

Perseus and the Legends of Argos

At that time Argos excelled all the cities in the land that is now called Hellas.

—HERODOTUS, *Histories* 1.1

Hera and Phoroneus

Argos was connected in history and in legend with Corinth and Thebes, and the Argive sagas demonstrate the many contacts of Argos with the eastern Mediterranean, notably the Levant and Egypt. While some of the legendary heroes are associated with a particular city of the Mycenaean Argolid (e.g., Heracles with Tiryns, Diomedes with Argos, and Perseus with Mycenae), it is often hard to distinguish between the separate cities. We shall generally use “Argos” to cover the whole Argolid and its cities.

Argos was the greatest center in Greece for the worship of Hera, and the **Heraeum**, the hill where Hera’s sanctuary stood, was the religious center of the whole area. In the Argive saga, the first of men was Phoroneus, who established the kingdom of Argos and decided in favor of Hera in the contest for the land between Poseidon and Hera. In anger Poseidon dried up the Argive rivers, one of which, Inachus, was the father of Phoroneus. Ever after, the Argive rivers have been short of water.

The richness of Argive saga can be seen from the opening lines of Pindar’s tenth *Nemean Ode*:

Sing, O Graces, of the city of Danaüs and his fifty daughters on their shining thrones, of Argos, dwelling of Hera, a home fit for the gods; bright is the flame of her brave deeds unnumbered in their excellence. Long is the tale of Perseus and the Gorgon, Medusa; many are the cities of Egypt founded by the wisdom of Epaphus; Hypermnestra kept to the path of virtue and alone did not draw the dagger from its sheath. Fair Athena once made Diomedes divine; in Thebes the earth, struck by Zeus’ thunderbolts, received the seer Amphiaraüs, the storm cloud of war. Ancient is Argos’ excellence in beautiful women; Zeus revealed this truth when he came to Alcmena and to Danaë. (1–11)

PERSEUS

Danaë and Acrisius

Of the heroes of Argos, first in importance, though not in time, is Perseus. His great-grandfather Abas had twin sons, **Proetus** and Acrisius, who quarreled even before their birth.¹ Acrisius, who became king of Argos itself while Proetus ruled Tiryns, had no sons and only one daughter, Danaë; an oracle foretold that her son would kill Acrisius. To keep her from having children, Acrisius shut Danaë up in a brazen underground chamber in his palace, but Zeus loved her and entered the chamber in the form of a shower of gold and lay with her.² Their child was Perseus, and Danaë kept him in the chamber for four years, unknown to Acrisius, until he was discovered from the noise he made while playing. Acrisius refused to believe that Zeus was the child's father and put mother and child into a chest which he set afloat on the sea. The chest floated to the island of **Seriphos**, where the fisherman **Dictys** (whose name means "net") found it and rescued Danaë and Perseus, giving them shelter in his own home.

Polydectes

Now Polydectes, brother of Dictys, was king of Seriphos, and as Perseus grew to manhood, Polydectes fell in love with Danaë, who refused him. He then summoned the leading men of the island to a banquet at which each man had to present him with the gift of a horse. Perseus boasted that he could just as easily give Polydectes the Gorgon's head. Polydectes, eager to get Perseus out of the way, took him at his word and ordered him to perform the task. In despair Perseus wandered to a lonely part of Seriphos, where Hermes and Athena came to his help with advice. That two gods should assist him is remarkable; Hermes belongs more to the Peloponnese than Athena, and it is very likely he was originally the hero's only supernatural helper. Since the Gorgon's head was an attribute of Athena's aegis, she may very early have been associated with the saga, for much of the literary tradition was in the hands of Athenians.³ Pindar, writing in the first half of the fifth century B.C., makes Athena the sole helper: "Breathing courage, Danaë's son joined the company of blessed men, and Athena was his guide" (*Pythian Odes* 10. 44–46).

