

Classical Mythology

LLCU/CMLT 316.010/080



Class 14

Demeter and Persephone

Perseus

Readings for Next Tuesday:

Classical Mythology 548-559, 589-598
(Theseus)

Reminder: Exam 2, this Thursday

Same format as Exam 1,
Covering material from February 27 lecture to
March 22nd's

Dionysus: The god of Life and Death



<http://iris.haverford.edu/athens/files/2009/08/thyrsus-291x300.jpg>

Dionysus: Birth (Zeus and Semele)



<https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/e/e3/Rubens-Death-of-Semele.jpg/1280px-Rubens-Death-of-Semele.jpg>

Demeter and Persephone



Demeter and Persephone



<http://artipeeps.files.wordpress.com/2013/05/bernini-rape-of-persephone-sculpture.jpg>

Demeter and Persephone



Demeter and Persephone

- .Celeus: King of **Eleusis**
- .Metaneira (Celeus' wife)
- .**Demophoon**: son (or Triptolemus)
 - .Demeter becomes his nanny; tries to make him immortal
- .Iambe: nurse
 - .Receives Demeter; tries to make her laugh; makes her a drink of “Kykeon” (pennyroyal tea?) – ritual aspects

Triptolemus: Alternative to Demophoon (Spreads knowledge of grain to world)



Demeter and Famine

While Demeter was grieving,
no crops would grow

- The thought of losing humans to starvation forced Zeus to come to an arrangement
- Hades would have Persephone for 1/3 of the year; Demeter for the rest
- Deal sealed by the “pomegranate”



Demeter and Persephone

Themes

- .Sacred marriage (Hades and Persephone)
- .Death/rebirth
- .Aetiology for the seasons

Mystery Cults

- By nature, secret (*mystes* = “initiate”)
- A personal choice to take part in them (unlike, say, the worship of Athena in Athens – a communal activity)
- open to everyone (usually): men, women, and slaves are often all permitted to join and to move through the ranks
- Allow for a closer communion with the chosen god (and often the chance for a happier afterlife)

Eleusinian Mysteries:

- .For Demeter and Persephone
- .Spring (Lesser Mysteries)
 - .Winnowing fan; purification with fire, air and water (?) - [education]
- .End of summer (Greater Mysteries)
 - .Revelation of sacred truth [contemplation]
- .Open to anyone (citizen / freeborn / slave)

Eleusinian Mysteries:

Plato, *Phaedo*

“I imagine that the men who established our mysteries had a very real meaning: in truth they have been telling us in parables all the time that whoever comes to Hades uninitiated and profane will lie in the mire, while he who has been initiated shall dwell with the gods. As they say in the mysteries, ‘the thyrsis bearers are many, but the inspired few’.”

Eleusinian Mysteries:

.Telesterion (Eleusis)



Eleusinian Mysteries:

.Telesterion (Eleusis)



Eleusinian Mysteries:

.Ploutoneion – Shrine of Hades - (Eleusis)



Eleusinian Mysteries:

- Interior Telesterion, Roman Expansion (Eleusis)



Eleusinian Mysteries: Elements we know about

- .Heirophant (Head Priest)

- .Hieron (sacred object)

- .Priestess of Demeter

- .Kykeon (drink of meal, mint, and water); drink given to Demeter in the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*

The Legend of Perseus

From Myth to Legend

Features of Myth and Legend (Perseus borders this)

Myth:

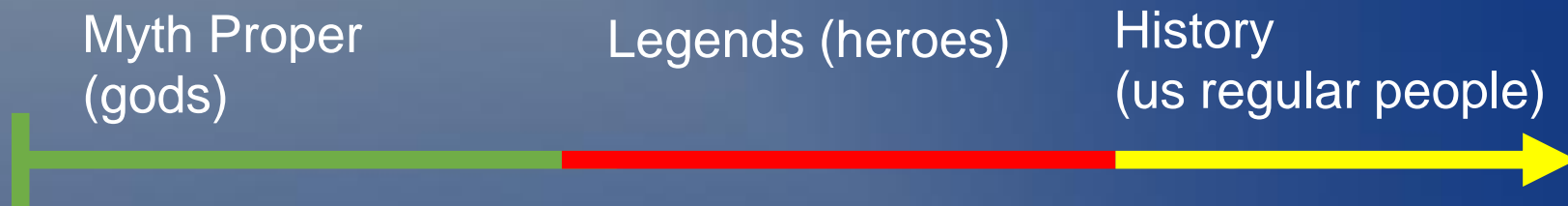
- .Thought to be true
- .World *is not* like today

Legend:

- .Thought to be true
- .World *is* like today

From Myth to Legend

Ancient Concept of Chronology ("What happened before us?")



