

Classical Mythology

LLCU 316.010/080



Class 20

The Age of Heroes

Medea and Jason

Readings for Tuesday

Classical Mythology
pages 414-444

Reminders:

- Honors Section assignment due Thursday, May 3rd
- Unclaimed exams available at end of class
 - Same instructions as last time
 - Look over addition
 - Ask if you have any questions about the grading
 - Average: upper “B”

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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The Legend of Jason: Pelias' Death



The Legend of Jason

What does a hero do after his quest?

The Legend of Jason

- Medea and Jason settle into their lives at Corinth
- They have two children together
- Both Jason and Medea attempt to be domesticated



The Legend of Jason

But then...

- .Jason seeks a legitimate Greek marriage (mirrors Classical Athenian laws – no foreigners allowed citizenship)

- .**Creon** ('Power') agrees to give his daughter **Glauce** – “Blue (eyes)” – to Jason

- .With a legitimate royal marriage, Jason would be set for life and achieve his goals

The Legend of Jason

What is Medea to do?

The Legend of Medea

- Medea argues with Jason: she had done *literally* everything for him, but now he throws her aside
- Jason responds that he did her a favor by bringing her to Greek from a barbaric land
- Medea can do nothing to stop him
- Prepares a “wedding gift” for Glauce, Jason’s bride, a crown/robe imbued with caustic poison
- Glauce and Creon both die



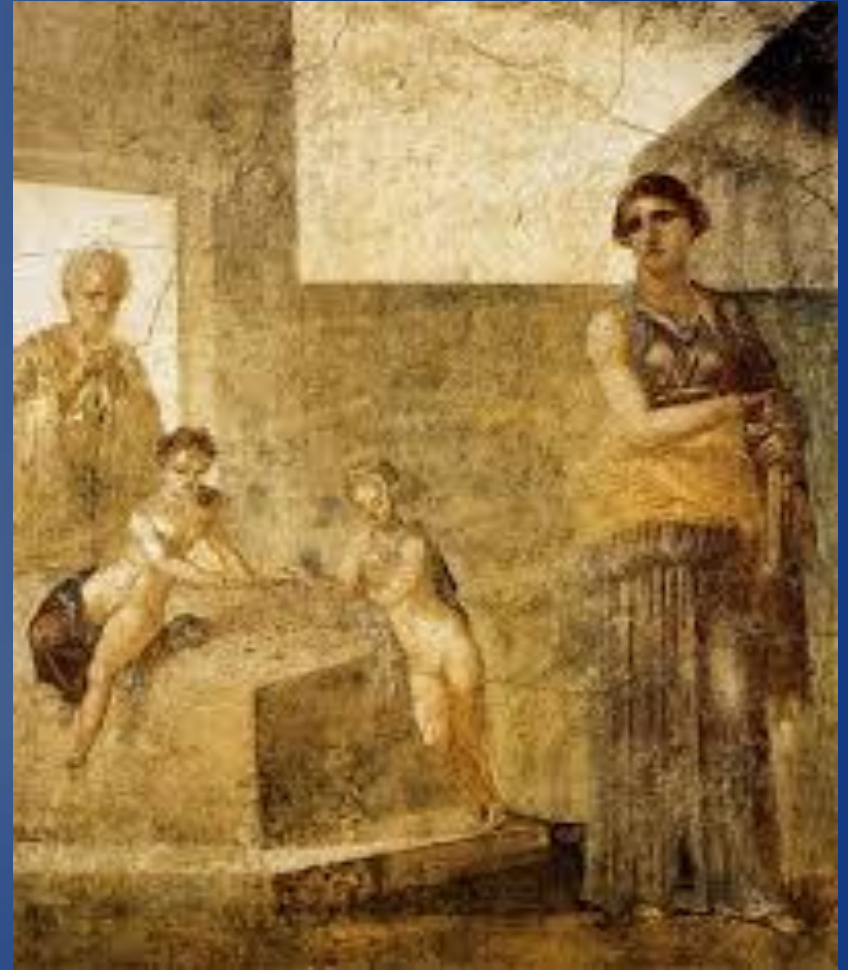
The Legend of Medea

Medea and Jason's children deliver the crown to Glauce



The Legend of Medea

- What can Medea do now?
- She's a foreigner who has murdered the princess and king
- Her husband has left her
- She has two children now complicit in the murder (they delivered the crown to Glaucus)



The Legend of Jason

Euripides' *Medea*

- Perhaps first author to have Medea kill her children
- Reasons for doing so are vague:
 - to take revenge on Jason?
 - to prevent her children from being persecuted by the Corinthians?
 - to prevent her children from becoming like their father?



