Philosophy of the Czech Academy of Sciences. The Czech version of the book: Jan Bažant, *Perseus & Medusa* (Prague: Academia, 2017). For the methodology of the book cf. Jan Bažant, *Statues of Venus: From Antiquity to the Present* (Heidelberg: Propylaeum, 2022) https://doi.org/10.11588/propylaeum.1015, 4.

[2] Thomas H. Carpenter, *Art and Myth in Ancient Greece* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1991).

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Short History of Myth

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Story of Perseus

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

PERSEUS

Beginnings

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

3. Gorgons. Athenian amphora, around 670 BC.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

[4] Homer, *Iliad*, 11, 36–37.

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

[6] Samos, Archaeological Museum, A 1682.

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

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

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

[7] Pausanias, 5, 18.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

[10] Pausanias 3, 17, 3.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

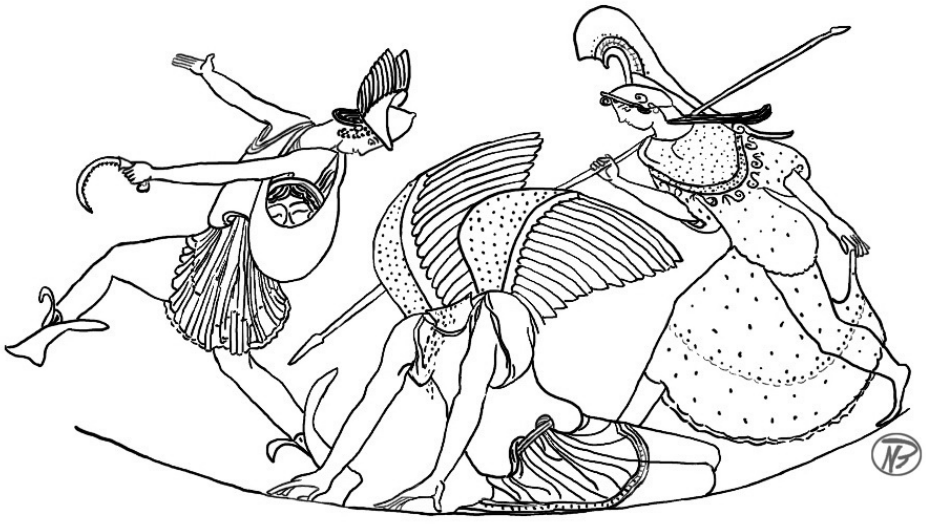
Myths and their depictions allowed people to enter into a chaotic subconscious, meet monstrous characters, experience irresolvable conflicts or unimaginable horrors, and above all carry out heroic deeds. In the case of Perseus, however, a true battle does not take place; its essence is that its progression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

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

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

A Beauty and a Monster

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

[30] Paris, Louvre, 1286.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

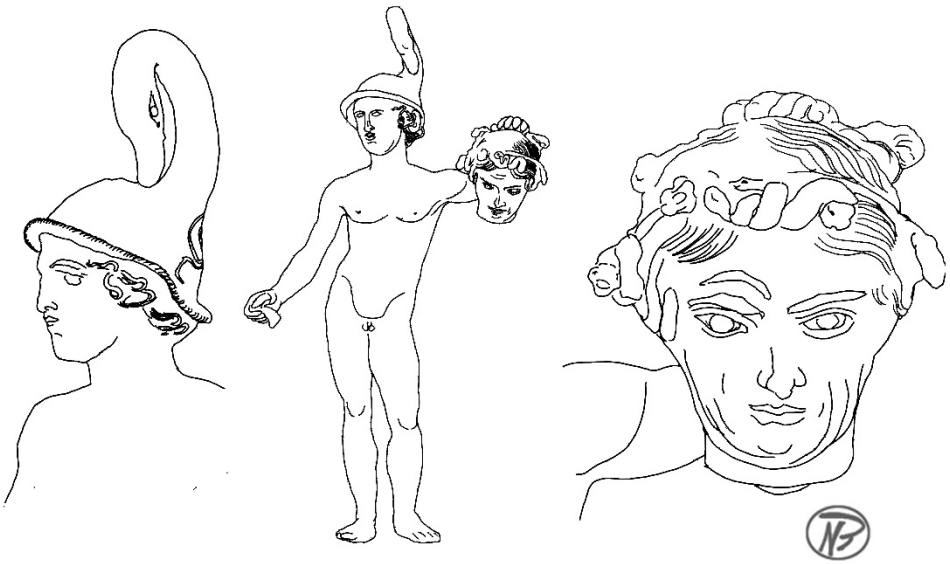
In the myth of Perseus, the most frequent pictorial type is the triumphant hero with Medusa's head in his hand.[37] It does not show any moment in this hero's quest, because he had to flee immediately after the beheading of the monster. In the situation where Medusa's sisters pursued Perseus, it would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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Petrifaction and Statues

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

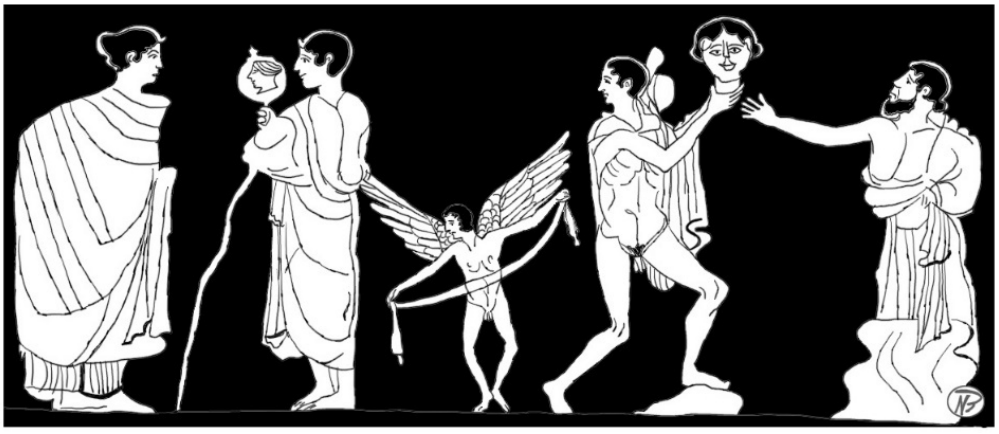
Through the petrification caused by Medusa's gaze, a human being received a monumental and lasting form; a living organism became a stone statue. Pherecydes of Athens wrote that when Perseus returned to Seriphos, he came to Polydectes and asked him to gather all the inhabitants of the island to show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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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[53] 5, 180, 241, 249, 209–236.

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

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

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

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

Mirror Image

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

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

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

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

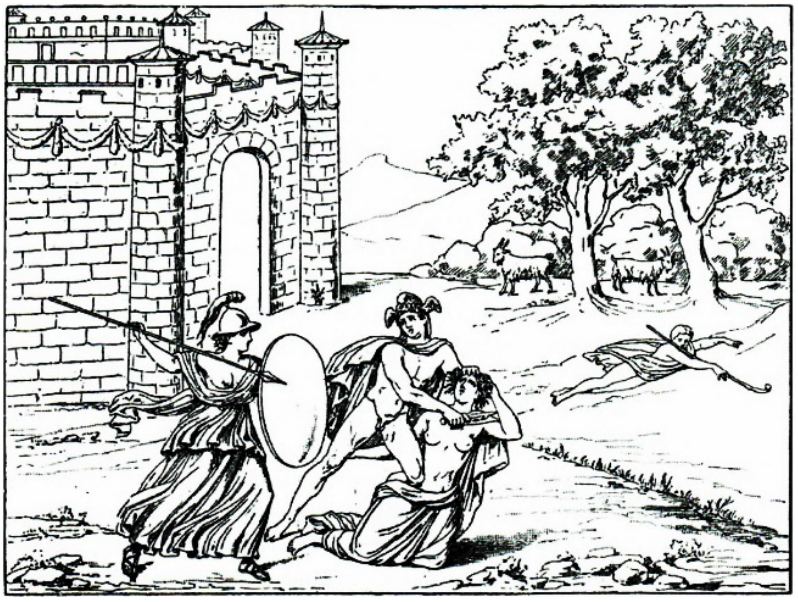
[59] Pherecydes, fr. 11 Fowler.

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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[70] Taranto, private collection.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Medieval Perseus

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

22. Perseus myth. Book illumination, around 1420.

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

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

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

[98] *Ovide moralisé*, 4, 5740–5744.

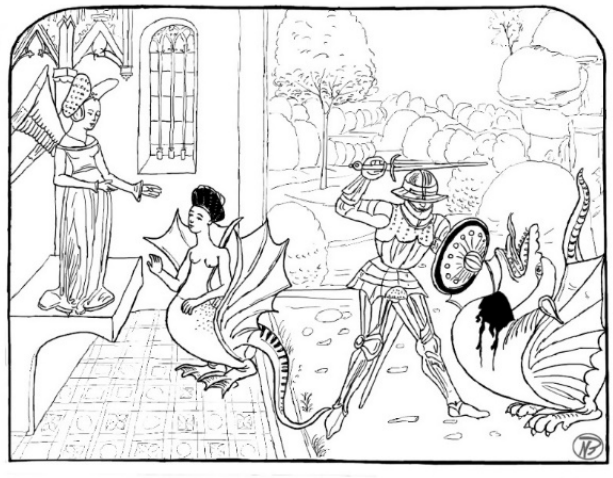
[99] Petrus Berchorius, *Ovidius Moralizatus*, Fa. 13.

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

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

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

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



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

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

The Early Modern Perseus

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

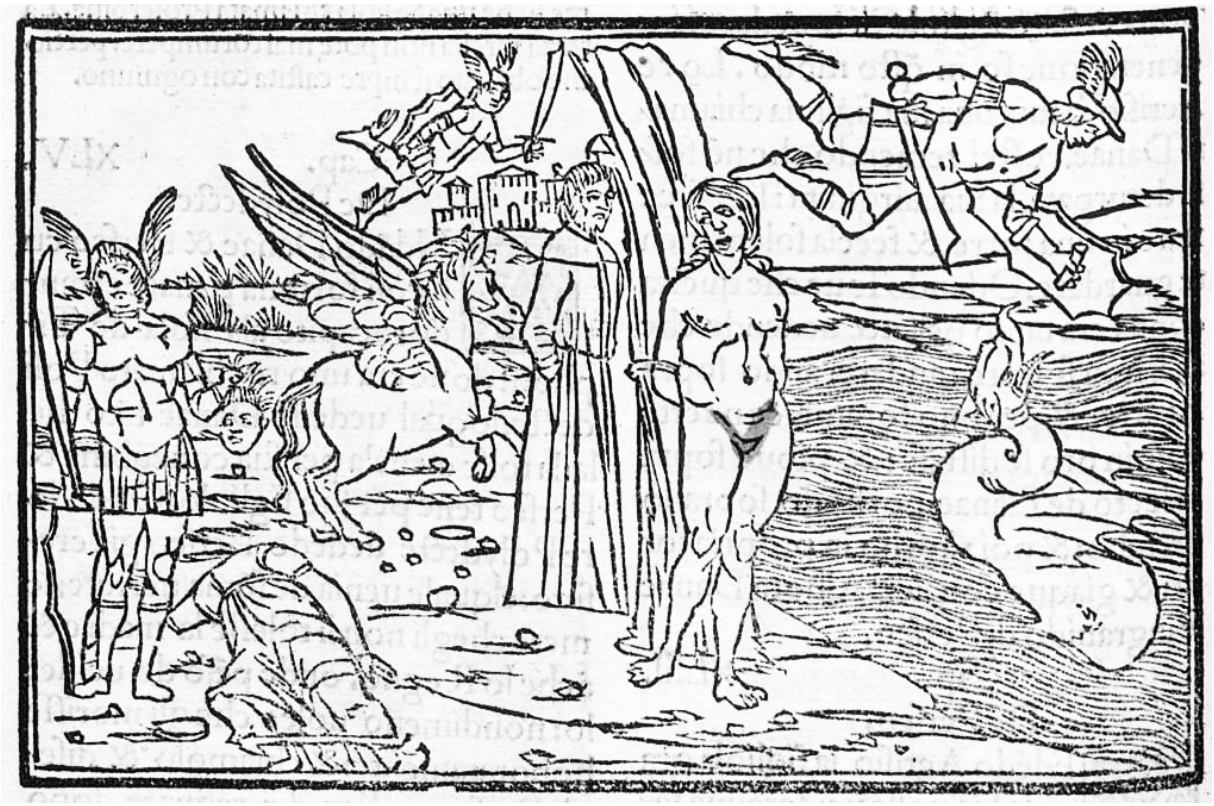
28. Story of Perseus. Woodcut, 1499.

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

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

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

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



29. Story of Perseus. Woodcut, 1497.

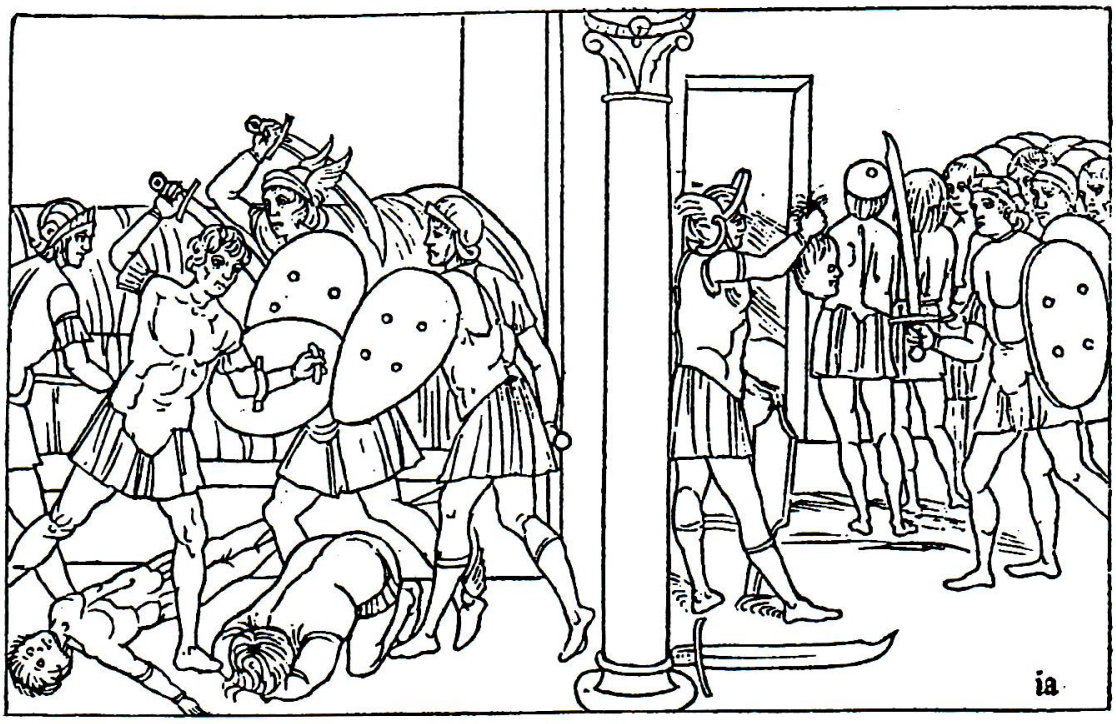
In 1505, an illustrated Latin edition of Ovid's Metamorphoses with a commentary by Raphael Regius was published. In it, we find a woodcut by the monogrammist ia depicting Perseus' struggle with Phineus and his companions (**30**). The scene is divided into two halves by the Corinthian column, and all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

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

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

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

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



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

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

[113] Florence, Museo Bardini.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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[117] Paris, Louvre, 621.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

[125] Florence, Bargello, 286633.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Christian Perseus

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

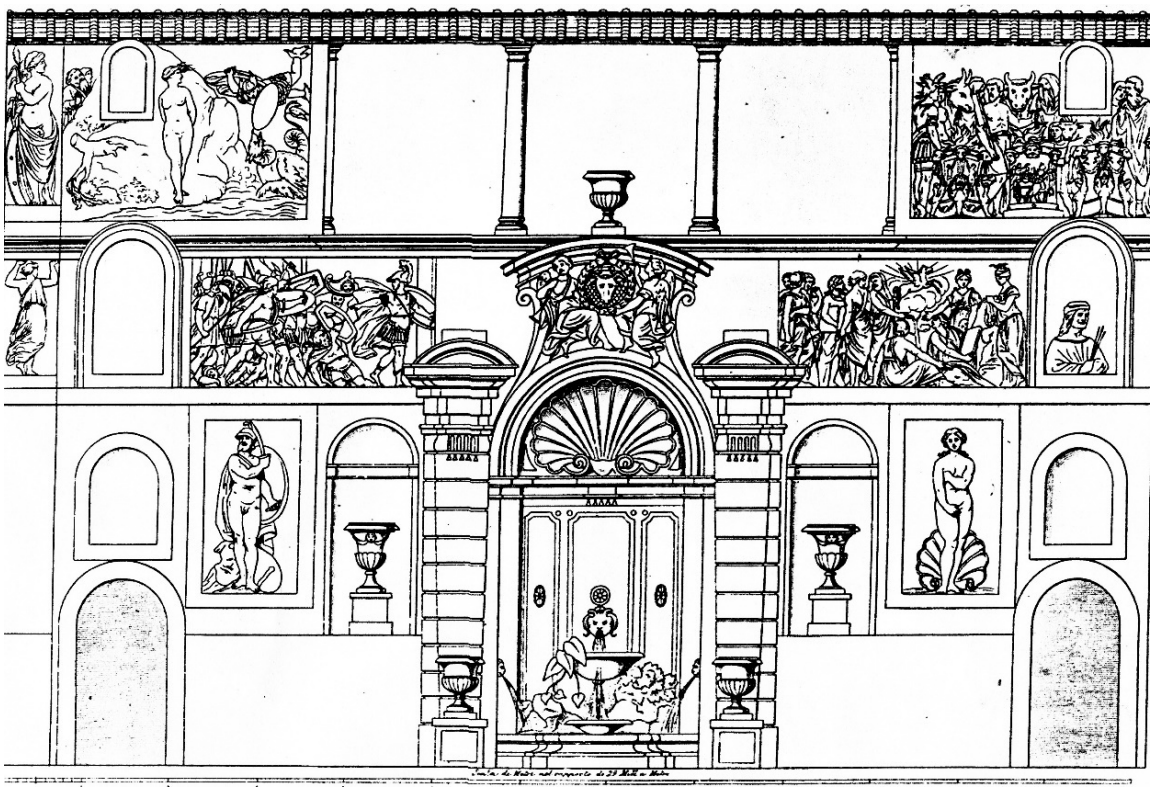
38. Bernard Picart, Perseus and Medusa. Engraving, 1754.

Celebration of Painter

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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[146] Hamburg, Hamburger Kunsthalle, 21348.

[147] Hamburg, Hamburger Kunsthalle, 21349.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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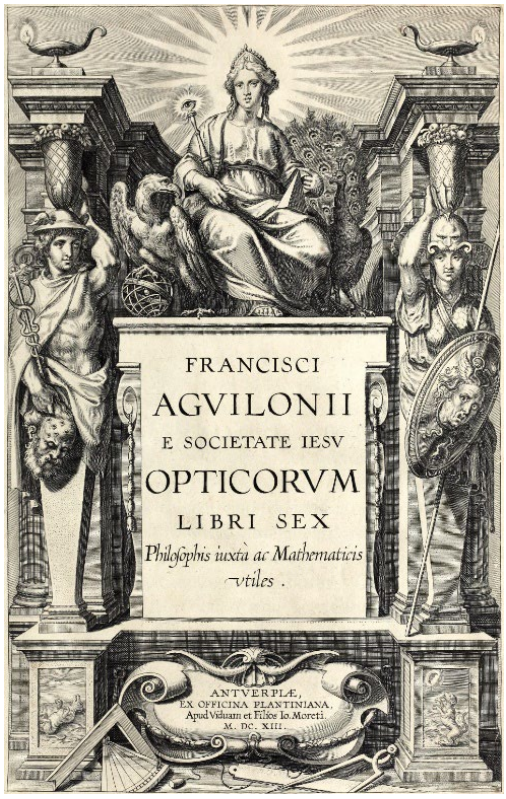
[149] Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann, "The Eloquent Artist: Towards an Understanding of the Stylistics of Painting at the Court of Rudolph II," *Leids Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek* 1 (1982): 119–145.

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

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

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



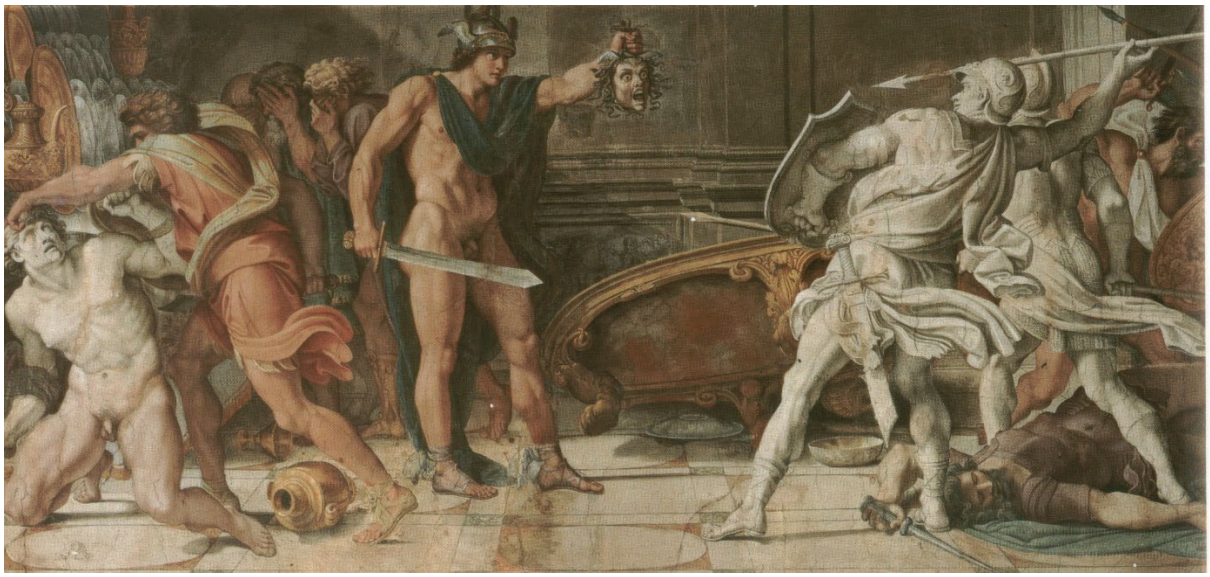
42. Peter Paul Rubens, frontispiece with Hermathena. Engraving, 1613.

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

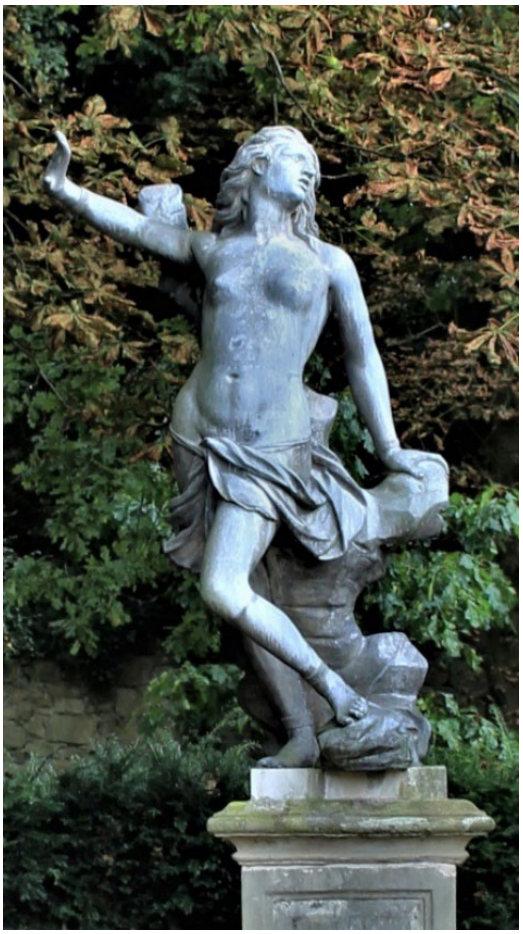
In early modern Europe, the aims of rulers and the artists who worked for them largely overlapped, but they were never identical. The depictions of Perseus were perceived as political or ethical models, but also as a starting point for reflection on art and artists. Artists implemented the ideological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

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

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

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

Perseus's Triumph



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Perseus's Doubts

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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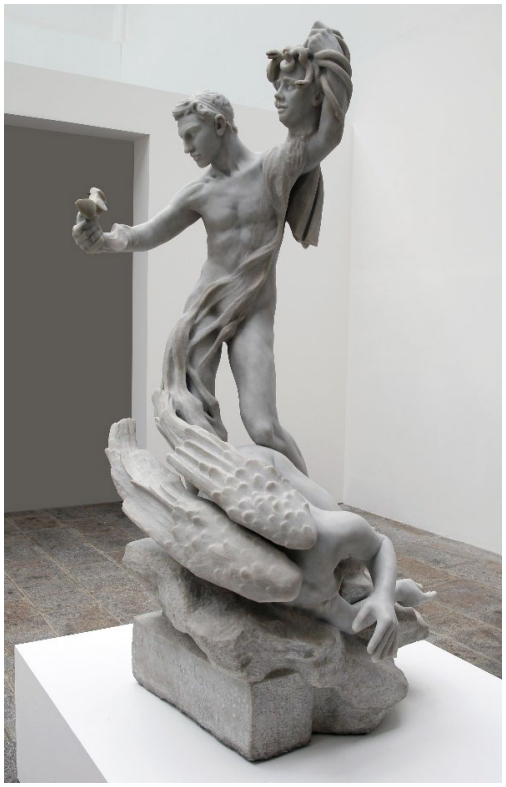
[193] London, Tate gallery, N04828. Cf. Jason Edwards, "A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Aesthete: Alfred Gilbert's Perseus Arming (1882) and the Question of 'Aesthetic' Sculpture in Late-Victorian Britain," in *Sculpture and the Pursuit of Modern Ideal in Britain, c. 1880–1930*, ed. David Getsy (Burlington: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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

MEDUSA

Gorgoneion

In ancient art, the most commonly depicted pictorial type of the myth of Perseus was not the hero himself, but a gorgoneion, the severed head of his nemesis, Gorgon Medusa.[211] "Gorgos" in Greek means "terrible," and the only thing Greeks knew for sure about "the terrible" was that it was invisible, and therefore unknowable. No one ever saw the Gorgon with their own eyes; nevertheless, the Greeks portrayed her – as an impossible combination of traits (**63**). The threatening grimaces make these faces even more repulsive. The dynamism of this monster is indicated by wings or running legs that grow from its head. An element that all the faces of Gorgons share is that artists represented them frontally, although the Greeks preferred to represent animals and human beings in profile. The frontal view of the Gorgon indicates that the monster tries to establish eye contact with the viewer. The oldest gorgoneia of this type appear on Corinthian painted vases from the 7th century BC, which spread this pictorial type throughout Greece.

63. Medusa, Athenian hydria (detail), 490 BC.

[211] Josef Floren, *Studien zur Typologie des Gorgoneions* (Münster: Aschendorff, 1977), cf. review: Isler, Hans Peter. Gnomon 53, no. 1 (1981): 89–91. Cf. also Ingrid Krauskopf, "Gorgo, Gorgones. Gorgones in Etruria," in *Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae, IV/1* (Zürich: Artemis, 1988), 285–345; Orazio Paoletti, "Gorgones Romanae," in *Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae, IV/1* (Zürich: Artemis, 1988), 345–362; Françoise Frontisi-Ducroux, *Du masque au visage: Aspects de l'identité en Grèce ancienne* (Paris: Flammarion, 2012).

The incomprehensible nature of Medusa, the most famous of the Gorgons, manifested itself also in the fact that she not only took life but also gave it. In Euripides' tragedy Ion, Medusa's blood, which has a double effect, plays a critical role. Creusa, Ion's mother, wore a golden bracelet in which she had two drops of Medusa's blood: one is a lethal poison, the other a reviving cure. The poison came from Medusa's snakes; the medicine was the blood that sprang from her veins. Creusa herself comments on the paradox of Medusa' existence when she emphasises that the drops must be kept separate, as good cannot mix with evil.[212] Medusa's exceptional position lies in the fact that in her case good and evil, or the beautiful and the ugly, form an inseparable unity.

Gorgoneion was not exclusively associated with Perseus and Athena. According to Homer, it was an attribute of Zeus.[213] He had it on the aegis, which made him invincible, and occasionally he lent it to the other gods. Mortals followed the example of the supreme Olympian god and protected themselves with depictions of Gorgon. We know from Homer that the most powerful King of Greece, the Mycenaean Agamemnon, had a representation of Gorgon as a protective symbol on his shield. In the middle of this shield there was a dark steel bulge, "and circled in the midst of all was the blank-eyed face of the Gorgon with her stare of horror, and Fear was inscribed upon it, and Terror."[214] Homer described not only what Agamemnon's gorgoneion looked like, but also how it worked. It was an abusive face, and her eyes were most terrible, its expected effect showing the attached personification of Fear and Terror. The fact that the heads of Gorgons had a circular shape from the beginning could be related to the fact that their original and primary place could be the centre of the circular shield.

The circular shield appeared in Greece in connection with a new technique of fighting that involved a phalanx of hoplites, who took their name from the shield they carried, called "hoplon" in Greek. Perfectly aligned rows collided, and the soldiers struck their opponents in the only gap in their bronze armour below the lower edge of the helmet and above the upper edge of the shield. The frightening face on the shield was meant to distract the enemy for at least a split second; in these cases, the glance of the gorgoneion on the opponent's shield was the last thing the soldier would ever see. We know shields with the gorgoneion not only from vase paintings;[215] a real specimen from the 7th century BC also exists.[216] This shield was made in Ionic Greece in the 7th century BC and was found in Carchemish, the famous ancient city on the border between today's Turkey and Syria. It was probably a part of the equipment of a Greek mercenary. In the middle of the wrought-bronze shield, we see the head of the Gorgon with snake hair, and around it there are concentric circles with running horses, gazelles and other animals.

At the same time, when the myth of Perseus arose in Greece, there appeared not only circular bronze shields, but also circular bronze mirrors whose smooth and

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[212] Euripides, *Ion*, 1017.

[213] Homer, *Iliad*, 5, 738–742. Cf. Pascalle Linant de Bellefonds and Évelyne Prioux, *Voir les mythes : Poésie hellénistique et arts figurés* (Paris: Picard, 2017), 64–65.

[214] Homer, *Iliad,* 11, 36–37, translated by Richmond Lattimore.

[215] Rome, Museo Nazionale Etrusco di Villa Giulia, 22679.