The Graeae

Advised by Hermes and Athena, Perseus made his way to the three daughters of Phorcys, sisters of the Gorgons and old women (in Greek, the *Graiai*) from their birth. They alone could tell Perseus the way to some nymphs who possessed



Danaë and the Brazen Tower, by Edward Burne-Jones (1833–1898); oil on canvas, 1888, 94 × 44½ in. Danaë, in the foreground, watches the raising of her future prison, a solitary and beautiful figure contrasted with the small figures of the distant workmen and the soldier and courtiers speaking with Acrisius. The tragedy of her coming immurement is heightened by the tension between the two regions of the painting, the garden with its exquisite flowers and the palace courtyard, through whose iron-studded gate she must soon be taken to a life bereft of freedom and human company. (*Culture and Sport Glasgow [Museums]: Edward Burne-Jones, Danaë or The Tower of Brass*)



TWO ROMANTIC IDEALISTS

Gustave Moreau (1826–1898) and Edward Burne-Jones (1833–1898) were profoundly inspired by classical mythology, and their art goes far beyond the morality and symbolism of many of their contemporaries. Moreau's great paintings *Prometheus*, *Oedipus*, and *Heracles* probe the meaning of the classical texts and express a heroic humanism appropriate for the challenges of his time. In England, Burne-Jones, who shared with William Morris the ideals of the pre-Raphaelite movement, returned again and again to the classical myths to support his search for purity and beauty in the past. In *Danaë and the Brazen Tower* (1888), he focuses on Danaë's feelings as the tower is built, not on the lust of Zeus and the anger of Acrisius. In the *Pygmalion Series* (1878) and the *Perseus Series* (1887), Burne-Jones turns from the anger of the gods and the violence of the hero to the ideals of piety, chivalry, and chaste love. Yet these very ideals involve the psychological and sexual tensions that Freud (1856–1939) at the same time was beginning to explore.

certain magic objects he would need for his task, but would part with their information only under duress. Among them they had one eye and one tooth, which they passed to one another in turn. Perseus got hold of these and gave them back only when the Graeae had told him the way to the nymphs. From the nymphs he received three objects: a **Cap of Invisibility**, a pair of **winged sandals**, and a **wallet** or **kibisis**.⁴ From Hermes he received a **scimitar**, the only object given directly by Hermes.⁵

The Gorgons

Perseus now flew to the Gorgons, whose home was somewhere on the edge of the world, usually situated in North Africa.⁶ Pindar, who makes Perseus go to the far north, gives a beautiful description of the perfect life lived by the Hyperboreans, and his account is one of the few continuous passages in extant classical Greek literature that deals with the legend of Perseus (*Pythian Odes* 10. 29–48):

Not with ships nor on foot would you find the marvelous road to the assembly of the Hyperboreans. Once did Prince Perseus feast among them when he entered their palace; he found them solemnly sacrificing one hundred donkeys to their god. In their feasts continually and in their hymns Apollo especially takes delight, and he laughs as he sees the pride of the animals rearing up. The Muse is always with them and is a part of their customs: everywhere are the maidens' dances, the music of lyres and of the deep-sounding flutes. They bind their hair with golden laurel-wreaths, feasting with joy. Neither disease nor wasting old age has any part in their holy nation. Without labor, without battles, they live, escaping the severe justice of Nemesis. Breathing courage, Danaë's son joined the company of blessed men, and Athena was his guide. And he slew the



Medusa, by Caravaggio (1571–1610); oil on a wooden shield covered with canvas, ca. 1598. The biographer Vasari relates that a young Leonardo da Vinci had once painted a monster upon a shield. That work has been lost, but this painting, commissioned by Cardinal Francesco Maria del Monte, has been seen as Caravaggio's attempt to compete with the legacy of the great Leonardo. It is a tour de force. Though painted on a convex shield the image itself seems to construct a concave space. The fantastical image is rendered with a startling realism. The gorgon Medusa has just been decapitated by the hero Perseus. The wound gushes with blood. The snakes are finely drawn. The face of Medusa seems frozen in the moment of recognition of what has happened. The horror of her gaze is double-edged: both instilling petrifying terror and yet itself trapped in a horrifying realization, as her eyes look down at her missing body. (Scala/Ministero per i Beni e le Attività culturali/Art Resource, NY)

Gorgon and came bearing the head with hair of writhing snakes, for the islanders a stony death.