Medea

Eubulus (4th century BCE Comic Poet)

“Oh, honoured Zeus, shall I ever say something unkind about women?...They are the best possessions one can have. Medea was an evil woman, but Penelope was a good thing; maybe someone might criticize Clytemnestra, but I'll set Alcestis against her. Maybe someone else might criticize Phaedra – but by Zeus, there must be another good wife! Who? Oh, poor me, I've run out of good women, and I still have so many bad ones to talk about.”

The Legend of Medea

Euripides' *Medea*



The Legend of Medea: Modern Stagings



The Legend of Medea

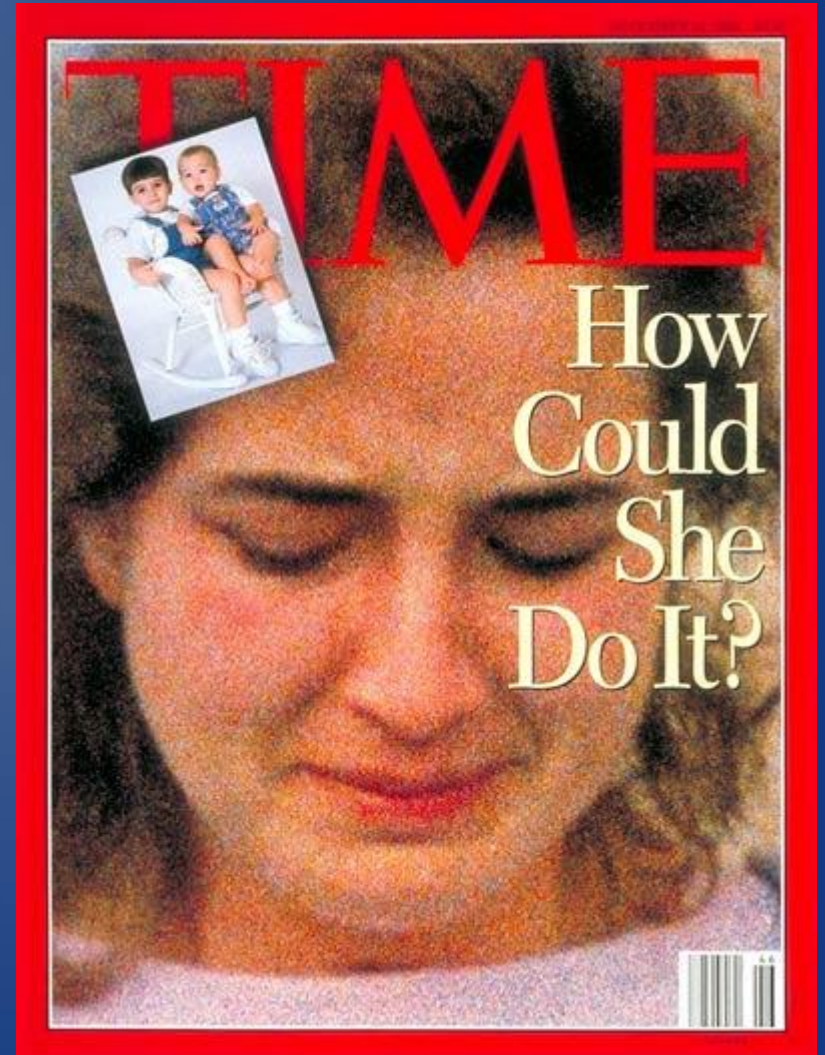
Christy Sheats (2016)

- Some media has portrayed her as a “modern day Medea”
- Killed her two daughters amongst a divorce dispute with her husband Jason Sheats



The Legend of Medea Susan Smith (1994)

- Killed her two sons with the hopes of winning back her wealthy boyfriend
- Washington Post describes the “Medea Syndrome”