[216] London, The British Museum, 116253.

polished surface served as a reflective surface. Mycenaean Greeks already knew them in the 2nd millennium BC, and they reappeared around 700 BC. In Greek thinking, shields and mirrors formed a contrasting pair, while the mirrors were an exclusive attribute of women, their male counterpart being shields that could also be used as a mirror.[217] As we have seen above, even though the motif of a mirror image enriched the myth of Perseus in the 5th century BC, the authors of the Roman epoch were the first who wrote explicitly about the reflection of Medusa's face on the shield.[218] However, the Greek mirrors were demonstrably linked with the myth of Perseus already at the beginning of the 5th century BC. The reverse side of the bronze mirror could be decorated with engraving or embossing, and on the back of one specimen we find the head of the hideous Medusa with a beard and snakes instead of hair.[219] This of course may have only been for entertainment purposes. When a woman held the mirror up to her face, she turned into Medusa to those observing her, as they saw the back of the mirror with the image of Medusa in place of the woman's face.

The gorgoneia that were placed on Greek temples held a similar function as the Gorgon on Agamemnon's shield, i.e. to intimidate and protect (**2**). From the end of the 7th century BC on, we can find them on ceramic metopes in the frieze of a Doric temple, acroteria at the apex or corner of the pediment, or antefixes at the lower edge of the temple roof. [220] In ancient Rome, gorgoneia decorated public buildings for the same reason. In the ruins of the ancient city of Leptis Magna in Libya, we find them in the arcades lining the main square (**64**). Gorgoneia are also often found in funeral contexts, tombs and sarcophagi. In modern Europe, gorgoneia were often placed on keystones, and an ancient example of such protection is found on the Roman mausoleum of 40–20 BC, which is today on the outskirts of the French city of Saint-Remy-de-Provence (**65**). Gorgoneia were also used in private homes, where they can be found on Roman floor mosaics.

Gorgoneia also protected coins since the 6th century BC. Several Greek states used them as their emblem, appearing on roughly sixty different types of coins. Gorgoneia can also be found on jewellery, pendants, earrings, necklaces, or rings that people wore daily.[221] The head of Medusa in the middle of the zodiac protected the owner of this amulet all year round.[222] Several women portrayed on painted panels from the late second or early third century AD wore necklaces with Medusa medallions.[223] Gorgoneion was supposedly an apotropaion, an object which protects against evil forces. The Greek word "apotropaios," which means reversing, is derived from the verb "trepein" for pointing, turning, or changing. In literature

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[217] Françoise Frontisi-Ducroux and Jean-Pierre Vernant, *Dans l'oeil du miroir* (Paris: O. Jacob, 1997).
[218] Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 4, 785; Apollodorus, *Library*, 2, 4, 2; Lucian, *Dialogues in the Sea*, 14, 2.
[219] Los Angeles, The J. Paul Getty Museum, 96.AC.109.
[220] Patricia Lulof, et al., eds., *Architectural Terracottas in Ancient Italy Images of Gods, Monsters and Heroes* (Oxford: Oxbow, 2010).
[221] E.g. London, The British Museum, 1917,0501.94.
[222] Roman gem, plasma, 2nd century AD. Paris, Cabinet des médailles (Erika Zwierlein–Diehl, *Antike Gemmen und Ihr Nachleben* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2007, n. 682).
[223] Walker, Susan, and Morris Leonard Bierbrier. *Ancient Faces. Mummy Portraits from Roman Egypt*. London: British Museum Press, 1997, 172–173.

concerning magic, the term apotropaion indicates an object with the ability to actively protect. In theory, an apotropaion returned a curse to the sender or at least redirected it so as not to harm the person protected in this way. The front face of Gorgon was meant to provide the maximum effect by covering the largest area in front of a protected person or object so that it could deflect threats coming from any direction.[224]

64 (left). Heads of Medusa on spandrels of arcades on the main square in Leptis Magna in Libya, 210–216 AD.
65 (right). Medusa on arch of the Roman funeral monument.
Mausoleum Iulii, Saint-Rémy-de-Provence, 40–20 BC.

Did all Greek depictions of gorgoneion have a magical function? Certainly not, as demonstrated by the Athenian cup from 530–520 BC that has eyes on its sides with gorgoneia in place of pupils.[225] The so-called eye-cups were produced in the second half of the 6th century BC, allegedly in order to protect the drinker, who could not see what was going on around him while drinking as his face was covered with the cup. In the case of the cup in Cambridge, this effect would be intensified by the gorgoneia in place of pupils. Six pairs of eyes, four of which belonged to the menacing Gorgon, would thus protect the man drinking from this cup. The problem of such an interpretation is that when the reveller emptied his cup, he discovered the dreadful gorgoneion at its bottom, just in front of his own eyes. The gorgoneion in the interior of the cup could not be an apotropaion, which means that the gorgoneia on the exterior of this cup were also not apotropaia exclusively. As Rainer Mack rightly stressed, "the gorgoneion is not at all the image of Medusa we have come to know: the transcendent sign of some monstrous and terrifying power. It is, to the contrary, a site where such a power was imagined in order to be denied … it is the other face of the hero, the face that looks out from the picture field, his prosopon. This is the gorgoneion itself, which Perseus holds up like a mirror that reflects back to us the image of 'Perseus,' the image of ourselves in the image of the hero." [226]

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[224] Albert M. Potts, *World's Eye* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1982), 26–37.
[225] Cambridge, Fitzwilliam Museum, GR.39.1864.
[226] Rainer Mack, "Facing Down Medusa (An Aetiology of the Gaze),"*Art History* 25 (2002): 571–604, 571 and 598.

In Roman art, Gorgons were mostly beautiful girls, who nevertheless had snakes for hair and a round face represented frontally. On the Roman republican denarius of 47 BC, we see on one side the smiling Gorgon with carefully crafted hair, and on the reverse a winged woman with a palm tree branch.[227] This personification of victory leads a quadriga; beyond it, we can imagine a chariot with the victorious Roman general. The representations on both sides of the coin thus refer to triumph under the auspices of Gorgon. The famous Roman mosaic from Pompeii, which is today in the Archaeological Museum in Naples, portrays Alexander the Great as he fights in armour with the head of Gorgon on the middle of his breastplate. [228] The mosaic originated around the year 100 BC; it was probably a copy of the image of the famous Apelles, which depicted the Battle of Issus of 333 BC. Later rulers also wore armour with Gorgons, especially the Roman emperors of the Flavius dynasty. While emperors of the Julio-Claudian dynasty had Venus as their protector, the Flavians had Minerva, the Roman counterpart of Athena, which explains why we often find gorgoneia on their breastplates.[229] In 92 AD, Martial wrote in an epigram dedicated to Domitian's armour: "receive the terrible breastplate of the warlike Minerva, which even the anger of the snaky-locked Medusa dreads. When you do not wear it, Caesar, it may be called a breast-plate; when it sits on your sacred breast, it will be an aegis."[230] By taking on Minerva's armour, the emperor becomes Minerva, and is invincible thanks to her gorgoneion.

Archaeologists use the term gorgoneion for any representation of the face of Gorgon Medusa, but in ancient times this term was used only for her face on the shield or the aegis of Athena.[231] Homer already knew that the goddess had gone to battles with the aegis over her breast, which she had received from her father Zeus: "and thereon is set the head of the grim gigantic Gorgon, a thing of fear and horror, a portent of Zeus of the aegis."[232] However, the head that was placed on the aegis described by Homer was not Medusa, but another Gorgon, Zeus' nurse Aix.[233] The head of Gorgon on Athena's aegis was a protection of the highest quality.[234] Next to the oldest version, according to which she received it from Zeus, there is a 5th century BC version, according to which Perseus gave it to her. [235] In Euripides' tragedy Ion, however, there is an alternate version, according to which Gorgon looked like "a breastplate armed with serpent coils."[236] This Gorgon did not have a

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[227] David R. Sear, *The History and Coinage of the Roman Imperators, 49–27 BC* (London: SPINK, 1998), 20.
[228] Paolo Moreno, *Apelle: La Bataille d'Alexandre* (Milan: Skira, 2001).
[229] Statius, *Silvae*, 1, 1, 37–39. For Venus and the the Julio-Claudian dynasty cf. Bažant, *Statues of Venus,* 80-86.
[230] Martial, 7, 1.
[231] Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 4, 802–803, cf. Frontisi-Ducroux, *Du masque au visage*, 25–29.
[232] Homer, *Iliad*, 5, 741–742, translated by Richard Lattimore.
[233] Hyginus, *On Astronomy*, 2, 13.
[234] Kim J. Hartswick, "The Gorgoneion on the Aigis of Athena: Genesis, Suppression and Survival," *Revue Archéologique* 2 (1993): 288–290; Patricia A. Marx, "The Introduction of the Gorgoneion to the Shield and Aegis of Athena and the Question of Endoios," *Revue Archéologique 2* (1993): 227–268; Igor Baglioni, "La maschera di Medusa: Considerazioni sull'iconografia arcaica di Gorgo," in *Storia delle religioni e archeologia: Discipline a confronto*, ed. Igor Baglioni (Rome: Alpes Italia, 2010), 65–72.
[235] Pherecydes, fr. 11 Fowler.
[236] Euripides, *Ion*, 993, translated by Ronald Frederick Willetts.

head, and was more akin to a walking coat of armour – something like a tortoise, but with skin that Athena tore off to wear on her chest to protect herself. One of the first statues of Athena with the head of Gorgon on the aegis was found on the northern slope of the Acropolis; it was sculpted by the sculptor Endoios around 525 BC. On the vase painting of the same time, Athena has an archaic type of Gorgon with beard and boar teeth on the aegis thrown over her chest.[237] Snakes are both on the edge of the aegis and the head of the Gorgon.

66. Head of Gorgon on an aegis. Tazza Farnese, exterior, chalcedony gem, 2nd century BC.

Gorgon on the aegis adorns the outer side of the greatest Hellenistic cameo, the Farnese cup of Egyptian origin, which is twenty centimetres wide (**66**).[238] We find here a circular shield on which an aegis is stretched with snakes at its edges; at the centre, there is the head of a Gorgon. The Gorgon on the outer side comments on the carving on the inner side of the cameo, where we find an allegorical figural scene. In

[237] Berlin, Staatliche Museen, Antikensammlung, F2159.

[238] Phyllis Pray Bober and Ruth Rubinstein, *Renaissance Artists and Antique Sculpture: A Handbook of Sources*, new, revised and updated edition (London-Turnhout: Harvey Miller Publishers, 2011), 116, n. 68; Marina Belozerskaya, *Medusa's Gaze: The Extraordinary Journey of the Tazza Farnese* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

this scene, we also find an Egyptian sphinx and a seated man with a horn of abundance, which is evidently a personification of the Nile as a source of prosperity. From the context of the bowl's inner decoration, it is clear that this Gorgon was a protector of the affluence of Egypt. The prestige that the aegis with Medusa's head enjoyed in antiquity is evidenced by the Seleucid gift to the Athenians. Around 170 BC, Antiochus IV placed a gilded aegis with Medusa's head on the southern wall of the Acropolis in Athens above Dionysus Theatre. There is a high steep slope between the theatre and the wall, so the head must have been gigantic. Otherwise, it could not have been seen from below. The ruler of the mighty Seleucid Empire presented himself as a generous patron of ancient Athens, and therefore a supporter of culture in general, at a well-chosen place above the theatre. Gorgon's head on the aegis was the most famous and most effective magical object, and therefore it also appears on Greek coins.

The Greek copper medallion of the Hellenistic epoch, which initially decorated a wagon designed for ceremonial processions, depicts Medusa's head in an unusual manner. It shows Athena with a spear in her right hand lifted high above her head; the goddess wears the head of Medusa on her own instead of a helmet.[239] However, this image type was not as unique as it might seem, as it was faithfully reproduced in a Venetian marble statuette from the first half of the 16th century.[240] The rare helmet likened Athena to Heracles, who killed the terrible lion of Nemea and afterwards used his head as a helmet. On this Hellenistic medallion, Medusa's eyes are closed, while the goddess had glass eyes which are wide open. On the head of the all-knowing and all-seeing Athena, the head of Medusa with closed eyes, which saw nothing, was not only a protective element but also emphasised Athena's divine intellect.

In the third quarter of the 5th century BC, Phidias created the most famous gorgoneion, which was in the middle of the golden shield of Athena's cult statue in the Parthenon at the Acropolis in Athens. According to ancient testimonies, Phidias' statue was twelve meters high and made of ivory and a ton of gold.[241] Pausanias, who saw it in the second century after Christ, gave a detailed description of the statue.[242] On the Roman copies of the shield, Medusa is frowning with a fixed glance and a round face, tongue stuck out, and two snakes wrapped around her head that are tied in knots both above and below it.[243] An ancient Roman relief from Apollo's Temple at the Palatine in Rome depicts Perseus, who puts the head of Medusa on the shield of Athena, who has the aegis on her chest (**67**). This Medusa has a thick round face with a rare smile, indicating how honoured she feels with her final placement. The representation was part of a series of terracotta slabs that originated in the time of Emperor Augustus, who programmatically proclaimed his cultural adherence to classical Greece.

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[239] Thessaloniki, The Archaeological Museum, 17540.
[240] Sotheby's, December 6th, 2011.
[241] Thucydides, 2, 13, 5; Pliny the Elder, *Natural history*, 36, 18.
[242] Pausanias 1, 24.
[243] London, The British Museum, GR 1864.2-20.18.

67. Perseus with the head of Medusa and Athena. Roman terracotta relief, 36–28 BC. From the temple of Apollo on the Palatine Hill in Rome.

The Christian Gorgoneion

In Byzantine empire, Medusa's head appears in the same function as in classical antiquity – as a guardian and triumphal emblem, which in the Christian context meant the salvation of the human soul and the victory of Jesus Christ over the devil. The 10th century Byzantine Medusa head demonstrates the survival of this pictorial type and its message.[244] The beautiful head with wings, snake hair and pained expression on its face decorated the lid of a luxurious inkwell, a gift to a prominent scribe whose name was Leon. Under the rim is written: "The holder of the ink is, for Leon, the means of all accomplishment." Below we find another inscription: "Leon, the delightful marvel of calligraphers."[245] Medusa was the guardian of the ink, which was vitally important for Leon. At the same time, every time he lifted the lid, he severed the head of Medusa. He was the second Perseus and the ink the blood of Medusa, the source of his art.[246] Medusa as a protector can be found in the Marian context on the Byzantine bronze amulet of 12th–13th century, with Madonna on the obverse side and the Gorgoneion on the reverse.[247]

Throughout the Middle Ages, people in Western Europe could see representations of ancient myths on ancient works incorporated into the Christian

[244] Padua, Diocesan museum.

[245] Paroma Chatterjee, "The Gifts of the Gorgon: A Close Look at a Byzantine Inkpot," *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics*, no. 65/66 (2014): 212–223.

[246] The miniature in the Paris Psalter also from the 10th depicts the death of Hezekiah (Bibliothèque national de France, Paris, Cod. Gr. 139, fol. 446v). The footstool beside his bed is also decorated with Medusa, "presumably used as an apotropaic device, cf. Anastasia Drandaki, et al., eds., *Heaven and Earth: Art of Byzantium from Greek Collections* (Athens: Hellenic Republic, Ministry of Culture and Sports, 2013), 170.

[247] Virginia Museum of Fine Arts. Cf. Anna Gonosova and Christine Kondoleon, *Art of Late Rome and Byzantium* (Richmond: The Museum, 1994), 128–129.

context, even though these representations often openly denied it. These secondarily used ancient works are called spolia. The term is somewhat misleading because the Latin word "spolium" means booty or spoil, and the term thus implies the triumph of Christianity over paganism. In the Middle Ages, however, the term spolium was not used in this context.[248] Ancient spolia may be anything from architectural components to precious gems, and the motivation for their use varies from case to case. Spolia were used either because they were simply available or due to their precious material or high aesthetic qualities. Naturally, it cannot be assumed a priori that in the Middle Ages people realised that these reused objects were of pre-Christian origin and had a pagan significance. However, they may have been aware of the fact and thus the spolium may have been the bearer of a significant meaning – for example, it may have been used to neutralise the alleged pagan demonic forces or exert magical properties attributed to the depicted theme. It could have also justified contemporary political ambitions by visualising the ancient past in a present work of art.

The most common medieval intellectual manipulation of ancient spolia is called "interpretatio Christiana." In it, these recycled works are filled with new, Christian content that has nothing to do with the original.[249] This approach is based on the so-called disjunction principle. In the Middle Ages, we were told there was a separation of ancient form from ancient content.[250] As a result, the ancient spolia were "content-less," thus making it possible to fill them with entirely new content. In addition to supporters of "interpretatio Christiana," we also find researchers today who assume that medieval patrons and artists had a much more differentiated approach to ancient spolia. In any case, medieval works incorporating authentic ancient elements were a form of bricolage or "DIY," as we might say today, i.e. when something new is created using prefabricated parts intended for a different purpose. Today, we know that bricolage can be a creative principle in cultural history.

Among the spolia, ancient gems (above all cameos) enjoyed a privileged position. They appear in the most prestigious works of goldsmiths of the Middle Ages. Ancient gems were imitated competently in the Middle Ages and their ancient significance could be recognised, allowing us to assume their multi-layered interpretation.[251] Ancient gems with Medusa's head were commonly used on medieval Christian reliquaries, on which these gems were often found in important places or in pairs. It follows that they were undoubtedly considered something

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[248] Kinney, Dale. "The Paradigm of spolia," in *Mittelalterliche Mythenrezeption: Paradigmen und Paradigmenwechsel*, ed. Ulrich Rehm (Cologne: Böhlau, 2018), 175–192; Dale Kinney, "The Concept of Spolia," in *A Companion to Medieval Art: Romanesque and Gothic in Northern Europe*, ed. Conrad Rudolph (Hoboken: Willey Blackwell, 2019), 233–252.

[249] Dale Kinney, "Interpretatio Christiana," in: *Maxima debetut magistro reverentia. Essays on Rome and the Roman Tradition in Honor of Russel T. Scott*, ed. Paul B. Harvey and Conybeare Catherine (Como: New Press, 2009), 117–125.

[250] Erwin Panofsky, *Renaissance and Renascences in Western Art* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1960).

[251] Classen 1999; Dale Kinney, "Ancient Gems in the Middle Ages: Riches and Ready-mades," in *Reuse Value: Spolia and Appropriation in Art and Architecture from Constantine to Sherrie Levine,* ed. Richard Brilliant and Dale Kinney, 97–120. Farnham: Ashgate, 2011; Rehm 2014.

extraordinary and a protective power was likely to have been attributed to them.[252] This is all that can be said with certainty about the medieval interpretation of gems depicting Medusa, as we have no written evidence in this matter.

From the collection of Charles IV's ancient gems, only the ones incorporated into works of art that the Emperor initiated are preserved. Among them, we find four gems representing Medusa. This was one of the most common themes depicted on ancient gems, so their existence in the collection of the medieval monarch is not surprising. Nevertheless, the placement of these gems with Medusa in goldsmith works ordered by Charles IV indicates that their use was intentional. In 1368, Pope Urban V gave a splinter of Christ's crib to Emperor Charles IV, who put it in the golden reliquary, which was made in Prague at that time or soon afterwards. The reliquary is decorated with a row of twelve precious stones of different colours closed by a magnificent intaglio.[253] Thamyras, who worked for the court of Emperor Augustus, carved it in aquamarine around 10 BC. The head of Medusa is on the shield, which carries Nereid on a sea horse. However, during a recent restoration, it turned out that the reliquary does not contain the original intaglio but a glass cast of it made in the late 18th century. Someone stole the ancient gem and replaced it with a copy, which is indistinguishable at first glance from the original. In the reliquary, the Thamyras' gem probably represented Jesus Christ; the twelve precious stones without carvings stood for his disciples.

Three gems with Medusa decorate the crown with which Charles IV was crowned as King of the Romans in Aachen on 25th July 1349, symbolically at the grave of Charles the Great, his namesake and great predecessor. After the coronation, Charles IV donated the crown to the Aachen Cathedral Treasury, where it was to become a permanent reminder of his coronation. The crown was brought from Prague, where it was made for this occasion. The fact that the crown was custom-made for Charles IV proves its exceptionally large circumference of 67 cm, which corresponds to the dimensions of his preserved skull. The Aachen crown has four large lilies placed crosswise on the front and right axis. Between these large lilies with three leaves, there are four small lilies with only one leaf. On all lilies, there are ancient gems with different themes, and the regularity in the selection of themes and their distribution on the crown indicates a well-thought-out design.[254] What is most striking is the repetition of the Medusa heads and portrait busts, which could be interpreted as ideal portraits of sovereigns. We find these portrait heads on all the small lilies, forming a cross.

On the front of the Roman Crown, we find two impressive cameos with prominently unchristian scenes. White figures, two of which depict naked women on a black background, making them visible from afar. The nakedness and pagan scenes did not apparently offend anyone. On the contrary, this was the reason the front side was decorated with these precious gems. On the lower cameo, the audience assembled for Charles IV's coronation saw a scene with Amores triumphant over the

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[252] Wiegartz, Veronika, *Antike Bildwerke im Urteil mittelalterlichen Zeitgenossen* (Weimar: VDG, 2004), 226–228.

[253] Wien, Weltliche Schatzkammer, XIII 24.

[254] Jan Bažant, "Medusa, Ancient Gems, and the Holy Roman Emperor Charles IV," *Anodos. Studies of the Ancient World* 13 (2013, published 2019): 1–16.

naked Psyche. At the top, they saw a naked Bacchante playing the double flute. On both sides of the crown, we find on the large lilies gems with heads of Medusa, whose identity is clear from the wings over the forehead. In the Middle Ages, these Medusa heads could not have represented the Virgin Mary because they were under the gems with ostentatiously pagan themes. On the left side of the crown, there is only one Medusa (**1**); on the right side, we can find Medusa on a large lily and on a small lily in the front.

After his coronation, Charles IV had given the crown to the Aachen Chapter, which used it to link itself more closely with the Holy Roman Empire. The Chapter made a reliquary bust of Charles the Great and put the crown on his head. The reliquary bust was also connected with the crown of Charles IV through an antique gem that is placed on its chest. There is a frontal face on this gem, which has no snakes in the hair or wings over the forehead but resembles Medusa with wide open eyes. Ancient Roman emperors were often depicted on coins and sculptures with Medusa on their armour. This was the reason this gem was placed on the chest of Charles the Great, the restorer of the Roman Empire. Medusa protects the Aachen reliquary bust of Charles the Great with the crown of Charles IV so perfectly that it cannot be a coincidence. The heads with snake hair, wings, and eyes fixed on the sides of the crown guard the whole space around the reliquary bust. The face on the armour of Charles the Great additionally protects the space in front of the reliquary bust. The place that the head of Medusa occupies on the Aachen crown of Charles IV has no equal in medieval Europe. Even though we do not know exactly how Charles IV understood the ancient gems with the Medusa, their secondary use was undoubtedly related to the exceptional personality of this monarch and to the dominant position he held in Europe at the time.

At the beginning of 14th century, Medusa started to interest artists and writers in Italy. In Ambrogio Lorenzetti's fresco of 1321 we find a statue of Minerva holding the head of Gorgon in the fictive architectural decoration.[255] Around 1410 Taddeo di Bartolo painted Athena with a shield on which we see Gorgon.[256] Another example is found on the cover page of the poem written by Francesca Petrarca around the year 1460, where we see an ancient altar with a gorgoneion.[257] The models for these depictions were ancient works of art, among which a great cameo known as Tazza Farnese stands out (**66**). Lorenzo il Magnifico acquired it for his Florentine collection in 1471, which stressed a special relationship of the Medici with Medusa.[258] The artists knew ancient depictions of the Perseus myth not only from authentic monuments, but also from drawings made after them. Already before the middle of the 15th century, the drawings of Medusa by Ciriaco from Ancona circulated in the

[255] „Martyrdom of Franciscans" in San Francesco, Siena. Cf. Maureen Burke, S., "The 'Martyrdom of the Franciscans' by Ambrogio Lorenzetti," *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte* 65 (2002): 484–485.
[256] Siena, Palazzo Pubblico, chapel vestibule.
[257] Sergio Marinelli and Paola Marini, eds., *Mantegna e le arti a Verona: 1450–1500* (Venice: Marsilio, 2006), 458–459, n. 190.
[258] John Varriano, "Leonardo's Lost Medusa and other Medici Medusas from the Tazza Farnese to Caravaggio," *Gazette des beaux-arts* 130 (1997): 73–80.

workshops of Italian artists.[259] His drawings of reliefs with Medusa came from Hadrian's Temple in Cyzicus, the ruins of which Ciriaco visited in 1431 and 1444.[260]

Gorgoneion Revived and Redesigned

In 1495–1496, Pinturicchio painted Madonna for the Church of Santa Maria de Fossi in Perugia.[261] The Virgin Mary is sitting on the throne, the backrest of which is like an ancient Roman niche with a gorgoneion at the top of an arc. Medusa has wings on her head and two snakes with their heads raised threateningly. The snakes bring death, but the image of the snake can protect. The key to the interpretation of Medusa on Pinturicchio's Madonna is the pomegranate apple held by the Virgin Mary. The pomegranate, like the Medusa, has a dual meaning; it is a symbol of primaeval sin, but also a symbol of salvation. This is suggested by Jesus on his mother's lap, who holds the cross in one hand while putting his other on the pomegranate.

In his writings on architecture dating back to 1464, Filarete mentions Perseus with the head of Medusa among the appropriate motifs for façade decoration.[262] From the ancient reliefs in collections of classical antiquities in Rome, Renaissance artists knew that Medusa was placed on facades already in classical antiquity.[263] Lodovico Dolce wrote in his work on gems, which was a translation of Leonardi's work from 1502, that the stone-carved image of Perseus with the sword and the head of Medusa at the entrance to the house protects its inhabitants against lightning, storms and witches.[264] Medusa as the protector of the entrance appears in Hypnerotomachia of 1499, in which he describes the horrible head of Medusa at the foot of the pyramid, whose mouth was the only entrance into the interior of the building. The wide-open mouth indicated that Medusa was menacing not only thanks to her repulsive appearance but also her terrible screams. In the illustration of the first edition of this book, there is no Medusa on the pyramid.[265] We find it for the first time on the woodcut in the French edition of 1541, from which the illustrations were taken for all other editions (**170**). Although the text clearly states that the only entrance to the pyramid was Medusa's mouth, in the illustration the head of the Medusa is located above the entrance as a protective symbol.

The painted Medusa on the keystone can be found in the painting decoration of the hall in the palace d'Arca in Mantua from 1515–1520. The individual signs of the zodiac are placed in the architectural frames imitating the ancient arcades flanked by Corinthian pilasters connected by the entablature. The arcade with the Aries sign

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[259] Oxford, Bodleian Library, Codex Ashmolensis, MS. Lat. Misc. D. 85, 140v. Karl Lehmann and Phyllis Williams Lehmann, *Samothracian Reflections: Aspects of the Revival of the Antique* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017), 50–52.

[260] Bernard Ashmole, "Cyriac of Ancona and the Temple of Hadrian at Cyzicus," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 19 (1956): 37, 39.

[261] Perugia, Galleria Nazionale dell'Umbria.

[262] Cieri Via, *L'arte delle metamorphosi*, 32.

[263] Bober and Rubinstein, *Renaissance Artists and Antique Sculpture*, no. 11,56 a 90.

[264] Lodovico Dolce, *Libri tre ne i quali si tratta delle diverse sorti delle gemme* (Venice: s.n., 1565), 77v.

[265] Francesco Colonna, *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* (Venice: Aldo Manuzio, 1499), 5r.

has a bronze relief with Medusa in the axis; the monster has large wings on her head and two snakes tied under her neck. Aries is the first sign of the zodiac, and that is why it is associated with war and revolutionary changes. That was the reason that Medusa and the spandrel medallions with portraits of Caesar and Augustus, which evoke the beginning of the Roman Empire, were associated with this sign.

The head of the Medusa became an amulet and a trophy especially in connection with Athena. Gian Paolo Lomazzo wrote that the shield of Athena means protection, but when Medusa is in its middle, it is the emblem of wisdom and reason. He justified this by pointing out that, just like Medusa, who changed those who looked at her to stone, wisdom silences those who do not understand anything.[266] In Iconology, the first edition of which was published in 1593, Cesare Ripa explains the gorgoneion in a similar fashion. Iconology was an alphabetical catalogue of abstract concepts (concetti) to which the descriptions of the respective images were assigned. Ripa describes the Personification of Reason as a girl similar to Athena, who embraces the laurel tree "on which the shield with Medusa hangs, which marks the victory of reason over the enemies of virtue who become stupid, just like those who look at the head of the Medusa become stupid."[267] Medusa, which was the opposite of Athena, evoked the barbarity into which humanity would fall without God's help. In this context, Medusa's severed head has become a symbol of struggle with everything that threatens civilisation-pride, carnal desires, impiety, and other vices leading to chaos. Athena's armour emphasised the need to defend the order with all forces to ensure well-being and cultural prosperity.

In Pinturicchio's painting of 1495–1496 mentioned above, Medusa's forehead is furrowed in pain with her eyes turned up, mouth wide-open. Emotional facial expression and especially the wide-open mouth, a metaphor of violence and destruction, we find only rarely on ancient depictions of Gorgon.[268] Nevertheless, at the turn of the 15th and 16th centuries, Italian artists often expressed extreme emotions with the use of screaming faces.[269] They found the ideal theme in the gorgoneion, in which the wide-open mouth was justified by ancient myth. When an expressive gorgoneion was placed on Athena's shield, it was the opposite of the beautiful and peaceful face of the goddess.

On the tapestry designed by Botticelli and woven around 1500, we find the head of Medusa on Athena's shield; she has a wide-open mouth and angry expression on her face lined with writhing snakes.[270] In 1509–1511, Raphael painted the head of Medusa on the shield of Athena, whose statue decorates classical architecture framing the monumental wall painting of the Athens School in the Vatican. Raphael faithfully imitated the ancient motif of two attacking snakes on the

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[266] Giovanni Paolo Lomazzo, *Trattato dell'arte della pittura, scoltura et architettura* (Milan: Paolo Gottardo Pontio, 1585), 470.

[267] Cesare Ripa, *Iconologia* (Rome: Gli heredi di Gio. Gigliotti, 1593), no. 321.3.

[268] Eugène Müntz, "Le type de Méduse dans l'art florentin du XVe siècle et le Scipion de la collection Rattier," *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* 17 (1897): 115–121.

[269] Jean-Jacques Courtin and Claudine Haroche, *Histoire du visage. Exprimer et taire ses émotions, XVI^e–début du XIX^e siècle* (Paris: Payot & Rivages, 1994).

[270] Private collection. Sebastiano Gentile, ed., *Sandro Botticelli. Pittore della Divina Commedia, catalogo della mostra, I–II* (Milan: Skira, 2000), vol. 1, n. 5, 18, p. 194–195.

head, ailerons, ruffled hair with snakes, and two snakes hanging under the neck, but he took Medusa's grimace to the extreme.