The three Gorgons, of whom only **Medusa** was mortal, were of terrifying aspect, and those who looked upon their faces were turned to stone.⁷ They were asleep when Perseus came; guided by Athena and looking only at the Gorgon's reflection in his brazen shield he beheaded Medusa and put the head in the *kibisis*. As she was beheaded, **Chrysaor (He of the Golden Sword)** and **Pegasus**, the winged horse, sprang from her body. Their father was Poseidon; Chrysaor became father of the monster Geryon, and Pegasus was prominent in the legend of Bellerophon. According to Ovid, his hoof struck Mt. Helicon and caused the fountain Hippocrene (Horse's Fountain) to gush forth, which from then on was loved by the Muses and associated with poetic inspiration.

This is not the only association of the legend of Medusa with music and poetry. Pindar, praising Midas of Akragas, winner in the competition for flute-playing at the Pythian Games, tells how the music of the flute was invented by Athena in imitation of the Gorgons' lament for the death of Medusa (*Pythian Odes* 12. 5–23):

Receive this garland from Delphi for glorious Midas who is the best in Greece in the art that Pallas Athena wove from the deadly lament of the impetuous Gorgons, which Perseus heard pouring from the snaky heads



Danaë and the Chest. Attic red-figure lekythos, ca. 470 B.C.; height 16 in. The infant Perseus, already in the chest, reaches up to his reluctant mother. Acrisius gestures impatiently to her to get in. In her left hand Danaë holds a perfume jar. (*The Providence Painter, Red Figure Lekythos, about 470 BCE, slip-decorated earthenware, Toledo Museum of Art, Purchased with funds from the Libbey Endowment, Gift of Edward Drummond Libbey, 1969.369. Photo Credit: Toni Marie Gonzalez, Toledo Museum of Art*)

that could not be approached. Grievously he labored when he killed the third part of the sisters, bringing death to sea-girt Seriphos and its people. Indeed he brought the darkness of death to the Gorgons, god-born children of Phorcys; and grievous did the son of Danaë make the banquet of Polydectes, and the long servitude of his mother and her forced love. His spoil was the head of fair-cheeked Medusa. And he, we say, was born from the shower of gold. But when the virgin Athena had delivered the hero dear to her from these labors, she made the music of the flutes with its many notes, so that with instruments she might imitate the loud-sounding lamentation that was forced from the hungry jaws of Euryale.⁸ This was the goddess' invention, but she gave it to mortals and called it "the music of many heads." 10

Perseus was able to fly away from Medusa's sisters unharmed, since he was wearing the Cap of Invisibility. In the original version of the saga, he probably returned directly to Seriphos and dealt with Polydectes.

