

Classical Mythology

LLCU 316.010/080



Class 21

The Age of Heroes

The Theban Cycle

Readings for Thursday

Classical Mythology
pages 445-474

Next in-class writing assignment:
Thursday, May 3rd

Euripides (probably) put a very particular spin on the Jason and Medea tale. If you were composing a movie and had free reign of the storyline, how would you end it?

Classics Lecture: Thursday, May 3rd @ 7pm

Memorial Hall 127



AWASH IN IMPERIAL INNUENDO

AT THE BATHS OF CARACALLA



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MAY 3, 2018 | 7PM | MEMORIAL HALL 127 | FREE ADMISSION | OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

In ancient Roman cities, baths were necessities of daily life and familiar urban landmarks. The most magnificent were the imperial *thermae*, built in Rome by the emperors between 25 BCE and 315 CE. Although previous study of these buildings has focused on their architectural design, the lived experience of these spaces warrants closer attention.

Prof. Gensheimer will explore the architectural and freestanding sculpture from the Baths of Caracalla (inaugurated 216 CE) to consider issues of patronage, infrastructure, and daily life in ancient Rome. Her fresh interpretive framework reveals that the building's polychrome marbles and masterfully-staged sculptural displays provided visual cues to the thousands of bathers who used the baths daily. Although bathing together tended to collapse distinctions between elite and non-elite Romans, the decorative program of the baths – and its messages of imperial power – affirmed traditional sociopolitical differences between bathers and the emperor.

Maryl B. Gensheimer is a historian of Roman art and archaeology. Her research focuses on the art and architecture of the city of Rome, on the Bay of Naples, and in Asia Minor. She is particularly interested in ancient cities and urban life, and the social structures and interdependent systems of urban design and urban infrastructure that impacted the ancient experience of monuments and spaces.



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Theban Cycle

Cadmus and Serpent



Theban Cycle: The *Spartoi* (the “sown ones”)



Theban Cycle

Laius' (king of Thebes) *atē* (rash action)

- while in exile in Elis, he kidnapped the king Pelops' son Chrysippus



Theban Cycle

- Upon his return to Thebes, Laius and **Jocasta** have a child – but the prophecy! (If they had a child, he would kill his father and marry his mother)
- Child to be exposed by servant, but instead given to Corinthian shepherd (child overcoming death)
- Shepherd gives child to Corinthian king Polybus and his wife Merope
- As a young man, uncertainty of birth sends Oedipus to find his true origins (Delphi)

Theban Cycle

- Delphic Oracle: Oedipus will kill his father and marry his mother
- Kills Laius along the road to Thebes (Oedipus' 1st *atē*)
- There is met by regent (**Creon**) and Jocasta – learns of Sphinx plaguing the city

Theban Cycle: The Sphinx



Theban Cycle

- Oedipus proves himself worthy of leadership (intelligent)
- But he is doomed because of his offence against his father
- Oracles (*viz.* one's fate) cannot be avoided
- His youthful recklessness has caused him to fulfil what he has tried so hard to avoid (cf. Pentheus, Phaethon, Perseus)

Theban Cycle

Could Oedipus have avoided these events?

Theban Cycle

- Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus* performed 429 BCE
- Plague of Athens 430 BCE



Theban Cycle

- Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*
- “The bodies of dying men lay one upon another, and half-dead creatures reeled about the streets and gathered round all the fountains in their longing for water. The sacred places also in which they had quartered themselves were full of corpses of persons that had died there, just as they were; for as the disaster passed all bounds, men, not knowing what was to become of them, became utterly careless of everything, whether sacred or profane.”

Theban Cycle

- Oedipus is insistent upon discovering the truth at all costs (Jocasta proves to be his foil – Polybus' grave is enough proof of his innocence)
- Decrees that the perpetrator of the plague be cast out of the city when discovered
- *Anagnorisis* (discovery) scene – interrogation of servant
- Realizes the truth and blinds himself

Theban Cycle

Oedipus:

“Apollo it was, Apollo, who brought to fruition these my evil sufferings. No one struck [my eyes] but I in my misery. Why should I need to see, when there is nothing sweet to see.”

Theban Cycle

- Jocasta: 'How oft it chances that in dreams a man has wed his mother! He who least regards such brainsick phantasies lives most at ease.'

Sigmund Freud: The Oedipus Complex



Theban Cycle

Sophocles: *Oedipus at Colonus* (401 BCE)

Oedipus wandering Greece with Antigone and Ismene

No place will receive them, except for Athens (under Theseus' rule)

Creon still pursuing Oedipus for his crime

Theseus protects Oedipus

Visited by son Polynices – Oedipus curses sons for fighting over rule (another *ate*)

Oedipus forgiven by the Furies at last for his crimes (and disappears in a garden)