The redesigned gorgoneion was an immediate success, and we will meet this new pictorial type repeatedly in the next centuries. The early echo of Raphael's Medusa can be found in the engraving of Rosso Fiorentino dating back to 1526. It also shows the statue of Athena in the niche. In this case, Athena is naked because she embodies virtue, which hides nothing (**68**). The goddess is characterised by the helmet on her head, the spear, and the shield with the screaming Medusa's head, which in this case has no ailerons at the top. In monumental art, we find the pictorial type created by Raphael on Jacopo Sansovino's bronze statue from around 1549, which was placed in a very prestigious place in Loggetta at St Mark's Square in Venice.

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68. Rosso Fiorentino, Athena with the shield with the screaming Medusa (detail). Jacopo Caraglio, copper engraving, around 1526 .¨

From the preserved ancient monuments, it was known in Renaissance Italy that ancient armours and shields were decorated with gorgoneia.[271] In ancient literary works, one can read that, when placed in such a way, the gorgoneion protected and celebrated the person represented.[272] The first evidence of the renewal of this pictorial tradition is Donatello's equestrian statue of Gattamelata of 1453.[273] The sculptor significantly enlarged Medusa's wings. This innovation was immediately accepted,

[271] Bober and Rubinstein, *Renaissance Artists and Antique Sculpture*, 174A.
[272] Statius, *Silvae*, 1, 1, 37–39; Martialis, 7, 1. Cf. Pierio Valeriano, *Hieroglyphica sive De sacris Aegyptiorum aliarumque gentium literis commentarii* (Basel: Isingrin, 1556), 122r; Ripa, *Iconologia*, n. 321.3.
[273] Michael Greenhalgh, *Donatello and his Sources* (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1982), 139.

as evidenced by the Florentine relief bust of Scipio Africanus from around 1470.[274] The marble relief with the bust of Alexander the Great, which was created in the workshop of Andrea del Verrocchio between 1483–1485, also has Medusa on his armour with large wings but no snakes in her hair.[275] Unlike Donatello's Medusa, whose mouth is closed, those on Scipio and Alexander have opened mouths

The meaning of Medusa's screaming mouth is highlighted on the majolica plate with the Pitti family sign from around 1500.[276] The Medusa has blue and green snakes on her head that are fighting one another, and there are unambiguous war symbols around the plate – cannons from which balls have just been fired. When a tournament was held in Florence in 1475, the winner, Giuliano de'Medici, fought with a shield that bore the head of the Medusa.[277] His sculptural bust from the years 1475–1478, which was created in connection with these courtly festivities, demonstrates the restoration of the ancient type of three-dimensional sculptural bust with Medusa on the breastplate (**69**). This Medusa also has enormous wings and a roaring mouth, which liken her to the Christian devil.

69. Andrea del Verrocchio, Giuliano de' Medici, terracotta, c. 1475/1478.

In the 1540s, the oldest preserved steel breastplates, which were decorated with gorgoneia, were created for the wealthiest customers in Milan.[278] In Madrid's Royal Armoury, there is a full suit of armour with a breastplate with a gorgoneion,

[274] Paris, Louvre, RF 1347. Viatte, *Masques,* n. 59.
[275] Washington, National Gallery of Art 1956.2.1.
[276] London, Victoria and Albert Museum, 1204–1864.
[277] Adrian W. B. Randolph, *Engaging Symbols: Gender, Politics, and Public Art in Fifteenth-century Florence* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 193, 322.
[278] S. W. Pyhrr, et al., *Heroic Armor of the Italian Renaissance: Filippo Negroli and his Contemporaries* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1998), nos. 33, 54, 55.

which was made in 1546 for Guidobaldo II delle Rovere, Duke of Urbino. In Florence's Bargello, there is a slightly older suit of armour with a gorgoneion, the patron of which remains unknown. Cosimo I de Medici was the first Renaissance ruler whose sculptural bust with a Medusa on the breastplate was made in marble. On the bust created by Baccio Bandinelli, there are even two gorgoneia.[279] On the bust of Benvenuto Cellini, the armour is dominated by the head of the Medusa, which completely overshadowed the prestigious Order of the Golden Fleece, which defined the Duke as the Emperor's ally.[280] The main feature of the Duke's face is the fixed gaze of his large eyes on both busts, which has been accentuated by deep drilling, indicating the irises of the eyes. As in the case of Medusa, the Duke's gaze alone was sufficient to sentence his opponent to death.

In Milan, a ceremonial shield with Medusa's head in the middle was made for Holy Roman Emperor Charles V.[281] Medallions with a double-headed eagle, Charles' emblem, Heracles' columns with the inscription PLUS ULTRA and imperial crowns above them personalize the shield. The nephew of Charles V, Archduke Ferdinand, also had a shield with Medusa in his collection.[282] On this shield from 1550–1555, we find scenes with the motif of decapitation: Judith and Holofernes, and David with the head of Goliath. Medallions with busts of Roman emperors and generals referred to the glory of war. There was also a Latin inscription (victory is a gift from the gods) and Greek (through victory and glory to the stars). The shield was probably commissioned by Francesco Ferdinando d'Avalos for Emperor Charles V. By creating these exceptional elements on the ceremonial equipment, Emperor Charles V was identified with Perseus. The heads of Medusa on the shields mentioned above are frowning and their mouths are only half-opened; we find a similar Medusa on a shield made in Milan in 1570–1580.[283] Medusa with a wide-open screaming mouth can be found on a slightly older shield in Florence.[284]

The Beautiful Medusa

The beautiful head of Medusa, which Canova's Perseus of 1797–1801 is lifting, is a variation on the ancient Roman relief known as Medusa Rondanini (**49**). The relief was evidently much discussed when Johann Wolfgang Goethe stayed in Rome in 1786–1788. In his diary entry of 25th December 1786, we find its first literary evaluation.[285] In the following year, Goethe's friend, Karl Philipp Moritz, quoted

[279] Firenze, Museo del Bargello, 7 Sculture. Detlef Heikamp, ed., *Baccio Bandinelli: Scultore e maestro* (Florence: Giunti, 2014), 304.
[280] San Francisco, Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco. De Young Museum, 75.2.16.
[281] Madrid, Real Armeria, D 64. Cf. Pyhrr, *Heroic Armor*, n. 32.
[282] Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum, A 693a. Cf. Marco Bona Castellotti, *Caravaggio, la Medusa. Lo splendore degli scudi da parata del Cinquecento* (Milan: Silvana Editoriale, 2004), no. 7 p. 100–101
[283] Paris, Musée de l'Armée, I. 75. Cf. Viatte, *Masques,* no. 63.
[284] Florencie, Bargello, M956. Cf. Bona Castellotti, *Caravaggio, la Medusa,* no. 8 p. 102–103.
[285] He transformed his diaries into book form and published them only in 1816 and 1817. Cf. Johannes Rössler, "Im Blick der Medusa Rondanini: Aporien klassizistischer Theoriebildung in Zeichnungen von Johann Heinrich Meyer und Friedrich Bury," in *Heikle Balancen: Die Weimarer Klassik im Prozess der Moderne*, edited by Thorsten Valk (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2014), 179–198.

Homer's Gorgo in this connection.[286] In Homer, Medusa Gorgo is mentioned for the first time in world literature as a head that brings death. This interpretation illustrates the coloured drawing of Friedriech Bury, which he probably made in 1786–1788 and which Goethe had in his collection. On the drawing, we see the giant Medusa Rondanini in the underworld, in front of Persephone who is sending her to petrify Odysseus.[287]

Medusa Rondanini is undoubtedly the finest and most beautiful of the six specimens in which this image type has survived. The dating and original function of Medusa Rondanini are still the subjects of controversy, but Goethe did not spare his words of praise for this face, which expressed the state between death and life, pain and pleasure. The idea of a beautiful death is typically romantic. Goethe had a cast of Medusa Rondanini in his apartment in Rome. In 1808, King Ludwig of Bavaria bought the original for the Glyptothek in Munich, and six years later, the king granted Goethe's request and sent its plaster cast to Weimar. Goethe placed the cast in a prominent place in his house, which influenced the way he wrote about it in his book on his Italian journey. At the time the book was published, it was not only an essential ancient work but also a part of German cultural heritage. In Goethe's house, Medusa Rondanini was in charge of an important task: it introduced its master not only as a German writer but also as one of the Germans who had discovered the essence of ancient art. Goethe placed the cast in an honourable place among the windows in his Yellow Salon, which served as a reception salon and dining room. The yellow colour chosen by Goethe for this room was to create a pleasant, joyous atmosphere, which was emphasised even more by the transformation of Medusa Rondanini into an aesthetic object.

The prestige enjoyed by the Medusa Rondanini in the 19th century is demonstrated by the Wallraf Medusa. On the design of the unrealised wall paintings for the Wallraf-Richartz Museum staircase from 1856, the men to whom the city owed its cultural boom are grouped around the marble head of this Medusa.[288] At that time, the Wallraf Medusa was considered to be the most famous work of art in Cologne and a symbol of culture in general. Today, no one would say the Wallraf Medusa is a work of genius, and one would hardly seek eternal beauty in its unpleasant features. It comes from the Forum Romanum, where it decorated the frieze of the Venus and Roma temple, and therefore Medusa's proportions had to be grotesquely distorted to appear pleasant from below. Even before the monument reached Cologne, it was furnished with a plinth, which transformed it into a free-standing sculpture designed for close-up view. The glory that the Wallraf Medusa enjoyed in Cologne in the mid-19th century stemmed from the fact that it was from Rome and belonged to the same pictorial type as the famous Medusa Rondanini.

From the second quarter of the 19th century, the Medusa Rondanini enjoyed the status of an exceptional masterpiece.[289] As a result, it became an attribute of social success and wealth. At Westonbirt Castle in English Cotswolds, a copy of the

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[286] Karl Philipp Moritz, *Werke, 1–3* (Frankfurt a. M.: Insel Verlag, 1993), vo. 2, 364.
[287] Klassik Stiftung Weimar, Graphische Sammlungen, GHz / Sch.I.259,0274.
[288] Eduard von Steinle, New Renaissance of Arts. Drawing, 1856. Köln, Stadtmuseum, HM 1954/131c.
[289] Konrad von Levezow, *Über die Entwicklung des Gorgonen-Ideals in der Poesie und bildenden Kunst der Alten* (Berlin: s.n., 1832).

Medusa Rondanini is placed on the frieze facade above each ionic pilaster. The castle was built in 1863–1870 by Robert Stayner Holford, an art collector and one of the wealthiest men in Great Britain and thus the world. His tremendous wealth was expressed in an endless series of the Medusa Rondanini, which proclaimed and protected the artistic treasures that had been gathered in this place. In this case, not only the model of Medusa but also the artistry of the copies was important. Their author was Alfred Stevens, who in his work attempted to break the boundaries between design and the fine arts. His Medusa in Westonbirt was not a serial architectural sculpture, but an original piece of art that could be exhibited in a gallery. In Westonbirt, Medusa Rondanini's features were highlighted so that her eyes and mouth attracted the attention of the viewer at first glance, even though it was seen from a great distance.

The Munich villa of then-famous German painter Franz von Stuck documents the tremendous prestige that the Medusa Rondanini continued to enjoy at the end of 19th century.[290] At the entrance, there was a bronze mailbox in the form of the archaic Greek head of Medusa, through the mouth of which all letters had to pass. In the vestibule just opposite the entrance, there was a plaster cast of the Medusa Rondanini; it was patinated to look like a bronze relief like the other casts of ancient sculptures assembled in this room. Franz von Stuck drew inspiration for his works from the still-popular ancient mythology, and therefore also returned to the myth of Perseus several times. In 1892, he painted a variation on the Medusa Rondanini which is now in a private collection. It differs from the original by having a calm face but wide-open eyes, giving it a hypnotic look. The white face of Medusa is surrounded by dark, mighty snakes to increase its effect.

In 1853, Karl Rosenkranz formulated the thesis of the unity of Medusa's life, death, beauty and ugliness in the Christian spirit. Medusa's severed head is, in his words, a prefiguration of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. With this pictorial type, "Greeks were so fortunate as to build up the terrible into the noblest beauty … the gruesome has been attenuated to delight – Christian art went even further, for its whole worldview sees true life as mediated through right dying. The God-man, deceased but arisen again to eternal life, is its centre. The dead body of Christ must, despite all truth of death, allow the immortal spirit that dwelt in him and will dwell in him again to shimmer through it. These closed eyes will open again; these bleached, inert lips will tense again, these stiff hands will once again bless and break the bread of life."[291]

The painting by Arnold Böcklin is a variation on this painful Medusa.[292] Later, he elaborated his concept into a coloured relief on the shield, on which he collaborated with his pupil and son-in-law, Peter Bruckmann.[293] Later copies are now in the museums of Basel, Paris and Boston; the original version created in 1886 is in Zurich (**70**). Böcklin's Medusa on the Shield is ambiguous by being both a

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[290] Alexandra Karentzos, *Kunstgöttinen. Mythische Weiblichkeit zwischen Historismus une Secessionen* (Marburg: Jonas Verlag, 2005), 105–108.

[291] Karl Rosenkranz, *Aesthetics of Ugliness: A Critical Edition*, ed. and translated by Andrei Pop and Mechtild Widrich (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 180.

[292] C. 1878, Nuremberg, Germanisches Nationalmuseum , Gm2096.

[293] Heinrich Alfred Schmid, *Verzeichnis der Werke Arnold Böcklins* (Munich: s.n., 1903), no. 6.

representation and a reflection. This being has come from Hell. This is suggested by her dark red hair, but her eyes are not staring because of hatred and aggressiveness, but because of pain. She is the sufferer, which is made clear by the snakes on her head that are arranged to look like the thorny crown that fate has placed on her head for her to feel pain forever. It is a typical example of the modern representation of Perseus' myth. We see a monster from classical mythology and, simultaneously, the mirror image of a man of our time, our own face.

70. Arnold Böcklin, Shield with Medusa. Painted plaster, 1886.

Antoine Bourdelle repeatedly returned to Medusa and created perhaps the strangest depiction of her for the legendary Parisian International Exhibition of Decorative Arts in 1925, which gave the name to Art Deco. In the commercial section of the exhibition, a bronze knocker was exhibited with the head of Medusa, whose snake hair is held in Perseus' hand (**71**). The knocker depicts a beauty with closed eyes that is reminiscent of Bourdelle's Aphrodite, which he created around 1900 with similarly sharp features, an aquiline nose and closed eyes. This Medusa's head is beautiful, but one cannot imagine knocking with it. The visitor would have to hold the snakes hanging from Medusa's head, which make up the knocker's handle. Moreover, what if the tap awoke the monster and she opened her deadly eyes? On the other hand, however, there is an irresistible urge to become Perseus and repeatedly separate Medusa's head from her body. The knocker worked but was not

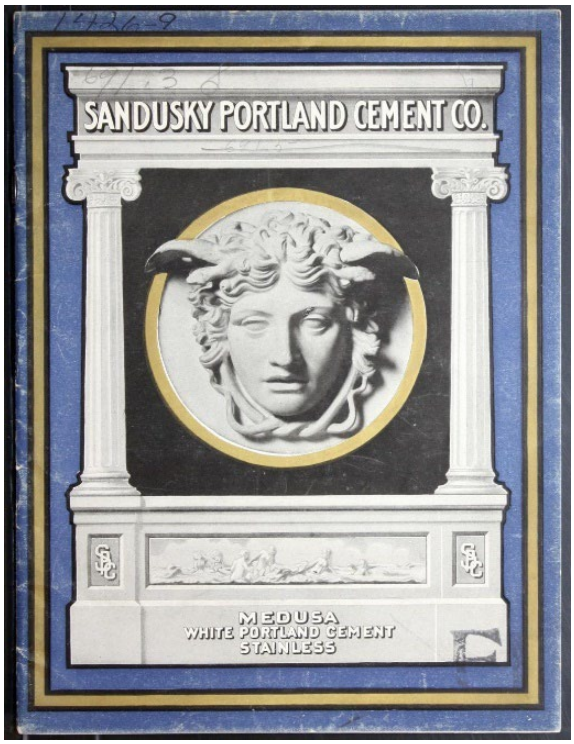
meant to be a functional object. According to period testimony, the only place where something of the sort could be imagined was at the entrance to hell.[294]

71. Antoine Bourdelle, Medusa. Door knocker, 1925 (bronze version: Rudier, 1930).

The 20th century can be characterised by infinite multiplication of all things including Medusa, and in this period the Medusa Rondanini enjoyed the most significant quantitative expansion. A hundred companies worldwide chose this beautiful dead face as their logo. The American cement company Sandusky Portland Cement registered the logo already in 1905 (**72**). It was a commercially successful move because in 1929 the firm was renamed the Medusa Portland Cement Company. We can find a visual commentary on its logo in the company's ads in the 1930s, which are dominated by portraits of the personification of the white Portland cement – a stylized naked man of classical proportions, the alter ego of Perseus, who has

[294] Jacques-Émile Blanche, *Les arts plastiques* (Paris: Les Éditions de France, 1931), 374.

overcome the monster and appropriated its magical ability (**73**). The logo quoting Medusa Rondanini announced that it is a company with a tradition. It was founded in 1892, which is a respectable past in the American context. From 1924, the company specialized in white, waterproof and indestructible cement, and thus Medusa gained new meaning in its logo. Since the 19th century, white colour has been associated with classical antiquity, which was known mostly in the form of white marble sculptures that had lost their original polychromy.[295] White at the time was also very popular for plaster casts of classic sculptures. The high-quality cement from a company in Ohio was also linked not only to the white Medusa Rondanini and to the white race ruling the USA and the world, but also to the mythical monster that changed everything into eternal stone.



72 (left). Sandusky Portland Cement, catalogue, c. 1914.
73 (right). Advertising of the "Medusa Portland Cement Company," USA, 1932.

The Medusa Rondanini is known primarily as the world-famous logo created by fashion designer Gianni Versace in 1978 when he founded his company.[296] The Medusa Rondanini is such an influential work of art that we do not need to know the mythical story which it illustrates. This girl's face attracts us with its beauty, but we immediately feel anxious because of her snakes. The contradictory nature of the Rondanini Medusa, which scares and fascinates us at the same time, is also thanks to her half-opened mouth, the meaning of which we can only guess. Does this mouth suggest erotic arousal or a convulsion of death? Her huge eyes are calm as if they see

[295] Philippe Jockey, *Le mythe de la Grèce blanche: Histoire d'une rêve occidental* (Paris: Belin, 2013).
[296] Karelisa V. Hartigan, *Muse on Madison Avenue*: *Classical Mythology in Contemporary Advertising* (Franfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2002), 130. https://gevrilgroup.com/versace/gianni-versace-medusa-logo/

something extra-terrestrial. Above all, there is her snaky hair, which is combined with ailerons on the sides of her head. The snakes evoke the earth and the underworld, while the wings evoke heaven and the divine sphere. The average modern man has only a superficial awareness of Medusa as a symbol of art and at the same time as something imminently dangerous; these two ingredients, however, have been enough to create one of the most successful commercial icons in the modern world.

In the second decade of the 21st century, controversial but notorious Damien Hirst has relentlessly exposed monumental representations of Medusa and attracted crowds of visitors. He conceives Medusa in a traditional manner, with a screaming face and writhing hair, but in different designs including crystal, gold, or malachite.[297] In a contemporary context, Medusa's commercial success and ubiquity in media has become more and more prominent. Whatever she is, nobody can deny that she is known to all. She is a top celebrity – scandalous, irresponsible, and unaccountable. Moreover, no one can overlook her erotic charm.

"Vagina Dentata"

At the turn of the 20th and 21st century, the psychoanalytical interpretation of Medusa was revived. This interpretation understood this myth as a product of the misogynist culture of the ancient Greeks. In Greek myths, the young heroes fought mostly with female monsters: Heracles with Hydra, Bellerophon with Chimaira, Oedipus with Sphinx, Theseus with the Amazons and Perseus with Medusa. These heroes were brought up in an exclusively male society, which, according to Sigmund Freud, expected superhuman performance from inexperienced youths who were unsure of themselves. In archaic Greek society, problems with male sexuality, we are told, led to the emergence of aggressive female demons. Freud had two typical Greek depictions of Medusa in his collection;[298] the founder of psychoanalysis claimed they demonstrated that ancient Greeks understood them as stylised female genitals, with the snakes standing for the hair surrounding the vagina.

According to Freud, the horror of Medusa is a specific male horror, but his oft-quoted text of 1922 contains only preparatory notes for a study that he never completed.[299] The text was published only posthumously, in 1940. According to Freud's notes, Medusa's head in the male imagination evokes both the female genitalia and the male penis. When a boy sees the crotch of a naked woman, which is missing a penis, he realises that castration is a real threat. The erection, an analogy of the petrification caused by Medusa's gaze, calms the little boy down as he realises that he still has his penis. In psychoanalytic literature, the head of Medusa is

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[297] Damien Hirst, ed. *Treasures from the Wreck of the Unbelievable* (London: Other Criteria, 2017).

[298] Wien, Sigmund Freud Museum.

[299] Sigmund Freud, "Das Medusenhaupt," *Internationale Zeitschrift für Psychoanalyse und Imago* 25 (1940): 105–116; Thomas Albrecht, *The Medusa Effect: Representation and Epistemology in Victorian Aesthetics* (New York: SUNY Press, 2009), 27–50.

associated with the fear of losing masculinity. It is a terrifying nightmare, a vagina dentata that amputates the man's penis during sexual intercourse.[300]

74. Igor Mitoraj, Ikaria. Bronze sculpture, 1996.

[300] Verrier Elwin, "The Vagina Dentata Legend," *British Journal of Medical Psychology* 19 (1943): 439–453.

Freud's interpretation of the myth of Medusa also inspired artists. The bronze female torso with wings by Igor Mitoraj called "Ikaria" pictures Medusa in the crotch (**74**). This female counterpart of the mythical Icarus has her wings outstretched, but she cannot take off, as a hand firmly holds her ankle, a motif known from the statuette by Rodin mentioned above (**58**). In 2009, Zaan Claasens created a bust of Medusa with penises instead of hair, which is also an illustration of Freud's theory.[301] As mentioned above, according to Freud, the little boy confronted for the first time with the sight of a vagina sees the pubic hair as small penises, which reinforces his fear of castration.

The Death of Medusa

The most famous Medusa was painted by the young Michelangelo da Caravaggio at the end of the 16th century.[302] At that time, he lived in Rome, in the house of his learned patron, Cardinal del Monte. According to Vasari, Leonardo da Vinci began his artistic career by painting Medusa on a wooden shield.[303] This may be an invented story, but it could have inspired Caravaggio. His painting is on a canvas-covered wooden shield with a realistic painting of Medusa's freshly severed and bleeding head with snakes for hair, which were faithful representations of the vipers common to Italy. The wooden shield on which Caravaggio painted his Medusa is convex and the painter, according to the inventory of 1605, had a curved mirror in his studio which he used to create this image.[304] However, it was not a mechanical copy of the mirror image. X-rays have proven that the painter was systematically searching for the appropriate proportions of Medusa's face. He first painted an only slightly distorted face with a wide-open mouth. In the second phase, he placed the eyes and nose considerably higher. The third phase was a compromise between the first and the second phases.

These changes can only be found in the first version of the image that was discovered in 1994 and is now in a private collection. Since 1598, a second version of the image is in Uffizi in Florence (**75**). The second version is larger than the first, but otherwise almost identical. On this version, x-rays did not show any changes and thus it was a replica made by Caravaggio. This version was commissioned as a gift to Grand Duke Ferdinand I de Medici by his long-time friend, Cardinal Francesco Maria del Monte, who then served as the Duke's Roman ambassador. The Duke exhibited the gift with the Persian ceremonial armour he had received from Sheikh Abbas the Great.

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[301] https://www.zaan.co.za/sculpture-bronze/.

[302] Cf. Marco Bona Castellotti, *Caravaggio, la Medusa. Lo splendore degli scudi da parata del Cinquecento* (Milan: Silvana Editoriale, 2004); Ermanno Zoffili, *The First Medusa/ La Prima Medusa* (Milan: 5 Continents, 2011); Elisa Ambrosio, "Le Bouclier avec une tête de Méduse du Caravage et son 'double:' réception d'une représentation paradoxale dans l'art italien de la première moitié du XVIIe siècle," *Iconographica. Journal of Medieval and Modern Iconography* 13 (2014): 143–159.

[303] Valentina Conticelli, ed., *Medusa: Il mito, l'antico ei i Medici* (Florence: Polistampa, 2008), 34–35.

[304] Maurizio Marini and Sandro Corradini, "'Inventarium Omnium et Singulorum Bonorum Mobilium' Di Michelangelo Da Caravaggio 'Pittore,'" *Artibus et Historiae* 14, no. 28 (1993): 162 („Item un specchio grande. Item un scudo a specchio").

In the poem written about this painting and published in 1620 by Giovanni Battista Marino, the Grand Duke is celebrated as the second Perseus; at the same time, the author emphasises that the Duke does not need to be protected by Medusa as he is already sufficiently protected by his virtue.[305] The horrified expression on Medusa's face on Caravaggio's shield may show that in the mirror image on Perseus' shield, she has for the first time fully realised what she is. In this way, Giuseppe Orologi comments on the demise of the monster and the function of the shield in a commentary on Ovid's Metamorphoses, which were retold by Giovanni Andrea dell 'Anguillara. In this work, which was very popular in Caravaggio's era, it is written that "Perseus is severing Medusa's head with bristling snakes, as we are prudently eliminating the strength and power of the intrigues that our enemies plot against us. They then flee and see the abomination of their thoughts in the shield of our stability and virtue just as Medusa fled when she saw her naughty face."[306]

75. Caravaggio, Medusa. Oil canvas on wood, 1598.

[305] Giambattista Marino, *La galeria del cavalier Marino, I* (Venice: Dal Ciotti, 1620), 28.
[306] Giovanni Andrea dell'Anguillara and Gioseppe Horologi, *Le Metamorfosi di Ovidio ridotte in ottava rima* (Venice: De'Franceschi, 1563), 73.

On the first version, the painter signed the painting with the same red paint which he used to paint the blood from Medusa's neck. The signature is located at the bottom edge of the shield, to the right of the blood splashing from Medusa's neck, as if the artist had dipped the brush in the still warm blood rising from the head that had just been separated from the body. By doing so, Caravaggio presented himself as an eyewitness. The painter added his original signature in red paint in a similar manner as on the painting of St John of 1608, where the signature is placed right next to a pool of blood flowing from the saint's throat. In the case of Medusa, the signatory may have been not only an eyewitness to but also the executor of Medusa's death sentence. The signature may also refer to the Archangel Michael, the painter's heavenly protector, with whom Perseus was identified, as we have highlighted above. In the abbreviation of the name, the letter A is highlighted (michelA). Everything depends on how we interpret the letter A and the abbreviation "f." that follows the name. We can read "f." as "fecit," a reference to the author of the painting (Michelangelo Caravaggio), or the executor represented on it (Archangel Michael). Nevertheless, we can read it also as "fra," a reference to Caravaggio's status as a Knight of Malta.[307]

Madrigal, published by the Genoese poet Gaspare Murtola in 1604, warns the viewer of looking at this painting.[308] The power to petrify that Murtola writes of does not refer to Medusa, but to the creator of the painting, Caravaggio, who is explicitly mentioned in the poem. Murtola was right – Caravaggio intended to stress that the painting has the same power as the monster painted on it. To draw attention to the painter's power to immobilise, Caravaggio painted the eyes of Medusa in such a way that she does not look at the viewer. Their eyes cannot meet because the monster looks down and to the left. Therefore, the viewer's immobility is exclusively the result of the painter's mastery. His brush can paralyse the viewer so that he resembles a statue. Caravaggio implicitly incorporated Perseus – which is to say himself – into his painting. The severed head illusively painted on the shield is not meant to be a permanent part of it. We may imagine that the painting represents the moment just after Medusa was beheaded. We can no longer see the hero's sword in the picture, but the head still has yet to fall to the ground. This is evidenced by the shadow that Medusa's head casts on the surface of the shield as it passes. When we look at this shadow more carefully, we realise the painter made the viewer think that the shield is not convex but concave. It is not only the reflected image seen by Medusa on its external surface but also the face of the monster seen by Perseus through his transparent shield.

The painter treated this traditional theme entirely as an essay on painting and life. The head of the Medusa has outspokenly male features, so it is possible that it is Michelangelo Caravaggio's self-portrait in the role of the Archangel Michael/Perseus. Caravaggio's painting can also represent the face of Perseus or the painter looking at himself. There is one more detail that should be noted – the snakes above Medusa's forehead create a formation very similar to the Isis knot that

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[307] Maurizio Seracini, "Investigations," in *The First Medusa/ La Prima Medusa*, ed. Ermanno Zoffili (Milan: 5 Continents Editions, 2011), 69.
[308] Gaspare Murtola, *Rime* (Venice: R. Meglietti, 1604), no. 478.

characterised Apollo, the patron of art, on ancient statues.[309] No matter how we understand the picture, there is no doubt that Caravaggio was also celebrating his artistic mastery.

The main character of the painting of Caravaggio is Perseus, whom he does not depict. Baldassare Franceschini later attempted to add him to this pictorial type. We see Perseus with a shield in his left hand, and in the right, he holds a sword and the head of Medusa, whose reflection we see on the shield.[310] Shortly prior to 1644, Bernardo Strozzi painted a portrait of the Venetian collector Giovan Donato Correggio as a Perseus with a shield and Medusa as an attribute. However, the gorgoneion is not a gorgoneion, but a realistically painted head of Medusa with male features looking downward. Its features are so distinctive that it could be a portrait, and the whole picture could be an insight into a situation in the life of the person portrayed, although no information about this exists. In the myth of Medusa's head, human and divine spheres intertwine; the polarity of the transient and the lasting is exemplified by the polarity of living and inanimate nature. In Ovid's Metamorphoses, the last-mentioned aspect is demonstrated by the story of corals; we'll come back to it later.