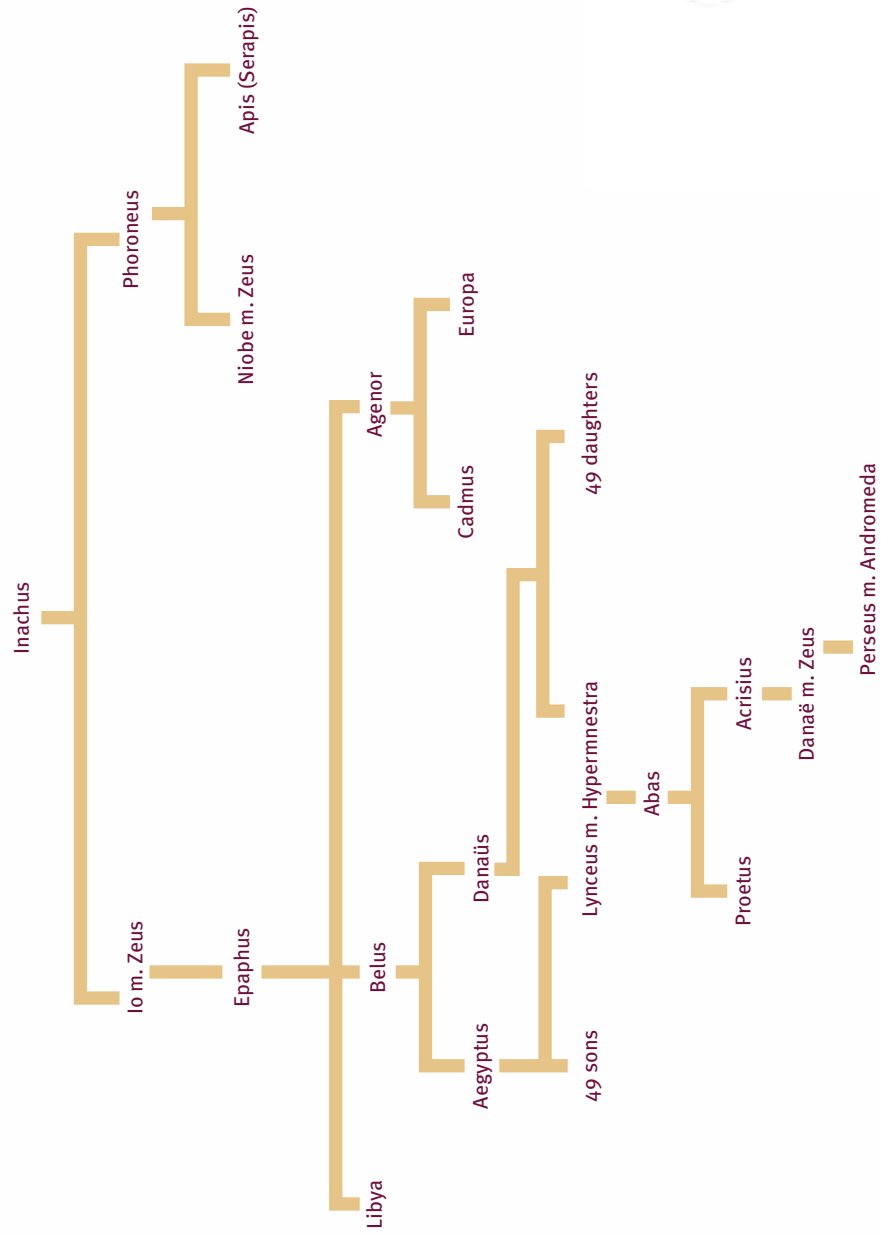


Figure 21.1 The Ancestry of Perseus



Perseus Beheads Medusa. Limestone metope from Selinus, ca. 540 B.C.; height 58 in. To the left stands Athena, wearing a *peplos*. The winged horse, Pegasus, springs from the body of Medusa. The frontality of the figures compels the viewer to confront the horror of Medusa's face and the necessity for Perseus of avoiding her gaze. (*Scala/Art Resource, NY*)

Andromeda

At a very early stage the legend of Andromeda was added to the story of Perseus' return. Andromeda was the daughter of King **Cepheus** and his queen, **Cassiopea**. Their kingdom is variously placed in **Ethiopia** or in the Levant.⁹

Cassiopea boasted that she was more beautiful than the Nereids. As a punishment, Poseidon flooded Cepheus' kingdom and sent a sea-monster to ravage the land. Cepheus consulted the oracle of Zeus Ammon and learned that the monster could be appeased only if Andromeda were offered to it, chained to a rock. Cepheus obeyed; but at this point, Perseus came on the scene and undertook to kill the monster if he could marry Andromeda. Making use of his sandals and cap, Perseus killed the beast with Hermes' scimitar and released Andromeda, whom he married, using the Gorgon's head to deal with the opposition of Cepheus' brother **Phineus**, to whom Andromeda had previously been betrothed. After their son Perses was born, Perseus and Andromeda flew back to Seriphos, leaving Perses behind as heir to Cepheus' kingdom.