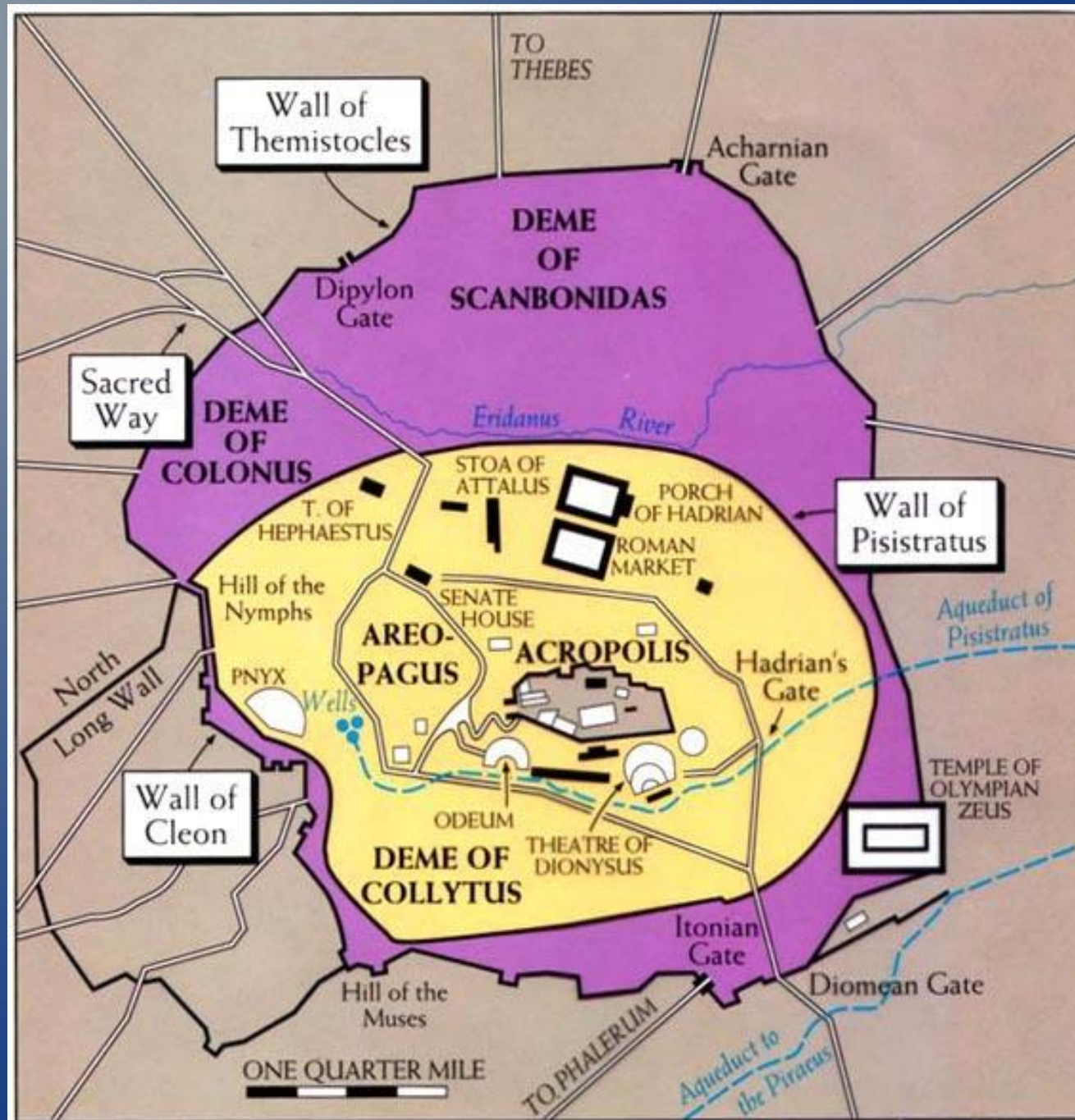


Theban Cycle

Sophocles: *Oedipus at Colonus* (401 BCE)

- An old man making peace with his life (Eumenides) before death
- Establishment of his religious 'hero' status (ability to do remarkable things)
- Propaganda for Athens and the deme of Colonus (Sophocles')

Theban Cycle



Theban Cycle

Seven Against Thebes

- Story of **Eteocles and Polynices**
- Polynices marshals force from Argos along with Tydeus (Arcadia) including Adrastus, Capaneus, Hippomedon, Parthenopaeus and Amphiaraus

Theban Cycle

- The two brothers fated to die at each other's hands (Oedipus' curse)



Seven Against Thebes

What is the message here?



Theban Cycle

Sophocles: *Antigone* (ca 441 BCE)

- Aftermath of father's and brothers' death



Theban Cycle

Sophocles: *Antigone*



Theban Cycle

Sophocles: *Antigone*

- Along with her sister Ismene, helped Oedipus in his exile
- Choosing to commit their lives to their father meant some difficult choices



Theban Cycle

Sophocles: *Antigone*

Creon and Antigone: Mortal vs. Divine Law



Creon and Antigone: Mortal vs. Divine Law

- Creon insists that Polynices is an enemy of the state, and shouldn't receive a proper burial
- Antigone (engaged to Creon's son Haemon) insists upon burying her brother
- Creon outlaws it, catches Antigone in the act
- Creon condemns her to death (walls her inside a cave)
- Antigone kills herself, Haemon kills himself
- Creon repents too late and is left with nothing



Theban Cycle

Antigone

- Sacrificed everything for her family (husband, children)
- Unwilling to submit to Creon ('Power')
- Big question: what happens when human law conflicts with divine law?
- Does Antigone go too far?

Levi-Straus and Theban Cycle

Overvaluing Kinship	Undervaluing Kinship	Men Kill Monsters	Men Are Monsters
Cadmus seeks his sister Europa, ravished by Zeus.			
		Cadmus kills the dragon.	
	The Spartoi kill one another.		
			Labdacus (Laius' father) = lame
	Oedipus kills his father.		Laius (Oedipus' father) = left-sided
		Oedipus kills the Sphinx.	
			Oedipus = swollen-foot
Oedipus marries his mother, Jocasta.			
	Eteocles kills his brother, Polyneices.		
Antigone buries her brother, Polyneices, despite prohibition.			