Caravaggio's painting influenced the head painted in 1617–1618 by Rubens, who may have seen Caravaggio's picture when he was visiting Florence in 1600 or sometime later; in any case, he decided to show a later sequence after Medusa's had fallen to the ground (**76**).[311] In 1629–1630, Constantin Huygens wrote about this work: "It represents the severed head of Medusa, encircled by the snakes that appear from her hair. In this painting he has composed the sight of a marvellously beautiful woman who is still attractive, but also causes horror because death has just arrived and evil snakes hanging around her temples, with such inexpressible deliberation that the viewer is suddenly caught by terror-since it is usually covered by a curtain – but that the viewer at the same time, and despite the horror of the representation, enjoys the painting, because it is lively and beautiful."[312] The end of the monster is the beginning of an even greater evil: Medusa's blood has created poisonous vipers, painted by Rubens's collaborator Frans Snyders. In addition to the viper, there are other poisonous animals in the picture – a salamander, spiders and a scorpion. Rubens' slain Medusa is the source of life of poisonous animals, which spread death all over the world. Rubens knew this ancient motif from Lucan or Apollonius.[313] He also adapted from classical antiquity the two-headed snake (amphisbaena) about which Pliny writes (foreground centre).[314]

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[309] Maurizio Marini, *Caravaggio "pictor praesentatissimus." L'iter artistico completo di uno dei massimi rivoluzionari dell'arte di tutti i tempi* (Rome: Newton Compton Editor, 2001), 417.
[310] Schleißheim, Staatsgalerie inv. 15531.
[311] Anne T. Woollett and Ariane van Suchtelen, *Rubens and Brueghel: A Working Friendship* (Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum, 2006.), 180–185.
[312] Caroline Alexandra Van Eck, "The Petrifying Gaze of Medusa: Ambivalence, Ekplexis, and the Sublime," *Journal of Historians of Netherlandish Art* 8 (2016): 1–2.
[313] Apollonius, *Argonautica*, 4, 1513–1517; Lucan, 9, 619–699.
[314] Pliny the Elder, *Natural History*, 8, 35; 20, 82.

76. Peter Paul Rubens and Frans Snyders, Medusa. Oil painting, 1617–1618.

77. An unknown Flemish master, Medusa. Oil painting, the first half of 17th century.

The theme was popular in Flanders in the 17th century and Florence's Uffizi house a painting that inspired Percy Bysshe Shelley to write his famous romantic poem (77). [315] The glory of this painting began in the 1780s when it was declared to be the work of Leonardo da Vinci and was praised along with the Mona Lisa in the Louvre.[316] At the beginning of the 20th century, however, experts concluded that this was the work of an unknown Flemish painter from the first half of the 17th century.[317] Both Flemish paintings represent an alternative version of Perseus' myth

[315] Percy Byssche Shelley, *Posthumous Poems of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, ed. Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley (London: John and Henry L. Hunt, 1824). This text is a fragment published posthumously; therefore, its interpretation is complicated.
[316] Conticelli, *Medusa*, 66.
[317] Corrado Ricci, "Le Meduse degli Uffizi," *Vita d'arte* 1 (1908): 1–10.

because in the canonical version Perseus immediately took the head of the monster and ran away because the remaining Gorgons began to pursue him. On both paintings Medusa's head lies on the ground in an abandoned landscape; the place is similar, but the time is different. Rubens' picture shows the moment just after the head was separated from the body and fell to the ground. We see the next and final act in the picture in Florence. The severed head is left to its fate, and no one else is interested in it except the author of the painting. It is getting darker, and the last poisonous breath comes out of her mouth; the snake heads sink to the ground, and Medusa has begun to turn into a carcass. Vermin scurry towards their banquet and a bat flies in from the right. The approaching struggle for the carcass is a parody of the heroic struggle described in the myth.

The images also differ in terms of viewing angle; on the picture in Vienna, the viewer bent down and looked at Medusa's head from the side. On the painting in Uffizi, the painter suggests that the viewer will soon regret approaching the head even though he has snuck up on it from behind. Medusa's face is turned to the night sky, but her eyes seem to turn back to look at the viewer. Medusa thus kills even after her death. Lucanus knew this very well, but despite this fact (or perhaps because of it) he wished to see the monster dying: "Medusa's features must have worn a ghastly grimace in the moment of her decapitation – I have no doubt that the mouth belched poison and the eyes flashed instant death." [318] Rubens and the unknown Flemish painter answer Lucan's question, but each in his own way.

Realistic paintings of Medusa's severed head have a counterpart in stone sculpture. Andreas Schlüter carved it twice in 1696–1699 – we find these heads on the keystones of two entrances on the north side of the Berlin Armoury (**78**). Death is indicated by various anatomical details – the muscles in the faces are loose, the eyelids have spontaneously dropped down and covered the eyes, and the chin is lowered. The mouth is open, in which a limp tongue is visible. The frowning forehead testifies to the terrible struggle which Medusa ultimately lost. This sculptural work is obviously the result of a careful study of the changes in the human face that occur after death. These famous heads in Berlin spread a message that was intended not only for the local population but above all for the enemies of Prussia. The severed heads of Medusa are exposed at the Armoury as if they were war trophies, displaying the function of this building and celebrating the military strength of the Prussian state - its military power is so great that it can even expose the head of the greatest killer of all time, the legendary Medusa, amongst its various war trophies. We must not forget that in the 17th century the severed heads of the enemy were still publicly exposed. In order for the illusion of the real trophy to be perfect, Schlüter even displayed the method in which the head of Medusa was attached to the shield. It is hung on the curved upper end of the shield by the snakes that she has in place of hair. It is also attached to the shield with strips of cloth that run across her forehead and the stump of her neck.

[318] Lucan 9, 678–680, translated by Robert Graves.

78. Andreas Schlüter, Head of Medusa.
Stone relief on the northern façade of the former Berlin armoury, 1696–1699.

The courtyard of the Berlin Armoury displayed more severed heads, which realistically depicted warriors of different ages and nationalities in various stages of death. All these heads belonged to the enemies that the Prussian army overcame. Just like the Medusa on the northern front, these severed heads were not intended to arouse pity; they were meant to show the horrors of war but also celebrate the prowess of Prussian weaponry. They sought to warn the enemy that their soldiers might end up like those whose lifeless heads are displayed on the keystones. This is expressed explicitly in the inscription on the façade, which states that the Armoury was built and decorated to frighten the enemy. Although the Berlin Armoury was a functional building, it was entrusted with an important political message. This was a specific feature of Central European architecture. In this part of Europe, complicated political conditions often did not allow the builders to declare their political ambitions openly.

The builder of the Armoury, Elector Frederick III of Brandenburg, placed it in the centre of the city next to his town residence. Moreover, he built this utility building in the form of a city palace with rich sculptural decoration and a complex iconographic program. The problem of the emerging Prussian state was that its real power did not correspond to the established hierarchy of states in this part of

Europe. In 1701, Elector Frederick III was proclaimed King (as Frederick I), but his official title was "King in Prussia." He could not claim the title of the "King of Prussia" because the Brandenburg Elector was still formally a vassal of the Habsburg Emperor, and much of Prussia still belonged to the Kingdom of Poland. Political ambitions that could not be expressed directly were expressed through architecture and its sculptural decorations. This explains the exceptionally naturalistic depiction of the severed heads of Medusa at the Berlin Armoury. Schlüter's Medusa defined Frederick III as a second Perseus who was now performing his epochal deed. The head of Medusa was thus represented in such a way that it was indistinguishable from a real severed head.

79. Joachim von Sandrart, Medusa. Engraving, 1675.

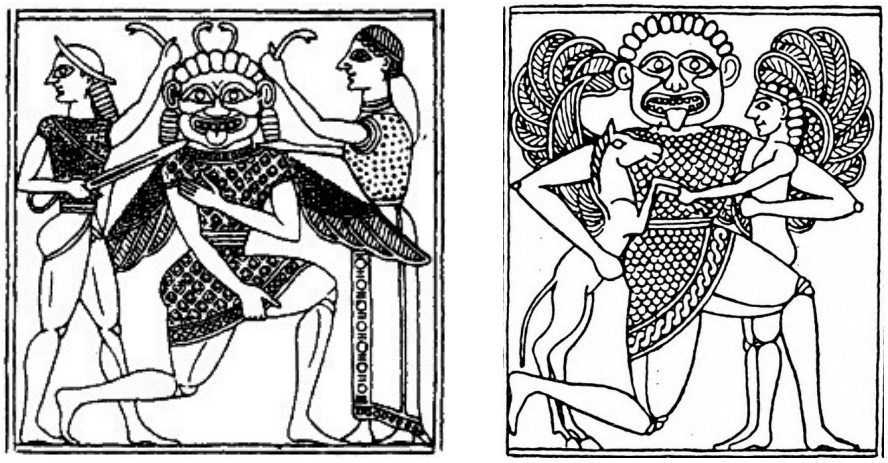
On the two heads of Medusa with which Andreas Schlüter decorated the Berlin armoury, as well as on those that Artus Quellinus I sculpted for the Amsterdam City Hall in 1650–1652, we find pairs of snakes that are similar but not the same. In Amsterdam, their heads are together as if they were kissing, in Berlin one bites off the other's head. In the 17th century, the ancient myth about vipers kissing and eating each other was linked to the myth of Medusa.[319] We find it, for example, also in the engraving published in 1675 in Sandrart's German Academy (**79**). The same motif can also be found in works of art that we have already dealt with, on the oil painting from 1617–1618 by Rubens and Snyders.

The Life of Medusa

Simultaneously, with the appearance of Medusa's beheading in the 6th century BC, images showing the monster with her children Pegasus and Chrysaor began to appear in Greece. These representations point to a completely different mythic tradition because Hesiod expressed himself quite clearly - Pegasus and Chrysaor saw

[319] Herodotus, 3, 109; Pliny the Elder, *Natural history*, 10, 169–170. Cf. Isidore of Seville, Etymologiae 12, 4, 10–11.

the light of the world only after their mother died.[320] The parallel existence of these two versions of the Medusa myth can be demonstrated on two bronze reliefs from Zeus' sanctuary in Olympia. On both of them, Medusa is displayed with a horrifying face turned towards the viewer; her wings and feet indicate running, a symbol of her speed and strength. On one relief, her murderers, Perseus and Athena, surround her (**80**). On the other, she is with her children, Pegasus and Chrysaor, whom she proudly embraces (**81**).

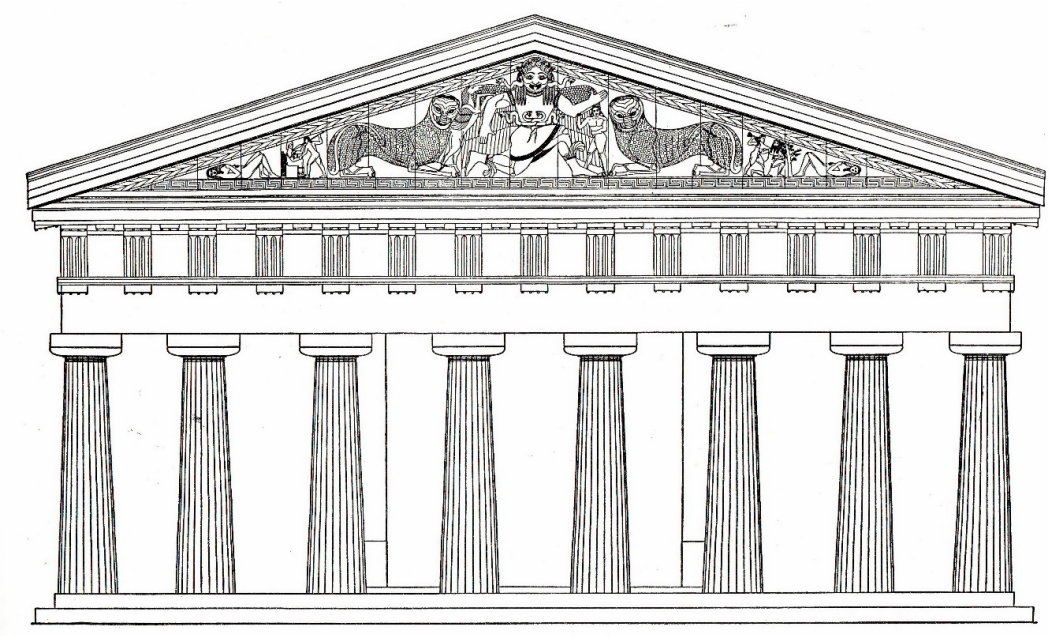


80 (left). Perseus and Athena kill Medusa. Greek bronze relief, around 550 BC.
81 (right). Medusa with Pegasus and Chrysaor. Greek bronze relief from Olympia, late 7th century BC.

In the 7th to 6th centuries, these two traditions existed in parallel but not everywhere with the same intensity. The epicentre of the tradition in which Perseus kills Medusa is likely Athens, because the goddess Athena dominates in this version of the myth. The centre of the parallel tradition, in which Medusa is a powerful deity, was probably Corinth.[321] Pegasus was especially worshipped in Corinth, where the horse appeared on coins already in the middle of the 6th century BC when the coins began to be minted in Greece. The Medusa as a foremother can be found on a terracotta relief from the late 7th century BC that decorated Athena's temple in Syracuse, which was a Corinthian colony (**82**). At the turn of the 7th and 6th centuries BC, monumental architecture with sculptural decoration appeared in Greece. The oldest preserved stone relief, which decorated the pediment of the Greek temple, can be found in another Corinthian colony, Corfu (**83**). In the middle of the pediment, there is a running Medusa with snakes in her hair, snakes in place of a belt, and wings on her feet. Next to Medusa, we see fragments of Pegasus on the left and Chrysaor on the right. The huge lions, which are depicted at her sides, are subordinate to Medusa. She appears here as a ruler of animals similarly to Artemis, to whom the temple was dedicated.

[320] Hesiod, *Theogony,* 280–281.
[321] Cornélia Isler-Kerényi, "La madre di Pegaso," in *Corinto: Luoge da azione e luogo di racconto*, ed. P. A. Bernardini (Pisa: Fabrizio Serra editore, 2013), 257–270.

82. Medusa with Pegasus and Chrysaor. Greek terracotta relief from the temple of Athena at Sysacuse, late 7th century BC.



83. Western pediment of the temple of Artemis at Corfu, around 580 BC.

In Hellenistic Greece, another alternative version of Medusa appeared. It was undoubtedly the same monster we know from countless representations because she has snakes in her hair and wings over her forehead, but she is clearly in no danger and threatens no one. Greeks and Romans knew her as a bust of a beautiful and calm

girl who looked at the viewer curiously. It is a relatively rare pictorial type, but we find it in different art genres, on mosaics, small relief sculpture, and statuettes.[322] These portraits of Medusa were important for ancient Greeks and Romans; nevertheless, they have no counterpart in ancient literary tradition. We know from ancient literary works that Medusa was originally a mortal girl with beautiful hair that the goddess Athena turned into snakes. The beautiful girl became a hideous monster whom the hero Perseus beheaded. However, no ancient author has given us a literary portrait of the living Medusa.

In ancient Greece, no one wrote about how she dealt with her terrible transformation. Do the portraits of Medusa tell us that she accepted it stoically? Is she a monster who is unmoved by snakes, as some Roman authors suggest?[323] Is she an alternative Medusa who never met Perseus? In the ancient literary tradition, the story begins when Perseus cuts off Medusa's head and her life ends. This scene was very often depicted in ancient art. Even more often, the severed head of Medusa was depicted and is one of the most frequently depicted themes in the fine art of all periods. The bust of the living Medusa, however, does not belong to this series of scenes, as her head firmly rests on her neck. In these ancient depictions, Medusa is not only alive but also beautiful and does not look at all hostile. Sometimes, she looks searchingly at the spectator as if she wished to know what he or she thought about her.

What did ancient Greeks and Romans think about portraits of Medusa? There was no hierarchical relationship between the ancient pictorial and literary tradition, and both traditions could exist completely independent of one another. They were, however, firmly interconnected. Every ancient Greek or Roman who knew the myth of Medusa from literary tradition could identify the portrait of Medusa in the visual arts. Mythological narration differs from all other methods of communication in that it allows for the omission of lengthy exposition. The myth is, in short, a story that is widely known because it is considered essential to the whole of society. Thanks to this, we foresee the outcome of the story. Predictability, however, only facilitates the understanding of myths, the strength of which stems from their ability to capture a generally binding aspect of human experience. However, myth always exceeds or even contradicts this experience.

The myth of Medusa is one of the most potent stories because no one has ever seen a human being with snakes instead of hair. The myth contradicts human logic, and by doing so draws us into the story which it narrates. In the case of Medusa, this illogicality induces terror and disgust. With Medusa, the face, which is most vulnerable to human beings, has come into direct contact with snakes, something people are most afraid of. Close to Medusa's ears, eyes, nose and mouth is a cluster of hissing, slimy and putrid snakes whose teeth spit poison. Being Medusa is the most frightening nightmare we can imagine. How can she then be so calm in these ancient portraits? Why is this Medusa not scared to death? Her snakes frighten us, but the beauty of her face irresistibly attracts us. We sympathise with her because we know she was not born with snakes for hair. In classical antiquity, the portrait bust of

[322] On representations of Medusa in ancient art cf. Krauskopf, *Gorgo, Gorgones*.
[323] Lucan, 9, 632–634.

the living Medusa might have been a cautionary reminder that nothing is certain and everything depends on the will of the gods. Theoretically, the same thing could happen to anyone else.

84 (left). Medusa. Ceramic relief plaque with a polychromy, 225–200 BC. Made in Greek Sicily.
85 (right). Medusa. Greek bronze statuette, c. 150 BC.

The first portraits of Medusa were created in Hellenistic Greece. A ceramic relief plaque shows Medusa with wings on her head and a Celtic neck ring, which characterised her as an exotic foreigner (**84**). The plaque has an opening at the top, making it an oscillum. These objects were suspended as magic protective amulets. The wind rotated the oscillum on all sides, so when hanging on a fruit tree, for example, the amulet provided perfect protection over the entire orchard. In antiquity, the severed head of Medusa was usually used as a protective amulet. On this plaque, however, the head grows out of a body, which is covered with scales. Therefore, it is undoubtedly a living Medusa. In the Syracuse Museum, there is a bronze bust of Medusa with snakes in her hair and also snake scales on her body (**85**). However, they are not a part of her body, but an adroitly sewn tunic or armour. A similar coat of armour is worn by Medusa on a drawing of an ancient sculpture by Cyriacus of Ancona, which he made in 1444 when he visited Samothrace on his trips through the eastern Mediterranean.[324] The original of the drawing is not preserved, but we know of three Italian copies from the late 15th century. Two of these drawings have the Latin inscription "Medusa's Bronze Head from the New Gate on Samothrace." Busts of Medusa in this scaled armour can also be found on ancient gems. Most often, we find the severed head of Medusa on gems, but sometimes Medusa's neck is intact; in these cases, we must interpret the depiction as the bust of a living monster.

The Romans often used Medusa as a central motif for their floor mosaics.[325] On these mosaics, the severed head of Medusa might be theoretically depicted because

[324] Oxford, Bodleian Library, Codex Ashmolensis, MS. Lat. Misc. D. 85, 140v.
[325] Carolyn McKeon Hessenbruch, *Iconology of the Gorgon Medusa in Roman Mosaic* (Ann Arbor: University microfilms international, 1983).

we often do not see her neck; but her eyes are lively, and she watches the viewer closely (**86**). On one mosaic, Medusa's neck, including a part of the bust, is also shown (**87**). On another mosaic, we see a bust of Medusa, who is depicted in the same manner in which Alexander the Great and the Hellenistic rulers were usually represented. She is a majestic figure with her head turned upward, her eyes looking up to the heavens and a grim expression on her face.[326] Medusa's head is placed on Roman mosaics into an ornamental frame that induces a stroboscopic effect. The endless whirl increases her hair's frightening effect. In the middle, as in the eye of the typhoon, however, there is utter peace, and the timelessness embodies the immovable yet living Medusa, who gazes at us. We do not know whom these portraits are showing. We do not even know whether it is a living Medusa or her petrified bust.

86. Head of Medusa. Roman mosaic, 1st–2nd century AD.

87. Head of Medusa. Roman mosaic, 2nd century AD.

[326] Los Angeles, The J. Paul Getty Museum, Villa Collection, Malibu, California, 71.AH.110.

In post-ancient Europe, representations of ancient myths were not only renewed but also further developed or re-evaluated, and the portrait of Medusa became a means of the artist's self-reflection. This pictorial type corrects the widespread idea of a revival of ancient mythical images. We tend to connect this process exclusively with the Italian Renaissance, but sculptors and painters only began to represent the live Medusa and the transformation of her hair into snakes in Baroque and - above all - modern art. The portrait of Medusa demonstrates that the reception of the ancient mythical tradition in visual arts is a continuous process that is not over yet. It continues on in the 21st century, and will continue in centuries to come.

Since Medusa changed everything into stone with her gaze, it could have been fatal to her to look at her own mirror image for some reason. Therefore, we may speculate that the ancient portraits of Medusa represented the monster who looked at her image by mistake and was petrified before she could scare herself. In 1587, the blind poet and actor Luigi Groto wrote about this accident in his epigram called The Medusa Statue: "This is not a sculpture of she who turned one to stone, but Medusa herself. However, let you who approach keep low your gaze! If you want not through awe to be turned into her, resting her tired body against this wall she became part of it, as taking a mirror to admire her beauty, she herself was turned to stone." [327] This theme was later developed by Giambattista Marino, which testifies to how the image of Medusa turning herself into stone was attractive at the turn of the 16th and 17th centuries.[328]

Renaissance Italy knew the sculptural bust of Medusa at least from copies of the drawings mentioned above by Cyriacus of Ancona. Already before 1474, the drawing of Andrea Mantegna was created, which may be his self-portrait in the form of Medusa.[329] Mantegna was one of the greatest experts in ancient art of his time, and he often incorporated self-portraits into his works. The drawing in Florence's Uffizi, which shows an angry screaming face from the front, could be his self-portrait. However, there are no wings or snakes on the drawing, so it may not be Medusa. Reports on ancient busts of Medusa in Roman collections date from the first half of the 16th century. [330] The first Renaissance versions are dated to the same period. On the bronze plaque in Berlin, we see a bust, not a severed head. It is undoubtedly Medusa, with wings on her head and snakes for hair, two of which are stuck under her neck.[331] Her eyes are opened; she has a painful expression on her face and parted lips.

Sometime after 1638, Gian Lorenzo Bernini created a monumental marble bust of Medusa, which depicts the monster with a mane of writhing snakes on her head

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[327] Luigi Groto, *Le rime* (Venezia: Zoppini fratelli, 1587), 138; Mina Gregori, "Caravaggio's First 'Medusa,'" in *The First Medusa/ La Prima Medusa*, ed. Ermanno Zoffili (Milan: 5 Continents 2011), 12.

[328] Giambattista Marino, *La Galeria del Cavalier Marino, II* (Napoli: Scipione Bonino, 1619), 3.

[329] Firenze, Gabinetto Disegni e Stampe degli Uffizi, 1447. Cf. Marzia Faietti, "'Gorgóneion' mantovano, "*Artibus et historiae* 31 (2010): 27–42.

[330] Rodolfo Amedeo Lanciani, *Storia degli scavi di Roma e notizie intorno le collezioni romane di antichità, I* (Rome: E. Loescher, 1902), 216.

[331] Berlin, Skulpturensammlung und Museum für Byzantinische Kunst, 7111.

and a painful grin on her face (**88**).[332] In its overall conception and details, Bernini's Medusa follows the ancient originals. The folds of the garment on her right shoulder indicate that she was dressed like the ancient Amazons, whose left breasts were left exposed. Bernini's Medusa was dressed like a man, and she has a face with male features. She is suffering; the model for the face of Medusa was the face of Laocoön from the famous group statue of Laocoön and his sons from the Vatican collections, a Roman copy after the Greek original from around 200 BC. Bernini appreciated it highly and, according to Laocoön's head, also created a marble bust, the prefiguration of his Medusa.[333] The gods sent snakes to torture and kill Laocoön and his sons because he opposed their will. Bernini's Medusa, however, is tortured by herself, the cause being either the snakes into which her beautiful hair has just changed or the fact that she is just changing into stone. In any case, Bernini's Medusa is portrayed as a withdrawn sufferer who turns away from the viewer. Her body is facing the viewer, but her head is turned away.

88. Gian Lorenzo Bernini, Medusa. Marble bust, 1638–1648.

[332] Irving Lavin, "Bernini's Bust of Medusa: An Awful Pun," in *La Medusa di Gian Lorenzo Bernini: Studi e restauri,* ed. Elena Di Gioia (Roma: Campisano, 2007), 120–134; Costanzi Costanzi and Giovanni Carlo Federico Villa, eds., *Gian Lorenzo Bernini. Medusa tra luce ed emozione* (Crocetta del Montello: Antiga, 2013).

[333] Maria Grazia Bernardini and Maurizi Fagiolo dell'Arco, *Gian Lorenzo Bernini. Regista del Barocco* (Milan: Skira 1999), n. 31.

The suffering of Bernini's Medusa was an echo of the sculptor's anguish. In 1636–1638, when he was around forty, he lived a passionate romance with Costanza Bonarelli, the emancipated wife of a sculptor, who worked under Bernini's supervision in St. Peter's Basilica in Rome. At that time, he carved a fascinating portrait of her for himself. [334] He caught his mistress in an intimate moment, with an open shirt revealing her breasts, watching her lover attentively. The affair ended when Gian Lorenzo Bernini learned that Costanza was also meeting with Luigi Bernini, who, under the guidance of his older brother, also worked in St. Peter's. The enraged Gian Lorenzo attacked his younger brother and injured him, sending a servant with a razor to the unfaithful mistress to disfigure her. Pope Urban VIII, Bernini's patron, punished the sculptor but soon granted him a pardon. Part of the deal with his powerful protector was that Bernini would marry the beautiful Caterina Terzio, with whom he lived happily ever after. He began a new chapter in his life by creating a bust of Medusa, a self-ironic counterpart to the Costanza bust. Thinking in contrasting pairs was typical for Bernini; his closest analogy to the pair of the active Costanza and the passive Medusa was a pair of busts dating back to 1620, The Blessed Soul and The Damned Soul, which is Bernini's self-portrait.[335]

The portrait of Costanza embodied immorality in this new context. [336] She treats Bernini as her equal; she is the representative of a new type of woman who appeared in the 17th century: self-confident, independent, and disregarding conventions. Her counterpart, Medusa, is the representation of punished licentiousness. She has sinned, and now she suffers for it. This is why she is ashamed and turns away from the viewer. Bernini shows us the transformation from beauty to monster. The snakes do not grow directly from Medusa's head; the locks of her hair are intact, but are transforming into snakes' bodies. These snakes have just been born, and therefore they are wildly writhing; they are just as surprised as Medusa.

Bernini kept to Ovid's version of the myth. Medusa was a girl famous for her beautiful hair, and her beauty attracted Poseidon, who raped her. This happened in the temple of the chaste Athena, who punished the girl on the spot.[337] The pair of Bernini's sculptural busts, Costanza and Medusa, represents the sinner before and after she was punished. Bernini is both Poseidon, raping Medusa, and the punishing Athena, as the sculptor changes a living girl into an inanimate work of art. [338] The Latin inscription on the base was made later, in 1731. It emphasizes that the work in the Capitoline Museums in Rome is to be judged primarily from the aesthetic point of view: "The head of the Medusa, which in the ancient times decorated the shields of the warriors to frighten the enemy, is now a pride of the famous sculptor and shines on the Capitol." Medusa is thus explicitly defined as the emblem of an artist.

Two Medusas with expressive faces can be found in Amsterdam City Hall, which is today the Royal Palace. In 1650–1652, Artus Quellinus I furnished a rich

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[334] Bernardini and Fagiolo dell'Arco, *Gian Lorenzo Bernini*, n. 19.

[335] Bernardini and Fagiolo dell'Arco, *Gian Lorenzo Bernini*, n. 32.

[336] Charles Avery, *Bernini: Genius of the Baroque* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1997), 91–92; Lavin, *Bernini's Bust of Medusa*.

[337] Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 4, 784–801.

[338] Patrick Haughey, "Bernini's 'Medusa' and the History of Art," *Thresholds* 28 (Concerto Barocco: essays in honor of Henry A. Millon), 2005: 83–84.

sculptural decoration for the courtroom where death sentences were pronounced. There is a marble bench for a jury with figural reliefs illustrating mercy, wisdom, and righteousness. The lintel of the bench carries four caryatids whose mournful gestures and expressions visualised the feelings of the men who were sitting under them. On the underside of the lintel, two reliefs represent Medusa. In her face, we see the expression of extreme horror, because she has just heard the sentence of death.[339] These depictions of Medusa were to celebrate the justice of the local administration, but above all to demonstrate the prosperity of the city and the mastery of Artus Quellinus.

The view of the world through the eyes of Medusa also attracted artists in the 18th century, as evidenced by the Florentine bust by Spinazzi, a professor of sculpture at the Florentine Academy.[340] Spinazzi's head of Medusa is bowed and her eyes are lowered, but not because she is afraid. She thinks and therefore does not want to be distracted by what is happening around her. Her soulful face is seemingly calm, but her raised eyebrows and her open mouth reveal the intensity of her thoughts. When looking at this bust, we immediately perceive two inconsistent traits. The perfectly groomed hair contrasts with the slovenly clothing. The massive knot is tied up in haste, in a typically masculine fashion. Spinazzi and his audience knew that Amazons and soldiers fastened their cloaks on their right shoulders so their right hands were free to fight. The beauty of this Medusa's face is somewhat rough, almost masculine, with bare cheekbones, a distinctive nose, and an energetic chin. Her figure is rather boyish, and she has broad shoulders and strikingly small breasts.

Spinazzi's Medusa ponders herself, her identity, her nature and the beautiful hair she has so carefully adjusted. The bust originated in the second half of the 18th century when the audience expected artists to stick to traditional image types, but fill them with radically new content. Spinazzi did not disappoint this expectation: his bust looks like a variation on Bernini's version of the myth, but when we inspect it carefully, we find that it shows something completely different. Spinazzi's marble bust has the inscription MEDUSA on its base. It is, however, not Medusa with snakes for hair, but a girl who has stitched two snakes into her hair. This was not an act of momentary caprice, but a careful work of hairdressing; the snakes are neatly crossed over her forehead, their bodies knotted into her hair, and the ends merging on both sides on her shoulders as if they were curls. The bust does not show a monster, but a beautiful girl fatally attracted by danger, inducing her to play with the snakes. She has only disguised herself as Medusa; her character drives her inevitably toward destruction, a fact which she does not yet realize.

The bust of Spinazzi is a patriarchal morality, and a hundred years later, several female sculptors responded to the social problem of their existence by creating a portrait of Medusa. Around the middle of the 19th century, the first wave of female emancipation begins, in which women started to attend art schools. The portraits of the ostracised Medusa can be the alter ego of the first women sculptors

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[339] Stijn Bussels, "Medusa's Terror in the Amsterdam Town Hall, or How to Look at Sculptures in the Dutch Golden Age," in *Idols and Museum Pieces: the Nature of Sculpture, its Historiography and Exhibition History 1640–1880*, ed. Caroline van Eck (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2017), 85–102.

[340] Firenze, Galleria degli Uffizi, 1914.11.

who have tried to enter into the purely male sphere. One of the first women to study anatomy was Harriet Goodhue Hosmer, the most famous 19th-century American sculptor. Her childhood was exceptional. Her father was a doctor, whose wife and three children died of tuberculosis. The widower intended to protect Harriet through physical exercise and keeping her outdoors, which he managed to accomplish, but he thus raised his daughter as a wild Amazon. In 1852, she moved to Rome, where she became the first member of the White Marmorean Flock, a sisterhood of American sculptresses. Hosmer's Medusa was sculpted two years after her arrival in Rome as a classicist counterpart to the Bernini version of this subject (**89)**.[341]

89. Harriet Goodhue Hosmer, Medusa. Marble bust, around 1854.

[341] William H. Gerdts, "The Medusa of Harriet Hosmer," *Bulletin of the Detroit Institute of Arts* 56, no. 2 (1978): 97–108.