Perseus and Andromeda, by Titian (ca. 1487–1576); oil on canvas, 1554–1556, 70½ × 77¾ in. For six centuries the subject of Andromeda has been a favorite vehicle for painters' interpretations of the theme of "Beauty and the Beast." Titian correctly gives Perseus winged sandals and *harpe*. In many versions Perseus is confused with Bellerophon and rides on the winged horse, Pegasus. (Bridgeman Art Library International—New York)

The Origin of Libyan Snakes, the Atlas Range, and Coral

A number of other details have been added to the original account of Perseus' flight with the Gorgon's head. The Gorgon's blood is said to have dripped through the *kibisis* as Perseus flew over Libya, and from the drops sprang the infinite number of poisonous snakes that (according to the belief of the ancients) infested the Libyan desert. The giant Atlas, supporter of the heavens, refused to show Perseus any hospitality, and Perseus turned him into stone with the Gorgon's head. His head and body became a mountain range, his hair the forests upon the mountains. As an example of these ingenious additions to the legend, we give Ovid's description of the creation of coral (*Metamorphoses* 4. 740–752):



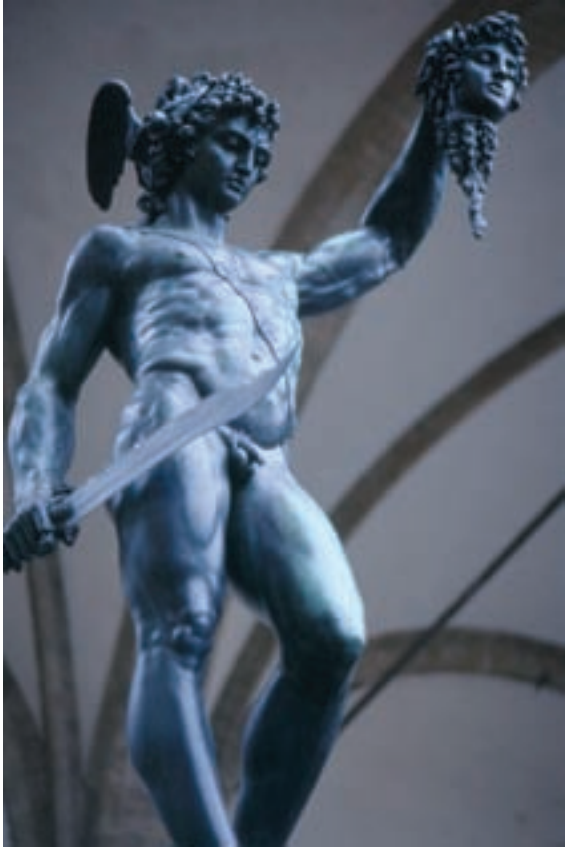
Perseus Attacks the Sea-Monster. Etruscan black-figure hydria from Caere (Cerveteri), ca. 530 B.C.; height 15¾ in. Perseus brandishes a rock in his right hand and Hermes' scimitar (*harpe*) in his left. The seal, octopus, and dolphins remind the viewer of marine realities. The absence of Andromeda reflects the artist's narrative priorities, and it has been suggested that the hero is Heracles, rather than Perseus. (*Private Collection*)

Perseus washed his hands, bloody from his victory over the monster, in the sea. So that the hard sand should not damage the snake-bearing head, he made the ground soft with leaves and branches that grow beneath the sea's surface, and on these he placed the head of Medusa, daughter of Phorcys. The branch that a few moments before had been fresh and filled with living pith absorbed the monster's power; and touched by the head, its leaves and stems took on a new hardness. But the sea-nymphs tested the miraculous change on other branches and rejoiced to see the same thing happen. Now coral still retains its same nature: it grows hard in contact with air, and what in the sea was flexible becomes stone out of the water.