The closer we come to "history", the more the world looks like it does today
(fewer "monsters", less interaction with gods, etc.)

Legend of Perseus:

Primary features of Legend

- .More secular than sacred
- .Principal characters humans

Legend of Perseus:



https://encrypted-tbn0.gstatic.com/images?q=tbn:ANd9GcRc2IKxaFILOy24IcbsARnjqtremFaL_q9OboWt4Y6J8diocBAnqw

Legend of Perseus:

Beginnings:

- .Born of Danae (daughter of Acrisius, king of Argos) and Zeus
- .Motif of prophecy about a child
 - .Acrisius hears that his grandson would kill him
- .Acrisius takes extreme action

Legend of Perseus:

Argos:



Legend of Perseus:

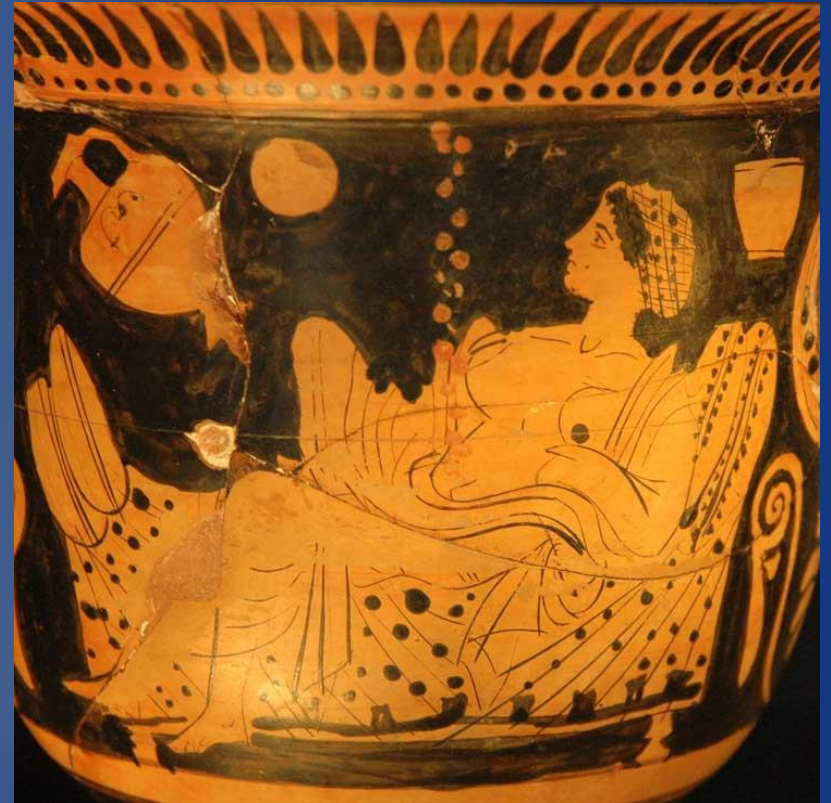


[http://www.mlahanas.de/Greeks/Mythology/Images/DanaeLouvreCA925.jp](http://www.mlahanas.de/Greeks/Mythology/Images/DanaeLouvreCA925.jpg)

Legend of Perseus:

Beginnings:

- **Acrisius** locks **Danae** in a room to prevent her from having intercourse
- Zeus sees her, and visits her in the form of “golden rain”
- She becomes pregnant
- When Acrisius hears the baby cry, he tosses them into a box



Legend of Perseus:

Beginnings:

- .Motif of disbelieving divine parentage
- .Acrisius casts box containing Danae and Perseus out to sea, where it is found by **Dictys** off the island of Seriphos

Legend of Perseus:

Beginnings:



Legend of Perseus:

- **Polydectes**, the king of Seriphos, falls in love with Danae (who loves Dictys)
- After some time (Perseus a young man now), Polydectes pretends to want to marry another woman
- Asks for “wedding gifts) of horse
- Perseus can’t afford one, but says “I can bring you **Medusa’s head!**”



Legend of Perseus:

- Perseus wholly outmatched (how can he get the head of a supernatural beast?)
- Assisted by **Athena**, who tells him where to get his tokens:
 - **winged shoes**
 - **kibisis** (a magic bag)
- **Hermes** might also have given him a **scimitar** (curved bladed sword)