The difference is not only in the artistic style but also in Medusa's psychology. Both react to their transformation, but differently. While in Bernini's version she is panicked, Hosmer only indicated her emotional storm by tipping her head, raising her eyebrows and opening her mouth. The girl's transformation is irreversible, and the loss of humanity definitive, which is suggested by the snakes firmly positioned under her breasts. This Medusa, however, does not resign herself to her fate. She does not close herself, and on the contrary, she seems to reproach Athena, who has transformed her. From Bernini's Medusa, this version also differs in the wings that frame the girl's head, making it reminiscent of a halo. Hosmer has put a bit of personal experience into her Medusa; it belongs to a series of her works dedicated to women with a tragic fate - Daphne, Oenone, Beatrice Cenci and Zenobia. Not only Hosmer's artistic career was incompatible with the conventions of American Puritan society, so was her lesbian orientation, which she masked with life-long celibacy.[342]

Adèle d'Affry came from an entirely different background, which explains the different concept of her Medusa. She married Carlo Colonna, Duke of Castiglione. Her contemporaries knew her as Duchess Colonna, but she presented her sculptural works under the masculine name of Marcello.[343] The model for her Medusa of 1865, when she was 29 years old and lived in Paris, was a singer who captured the sculptor's attention during her performance of Lully's opera Perseus. In Adèle d'Affry's own words, she wanted the beauty of Medusa to be a mixture of "contempt, fury, and defiance." [344] There is indeed no sign of dismay in her Medusa (**90**). She is very masculine, with a lion's skin stretched over her head - an attribute of the mythical hero Hercules. She stares straight ahead, her lips firmly pursed; but, at the same time, she is not resigned to her femininity. Her hair is perfectly combed and the snakes are neatly woven into plaits. The snakeskin, which was a part of her transformation, takes the form of an elegantly cut waistcoat. The entangled snakes lining the lion's head are a parody, however, of the woman's headgear, which was an obligatory item of clothing worn by women of the time.

D'Affry's Medusa perhaps took inspiration from a bust with the same theme by the French sculptor Prospero d'Epinay, for which he created only a ceramic bozetto (**91**).[345] In this case, the psychological characteristics of the mythical being were borrowed from the person who was the sculptor's model. Her name was Assunta Della Ruella, and she was a convicted member of a highwayman's gang. The principal motive of the myth of Medusa was that a beautiful face may deceive. D'Epinay contributed to this theme by choosing at that time a famous criminal as the model of Medusa.

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[342] Alicia Faxon, "Images of Women in the Sculpture of Harriet Hosmer," *Woman's Art Journal* 2 (Spring-Summer, 1981): 25–29; Camille Coonrod, "Two Images of Medusa in the Sculpture of Harriet Hosmer," *Undergraduate Journal of Humanistic Studies* 1 (Spring 2015): 1–12.

[343] Aurélia Maillard Despont, et al., eds., *Adèle D'affry, duchesse Colonna, "Marcello" (1836–1879). Ses écrits, sa vie, son temps* (Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2017).

[344] Comtesse D'Alcantara, *Marcello: Adèle d'Affry, Duchesse Castiglione Colonna, 1836–1879, sa vie, son oeuvre, sa pensée et ses amis* (Geneva: Éditions générales, 1961), 88.

[345] Andreas Blühm, "'Une beauté sauvage:' Prosper d'Epinay's Head of Medusa," *Van Gogh Museum Journal* (1996): 133–144.

90 (left). Marcello (Adèle d'Affry), Medusa (La Gorgone). Bronze bust, h. 107 cm, around 1865.
91 (right). Prosper d'Epinay, Medusa. Ceramic bozzetto, c. 1866.

Artistic education became universally available to women in Western Europe in the 1870s, and at that time the English Pre-Raphaelite painter and sculptor Evelyn De Morgan was admitted to the Slade School of Art in London. She created a bust of Medusa in 1876 during her study residency in Rome at the age of 21. Five years later, the bust, which has since been lost, was exhibited at the London Grosvenor Gallery, one of the first public appearances by the female sculptor. There she demonstrated her artistic ambitions, which were then considered to be reserved for men only. Her Medusa is perhaps just about to transform into a monster; the snakes are just beginning to crawl about, but the girl does not seem to notice them (**92**).[346] She is neither surprised nor frightened, just lost entirely; she has no idea who she is, which is indicated by her face, which is neither female nor male. She is turning her head as if she wanted to leave the material world, which has lost all sense to her. She is completely absorbed in herself, but is not thinking of anything specific; she seems merely to be gazing into the void. The only idea in her head is that she wants to be somewhere else and be someone else, but she does not know where and who. This Medusa knows only one thing for sure - nothing of what she might want is feasible, and there is no sense in any action. All the characters the artist created have the same look, including the bust of Mater Dolorosa, which is also lost. This attitude towards life was the very opposite of De Morgan's stubbornness and explosive nature, which

[346] Walter Shaw Sparrow, "The Art of Mrs. William de Morgan," *The Studio* 19 (1900): 232; Elise Lawton Smith, *Evelyn Pickering De Morgan and the Allegorical Body* (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2002), 18, 66.

testifies to the frustration of the Pre-Raphaelite artists, and was multiplied by her being a woman and a sculptor.

92. Evelyn De Morgan, Medusa, bronze, 1876.

The ambiguity of female hair, which attracts and threatens, was typical of Pre-Raphaelite art.[347] In Frederick Sandys' drawing of 1875, Medusa has distinctive wings on her head, but the snakes are only indicated in the background.[348] The main motif of the drawing is formed by the rich curls of hair; the shiny metallic locks evoke snakes and arouse far more horror than the actual snakes themselves. The ancient Roman poet Lucan compared Medusa's snakes to curls that tower over the front of women's heads and loosely fall over their backs.[349] The hair of Sandys' Medusa frames a massive face with male features and an arrogant expression. The lips are pulled down, the brow is furrowed, and the gaze is avowedly aggressive. Sandys had a very unconventional attitude towards marriage. He was fatally attracted to strong, sensuous women, but his Medusa is typical of the Pre-Raphaelite artists who saw in her the attacker as well as the victim. At that time, women began to penetrate massively into the hitherto strictly patriarchal world, which artists

[347] Galia Ofek, *Representations of Hair in Victorian Literature and Culture* (Farnham, Ashgate, 2009).
[348] London, Victoria and Albert Museum, P.18-1909.
[349] Lucan, 9, 632–634.

expressed in their works by blurring the boundaries between masculine and feminine.

Simeon Solomon came from a prominent Jewish family, but he belonged to the same artistic circle as Sandys. His promising career ended in 1873 when he was first convicted for his homosexuality. In the 1880s, he repeatedly returned to the theme of the bust of Medusa, whom he always represented in the same way, with robust masculine features. On a woodcut from 1893, her masculine nature is highlighted by the inscription "corruptio optimi pessima" (the corruption of the best is the worst).[350] The Latin proverb is about men; if Solomon had wanted the proverb to apply to female beings, i.e. Medusa and her sisters, he would have had to write "optimae." In the European art of the last third of the 19th century, artists strove to abolish borders not only between women and men but also all between opposites - private and public, sleep and wakefulness, life and death, love and hatred, beauty and ugliness, past and present, image and reality. At that time, Medusa became the emblem of this universal unity of opposites. The recurring feature on Solomon's Medusas is that their eyes are neither closed nor open; their eyelids are shut, but their irises are visible. This ambiguity has far-reaching consequences in regard to Medusa; open eyes define her as an attacker because she kills with her sight. However, if her eyes are closed, she is the victim.

In German painting, Anselm Feuerbach, the son of a famous classical archaeologist, was most influenced by ancient art. In 1872, he draw Medusa in a circular frame that evokes a shield.[351] It is not a severed head, however, like the one painted on Caravaggio's shield, even though the neck and shoulders are only slightly indicated. The snakes on her head have open mouths, but they are not attacking anyone, and they do not look at Medusa or the viewer. Medusa looks directly in front of her, but her gaze is blurred as though she was thinking hard about something harrowing that she has experienced. This is shown in her wrinkled forehead and her mouth with its drawn corners and her lower lip in a slight smirk.

The painter was inspired by the famous ancient relief sculpture, Medusa Rondanini, but he assimilated it according to his living model. At the time, Feuerbach lived in Rome and used Lucia Brunacci as a model for all female figures, but her features were modified in this case to look masculine. Feuerbach's Medusa lowered her head, but it is not a sign of humility as she looks defiantly upward. Twenty years before, in 1852–1853, Feuerbach painted himself in the same way, as a demon.[352] Like Medusa, he is fully aware of his extraordinariness and physically suffers from the mediocrity of the environment he despises but in which he is forced to live.

On the 1889 watercolour by Carlos Schwabe, Medusa is a monster, as she was often presented in the late 19th century.[353] Medusa has serpentine hair and eyes; her fingers end in long sharp claws, and all of her snakes have wide open mouths. She is

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[350] London, The British Museum, 1896,1019.176.

[351] Karlsruhe, Staatliche Kunsthalle, VIII 1358. Cf. Karentzos, *Kunstgöttinen*, 113–114.

[352] Karlsruhe, Staatliche Kunsthalle, 92. Cf. Mira Hofmann, et alii, eds., *Anselm Feuerbach* (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2002), 118–119.

[353] Glencoe, collection of M. Hand and J. Nyeste. Cf. Jean-David Jumeau-Lafond, *Carlos Schwabe: symboliste et visionnaire* (Paris: ACR, 1994), 76.

screaming with horror and stretching out her hands - this she does in vain, however, for she will never escape herself. The circular shape of the watercolour indicates that Medusa is looking at her own face in the reflection of the shield; her deformed features refer to the famous image of Caravaggio.

In 1897, Lucien Lévy-Dhurmer painted a pastel called Medusa, or the Furious Wave.[354] The image is part of a series of similar works in which women blend in with the natural environment they personify. The hair of this Medusa, with its notable male features, is not made of snakes, but of green sea grass and red coral. Ovid in his Metamorphoses tells us that as soon as Perseus laid the severed head of Medusa onto living sea grass, it transformed into inanimate coral.[355] Lévy-Dhurmer's Medusa suffers from her destruction of living nature; her face with wrinkled forehead has a pained expression. The water turns red as she cuts into her chest with the nails of her left hand; her self–hate is so great that she tries to destroy herself. She is a dangerous monster, but she is also like a wave that sweeps away everything that is in its path, only to shatter finally upon the coast. The more furious she is, the faster her end.

A masculine view of Medusa is represented in a pastel from 1891 by Maximilian Pirner, a professor at the Academy of Fine Arts in Prague. He shows Medusa washing her snake hair with unconcealed pleasure.[356] Pirner emphasises her sex appeal by displaying her naked body; he has placed the bowl in such a way that one can see not only her generously curved breasts but also her narrow waist and wide hips. Her spiteful smile enhances the decadent confrontation of eroticism, the banality of the action shown and Medusa's appalling appearance. Pirner thus illustrates Lucan's verse that when Medusa was combing her hair, venom was shed from the snakes.[357] According to Lucan, Medusa was wicked and loved her snaky hair; she was hugely proud of it, as if it were a stunning hairstyle.

Clara Siewert drew her self-portrait as Medusa around 1890.[358] Her face is relaxed as if she were asleep; her eyes are closed, her mouth open, her eyebrows slightly upright and wrinkled. Even her snakes are asleep, hanging tightly across her face as if they had been randomly thrown there. Clara drew her self-portrait as a sleeping or dead Medusa at the beginning of her artistic career as if she were predicting her own fate. The identification with Medusa is not surprising; most of Siewert's self-portraits were Medusa-like. She usually looks straight into the eyes of the viewer with a slightly wrinkled eyebrow. She never smiles, as if she were fully aware of her tragic fate, which she cannot and will not change. Despite talent, thorough training, and a considerable amount of work, Siewert did not succeed in asserting herself, which was no doubt also partially her fault. In Königsberg, Prussia, where Clara grew up, women could not study at the painting academy; but, thanks to her art-loving mother, her daughter received private training, which she completed in Berlin. The beginnings of Siewert's artistic career were promising. Since 1900, she was a member of the Berlin Secession, and took part in its exhibitions with

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354 Paris, Musée d'Orsay, RF 35502.

355 Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 4, 741–752.

356 Prague, Národní galerie, O-5839.

357 Lucan, 9, 634–635.

358 Regensburg, Kunstforum Ostdeutsche Galerie, 9191. Cf. Roman Zieglgansberger, ed., *Clara Siewert: Zwischen Traum und Wirklichkeit* (Regensburg: Kunstforum, 2008), p. 74, and p. 165 n. 52.

paintings depicting mystical themes inspired by literary tradition. In 1912, however, for unknown reasons, she stepped out of the group, an act which had tragic consequences. She spent the rest of her life in a house she shared with her sisters, who were also artistically active. They lived in their own isolated world, surrounded by memories of their childhood in distant Prussia. Siewert died in misery and was completely forgotten after the end of the Second War, in which almost all her work was destroyed.

Siewert was obsessed with Medusa. She reproduced the above-mentioned drawing as a lithograph, which is now lost.[359] In the same year, when she created her self-portrait as Medusa, she drew a piece called Childhood, which she then also reproduced as a lithograph. The emblematic nature of the composition is evident from the fact that she placed this lithograph on the cover of the lost and perhaps unfinished portfolio with the title From Life and Dream.[360] Medusa, with large wings and hair, is placed behind a little girl with a wreath of flowers around her neck. The child does not know anything about the presence of Medusa; she has a thoughtful expression in her face, but she looks at the world without worries. The Medusa faces the viewer, whom she gloomily observes; her dark face and the darkness that surrounds her contrasts with the child's brightly lit face.

The child is already under the full power (or the protection) of Medusa, whose snakes are crossed under the child's bust. In her work, Siewert returned to the unity of life and death, birth and extinction. In her two roles, as protector and destroyer, Medusa expresses this unity. Siewert also expressed her intimate relationship with demonic powers in her Witch Cycle. It begins with the death sentence of a witch, her stoning by a merry crowd, lamentation over the dead witch and her apotheosis. The witch is naked in these scenes, and in her apotheosis, her head is ecstatically turned back, and she sits astride a winged black horse that drives her to the heavens.[361] This scene is a dark variation of Perseus arriving on Pegasus to save the naked Andromeda, to which we return later in this book.

In 1892, American painter, philanthropist and patron of art, Alice Pike Barney, painted her daughter Laura as Medusa (**93**). This stylization was not a momentary whim. At the time, Sarah Grand published the article "The New Aspect of the Woman Question," in which she formulated the concept of a new woman - an educated and independent supporter of modern social trends.[362] The woman is presented here as a protector of spiritual values and the initiator of social and cultural development. The main promoters of the new women's concept were artists. The new ideal was fulfilled not only by the fact that they were engaged in a male profession but also by their cultural and educational activities. Their mission was also to represent a new woman. Laura shifted to the Bahá'í Faith around 1900 and

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[359] *Ausstellung Katalog. Clara Siewert. Zeichnungen und Aquarelle von 1890–1930. Galerie Gurlitt* (Berlin: Wolfgang Gurlitt, 1936), n. 162.

[360] Regensburg, Kunstforum Ostdeutsche Galerie, 9235. Cf. Zieglgansberger, *Clara Siewert*, p. 118, and p. 177, n. 146. Drawing: Zieglgansberger, *Clara Siewert*, p. 164, n. 51.

[361] Zieglgansberger, *Clara Siewert,* n. 32, 103.

[362] Sarah Grand, "The New Aspect of the Woman Question," *The North American Review* 158, n. 448 (1894): 270–276.

played a considerable role in the worldwide development of this religious movement, which sought universal welfare. Alice Pike Barney's Medusa is neither an attacker nor a silent victim; she is a prisoner who refuses to give up in a desperate situation and is calling out for help. The boulders cover her so that only her head and hand can be seen; her supernatural character is only indicated by her clawed nails. Her snakes do not grow out from her head but attack her from the outside.

93. Alice Pike Barney, Medusa. Pastel on canvas, 1892.

In Art Nouveau, we witness the explosion in popularity of Medusa's portraits. As Warren stressed, "she was also interesting to the artists of this period for stylistic reasons. Her long snake hair had an immediate appeal to them because of their love of line and curvature. The female form itself already gave them ample opportunities to indulge this, but in Medusa's hair it could be extended further. This partly explain her endless repetition in both works of fine art, but also frequently in Art Nouveau architectural ornament and jewellery."[363] Around 1902, René Lalique designed an ivory and bronze paperweight with the bust of Medusa.[364] She and her snakes with open mouths eagerly look up to the owner of this luxurious object.

Claude Cahun's photo, a self-portrait stylized as Medusa, originated in 1914 when she was twenty years old.[365] Her step-sister, co-worker and life partner Marcel Moore photographed her. In the photo, Cahun's head is isolated from her body, but it is alive. The head is buried in a pillow, the folds of which evoke the intimacy of the bedroom. The neck is covered by the blanket, the straightness and flatness of which is quite unnatural and disturbing. It is arranged to look like the edge of a guillotine that has just separated the head from the body. Did Cahun intend to imply that she does not cling even to her body? Perhaps. In her self-portraits, she styled herself as a man, a woman, or as a sexless being, demonstrating that she in no way insists on her sexual identity. Although she was forgotten as an artist after her death in 1954, her work and attitudes were widely discussed at the end of the 20th century. It was only then that the above-mentioned self-portrait of Cahun was interpreted as a Medusa thanks to her fixed look and curly hair, which has been thrown about to evoke the writhing snakes. In Cahun's time, it was expected that a woman kept her eyes downcast and her hair carefully kempt. A telling example is the story of the French Impressionist painter Berthe Morisot, who convinced Éduard Manet, her famous colleague, to paint in the open air. Nevertheless, when she married Éduard's younger brother, Eugène in 1874, she stopped painting outside. As her letters show, the sight of her curls fluttering in the wind offended her husband.[366]

Jindřich Štyrský, one of the most significant painters of Czech surrealism, associated Medusa with the memory of his late sister, with whom he was in love. The beginning of the Štyrský book was to demonstrate how from 1925 to 1941 the memory of Medusa's image repeatedly intertwined with the memory of his sister. It was for him the emblem of a woman - a lover, a mother, and an artistic principle. As he wrote in the introduction to his book: "Head of Medusa. It kept recurring in my dreams. I tried to place this head on those closest to me at that time: my mother and sister. The head was a perfect fit on my sister. So I was madly in love with her. In the depths of my memories lies the memory of her death … She certainly knew the many ways of love. Thus I instinctively created my CHIMERA, my PHANTOM OBJECT, on which I am fixated and to which I dedicate this work."[367] Marie was Jindřich Štyrský's half-sister and she died of a heart defect when she was twenty-one years

[363] Richard Warren, *Art Nouveau and the Classical Tradition* (London: Bloomsbury Press, 2018), 106.
[364] Lisbon, Calouste Gulbekian Museum.
[365] Juan Vincente Aliaga and François Leperlier. *Claude Cahun* (Paris: Hazan, 2011), 11.
[366] Denis Rouart, ed., *The Correspondence of Berte Morisot* (London: Camden, 1986), 102.
[367] Jindřich Štyrský, *Dreamverse,* translated by Jed Slast (Prague: Twisted Spoon Press, 2018), 23.

old. At that time, he was only six, but in his surrealist writings and drawings, he declares that he had formed a powerful erotic bond with her.

Štyrský placed the drawing Portrait of My Sister Marie at the beginning of his book Dreams. Marie is a girl dressed in the fashion of the early 20th century with a gentle face and large, melancholy eyes, a distinctive bust and a slim waist that emphasises her femininity. In Medusa's portraits, the hair or the snakes into which they have changed always dominate. In the portrait of Štyrský's sister, the snakes are only indicated. She wears a large hat on her head with a veil; upon closer inspection, however, the viewer finds a tube with crossed stripes reminiscent of snakes. In the drawing, she does not have a mouth or a nose, only large eyes, which were the most important and vivid aspect of Medusa. In this drawing, the destructive power of Medusa seemed to be turned toward herself, as the surface of her body and veil is cracked as if it were the plaster on an old wall. We do not find these cracks in the background: he was not portraying a disintegrating image but his disintegrating sister.[368] Štyrský prepared the book for publication one year before his premature death in 1942, but it was published only thirty years later.

Artists began to return to the Medusa as if she was the carrier of some vital message in the troubled atmosphere of the Second World War. In the tragic period of the Nazi occupation of Czechoslovakia, Jaroslav Horejc created the head of Medusa.[369] The wooden original made by the grand master of Czech art deco from 1944 is now lost, but we know it from casts. Medusa is a beautiful girl with a soulful expression, whose tragic fate is indicated by the grim expression on her face. She has closed eyes and snakes in her hair, which at first glance we fail to notice. The attraction of this work lies in the fact that the girl seems as if she could open her eyes at any time and look at us. Horejc displayed Medusa's long neck with a part of her bust. The sculptor, however, stepped in before Perseus could act, leaving behind a brutal slash in the bust that cuts off almost the entire right breast of Medusa. The base, which consists of a lump of still unprocessed sculpting clay, also refers to the sculptor. This reference to the world before the arrival of Perseus completely cancels the illusion of Medusa's presence. Under the influence of the French sculptor August Rodin, modern sculptors understood sculpture primarily as a means to visualise the creative process. The bust is not the bearer of a specific message, but the sculptor's record of the never-ending search.

After the 1940s, the portrait of Medusa again disappeared from fine arts for several decades. It reappeared in the postmodern era, for which the return to traditional image types and ancient themes was typical. Audrey Flack, a New York artist, began to work with sculpture after a successful career as a photorealistic painter. In her sculptural work, she concentrated on mythical female characters. Her Colossal Head of Medusa from 1990 represents the pinnacle of her sculptural work.[370] Flack interpreted the story of Medusa's rape and subsequent transformation as a metaphor of the rape of our planet by modern civilisation. The brutality of the act is

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[368] Jan Bažant, "Surrealist's Dreams and Classical Tradition," *Ars* 48 (2015): 82–94.

[369] Olga Malá, ed., *Jaroslav Horejc (1886–1983). Mistr českého art deca* (Prague: Galerie Hlavního Města Prahy, 2016), 234.

[370] Susan Casteras, *Audrey Flack: a Pantheon of Female Deities* (New York: Louis K. Meisel Gallery, 1991).

represented by the rope, the ends of which hang from both sides of Medusa's head; this rope is the symbol of Medusa's violation. According to Audrey Flack, the attribute of violence that was carried out on Medusa is a counterpart to the snakes, which protect her against further violence. In her interpretation of the mythical story, Medusa knows she is dangerous to her surroundings, and therefore she hides underground to protect the planet earth. She is the embodiment of nature, which is suggested by the seashells in her hair and the antlers above her forehead. This Medusa is not a gruesome threatening monster; she is not an attacker, but a wise sphinx. Her face is a summary of the history of this mythical creature in art, and thus in it we recognise Rondanini and Cellini's Medusa. Above all, however, it is Audrey Flack's self-portrait. The context in which this work was created was the feminist movement at the end of the 20th century, in which Medusa played a central role.

Hélène Cixous called her feminist pamphlet of 1976 "Medusa's Smile." Her often quoted reinterpretation of the classical myth runs as follows: "You only have to look at the Medusa straight on to see her. Moreover, she's not deadly. She's beautiful, and she's laughing."[371] Cixous criticised the traditional interpretation of Medusa, which was created by men for men. Cixous found an altogether different and "deeper significance" of this myth, which is the very opposite of its masculine reading. Medusa does not kill, and she is not ugly - Cixous' Medusa is beautiful and laughing. Hélène Cixous' laughing Medusa represents a total rejection of the male concept of the world without replacing it with anything else. According to her, female sexuality exists outside of the world's linguistic and communication systems, dominated by the phallus, which gives everything an exclusively male meaning.

The consequence of this asymmetry is that sexual activity causes a sense of guilt in women. They realise that their beauty immobilises men, who temporarily lose the ability to move and thus resemble motionless stone. Women, therefore, perceive themselves as monsters beheaded by the phallocentric Perseus to re-establish patriarchal order. Women must break down everything that men have built up; they have to start anew, writing about women and for women. They must not look at each other as men want them to look at each other. Once they get rid of the masculine vision of the world, women will start to see themselves as they are, and they will begin to realise their beauty. This is why Medusa laughs. The problem of this concept is that when Medusa becomes a harmless and laughing beauty, she ceases to exist. Cixous has killed Medusa by dissolving her in a crowd of innocent, beautiful and laughing women who have liberated themselves.

At the turn of the 20th and 21st century, Medusa sometimes takes life and sometimes gives it; she does, however, always attract irresistibly. The cover of GQ Magazine attests to this fact. Together with Esquire, the magazine (which is still named Gentlemen's Quarterly although it is a monthly magazine) co-dictates men's lifestyle. The cover of the 25th anniversary edition of GQ in 2013 was decorated with photographs of the successful pop singer Rihanna as Medusa, photographed by the above-mentioned Damien Hirst.[372]

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[371] Hélène Cixous, Keith Cohen, and Paula Cohen, "The Laugh of the Medusa," *Signs* 1, no. 4 (1976): 885.

[372] Heaf, Jonathan. "GQ's 25th Anniversary Cover Star. Rihanna by Damien Hirst."*GQ* 12 (2013).

The portrait of Medusa appeared for the first time in late Hellenistic Greece, but it was only post-ancient Europe that fully exploited its potential. In these portraits of Medusa, her head was not separated from her body by a heroic act but by artistic convention. These Medusas do not exist as heads but as busts. While Perseus cut off the head that no one could look at, the sculptor or painter created a work of art that everyone wanted to see. Artists of course will never match the mythical hero, as they have killed no one. They have done nothing for humanity - they did not dispose of the monsters the world; they have only created their image. Nevertheless, artists can show us what Perseus has never seen. They can indicate to us what Medusa would have looked like if she had never met Perseus. They can show us what Medusa was before she became a monster, and how she responded to her fateful transformation. They can create the portrait of Medusa, which is the self-portrait of the artist and of his time.

DANAE

The Greco-Roman Danae

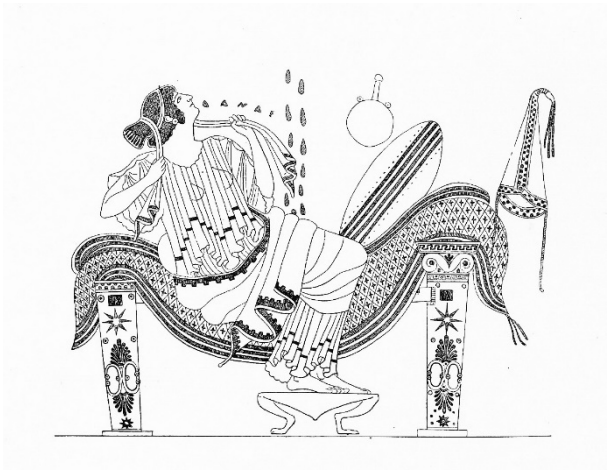
The impressiveness of Perseus' story is due to his heroic actions - the killing of Medusa and the rescue of Andromeda - which are embedded in the story of his mother and are closely intertwined with her. Danae is as unclassifiable as Medusa. She is a woman, but she is the heir of the throne in the mighty Argos, which is traditionally a male role. When Danae reaches the age of marriage, Acrisius, her father, forbids her to marry, because he is afraid of his grandson. Acrisius imprisons her daughter, but a child is still born, as Zeus makes her pregnant in the form of golden rain. Acrisius condemns the mother and child to death. Danae is buried alive twice - first in an underground jail that becomes her wedding room, and second in a chest thrown into the waves of the sea. The hopeless position of Danae sailing on the sea in the chest and her rescue on the banks of the Seriphos implies the hopeless position of Andromeda trapped on the shore of the sea and rescued by the adult Perseus. Danae is finally rescued but does not marry, which was the sense of a Greek woman's existence. The myth culminates in Perseus rescuing Danae from her second incarcerator Polydectes. Like Medusa, Danae crosses insurmountable boundaries; neither of them, however, ever reaches their destination.[1]

The circumstances of Danae's intercourse with Zeus are unclear, even though writings on the topic date back to Homer.[2] According to Pherecydes of Athens, Zeus flew through the roof in the form of liquid gold.[3] The princess placed it in her lap, whereupon Zeus became visible and had intercourse with her. In Sophocles' Antigone we read that Danae was fertilised directly by the golden rain.[4] This representation of Danae, into whose lap the golden rain descends, was common in Greece in the 5th–4th century BC.[5] On the vase painting from the 480s BC, Danae sits fully dressed on a bed (**94**). Drops of golden rain fall from the ceiling into Danae's lap. This ethereal ejaculation causes the mattress to bend and the girl to fall from her bed. Danae's head is turned backwards, indicating her sexual ecstasy. The gesture of anakalypsis, the revealing of the bride to the groom, characterises Danae as Zeus' earthly wife.

Around mid-5th century BC, Pherecydes and Sophocles explicitly state that Danae was placed in a metal prison. The Athenian vase painters, however, placed Danae in the bedroom with the usual furnishings of the time. In the background, we see for instance a fancy bonnet, which the virtuous woman had used to cover her head as she went out. On another vase painting, the woman's room is characterised by a mirror in the background (**95**). The miraculous nature of the golden rain is

[1] Marie-Claire Beaulieu, *The Sea in the Greek Imagination* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015), 90–118.
[2] Homer, *Iliad*, 14, 319.
[3] Pherecydes, fr. 10 Fowler.
[4] Sophocles, *Antigone*, 944–950.
[5] Jean-Jacques Maffre, "Danae," in *Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae III/1* (Zürich: Artemis, 1986), 325–337.

emphasised by the attitude of Hermes and the maid, who express their astonishment with theatrical gestures. The maid crouches and looks up; Hermes has stopped abruptly, raising his left hand, which is wrapped in a cloak, as one cannot touch sacred objects with his bare hands. Danae wears a pleated chiton reaching down to her heels. Over it she has a wrapped coat, which she raises with both hands as if wanting to catch the golden rain. The fact that Danae lies in bed fully dressed emphasises the festive character of the whole event.



94 (left). Danae and golden rain (inscription: Danae). Athenian calyx krater, 490–480 BC.
95 (right). Danae and golden rain. Athenian hydria, around 430 BC.