10

Polydectes and Perseus' Return to Argos

When Perseus and Andromeda reached Seriphos, they found that Danaë and Dictys had taken refuge at an altar from the violence of Polydectes. Perseus displayed the Gorgon's head before Polydectes and his assembled followers, who were all turned to stone. Thus Danaë was released and returned to Argos with Perseus and Andromeda. Perseus made Dictys king of Seriphos and returned the magic objects to the gods—the sandals, *kibisis*, and cap to Hermes (who returned them to the nymphs) and the Gorgon's head to Athena, who set it in the middle of her shield.



Perseus, by Benvenuto Cellini (1545–1553). Cellini was a Florentine goldsmith and sculptor. This work, which stood (as it still does today) in the Loggia dei Lanzi looking out upon the Piazza della Signoria, the heart of the Florentine republic, was the product of the artist's maturity and is considered his masterpiece. It was commissioned by Cosimo de' Medici, the Duke of Florence between 1537 and 1574. Prior to this the Medici had been expelled from Florence by the republican government, but they would eventually return to power. In this work Cosimo sought to celebrate the triumph of the Medici and to underscore the threat of what would happen to their enemies. Perseus stands as the invincible hero who has just decapitated the head of Medusa. He carries the curved sword or scimitar that he received from Hermes and the winged sandals and cap of invisibility (also winged perhaps to resemble Hermes' own cap) that he received from the Graeae. The heroic figure is exalted in triumph, yet his head and eyes are turned down, both to prevent his looking upon the head but also to suggest a modesty at the apex of victory. The modeling of Perseus' body and the decorations of the plinth, which is an exquisitely wrought work of an art in itself, display the perfection of the bronzemith's art. (Timothy McCarthy/*Art Resource, NY*)

The Death of Acrisius

When Acrisius heard that Danaë's son was indeed alive and returning to Argos, he left the city and went to the city of Larissa, in Thessaly, where Perseus followed him. Here Acrisius met his long-foretold death. Competing in the athletic games which the king of Larissa was celebrating in honor of his dead father, Perseus threw a discus that accidentally killed Acrisius. He was buried outside Larissa and honored there as a hero. Perseus, having shed kindred blood, returned not to Argos but to Tiryns, whose king Megapenthes, son of Proetus, exchanged kingdoms with him. As king of Tiryns, Perseus founded Mycenae, where in historical times he was honored as a hero. The children of Perseus and Andromeda became kings of Mycenae, and from them descended Heracles and Eurystheus.

Saga and Folktale

An interesting feature of the saga of Perseus is its number of folktale motifs, more than in any other Greek saga. These include the magic conception of the hero by the princess, his mother; the discovery of the hero as a child by the noise of his playing; the villainous king and his good and humble brother; the rash promise of the hero, which he performs with the aid of supernatural helpers and magic objects; the three old women from whom advice must be sought; the Gorgons,



The Baleful Head, by Edward Burne-Jones (1833–1898); oil on canvas, 1887, 60½ × 50¾ in. This is the final painting in Burne-Jones' Perseus cycle, undertaken for Arthur Balfour in 1875 and based on William Morris' poem "The Doom of Acrisius" in *The Earthly Paradise*. Ten full-scale watercolor cartoons (now in Southampton, England) and four oil paintings (now in Stuttgart, Germany) were completed. Burne-Jones sets the lovers in an enclosed garden. They look at the reflection of the Gorgon's head, held up by Perseus, in the surface of a marble-sided well. The bright, open eyes of Andromeda provide a dramatic contrast to the reflection of Medusa's closed eyes. The scene is an intense yet peaceful close to the turbulent adventures of Perseus, who still must face the battle with Phineus. (Staatsgalerie Stuttgart © Foto: Staatsgalerie Stuttgart)

imaginary monsters of ferocious ugliness; and, finally, the vindication of the hero and the punishment of the villain. Nevertheless, Euripides found material in these tales for two tragedies, *Danaë* and *Dictys*, both now largely lost.