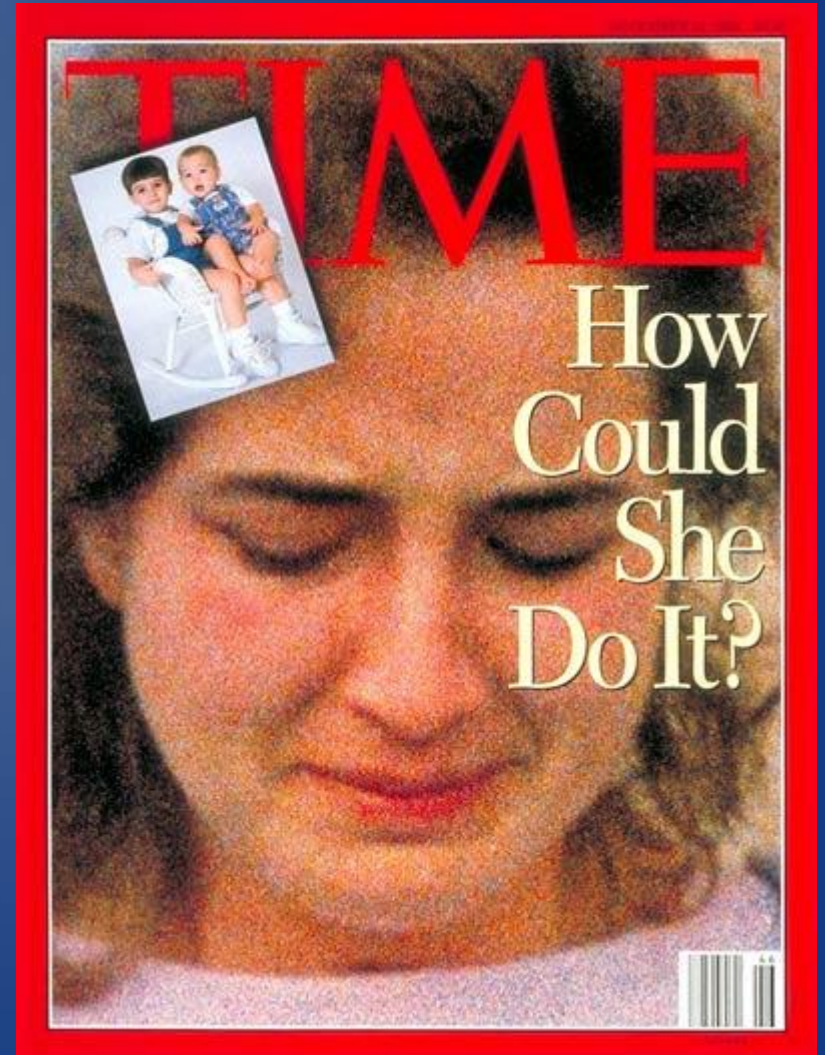
The Legend of Medea

Susan Smith (1994)

“This is the archetypal formula of betrayal and revenge -- and ultimate tragedy. When Susan Smith, the 23-year old South Carolina mother confessed to police that she drove her two sons into a lake where they drowned, she became the nation's modern Medea.

Like a Greek chorus, we are furious that this woman would have captured our sympathy with her racist kidnapping fantasy. Horrified that a mother could do this to her own children. And mystified.

But to those who work with high-risk families, the Medea-like figure is no stranger...”



The Legend of Medea

The Conclusion of Euripides' *Medea*



The Legend of Medea

Euripides' *Medea*

- At the end of Euripides' *Medea*, Medea summons a serpent chariot of her grandfather Helios
- A mechanical device (a crane) lifts her up to the sky as she escapes
- the crane is usually reserved for gods/goddesses (hence the term *deus ex machine* – “god from the crane”)
- After other adventures, she eventually returns home to Colchis to rule (gives rise to the “Medes” and the Persian Empire)



The Legend of Medea

- No certain accounts of her death (old age? spirited away?)
- Late sources suggest that she *did* die and married Achilles in the underworld



The Legend of Jason: What is he without Medea?



The Legend of Jason: What is he without Medea?