We find the motif of capturing the golden rain in a raised cloak also on the vase painting from the 460s BC.[6] Danae does not lie on the bed, but sits in a chair; the mirror is "on the wall" again, and Danae has a wool basket in front of her, an item typical for women. On another vase, Danae sits in a similar pose on the bed, with Eros entering from behind, symbolising Zeus' sexual arousal.[7] The motif of the raised cloak is also found on the Greek gems of the classic epoch. They are oval-shaped, and therefore Danae is depicted in a standing position; her gesture, however, is the same. On the gems in Boston, she stands beside a bed,[8] and the ring in the same collection shows not only the rain but also an eagle, representing Zeus.[9] On the vase painting from the end of the 5th century BC, we find Danae revealing the entire upper half of her body (**96**). In the background, vases are hung - a hydria, which was used to dilute wine according to the Greek custom, and a large pot from which Greeks sometimes drank wine. In this case, Danae is not characterised as an honourable woman. Her nudity and the vases used during drinking parties, or symposia, indicate a hetaira, or prostitute.

In ancient Greek art, the prostitute is not always clearly distinguished from the honourable wife. The men who bought Athenian vases did not insist on the

[6] Athens, The National Archaeological Museum.
[7] Adolphseck (Eichenzell), Schlosss Fasanerie, AV 38.
[8] Boston, Museum of Fine Arts, 98.716.
[9] Boston, Museum of Fine Arts, 99.437.

unambiguous differentiation of these two categories, a fact which is crucial to us.[10] On the vase painting from the beginning of the 4th century BC, Danae also undresses so that the golden rain can fall directly into her lap.[11] The erotic character of the scene is emphasised by the figure of Eros standing in front of Danae. Behind Danae, there is a maid raising her hand as a sign of astonishment. The same image type is found on the bronze lid of a mirror, typically a female object.[12] On it, a servant raises both hands in amazement while little Eros crowns Danae with a wreath. The representations of Danae and Zeus in the form of golden rain, which appear in the 5th to 4th centuries BC, may be inspired by the theatre.[13]

96. Danae and golden rain (inscription: Danae). Boeotian bell krater, around 410 BC.

The series of vase paintings begins after 480 BC and on it the princess is always dressed, even though she is aware of what the golden rain really is and, as she sees the union with Zeus as an honour, is willing to cooperate. In the second half of the 5th century BC, the erotic nature of these representations is suggested by the

[10] Jan Bažant, *Les citoyens sur les vases athéniens* (Prague: Academia, 1985), 65–72; Robin Osborne, *The Transfomation of Athens: Painted Pottery and the Creation of Classical Greece* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018), 122–150.
[11] London, The British Museum, 1866,0415.63.
[12] London, The British Museum, 289.
[13] François Lissarrague, "Danaé, métamorphoses d'un myth," in *Mythes grecs au figuré : De l'antiquité au baroque*, ed. Stella Georgudi and Jean-Pierre Vernant (Paris: Gaillmard, 1996), 105–133.

presence of Eros and the nudity of Danae. In Menander's comedy from the end of the 4th century BC, one neighbour asks another whether he has heard the story of Zeus, who, in the form of rain, entered the girl's bedroom. It was undoubtedly a common subject, as the man replied: "Yes, and what about it?"[14]

Perhaps from the beginning, the golden rain was also a metaphor for venality. Euripides, in the lost tragedy Danae which premiered in the years 455–428 BC, perhaps indicated that Danae had been bribed with gold. Acrisius did not believe his daughter when she claimed that Zeus had come down to her, and thought that someone had bought her with gold.[15] The erotic aspect of this encounter was later taken over by the Romans. In 159 BC, Terence's The Eunuch premiered, in which a young man describes his love affair to his friend. He tells him that he was with a girl in the bedroom, on the wall of which hung a painting with Danae and the golden rain. The painting excited him so much that he locked the bolt on the door. When he pauses, his friend asks what came next. He says: "What next? You idiot." Only then does his friend understand and say: "Oh, yes."[16] In this context, we may mention the dispute between Athena and the blasphemous and wicked Arachne. She dared to compete in weaving with Athena, the divine patron of crafts and women's works. Arachne maliciously covered her carpet with illustrations of loves of the Olympian gods and mortal women, including Danae and Zeus. This infuriated Athena, who tore up the tapestry and the insults of the gods woven on it, as Ovid stresses in his Metamorphoses.[17]

In the time of Emperor Augustus, in which moral integrity became a subject of state interest, the unflattering image of Perseus' mother prevailed in Rome. In Virgil's Aeneis, completed in 19 BC, Danae was a rather negative figure. She was associated with the mythical Rutuli, the enemies of the forefather of the Romans, Aeneas, who wanted to settle in Latium. He encountered the resolute resistance of the Rutulian king Turnus, the descendant of Danae, based in the city of Ardea, founded by Danae.[18] In Horace's Ode of 23 BC, we read that Acrisius imprisoned his daughter, but gold can overcome any guard and can break through walls better than lightning.[19] Martial, who died sometime between 102 and 104 AD, asks Zeus in one epigram why he paid to Danae when Leda gave herself to him for free.[20] Ancient Greek and Roman artists, however, never characterised Danae as a prostitute. In Pompeian wall paintings, we often find the story of Perseus' conception. All these representations are variations of one pictorial type. Danae sits or stands and picks up the golden rain, which Amor may be pouring into her lap. On the side, we find Jupiter or his attribute, which indicates the birth of Perseus. The no-longer existing wall painting represented Danae, who opened her cloak so that Eros could pour the golden rain into her lap; to the left stands Jupiter with a sceptre (**97**).

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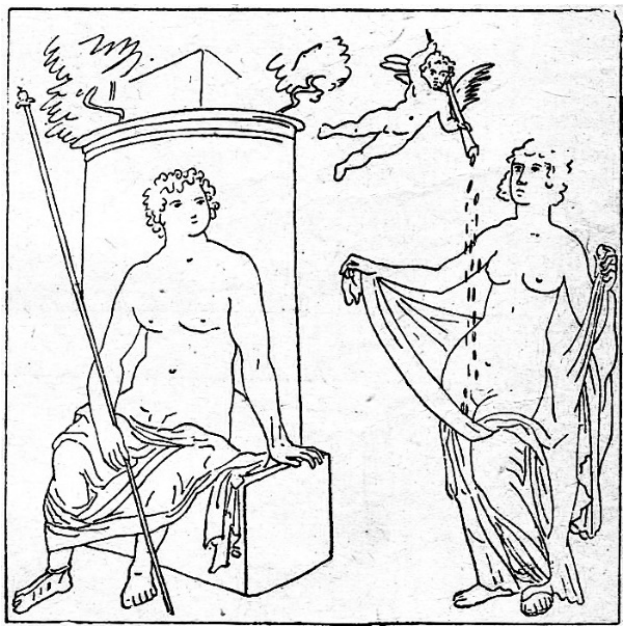
[14] Menander, *Samia*, 589–591.
[15] Euripides, *Danae*, fr. 324.
[16] Terence, *Eunuchus*, 3, 5.
[17] Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 6, 131.
[18] Virgil, *Aeneid*, 7, 409–411.
[19] Horace, *Odes*, 3, 16.
[20] Martial 14, 175.



97. Danae and golden rain, Roman wall painting, c. 70.

Around 500 BC, Simonides colourfully described the desperate situation of a mother floating in a closed chest on a stormy sea.[21] During the storm, the mother told her grief to the sleeping baby. On the previously mentioned Athenian vase from 490–480 BC, we find the first representation of the story of Danae. On one side, we see the scene with golden rain (**94**), while the opposite side is decorated with Danae with her child, who stands in a half-closed chest (**98**). On the left, we find a carpenter with a bow drill; on the right stands King Acrisius with a sceptre who gives orders with an outstretched hand. In Greek pictorial tradition, these two pictorial types - Danae with the golden rain and her punishment - highlight her crucial position in Perseus' myth.[22] Around 456 BC Pherecydes of Athens emphasises that the child Perseus owed his own survival to Danae.[23] The theme of Danae as a self-sacrificing mother was a popular literary motif. In Euripides' lost Danae, which premiered in the years 455–425 BC, Danae describes to her cruel father how much she enjoyed her son.[24] About 170 AD, Lucian let marine nymphs tell the story of Danae. Thetis recalled the cruel fate of Danae in the chest. When her sister asked how she acted, she said: "she kept quiet about herself, submitting to her sentence, but she kept pleading for her child's life, showing it to its grandad, for it was a lovely baby. Moreover, it, unaware of its troubles, was looking at the sea with a smile on its face. Remembering them brings tears again to my eyes."[25]

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[21] Simonides, fr. 543 PMG.

[22] Jean-Jacques Maffre, "Akrisios," in *Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae I/1* (Zürich: Artemis, 1981), 449–452; Ilaria Sforza, "L'eroe affidato alle acque: valenze dell'arca dall'epica al mito," *Gaia: Revue interdisciplinaire sur la Grèce Archaïque* 16 (2013): 211–228.

[23] Pherecydes, fr. 10 Fowler.

[24] Euripides, *Danae*, fr. 323.

[25] Lucian, *Dialogues in the Sea*, 12. Translated by M.D.Macleod.

98. Acrisius shuts Danae with a small Perseus in a chest. Athenian krater, 490–480 BC.

Numerous Athenian vase paintings from the 5th century BC show Acrisius putting Danae with a small Perseus into the chest. They were inspired by what the Athenians knew from the theatre stage. In one of the oldest scenes, the carpenter with a bow drill is still working on the ark; on the left, Acrisius energetically points to Danae, who stands behind the chest, her high status indicated by a sophisticated coiffure.[26] She turns to a servant with the small Perseus in her arms and turns her head back to Acrisius to give her last look of indignation. She is aware of the divine origin of her child and attempts to protect him at all costs. She refuses to step into the chest; she and the maid raise their hands with their palms turned to Acrisius as a sign of protest against the cruel royal decree. The vase painters also represented the next stage - Danae is already with Perseus in the chest, but the lid is not yet closed. The princess no longer protests but holds a fist to her chin, which is a gesture of mourning. Little Perseus stretches a hand to Acrisius, who is silent and stands with his royal sceptre between him and his daughter.

On another vase painting, the headdress characterises Perseus' mother as a princess.[27] She has realised that her protests are in vain and she fully devotes herself to the child, who looks up to her. At the chest stands a maid, who raises her hand in a gesture of farewell. Behind her is another maid, whose sadness is expressed by her bowed head and arms crossed over her chest. On the left is Acrisius, who leans on the stick with his right hand lifted to his chest. Several vase paintings depicted the chest landing at Seriphos, where fishers discovered it on the shore (**99**). A fisherman characterised by a felted cap on his head opens the chest while his companion takes off his cap as a sign of reverence as princess Danae and Perseus rise from it. In the middle of the 3rd century BC, the Greek painter Artemon created a painting of the chest with Danae.[28] However, we do not know what it looked like. In Pompeii, there is a Roman wall painting depicting Danae with a small Perseus on her lap as she sits on the seashore next to a chest with two fishermen. On the mosaics of Gaziantep,

[26] Boston, Museum of Fine Arts, 13.200.
[27] Boston, Museum of Fine Arts, 03.792.
[28] Pliny the Elder, *Natural history*, 35, 139.

Turkey, from the turn of the 2nd and 3rd centuries AD, Danae with a small Perseus emerges from an open chest surrounded by fishermen. [29]

99. Danae in a chest on Seriphos. Athenian bell krater, 460–450 BC.

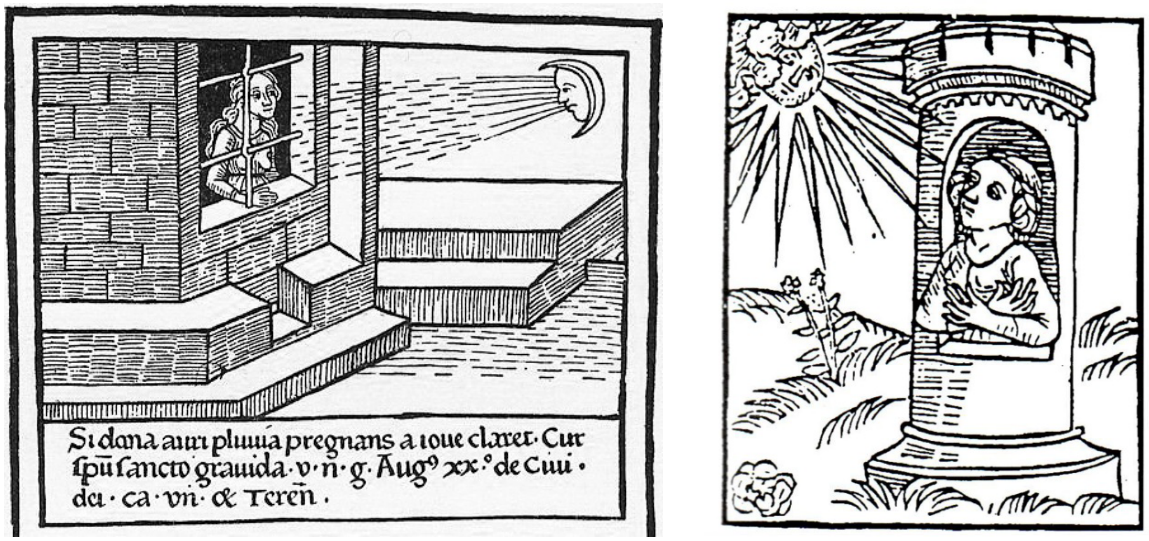
The myth of Perseus is exceptional because a great deal of attention is paid to the hero's childhood. The ancient Greeks also paid attention to the little Hercules, but only because he carried out his first heroic action just after birth. Little Perseus, however, lived in the Greek imagination exclusively as a defenceless child. In this, he was similar to the new-born Jesus Christ, who above all aroused compassion in Christian art. Perseus' mother, like the Virgin Mary, had to face many adversaries and risked her own life to save her divine son.

Pious and Venal Danae

At the beginning of the 14th century, Danae and Perseus were considered pagan counterparts of the Virgin Mary and Jesus Christ. In this way, they were written about in both of Ovid's commented translations, Ovide moralisé and Ovidius moralizatus.[30] In 1388, Francis de Reza referred to the Danae myth in his defence of the immaculate conception of the Virgin Mary. In the illustration to this treatise, which originated in the 1470s, Danae is depicted in a tower; the rays of a half-moon, with a human face indicating God, point toward the tower (**100**). In the text below this woodcut, we read: "when Danae could be known for being impregnated with golden rain, why could Mary not be made pregnant by the Holy Spirit." On a slightly

[29] Mehmet Önal, *Zeugma Mosaics: A Corpus* (Istanbul: A Turizm Yayanlari, 2009), 121.
[30] Salvatore Settis, "Danae verso il 1495," *I Tatti Studies in the Italian Renaissance 1* (1985): 207–237 and 287–307.

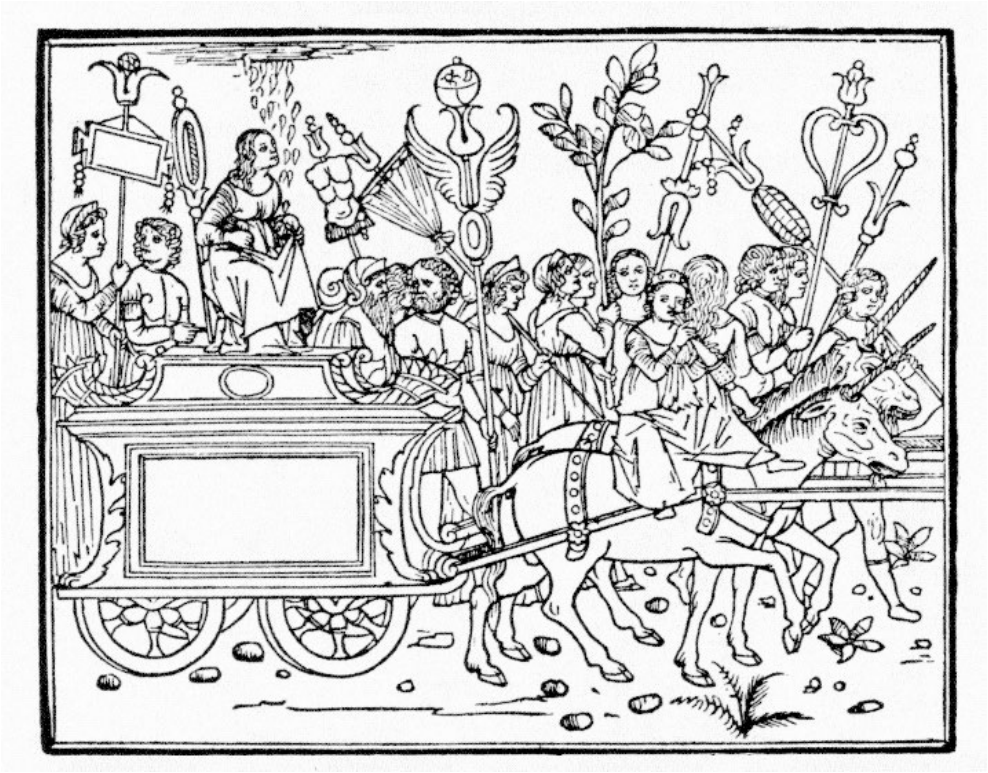
younger woodcut, there is a similar scene, but the moon has replaced the sun, which is also shown with a human face (**101**).[31] With the reinterpretation of Danae, the golden rain was also reinterpreted and became a celestial phenomenon indicating the presence of God. Danae has her hands crossed on her chest in a gesture known from the Annunciation of the Virgin Mary.



100 (left). Johann Eysenhut, Danae in tower. Woodcut, 1487–1488.
101 (right). Danae in tower. Woodcut, 1490.

On some 15th century depictions, the golden rain falls from above, and Danae catches it in her cloak, as was the rule in ancient times. We find this pictorial type in the illustration for Ridewall's work from around 1420[32] and Hypnerotomachia (**102**). In the later text, the hero describes a series of triumphal chariots he saw in a parade celebrating God's love. This is very important for us because it shows how this topic was interpreted at that time. Unicorns symbolising purity pulled Danae's chariot. The pictorial type of Danae capturing the golden rain into her raised robe was not necessarily taken directly from ancient monuments. Apparently due to the influence of ancient depictions of Danae, Mary was depicted in the same manner from the beginning of the 15th century. In the first half of the 16th century, this concept was widespread in transalpine Europe, as suggested by Danae's representation from 1537 by Hans Kels.[33] The princess, characterised by a crown on her head, is fully dressed and stands in front of her prison in the form of a tower. The golden rain falls diagonally into the skirt that Danae raises to catch it. Perseus is represented as an adult figure in full armour and is incorporated into the rays. The motif is known from the representation of the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary, where we find Jesus Christ in place of Perseus.

[31] Ovid and Horace inspired the medieval concept of Danae's prison as a tower (Ovid, *The Loves,* 2, 19, 27; Ovid, *The Art of Love*, 3, 416; Horace, *Odes*, 3, 16, 1).
[32] Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Cod. Palat. Lat. 1066, 228r.
[33] Latin inscription: "Danae, the daughter of the King of Argos." Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum, KK 3419-KK 3449.



102. Triumphal chariot with Danae. Woodcut, 1499.

Danae is depicted as the Virgin Mary in the painting made for the Burgund court by Jan Gossart in 1527 (**103**).[34] The princess sits in an ancient Ionic circular temple, reminiscent of the temple of Vesta on the Forum Romanum in Rome. Gossart may have known from Vitruvius that the Ionic order was appropriate for the temples of Junona, Diana, and other virtuous goddesses.[35] In any case, the painter emphasised the sacral context of the representation of the virtuous Danae in the architecture of the temple. The real golden rain drops link Danae with the heavens. Through the columns of the temple, we see buildings in Gothic and classical style in the background, which suggests that the event is crucial for the entire population of the earth. Danae is conceived as a Madonna, which is indicated by her azure cloak and a whole host of other details. However, the interpretation of Gossart's painting, which was based exclusively on medieval tradition, was questioned in the 1990s.[36] In the picture, we find features that could point in a completely different direction. Danae is shown with pink cheeks and parted lips; her knees are opened, and she pulls her skirt high up to her thighs with both hands although the event does not require it. Contact with the divine golden rain would take place even if the princess were completely shrouded. Her uncovered breast is also an erotic motif, as she reveals not only her breast but also a significant portion of her abdomen.

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[34] Maryan W. Ainsworth, ed., *Man, Myth, and Sensual Pleasures: Jan Gossart's Renaissance: the Complete Works* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2010), no. 35, pp. 232–235.

[35] Vitruvius, 1, 2, 5.

[36] Marisa Bass, *Jan Gossart and the Invention of Netherlandish Antiquity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016), 116–130.

103. Jan Gossart (Mabuse), Danae. Oil wood, 1527.

The unusual perspective of Gossart's image, in which all lines converge to the centre of Danae's body, also bears significance. Her womb is in the centre of the composition of this painting, and it also dominates its content. The position of the princess accentuates this. In Gossart's time, women gave birth on low chairs, just as Danae is depicted here. However, she does not sit on a stool, but on red pillows with huge ornate tassels at the corners. The pillows evoke the bedroom, bodily pleasure and eroticism. The painting is the first of a series of famous paintings depicting the sensual Danae for the humanistic courts. Gossart's Danae summarises the medieval conception of the Perseus myth, but at the same time it heralds its early modern reading. Danae's womb not only gave birth to Perseus, but was also a source of artistic creation. The girl who received God in her prison was predestined to be the mother of all art. The monumental inscription on the step leading to Danae indicates this fact. It announces that Gossart (IOANNES MALBODIVS PINGEBAT 1527)

created the painting. This inscription is on the axis of the image, which intersects Danae's lap.

At Baldassare Peruzzi's fresco in the Villa Farnesina from 1508, Danae received the golden rain on a bed. She is dressed, however, and sleeps with her head turned away from the rain as if she had nothing in common with God's appearance. On an Italian majolica plate from 1520, we find a similar depiction. In this case, the princess is naked and her legs are slightly spread, but her head is turned away from the golden rain and her eyes are closed.[37] At the turn of the 15th and 16th centuries, Danae's pictorial type was modified to approach ancient patterns - the golden rain began to fall from above, Danae began to appear on a bed, and was at times naked. However, this innovation did not imply Danae's immorality. This concept influenced Flemish tapestry in the second quarter of the 16th century, which depicts the whole myth. On the left, Acrisius puts Danae, accompanied by two court ladies, into confinement. The tower's interior is depicted in the middle; Danae sits on a bed and Zeus descends to her in the form of golden rain, but simultaneously appears in a real shape.[38] On the right, we see the punishment - Danae sails in a boat with the small Perseus, who she holds in her arms; Acrisius and the ladies are on the shore.

At the beginning of the 16th century, the pictorial type of Danae and the golden rain was primarily seen as a prefiguration of the immaculate conception of the Virgin Mary. Although St Augustin understood the myth as an example of a virtue corrupted by gold, [39] and Fulgentius commented on Danae's myth quite clearly, the golden rain was not raindrops, but money.[40] The text mentioned above by Ridewall, which paraphrased Fulgentius, shows an illustration from 1420 in which we see Danae, who has lost her chastity.[41] The relevant text states that she was "raped with gold."[42] Giovanni Boccaccio was instrumental in bringing about the negative image of Danae. In his work The Genealogy of the Pagan Gods, which he published in 1360, he wrote that Danae's illegal lover climbed secretly onto the roof, and from there descended into the girl's bedroom. When she became pregnant, she boarded a ship filled with all the valuables she could collect and departed.[43] Jupiter, who is handing over the gold to Danae, is found in the Alsatian book illustration from 1469.[44]

In the representations of Danae and the golden rain, explicit sexual references began to appear in Italian art in the second quarter of the 16th century.[45] In these

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[37] London, Victoria and Albert Museum.
[38] Boston, Museum of Fine Arts, 50.2627.
[39] Augustine, The City of God 8,13.
[40] Fulgentius, *Mythologies*, 1, 19.
[41] Città del Vaticano, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Cod. Palat. Lat. 1066, 228r.
[42] Hans Liebschütz, *Fulgentius Metaforalis: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der antiken Mythologie im Mittelalter* (Leipzig: B.G. Teubner, 1926), 116.
[43] Boccaccio, *Genealogy of the Pagan Gods*, 2, 33.
[44] Los Angeles, The J. Paul Getty Museum, Ms. Ludwig XV 9, fol. 237v.
[45] Erwin Panofsky, "Der gefesselte Eros,"*Oud Holland* 50 (1933): 193–217; Madlyn Millner Kahr, "Danaë: Virtuous, Voluptuous, Venal Woman," *The Art Bulletin* 60, no. 1 (1978): 43–55; Cathy Santore, "Danaë: The Renaissance Courtesan's Alter Ego," *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte* 54, no. 3 (1991): 412–427; Eric Jan Sluijter, "Emulating Sensual Beauty: Representations of Danaë from Gossart to Rembrandt," *Simiolus* 27 (1999): 4–45.

paintings, the relationship between the princess and the golden rain changed radically. The first step is represented in Correggio's painting from around 1531, which is the beginning of an entirely new pictorial tradition (**104**).[46] The painter created a breakthrough painting as part of a set of paintings with Zeus' loves that he painted for Federico II Gonzaga in 1531–1532. The set was to decorate the duke's villa, Palazzo Te outside Mantua. Correggio's Danae is not a mature woman, but a very young girl. She actively participates in the event and does not conceal the pleasure she enjoys. She is completely naked, her legs are spread, and she does not look upward like the ancient images illustrating this myth. She looks with a slight smile down at her body, evidently delighted by the divine presence within her lap. Eros, sitting at her feet, looks up curiously at the golden cloud but forms a unity with Danae. This unity is expressed by the fact that Eros, together with Danae, pulls the blanket so the golden rain can penetrate the princess's vagina.

104. Correggio (Antonio Allegri), Danae, oil on canvas, around 1531.

The figures of Danae and Eros are remarkably similar - their bodies, arms and legs form pairs of parallel diagonals that dominate the painting. Danae carries out God's will, and Eros assists her. A pair of small putti is sitting by the bed, fully occupied with studying Eros' arrows. By using them to etch on the stone, they try to find out which of them is of gold and excites love, and which is of lead and has the

[46] Lorenz Dittmann, *Die Wiederkehr der antiken Götter im Bilde: Versuch einer neuen Deutung* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2001), 68–74; Anna Coliva, ed. *Correggio e l'antico* (Milan: F. Motta, 2008), 134.

opposite effect. Only one of these putti has wings, so it is probably Eros and Anteros, the embodiment of the Love of Heaven and the Love of the Body. Erotic curiosity, which is the path to god for Danae, is transformed into innocent child's play in the pair of Erotes.

In the gallery of Château de Fontainebleau, Francesco Primaticcio created a series of mythological wall paintings for French King Francis I in 1533–1540. In the representation of Danae and the golden rain, the painter enriched the pictorial type with two motifs (**105**). The raindrops were replaced with coins, which we also find on the relief by Hans Kels from 1537 mentioned above. The second of Primaticcio's innovations is the old servant, which is represented on the right. In the Italian Renaissance, the old servant embracing a jar was a generally understood personification of corruption and greed. This contrasting figure emphasised the beauty of Danae, but also her venality. The pairing of seductive beauty and an ugly old woman can also be understood as the polarity of the eternal love of God and the transience of earthly possessions and the illusion of pleasure that our senses give us. We can also see it as a warning that even the beautiful Danae will age and soon become ugly. In the 1530s, Zeus embracing Danae stressed the explicit erotic content of the scene with the golden rain. In 1531–1532, Perin del Vaga designed a series of tapestries depicting Zeus' loves for the Salon of Zeus in the Palazzo Doria in Genoa.[47] In the scene with Danae, Zeus is represented not only as the golden rain but also assumes a human form and embraces the princess. In the 1550s, this pictorial type appears on wall paintings in Roman palaces decorated by the pupils of Perin del Vaga.[48]

105. Francesco Primaticcio, Danae, wall painting, 1533–1540. Leon Davent, etching, 1542–1547.

[47] Bernice F. Davidson, "The Furti Di Giove Tapestries Designed by Perino Del Vaga for Andrea Doria," *The Art Bulletin*, 70, no. 3 (1988): 424–450.

[48] Jan L. de Jong, "Love, Betrayal, and Corruption: Mars and Venus and Danaë and Jupiter in the Palazzi Stati-Cenci and Mattei di Paganica in Rome," *Source. Notes in the History of Art* 19 (1999): 20–29.

Titian's Danae from around 1544 is very well aware of the golden rain. She has raised her knees and spread her legs. Unlike Correggio's princess, she looks upward to the golden rain, which has the shape of coins that fall into her lap.[49] Eros does not participate directly in the event; he only sees that it takes place successfully. He stands on guard fully armed with a quiver hanging on his shoulder and a bow in his hand. He looks back at the golden rain, but he is turned to the opposite direction and stretches his right hand in this direction to prevent anyone from disturbing the lovers. Cardinal Alessandro Farnese, the great-grandson of Pope Paul III, commissioned the painting. In Danae, he recognised with delight his mistress Camilla, a former prostitute and brothel owner.[50] The audience of the time perceived Titian's Danae as a modern picture that was full of classical allusions. Danae's pose is a variation on the recumbent characters from ancient Roman sarcophagi. Eros is a variation on the pictorial type of the god of love stretching his bow, a type probably made by the Greek sculptor Lysippos in the 4th century BC, which was known from several copies in Titian's time.[51]

Titian later painted at least five other variations of this theme; the erotic dimension is more intense from picture to picture, evidently in order to meet the prevalent taste of that time. In the painting he created for Philip II, the erotic dimension completely dominates. The princess is entirely naked; her legs are not only spread, but she also places her left hand on the inside of her thigh.[52] The spread legs evoke fertility, and the hand between her legs indicates auto-erotica, which was closely related to ideas of the time. Doctors believed that conception could not occur without a female orgasm. In the 16th century, Danae could be interpreted in two ways - as a saint or a prostitute. Titian was fully aware of this dichotomy, and on it he based the concept of his painting, which consists of two contrasting halves. The dividing line is in the diagonal connecting the upper left corner with the lower right corner. To the left, in full light, is the young, beautiful and loving Danae; to the right in the dark is the old, ugly and avaricious maid. The old woman catches golden coins, which is a gesture with which Titian also portrayed Danae, but the sense of gesture here is overturned, love-desire is replaced by greed for money. The framing of this mismatched couple enhances the contrast; behind Danae we see a purple velvet curtain, while behind the old woman is a cold stone wall. Titian, however, did not delve into either of Danae's identities - she is neither a saint nor a prostitute, but a woman fully devoting herself to sex. In Titian's work, the golden rain falls directly into the woman's open lap; it is neither God's grace, nor money, but male sperm.

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[49] Naples, Museo di Capodimonte, Q 134. Cf. Annachiara Alabiso, ed., *La Danae di Tiziano del Museo di Capodimonte: Il mito, la storia, il restauro* (Naples: Electa, 2005).

[50] Roberto Zapperi, "Alessandro Farnese, Giovanni della Casa and Titian's Danae in Naples," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 54 no. 159 (1991): 159–171.

[51] Bober and Rubinstein, *Renaissance Artists and Antique Sculpture,* 98, no. 50.