- Some say that he committed suicide in despair
- Most common ending has him withering away in Corinth
- Hungry to relive his past glories, he regularly visits his ship the *Argo*, now on blocks as a tourist attraction
- One day, while sitting under the ship, the rotten prow breaks off and falls on his head...killing our dear hero Jason



Theban Cycle

(or “Theban Saga”)

Cycle:

A collection of stories (usually poems) based
on a theme

Theban Cycle

Some themes of an epic “Cycle”:

- *atē* (rash action) of ruler that brings personal downfall
- A successor must fight for his rightful place (and pattern repeats)
- Sense of fatalism (notice role of Delphic oracle in these stories)

Theban Cycle

Road map:

- Cadmus (founder of Thebes)
- Laius (king of Thebes and father of Oedipus)
- Oedipus and Jocasta (his mom-wife)
- Eteocles, Polynices, Antigone, and Ismene (the children of Oedipus)

End of the House

Theban Cycle



Thebes today:
Thanks, Alexander the Great...



Theban Cycle

Zeus and Europa

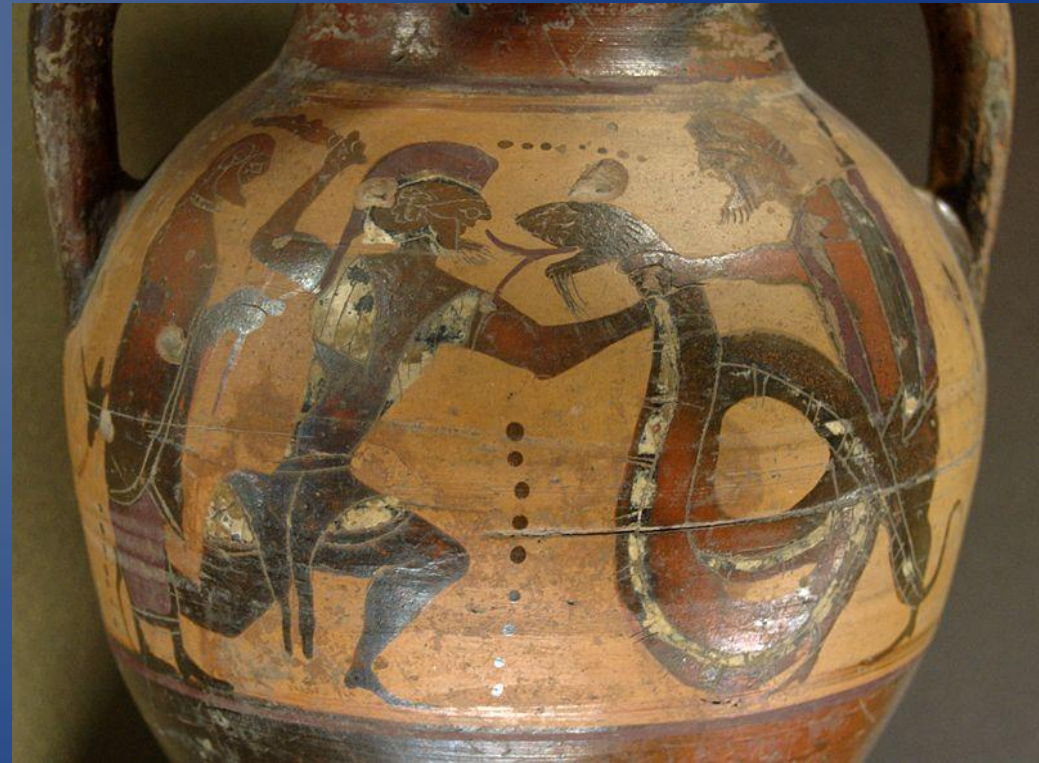
- Zeus tricks Europa (from the East – Phoenicia) in the form of a bull
- She gets on his back and he ferries her to Greece
- Her brother Cadmus goes in search of her
- Told by an oracle to give up on the search, and instead to establish a city where a cow was resting



Theban Cycle

Cadmus and Serpent

- Cadmus encounters a serpent
- Kills it, and sows its teeth in the ground to produce citizens for his new city
- They turn out to be hostile



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



Theban Cycle

Descendants of Cadmus (+ Harmonia)

- Semele (Dionysus), Autonoe, Agave (Pentheus), Ino
- After Pentheus' rule > Labdacus > Laius
- Zeus + Antiope = Zeuthus and Amphion (brothers take throne from Labdacus)

Theban Cycle

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

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