[52] Titian, Danae. Oil canvas, around 1550. Madrid, Museo del Prado, P00425. Cf. Ingrid D. Rowland, *From Heaven to Arcadia. The Sacred and Profane in the Renaissance* (New York: New York Review, 2008), 119–133; Daniela Hammer-Tugendhat, *The Visible and the Invisible: On Seventeenth-Century Dutch Painting* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2015), 138–139.

This Danae was identified as an image of erotic desires in a private letter written at the time the painting originated.[53]

Titian may have been inspired by the way Bonasone had taken on this subject; his Danae of 1545 could not have expressed sexual arousal more openly.[54] The naked princess not only spreads her legs wide towards the viewer, but her head is also tossed backwards with an open mouth into which the stream of coins is directed. An ambiguous commentary is also added to the engraving: "I cross the high wall and the trench, the shining gold penetrates the virtues, I open one and the other." Opening one and the other may relate to the fact that Zeus entered the prison and the body of Danae or that he entered her body in two places. After the Council of Trent was concluded in 1563, the explicitly erotic conception of the myth about Danae was no longer tolerated. Bonasone's and Titian's completely naked Danae, with her legs spread, did not find any followers in the next few centuries.

106. Jacopo Tintoretto, Danae. Oil canvas, c. 1553–1555.

Tintoretto's Danae of 1553–1555 looks like a critical reaction to Titian's exalted eroticism, even though the princess is also naked and the golden rain falls from above (**106**). In Tintoretto's version, there is no hint of erotic passion. The scene takes

[53] Maurice Brock, "L'anecdote de Pline sur l'Aphrodite de Cnide dans quattre lettres, de Bembo à Dolce," in *Le mythe de l'art antique*, ed. Emmanuelle Hénine and Valérie Naas, (Paris: CNRS éditions, 2018), 352–355.

[54] Dresden, Kupferstich-Kabinett, A 124657.

place in the bedroom of a courtesan characterised by a lute, which we find on the sill of the window. It is a bedroom, but a purely commercial atmosphere reigns in it. Danae's right hand is full of coins; in her left hand she holds a coin which she puts in the chest. At the same time, she looks suspiciously at the servant catching the money in her apron. The painting is dominated by the realistically painted money; the multi-layered mythical story is replaced by an anecdote - this was the way Danae was presented in visual arts at the turn of the 16th and 17th century. In the painting by Hendrick Goltzius, the golden rain accompanies Amor, who holds pouches of money in his hand that are reminiscent of the male genitalia. A penis with testicles composed of a "stockbeurs" or money pouches placed on a stick can also be found in the drawing by Joachim Wtaewel in Munich. In the Louvre, there is a painting of Wtewael with Zeus descending to the terrified and naked Danae, a parody of the Angel from the scene of the Annunciation.[55]

In his book on Dutch painters, published in 1604, Karl van Mander mentions his friend Cornelis Ketel's painting Danae and the Golden Rain. The painting was supposedly hanging in the hall of the painter's house when a villager passed by and saw it. He asked Ketel's wife for permission, and when he looked at the picture thoroughly, he said he knew what was on it. As Mander noted, "he identified the flying Eros as an angel, and Danae, who lay with her legs stretched out on a luxurious and richly decorated bed as the Virgin Mary." For Mander, the anecdote was an opportunity to laugh at the medieval allegorical interpretation. The story concludes with the statement: "the villager left with his ignorant view as wise as he was before."[56] The story shows that the medieval allegorical interpretation of the myth of Danae and the golden rain was not forgotten at the beginning of the 17th century, but the members of the intellectual elite no longer shared it.

Rembrandt's Danae of 1636 is an exceptional painting in many ways.[57] She lies naked on the bed and looks up excitedly at the golden rain, which does not form coins but a dazzling light that flows directly toward Danae. There is also a maid, who had been a frequent part of these scenes since the second half of the 16th century. The role of the maid on Rembrandt's picture is unambiguous – her left-hand removes the curtain covering the bed, keys hang from her wrist, and in her hand she holds a money pouch. She has used the key to allow Zeus to enter and the pouch holds the money that she received for doing so. However, Rembrandt's Danae does not look like an agitated lover; she does not lie with her legs spread and her body is turned away from the golden rain. However, the princess turns her head to it with a joyous smile – her relaxed pose, the casually raised right hand, and the half-opened mouth make it seem as if Danae was greeting an old friend. She carefully watches him in order to ascertain what mood her close acquaintance is in today.

There are two opposing signs in Rembrandt's image. In front of the bed, there are slippers on the floor, which were a metaphor for female genitalia in the

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[55] Francesca Alberti,"Bizzarri componimenti e straordinarie invenzioni: la Danaé de Tintoret, une peinture comique," *Studiolo* 7 (2009): 11–39.

[56] Karel van Mander, *Het Schilder-boeck* (Haarlem: Passchier van Wesbusch, 1604), 280r; Sluijter, *Emulating Sensual Beauty*: 36–37.

[57] Oil canvas, 1636. St Ptersburg, Hermitage museum, ГЭ-723. Cf. Eric Jan Sluijter, *Rembrandt and the Female Nude* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2006), 221–249.

Netherlands at that time; over Danae's head, we see Eros, who is crying with his hands tied. This motif is ambiguous; it can either be Eros or a gilded statuette of him that forms the decoration of the bed. Like Titian's Danae, this version by Rembrandt is by no means an allegory or an abstract symbol, but a study of human sexuality. Unlike Titian, however, Rembrandt entirely focused on the feminine body, which he turned entirely to the viewer and did not hide anything at all. In addition, he placed the body on a white bed in the centre of a dark picture field, creating the illusion that it was in the forefront of the painted canvas, making her body readily available to the viewer. There is nothing abstract about the appearance of Danae's body for which we might need to use our imagination. Her legs, hands, stomach and breasts respond to the environment in which the painter has represented them. The viewer has the impression that he might touch Danae's belly, which droops down onto the bed sheet, or feel how her left breast presses against her hand.

Rembrandt's concept of sexuality is thoroughly medieval in that Danae stands for the female element, which is characterised by passivity, physicality and closeness to nature. In Rembrandt's painting, the ancient Greek story of Zeus and Danae visualises substance (the principle of masculinity) confronting form (the principle of femininity). An opposite to Danae is the light, which embodies activity, spirituality and culture. Aristotle's hylomorphism, which was adapted by medieval Europe, taught that the whole world consists of a purely potential substance and an active form, but it is realised exclusively in matter. Danae is the antipode of Zeus, in the same way that a woman is the antipode of a man with whom she forms an integral unity.[58]

The painting of Danae ascribed to Artemisia Gentileschi, one of the earliest woman painters of the early modern age, has only recently become the focus of scholars (**107**).[59] Artemisia was the daughter of Caravaggio's follower, Orazio Gentileschi. The image allegedly dealt with her traumatic personal experience. Her father's friend and companion Agostino Tassi raped her, and that is why the picture became one of the icons of the feminist movement of the end of the 20th century. The naked, deathly pale Danae is exposed to the golden rain; a few golden coins are stuck in her lap between her tightly pressed thighs, which we do not find in any other treatment of this subject. Her crossed legs, the convulsive gesture of her right hand, and head that is thrown backwards show that Danae is in pain. She turns away from the golden rain; her eyes and her lips, similarly to the fingers of her right hand, are firmly closed. Danae's attitude towards the golden rain contrasts with the servant, who looks up to the source of the coins and snatches them into her apron. The meaning of the painting is, however, a subject of dispute. Danae distances herself from the golden rain in many ways, yet she exposes her body to it as indicated by her left arm, which is raised to her head. After all, it is also a possibility that Artemisia's father, Orazio Gentileschi, painted this work.

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[58] Hammer-Tugendhat 2015, 143–145.

[59] Elizabeth S. Cohen, "The Trials of Artemisia Gentileschi: A Rape as History," *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 31, no. 1 (2000): 47–75; Judith W. Mann, et al., *Orazio and Artemisia Gentileschi* (New York: Yale University Press, 2001).

107. Artemisia Gentileschi, Danae and the golden rain. Oil copper, around 1612.

The image of Cleopatra, painted at the same time by Artemisia Gentileschi or her father, Orazio, may be the key to the painting. The Egyptian queen is depicted in an identical pose, the only difference being that in her right hand she clings to a poisonous snake instead of gold, with which she will soon commit suicide. This would indicate that the image of Danae also depicts a tragedy. Only two things can be said reliably about these images. The paintings of Danae and Cleopatra are painted in a naturalistic way; the lying figure ought to be perceived by the viewer as a specific woman. At the same time, however, the viewer should perceive it as part of the classical tradition. The paintings of Danae and Cleopatra draw inspiration from the famous marble sculpture from the Vatican collections, which was considered to be a representation of Cleopatra at that time.[60]

Danae's paintings by Rembrandt and by Artemisia or Orazio Gentileschi are exceptions to the rule. Countless representations of Danae with the golden rain, which originated in the 17th and 18th centuries, were ostensibly a criticism of sensuality, but, in fact, they provided an alibi for displaying a naked female body with all the racy details. Of course, the eroticism of these images was within the strict limits of the norm of the day. Danae was an ambiguous figure since the time of

[60] Francis Haskell and Nicholas Penny,*Taste and the Antique: The Lure of Classical Sculpture 1500–1900* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), no. 24.

ancient Greece and Rome. She was a self-sacrificing mother and a virtuous woman, the precursor of the Christian Mary; but, at the same time, she was considered a loose woman, the embodiment of bodily lust and moral corruption. While the virtuous form of Danae was primarily depicted in ancient times and the European Middle Ages, from the second quarter of the 16th century until the 18th century artists most often portrayed her in her wicked form.

In Baroque art, classical myths were often used as mere amusement, but in the neo-classicist art of the turn of the 18th and 19th centuries they, as a rule, edified the minds of the audience and revealed the secrets of the cosmos and the human being, the labyrinth of the soul and the mystery of life's course. The typical example is the Night of Danae by Anne-Louis Girodet of 1798.[61] The French neo-classical artist portrayed Danae under the open night sky for the first time. The period commentary, which the painter himself probably wrote, points out that he distanced himself from Danae's "materialistic" interpretation as a venal woman and took her image as an allegory of the intersection of the heavenly and earthly. The mirror that Amor shows to Danae has a dual role in the painting; it refers to Danae's encounter with God, but also to the son who will be its result because mirroring has played a key role in the son's life story. The cosmic dimension of Danae is emphasised not only by the night sky with the shining stars but also by the fact that Danae is depicted in the attitude in which Venus was depicted as she was born from the sea foam.

In his second image of Danae, which Girodet painted one year later, he conceived the myth in a very different way. The picture is called Miss Lang as Danae or New Danae, and the painter unequivocally accepted the materialistic interpretation of the mythical princess. It was a biting satire on Anne-Françoise Elisabeth Lange, an actress famous for her immoral life. Girodet painted her portrait and displayed it at the Parisian Salon, but the actress did not like the painting and wanted the money back that she had paid for it. The offended Girodet took revenge. He painted a new version of her portrait that he was still able to expose to the Salon before its closing (**108**).[62] At a glance, the painting seems to represent the beautiful naked actress in the role of Danae; she sits on the bed, and a rain of gold coins comes down from the sky. However, a close-up view reveals many details that entertained the audience of the time. Firstly, there is a turkey with a wedding ring staring at Danae's lap with its tongue stuck out while Amor strips it of its feathers from behind. The turkey depicted wealthy Brussels entrepreneur Michel-Jean Simons, the actress' husband. There is also a cracked mirror demonstrating Miss Lange's lack of self-reflection, a bleeding dove struck by a coin, the collar of which bears the inscription "Loyalty," a rat in a cage, a spider whose web has caught several coins, flame-burned moths and many other details and countless literary allusions. The painting aroused tremendous attention, but the painter was criticised as this was not what the public expected from a painting inspired by classical mythology. After the Salon ended, Girodet hid the painting and showed it to no one.

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[61] Leipzig, Museum der bildenden Künste.

[62] Dorothy Johnson, *David to Delacroix: The Rise of Romantic Mythology* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 60–63.

108. Anne-Louis Girodet, Mlle. Lange as Danae, or New Danae, oil canvas, 1799.

In the last quarter of the 19th century the spiritual conception of Danae came to the fore in England. In the album called The Flower Book, Edward Burne-Jones returned to Danae as Jan Gossart had portrayed her, i.e. as a prefiguration of the Virgin Mary.[63] The mythical princess wears a dark, uncut dress that covers her entire body. She stands with her head turned toward the heavens, from which golden drops fall. Her chastity is indicated by the fact that she is in a small room with the window closed in accordance with the ancient tradition; it is a metal prison, which is suggested by the rivets on the metal plates. Thomas Sturge Moore wrote a poem about Danae that he published with woodcuts by Charles Ricketts. On one illustration, she looks out of a small window. On the second, she stares at the trio of massive rays of light that penetrate from the window into the room and hit the floor of her prison. The inscription reads: "She kneels in awe beholding lavish light."[64] Danae's status is defined by a secure prison, an embroidery frame indicating her daily occupation and, above all, a lily vase standing on the ground beside the rays of light. The lily was a traditional symbol of the Virgin Mary's immaculate virginity. Burne-Jones and Ricketts emphasised the role of Danae as the rescuer of humanity.

[63] London, The British Museum, 1909,0512.1.19. Edward Coley Burne-Jones, *The Flower Book* (London: H. Piazza et cie, 1905).
[64] London, The British Museum, 1910,0324.4. T. Sturge Moore, *Danae. A Poem* (London: Hacon & Ricketts, 1903).

Her connection with the golden rain becomes a hierogamy, the sacred union of the earth and the heavens, of a mortal woman and a god. In the depictions of both authors, the princess' prison plays an important role. Thanks to the isolation from the world of sensual perceptions, Danae is strengthened spiritually; she has given up her human essence to be able to unite with God.

109. Max Slevogt, Danae. Oil canvas, 1895.

By returning to the medieval conception of Danae, the above-mentioned English artists returned in a certain way to how Danae was perceived in ancient Greece. This attitude changed at the very end of the 19th century, when the issues of the time brutally transformed the representation of classical myths. German painter Max Slevogt approached the Perseus myth in a manner similar to the aforementioned Lovis Corinth. Slevogt updated the Renaissance concept of Danae as a prostitute in such a ruthless way that the painting produced a scandal when it was exhibited (**109**). In the foreground of the painting, the traditional character of the greedy old hag is catching coins falling from the sky. Behind her is a bed with Danae, who lies on her back; her hands are under her head to signify that she accepts her fate. Nevertheless, she bows her head, closes her eyes and purses her lips – by doing so, she makes it clear that she is distancing herself from everything that is happening around her. Her coarse face is worn and her body is greenish. The angle from which she is depicted gives her the semblance of a dead body on a bier.

In Slevogt's picture, this woman is not a figure of the ancient myth, but a tired prostitute who rests after her client has left her while the business is handled by a

greedy procuress. Slevogt commented unequivocally on the picture: "It was intended to be a display of pimping, to where the majority of gold flows. The image was meant to show that beauty is not needed to earn money. I wanted to call the painting 'Modern Danae' or 'Pimping.'" [65] The organisers of the Munich Art Nouveau exhibition of 1899 removed the painting before its opening. At that time, the public still expected a timeless idealisation in representations inspired by classical myths. In paintings of Danae, they wanted decent eroticism; critical commentary of topical issues was out of the question.

110. Gustav Klimt, Danae. Oil canvas, 1907.

Around 1900, the situation changed beyond recognition. In 1907, Gustav Klimt's Danae was an immediate success at the "Kunstschau" in Vienna (**110**).[66] In his version of Danae, he also provocatively abandoned the established tradition, but did so several years later in a different city and in an entirely different way. Klimt knew ancient art very well and often took inspiration from it, but in his Danae, sexuality completely dominates. While for Slevogt the ancient theme was a pretext for the critique of prostitution, Klimt understands Danae as a straightforward expression of the principle of life. The naked princess is shown in a close-up view, her thick thigh covering a substantial part of the image. The centre of the picture is her breast with a prominent nipple; the princess has a red face and open mouth,

[65] Hans-Jürgen Imiela, *Max Slevogt. Eine Monographie* (Karlsruhe: Braun1968), 36.
[66] Monique Halm-Tisserant, "De Makron à Klimt." *Revue de l'Art* 96 (1992): 77–81; Warren, *Art Nouveau and the Classical Tradition*, 95–97.

revealing her lower teeth, while the fingers of her right hand are stiffened in a convulsive gesture. All of this is a sign of sexual excitement, which is rendered naturalistically. The reddish hair of Danae characterises her as a sultry woman, but various other features indicate that this is not a depiction of a relationship between a woman and her sexual partner, but of a cosmic act. The golden rain that penetrates Dana's womb is so powerful that it goes beyond the human scale. Danae does not comment on this monstrosity; she wholly concentrates on her body, her eyes are closed, and she is cramped in the foetal position, which is also suggested by her hair, which looks as if it was floating in water. She is a lover, a mother and a stillborn child in one. What is celebrated in the picture is not just sex and fertilisation, but above all the mystery of life. Klimt's painting is a typical example of the modern search for the "deeper significance" of classical myths.[67]

American Surrealist photographer George Platt Lynes also stressed the cosmic dimension of Danae's conception. In the 1930s, he created a series of attractive trick pictures illustrating ancient erotic myths. In his conception, Zeus is a naked man covered with gold coins who descends to the sleeping, naked Danae. He does not enter her lap, but her head; the golden rain is neither an allegory of Danae's venality nor a disguise of the immoral Zeus. It is what it was in the ancient myth – the interpenetration of the divine and human sphere. Platt Lynes' photography is not typical for the 20th century; the majority of artists did not care for classical myths. As we have said above, the situation began to change only at the end of the 20th century. In the work of American realist painter Jack Beal, the ancient mythical stories were dissolved in the petty details of modern everyday life. Mythical figures are represented by his friends and family members, whom he depicts in ordinary situations. His Danae from around 1972 is a naked woman lying in a room filled by violent sun rays.[68] A girl sitting next to her refers to the servants who have been part of this pictorial type since the 16th century. The girl's subordinate position is indicated by the kitchen towel that she has thrown on her chair, and by the fact that she is in the shade, unlike the woman fully exposed to the sun. The picture does not refer to the ancient myth, but to the post-ancient pictorial tradition, in which sun rays characterised Danae as a prefiguration of the Virgin Mary.

The feminist movement legitimised its innovative attitudes by reference to tradition, including the Danae myth. In 1992, Phyllis McGibbon, by then thirty-three years old, presented her "Incubation Shadows" in California's Santa Ana. The room with painted bronze walls evoked the bronze prison of Danae.[69] There were shadowy drawings on the walls with naked Danae. She sat and held a pan in her hands as if she were panning for gold, she pretended to defend herself, or she lay lifelessly on her back with her legs lifted. In the middle of the ceiling, there was a hole through which light flowed. From this hole, test-tubes partially painted in gold were hung at different heights. The tubes evoked the golden rain and resembled the male genital organs. At the same time, Zeus' violation of Danae was ironically commented on by

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[67] Warren, *Art Nouveau and the Classical Tradition*, 97–98.
[68] New York, Whitney Museum of American Art, 74:82.
[69] Klaus Kilinski II, *Greek Myth and Western Art: The Presence of the Past* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 170–172.

the tubes, which evoked artificial insemination, in which the role of man is minimised and the role of the erotic is non-existent. Another parody of the golden rain was the straw spread on the ground beneath the hole. The gold falling from the heavens becomes worthless straw on the ground and has only one feature in common with gold – its colour.

In his installation in the Russian pavilion of the Venice Biennial in 2013, Vadim Zakharov updated the morality of the power of money to buy everything, including love. On the floor of the pavilion, there was a large square hole surrounded on all four sides with a railing with a prayer stool. Visitors who knelt here could pray to the rain of the gold coins falling from the glass pyramid on the ceiling to the room below.[70] Only women could enter the lower room, where a large heap of money lay on the floor. This was an exclusively female space, a kind of giant uterus. The women were given umbrellas so as not to be hurt by the falling coins, and they could transfer the coins from the pile into the next room (**111**). There they could throw the money into a tin bucket that stood on the floor in the middle of this room on the lap of a magnified reproduction of Rembrandt's Danae. The bucket was hung on a rope running through a circular opening in the ceiling. When the bucket was filled with coins, it was pulled up to the hall with the square hole and prayer stool. The man in the suit puts the contents of the bucket into a carrier that transported the coins to the glass pyramid above the square hole. From there, the coins fell down again. An inscription accompanied the installation on the upper floor, which was accessible to men: "Gentlemen, the time has come to confess our Rudeness, Lust, Narcissism, Demagoguery, Falsehood, Banality, and Greed, Cynicism, Robbery, Speculation, Wastefulness, Gluttony, Seduction, Envy, and Stupidity."

111. Vadim Zakharov, Danae, Venice Biennial in 2013.

[70] Vadim Zakharov, *Danaë. Russian Pavilion, 55th International Art Exhibition – La Biennale di Venezia*, ed. Udo Kittelmann (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz 2013).

ANDROMEDA

The Greco-Roman Andromeda

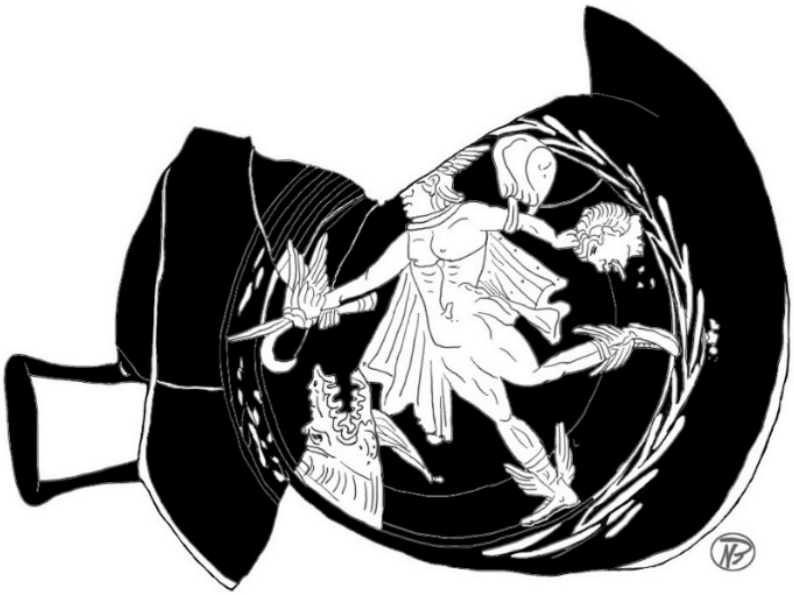
Perseus' life and his actions were linked to three women, who all had one trait in common-all of them were beautiful, a fact for which they had to pay an extraordinary price. The hero's mother, Danae, becomes a refugee simply because she appeals to Zeus. Andromeda was supposed to die because of her mother's 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]

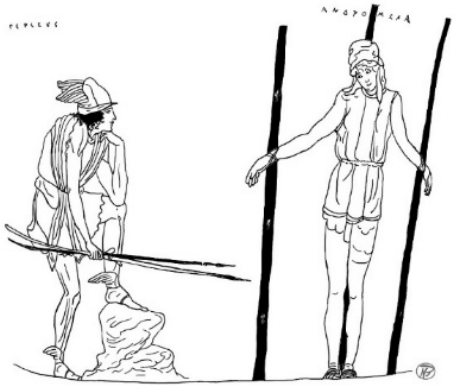
The scene with poles is shown in the Athenian vase painting from about 440 BC (**114**). In the centre, we see Andromeda in oriental dress supported by servants; on the right, other servants are preparing the poles to which they will fasten the princess. On the far right, Cepheus sits on the rocks, and 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

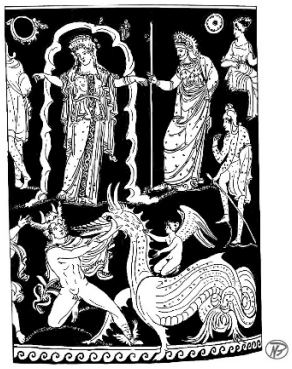
characterised by her physiognomy as a black woman, is completely naked (**118**). The princess is wearing only her jewellery, a wreath on her head, a necklace, an amulet hanging over her shoulder, and a bracelet on her hands and leg. The funeral context is emphasised by the tainiai in the background. 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.

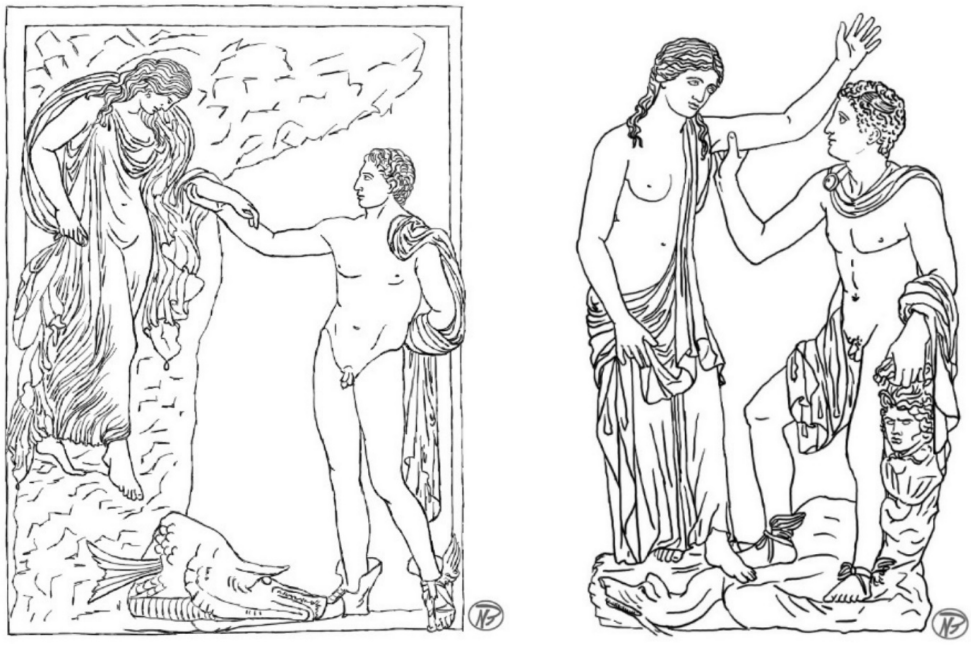
dragon, because she stands behind her throne, leaning against Homonoia, the personification of accord whom Eros is crowning. She has received Cassiopeia's apology, and therefore Homonoia turns away from the pair of women; she stands relaxed with her legs crossed and her elbow leaning against the back 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.

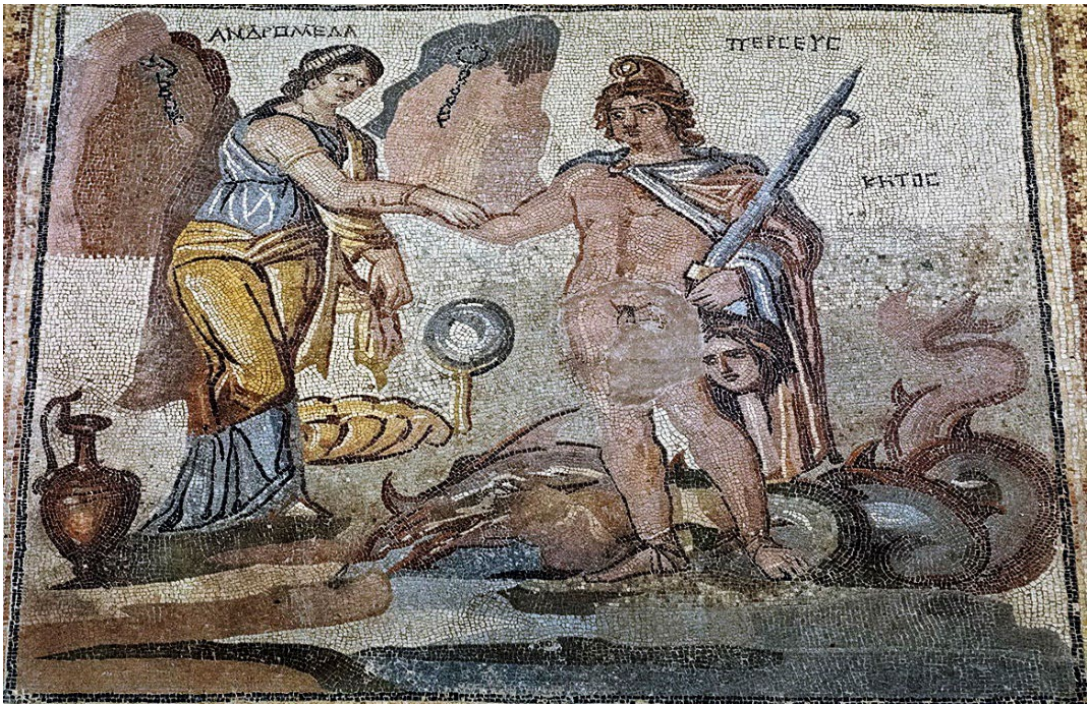
While Greeks paid the maximum amount of attention to Medusa, the Romans preferred the story of Andromeda. Perseus, who releases the enchained Andromeda, appears in classical Greek art only in one representation.[19] In Roman art, the most popular pictorial type of the Perseus myth was the hero who courteously 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

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[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.

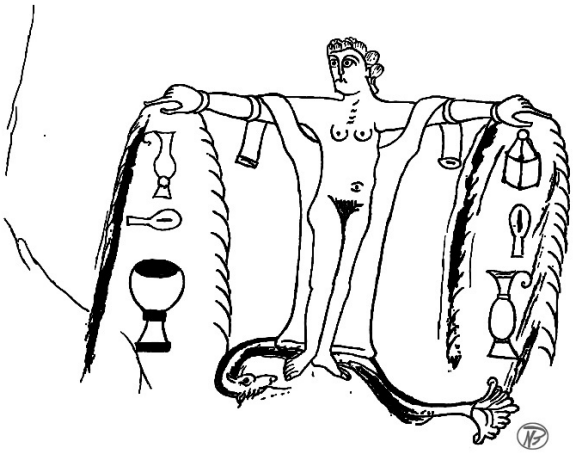
[30] Maria Concetta Laurenti, "Un pavimento a mosaico con due emblemata sotto la basilica di S. Susanna a Roma," *Colloque de la Mosaïque Gréco-Romaine* 9, vol. 1 (2005): 321, fig. 8c, cover of the volume 2.

[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.

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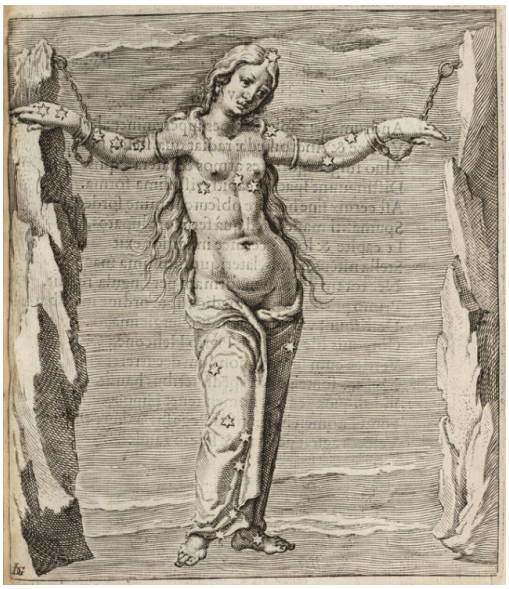
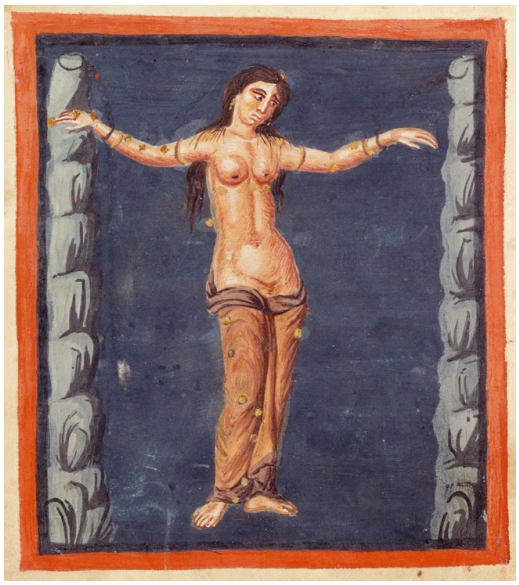
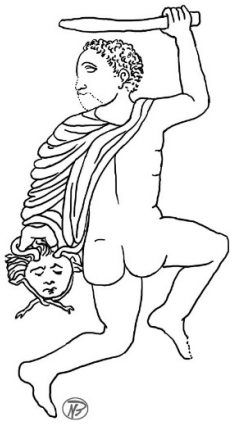
[35] Nonnus, *Dionysiaca*, 25, 123–142.
[36] Homer, *Iliad*, 18, 485–487.
[37] Aratus, *Phaenomena*, 200–204.
[38] (Eratosthenes), *Catasterismi*, 1, 17.





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.

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[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,

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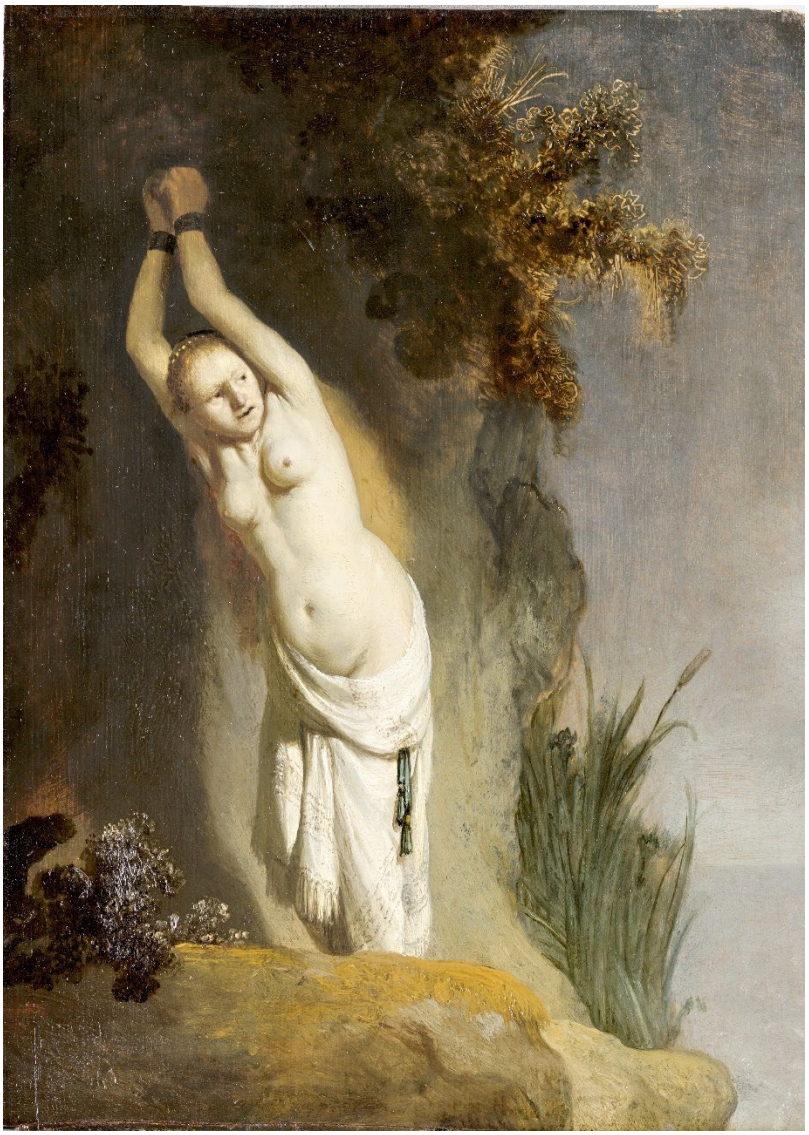
[47] Roman denarius, 74 BC, London, The British Museum, R.8543. Cf. Antonio Agostini, *Dialoghi … intorno alle medaglie inscrittioni et altre antichità* (Rome: Gugliemo Faciotto, 1592), 152.
[48] Hyginus, *On Astronomy*, 2, 12a.
[49] Konrad Schauenburg, *Perseus in der Kunst des Altertums* (Bonn: Habelt, 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

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[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

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[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).

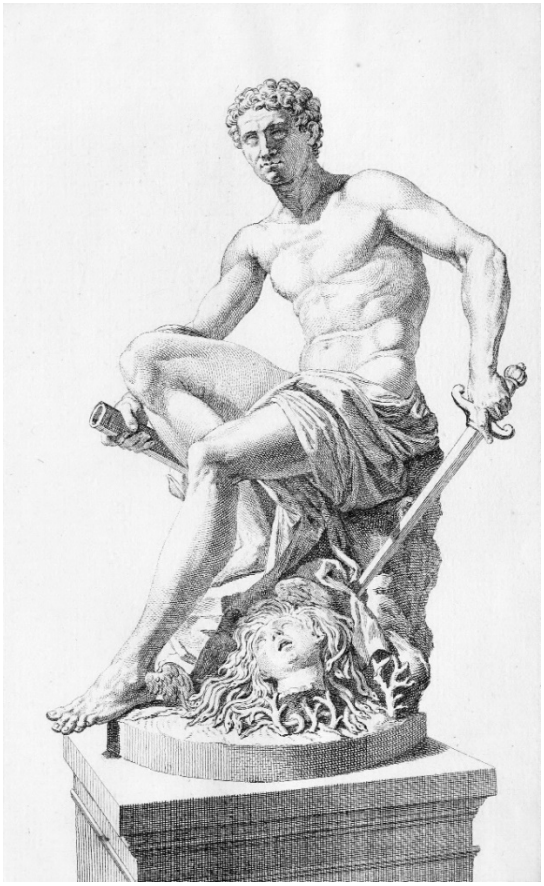
partially naked, she is pushed to the edge of the picture. In addition, a woman with a cloak rushes from the left toward the naked princess, so that her nakedness will soon be covered. The painting was commissioned by Louis, Grand Condé, the second most powerful man in the French kingdom. At that time, 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.

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[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

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[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.

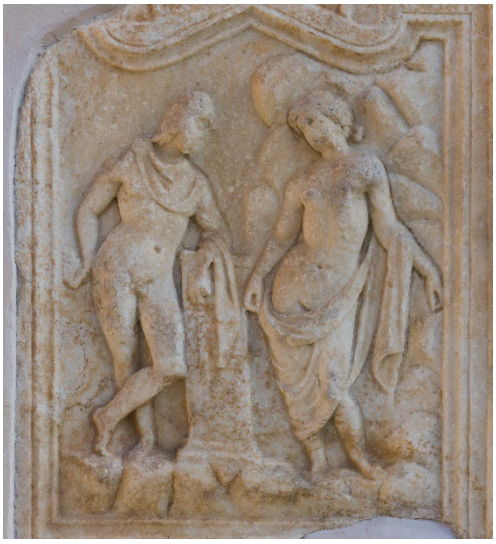
face has an expression of extreme pain, which is the counterpart of the expression of the dying Atlas. Around Medusa's head, the snakes are indicated by curves engraved on the relief background. Only the serpent that climbs from the hair of Medusa at the ear was rendered three-dimensionally. Atlas still 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:

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[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

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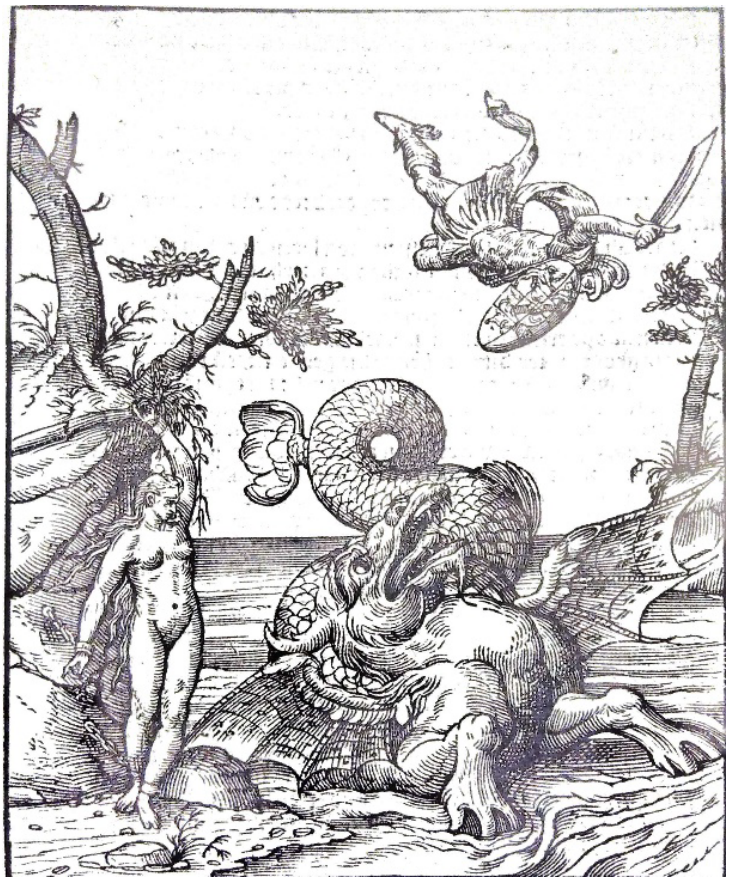
[89] Estienne Jodell, *Le recueil des inscriptions, figures, et devis* (Paris: s.n., 1558), 10v–11r.
[90] Paris, Bibliothèque nationale, Cabinet des Estampes, Qb' 1594.
[91] Paris, Bibliothèque nationale, Cabinet des Estampes, QB-1 (1628)-FOL.
[92] H. Morel, *Sujet du feu d'artifice sur la prise de la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

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[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

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[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

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[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,

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[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.

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[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]

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[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 .

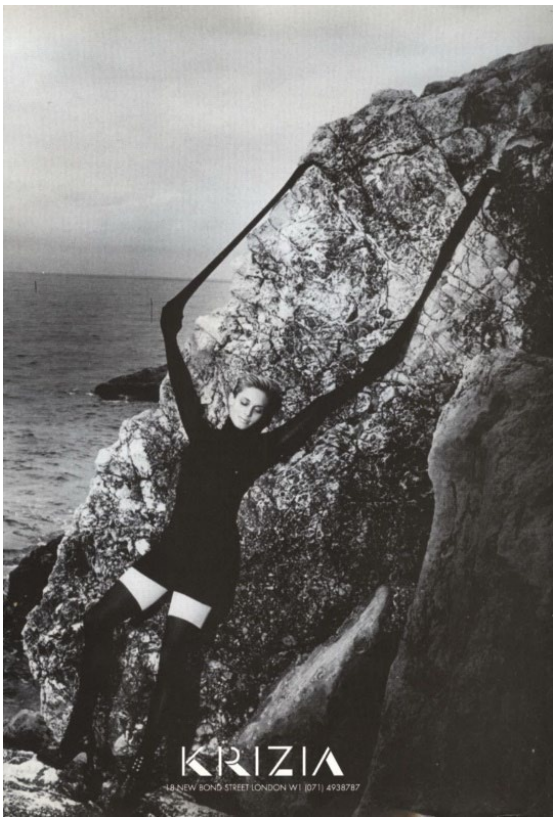
announced a contest for a sculptural group, the description of which, as was to be expected, corresponded to this revived ancient pictoral type. The Lyon sculptor residing in Rome form 1784, Joseph Chinard, won the medal (**166**). In his work, Chinard combined the study of ancient sculptures using living 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.

CONCLUSIONS

Perseus' victory over the monster, whose gaze brings death, is not a variation on a foreign theme that the ancient Greeks may have appropriated and edited. They surely used a variety of characters and motifs borrowed from their Near Eastern neighbours.[1] However, the myth of Perseus is an original Greek creation, the proof of which is that no other mythical hero has such sophisticated extra-terrestrial technologies as Perseus. He received from gods the invisibility cap, flying boots and instruments to defeat the invincible creature and to keep its severed head. Homer (8th century BC) and Hesiod (about 700 BC), the authors of the oldest Greek literary works, knew the myth of Perseus, but in different versions. The oldest representations of this myth in the visual arts, dating from 7th–6th centuries BC, are also very diverse. The analysis of the image tradition coincides with what we know about the beginnings of the literary tradition: the myth about Perseus and Medusa was created gradually after the 8th century BC. Only then did inspiration from the outside and diverse local traditions merge into the story of the Perseus, which was continuously transformed in the later centuries.[2]

In the story of Perseus, the special equipment that the gods gave to Perseus, the backward glance that his divine protectors advised him to take, and the monstrosity of Medusa played a key role from the very beginning. The most significant emphasis was placed on Medusa's head, which was often depicted in isolation. At the time the myth of Perseus originated, the Greeks began to define themselves as the exact opposite of the hybrid beings who, along with advanced technologies and visual art, they adopted from the Near East. In the case of the Medusa, the oldest depictions of which combine human beings and reptiles, this hybridity was carried out ad absurdum. The head is the dominant feature of the human being, which differs from animals in its upright stance. In the case of Medusa, however, this part of the body was connected with the opposite of humanity – a snake crawling on the ground. The Medusa, however, was different from the centaurs, sphinxes, and other mythical figures of Near Eastern origin that kept their hybridity until the end of antiquity.

From the 5th century, Medusa could lose all hybrid features and be depicted as a beautiful sleeping girl. In classical Greece, not only the appearance of Medusa changed, but also the way in which she kills, how Perseus killed her and what role Perseus' divine helpers played. At first, Athena and Hermes helped prevent the hero from perishing from his fear of the terrifying monster; later they had to prevent Medusa from seducing Perseus with her beautiful appearance and closed eyes. They used a mirror to show Perseus what Medusa looked like, the third innovation of classical Greek Medusa, next to her beauty and sleep.

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[1] Walter Burkert, *The Orientalizing Revolution: Near Eastern Influence on Greek Culture in the Early Archaic Age* (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1992), 82–87; Joan Aruz et al., eds, *Assyria to Iberia at the Dawn of the Classical Age* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2014), 248–319.

[2] Timothy Gantz, *Early Greek Myth: A Guide to Literary and Artistic Sources* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), 300–311.

The transformation of a monster with wide-opened eyes and roaring mouth to its very opposite, a beautiful sleeping girl, was only ostensible, as ugliness and beauty have been Medusa's attributes from the very beginning. The monster, which spread death wherever it went but appeared to be the exact opposite, drew attention to the limits of human knowledge. Even though Perseus saw Medusa with his own eyes, he was unable to distinguish the terrible monster from the harmless and innocent girl. The Greeks highlighted this aspect by emphasising the conditionality of Medusa's deadly gaze. Since the 5th century BC, Greeks began to portray Perseus as walking on his tiptoes toward the sleeping Medusa or standing directly above her. The Gorgons were mortally dangerous; their devastating attack was immediate and definitive, but only when they were awakened. It was only then that these beautiful girls turned into murderous monsters. The theme of Medusa's sleep became a crucial innovation that refined and enhanced the characteristics of Perseus. He did not win by the strength of his arms, courage or perseverance, but above all by faith in the gods and absolute discipline. The gods provided him with equipment and know-how, and he won because he carried out his act precisely, just as the gods had advised him, and did not hesitate for a second to follow their instructions.

The key image, Perseus cutting off Medusa's head, developed throughout ancient civilisation from the 7th century BC to the 1st century after Christ. This long development was surprisingly consistent. Although we encounter radical changes in it, the essence of its protagonists and the role of the gods remains the same. The artists only further developed and illuminated the themes that from the very beginning formed the core of the story. Nevertheless, Roman artists fully exploited the potential of the motif of mirror image in Perseus' myth. Image type of that we consider today to be typical of the Greek myth appears only in Roman art. Here we encounter for the first time Perseus decapitating Medusa and looking backwards at her mirror image reflected on the surface of the shield.

In her life and after her death, when Medusa only existed as a head, she changed everything into inanimate stone statues, which remained as representations of her victims. Ovid describes Medusa' residence as a kind of sculptor's studio full of statues (*simulacra*) of humans and animals that she had created by looking at them. When Perseus seized her head, he became the sculptor himself, and everyone he showed it to became a marble statue (*signum de marmore*).[3] Thus, in the myth of Perseus, the image is an attribute of death. Nevertheless, the representation also brings salvation, because it was with it that the hero killed the monster. Perseus turned the deadly strategy of Medusa against her; he created her image on the shield, which allowed him to kill her. Minerva, the Roman counterpart of Greek Athena, always holds the shield that Perseus gazes at, which means that this innovation also celebrated divine assistance, vitally important.

Ancient Greek myths and their depictions survived both the onset of Christianity and the demise of state organisation throughout the western part of the ancient Roman Empire. The fact that they have never disappeared entirely from the cultural horizon of post-ancient Europe was primarily thanks to the uninterrupted literary tradition dominated by Ovid's Metamorphoses, the Latin retelling of Greek

[3] Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 4, 780; 5, 183.

myths. The partial reunion of ancient stories and ancient forms of individual mythical figures began in Italy in the middle of the 15th century and was completed a hundred years later. In the first half of the 16th century, this revival became a pan-European phenomenon because artists working in transalpine Europe were also involved in it. Since then, the ancient pictorial types of Perseus and other characters of his myth have once again become an integral part of European culture. The result of this process, however, was not a return to how myths were understood and depicted in ancient Greece and Rome.

From ancient Greece up to the 18th century, ancient myths were conceived as creations of individual poets, sculptors and painters, which meant that artists felt free to further develop, alter, and re-interpret them. Perseus and other figures from ancient myths were given a brand-new face in early modern Europe, which expressed the views and needs of this epoch. Inspiration from the ancient Greek and Roman texts and models was only one aspect of this grand synthesis. Medusa was above all a negative figure; the transformation of her hair into snakes was a deserved punishment for the desecration of the temple. In classical antiquity, we cannot find Athena punishing Medusa, but on the German engraving from the end of the 17th century, for instance, we can see the goddess expelling Medusa with snake hair and Neptun from her temple (**168**). In this picture, Medusa became a prefigurement of the heretics desecrating the temple of the Lord, who must be expelled and punished.

168. Johann Ulrich Kraus, Athena punishes Medusa. Engraving, 1694.

Perseus triumphantly raising Medusa's severed head appears in the art of early modern Europe so often that we can see this image type as one of the emblems of this epoch. We can find a comment on it in the monumental work The World of Symbols written by Filippo Picinelli. This Augustinian monk understood the world as a huge book of symbols by which God speaks to us. In this widely read encyclopaedia, which was published in Italian in 1653 and Latin in 1681, Perseus is a symbol of the exercise of justice, which brings about horror. This horror, however, is generally beneficial. Picinelli wrote that "we perceive the punishing justice stained by a crime as something tragic because such a spectacle gives rise to horror, but when we think it well, this dreadful horror has undoubtedly a healing effect. In this regard, there is much to learn from the Perseus symbol ... who holds Gorgon's terrible head in his raised hand."[4] Terrible things need to be shown; they can give instruction effectively because they are very intense experiences, which remain in our memory forever.

In the 16th to 18th centuries, Perseus differed significantly from his ancient namesake. Artists reassessed ancient pictorial types evoking the myth of Perseus, elaborated upon them and invented entirely new visual types. All representations of the Perseus myth were filled with new content. Above all, there was a multi-layered Christian interpretation rooted in medieval Europe. Closely related to this theological dimension was the status of Perseus as the chosen hero, virtually invincible due to his unparalleled divine favour. European rulers who aspired to absolute power by the will of God identified with Perseus, as seen in examples from Italy, France and the newly forming Habsburg Danube Empire. Especially the scenes of Perseus saving Andromeda, whose erotic charm ensured their visual appeal, were often used as political allegories.

Besides scenes with Andromeda, those with Danae often evoked erotic experiences in its early modern versions. Ancient Greek and Roman models inspired these scenes, but eroticism never played a significant role in antiquity. The ancient literary tradition inspired modern depictions of the Perseus myth, which emphasized the connection with artistic creation. The most significant contribution of early modern Europe was the introduction of Medusa's head and Pegasus as emblems of the visual arts and culture in general. As Hesiod proves, Medusa has been associated with the Muses and art in the Greek imagination from its very beginning. Together with her sisters, she lived by "the singing Hesperides."[5] When Perseus cut her head off, he opened up art to people because Pegasus was born from her headless body. On the mountain of Muses, Helicon, the winged horse Pegasus created the Hippocrene Spring, a source of poetic inspiration. By petrifying everyone with her gaze, Medusa created the first statues. Greek writers mention this motif merely in passing, but it becomes an essential topic in Roman literature. Nevertheless, neither Greek nor Roman painters ever depicted it. This aspect of the myth of Perseus and Medusa became a theme in the visual arts only in early modern Europe.

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[4] Filippo Picinelli, *Mundus symbolicus* (Cologne: s.n., 1681), 58.

[5] Hesiod, *Theogony*, 275 (translated by Richmond Lattimore), cf. also 1, 281. Cf. Aratos, *Phaenomena*, 221.

In the 19th and 20th centuries, how ancient myths were analysed was fundamentally transformed, and their depictions in visual art are thus noticeably different from their early modern predecessors. In the 20th century, representations of Perseus myth usually looked more like a parody of paintings and statues that originated in the previous century, even though this was not always the artist's intention. The type of analytical approach that was applied made the difference. Dissolution, which is to say the effort to purify ancient myths, prevailed in the 19th century. Classical myths were purged of everything that was supposed to be irrelevant, and artists concentrated wholly on what they thought constituted the "myth's essence." This essence was often sought in dignity, restraint, or other moral messages.

In the analyses of the 20th century, a state that we might call segregation prevailed, i.e. artists usually focused on the individual aspects of the myth, which they dealt with separately and in isolation. They attempted to capture the character of these isolated parts. In these analyses, as a rule, the emphasis was placed on violence, sex and immorality. Perseus is not the main hero of his myth; it is his victim, the appalling or irresistibly beautiful Medusa. Both approaches to classical myths, dissolution and segregation, coexist today, even though they are mutually exclusive. Artists try to capture the essence of myth, but they understand classical myths' versions as testimonies based on authentic life experiences, which are necessarily unique. The result is a parallel existence of more or less inconsistent definitions, which are constantly increasing in number and variety. This approach of contemporary artists to classical myths places an unsolvable problem before historians. They can describe individual updates of Perseus myth in modern art. Still, it is impossible to summarise these contemporary representations because each one deals with something different. This is especially true of Medusa, which is one of the most frequently depicted themes of ancient mythology. Today, as the scope of artists has expanded, they operate in all genre positions, from the comic to the tragic and from playful improvisations to highly serious analyses.

This is not to say that the myth of Perseus is an empty shell today. In 2020, a statue of Medusa was shown in New York's Collect Pond Park in front of the court of criminal justice as part of the #MeToo movement (**169**). The Argentinian-Italian sculptor Luciano Garbati created the sculpture in 2008, it represents the naked Medusa with a sword in her left hand and the severed head of Perseus in her right. Similar to Cellini's Florentine sculpture, which Garbati paraphrased, the hero and the monster are similar, both of which have a slightly altered sculptor's face. In the stormy debate that erupted around the statue, what Medusa was and what role Perseus had in her story was again addressed.[6]

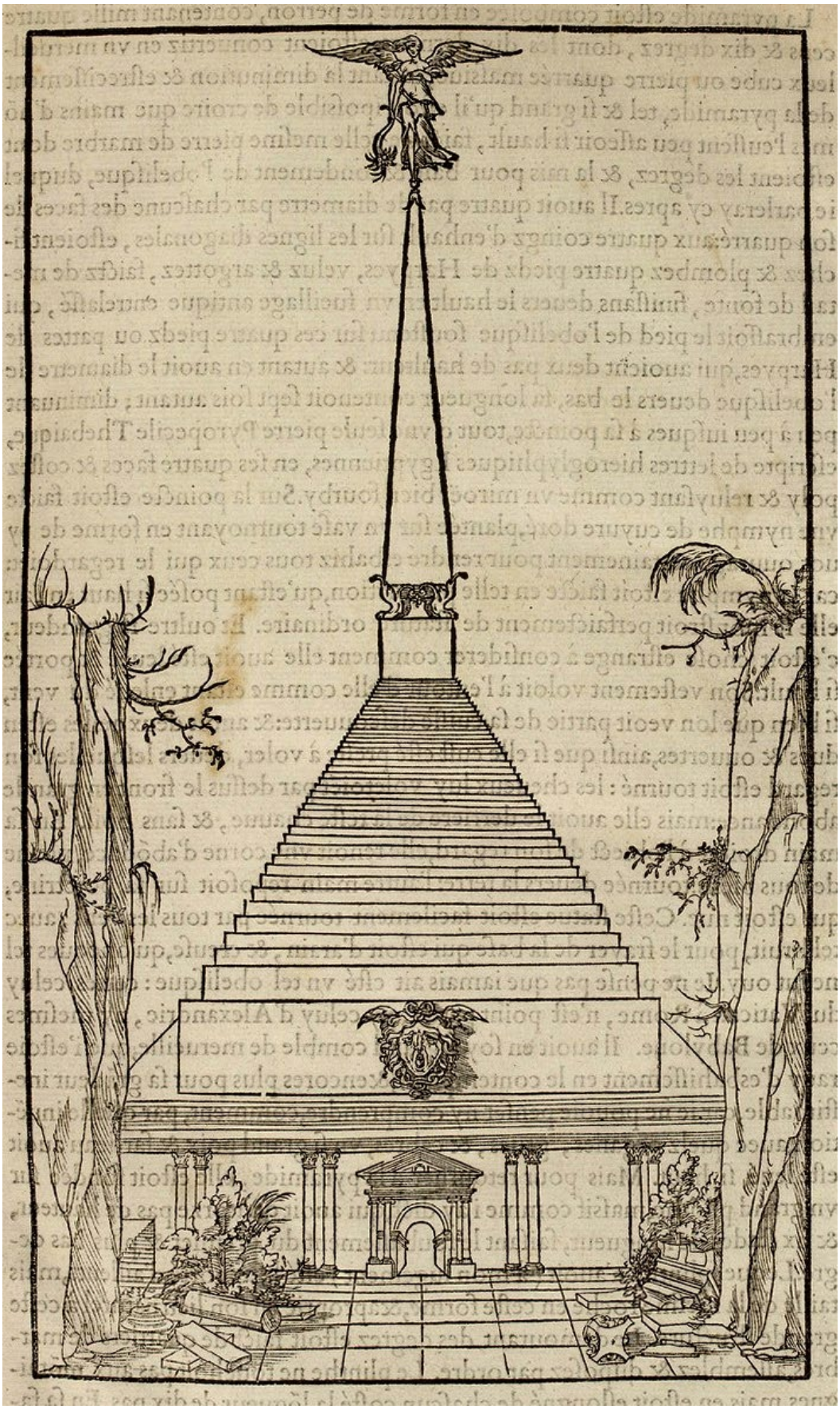
Today, artists cannot ignore that classical myth is no longer a topic in social conversation. The typical modern man or woman probably would not recall a single work of art inspired by the myth of Perseus and Medusa. Latin, Greek, and ancient culture no longer belong to general education, which naturally influenced the reception of ancient myths. This gap between specialists and the lay public widens

[6] Julia Jacobs, "How a Medusa Sculpture from a Decade Ago Became #MeToo Art." The New York Times, 13 Oct. 2020. www.nytimes.com/2020/10/13/arts/design/medusa-statue-manhattan.html

unremittingly. University students know increasingly more about ancient myths and their depiction in art, while the people outside the walls of universities know less and less. Nevertheless, classical myths are still used as a means of communication. These myths were tailored to ancient Greek society and its emotional needs, but it turned out that, from the very beginning, they had exceeded the framework of religious, cultural and social communication in ancient Greek communities. Their creators had touched on something essential that was hidden deep in human beings regardless of when and where they lived. This is why Western civilisation continues to return to ancient myths, especially the story of Perseus. What ended in the 20th century was only the canon of pictorial types created in Greek art in the 5th–4th century BC and revived in early modern Europe.

169. Luciano Garbati, Medusa, with the head of Perseus,
a sword in her left hand vandalised when the picture was taken (February 12, 2021). Bronze, 2020.

One of the aims of this book is to stress that the representation of the myth of Perseus has changed from the beginning to the present. All pictorial types, which we have followed throughout centuries or even millennia, have been continuously evolving and radically changing in their form and meaning. Every epoch has its Perseus myth. When 20th century artists represent classical myths, they feel obliged as a rule to explain this unusual step by emphasising the uniqueness and hence the originality of their concept. Consequently, the most extreme positions are given preference. Nevertheless, there is no reason why the story of the fearless Perseus, the terrifying Medusa, the dedicated Danae, the beautiful Andromeda, and the mysterious Pegasus should not inspire artists in this century and those to follow.



170. Pyramid with the head of Medusa. Woodcut, 1541.

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Every depiction of Perseus or Medusa in post-antique Europe is just as remarkable as the origin and development of this myth in ancient Greece and Rome. Pictures, reliefs and sculptures inspired by ancient myths are now incomprehensible to most people. From the once-rich artistic language, only a few phrases survive in general consciousness; what is more, these phrases have lost meaning through constant repetition. This book aims to speak the fearless Perseus, the terrifying Medusa, the selfless Danae, the beautiful Andromeda, and the mysterious Pegasus again. It analyses the evolution of grammar and vocabulary of these depictions from Greek antiquity to the present. The oldest depictions date to the second millennium BC, the youngest ones from the present time; they originated not only in Europe but also from the Near East and Northern America. Why the depictions of Perseus' myth? From the beginning, this myth was connected with the vision and imagery on which today's culture is built.