OTHER LEGENDS OF ARGOS

The Family of Inachus

Among the earliest legends of Argos are those of the family of Inachus. The daughter of Inachus was **Io**, much of whose story is told on pages 94–98 in connection with Aeschylus' *Prometheus Bound*. Beloved by Zeus, Io was changed into

a white cow by jealous Hera and guarded by all-seeing Argus until Hermes, sent by Zeus to rescue her, cut off Argus' head. Next Hera sent a gadfly to madden her; but after wandering the earth, Io came at last to Egypt, where Zeus restored her human form. There she gave birth to a son, Epaphus, destined to be the ancestor of the hero Heracles.

From other sources we learn that the Egyptians identified **Epaphus** with **Apis**, the sacred bull. And his birth did not bring an end to Io's wanderings. Hera had Epaphus kidnapped, and Io set out in search of him, eventually finding him in Syria. She now returned to Egypt, where she came to be worshiped as **Isis**.

The story of Io has many confusing elements. An Apis was said to have been a son of Phoroneus and to have given the Peloponnese its ancient name of Apia; after his death he was identified with **Serapis**, who is the same as the Egyptian bull-god Apis. Io was originally a goddess; she may have been a form of Hera herself. Herodotus, who himself visited Egypt, said that Isis was identified there with Demeter, whose image Io had first brought there, and that Isis was always represented as a woman with cow's horns (in this being similar to the great Phoenician moon-goddess, Astarte). The versions of Io's legend vary considerably, and Aeschylus gives different reasons for her departure from home and her transformation in his two plays the *Supplikes* and *Prometheus Bound*. She was originally a divine being rather than a human heroine, and through Greek contacts with the East (especially Egypt), she was assimilated into Egyptian mythology.

The Descendants of Io

Through Epaphus, Io was the founder of the royal families of Egypt and Argos, as well as those of Phoenicia, Thebes, and Crete. Epaphus himself was said to have founded many cities in Egypt, including the royal city of Memphis. His daughter was Libya, who gave her name to part of North Africa; he also had twin sons, Agenor and Belus. The former became the Phoenician king, father of Cadmus (founder of Thebes) and Europa (mother of the Cretan king Minos). Belus stayed in Egypt and also became the father of twin sons, Aegyptus and Danaüs, who, like their descendants Proetus and Acrisius, were bitter enemies.

The Daughters of Danaüs

Aegyptus and Danaüs quarreled over the kingdom, so that Danaüs was compelled to leave Egypt. Sailing with his fifty daughters (the **Danaïds**) via Rhodes, he came to Argos, where he peaceably established himself as king. (His subjects were called after him **Danaï**—the term by which Homer generally refers to the Greeks.) Now Aegyptus had fifty sons, who claimed as next of kin the right to marry their cousins and pursued them to Argos. Danaüs gave his daughters in marriage, but to each he gave a dagger with orders to kill her husband that night. All obeyed, save one only, **Hypermnestra**, who spared her husband, Lynceus, and hid him. As to the sequel, accounts vary; according to the most popular version, the forty-nine Danaïds who obeyed their father were punished in the Underworld by eternally having to fill water jars, through which the water leaked away. According to Pindar, however, Danaüs gave them as wives to the winners of an athletic contest. After a period of imprisonment by Danaüs, Hy-

permnestra was reunited with Lynceus and became the mother of Abas, father of Proetus and Acrisius. Thus the line of descent of the Argive kings from Inachus to Heracles remained unbroken.

AMYMONE

The Danaïd Amymone was sent by her father to search for water and came upon a satyr who attempted to seduce her. She was saved by Poseidon, who then himself lay with her and as a reward caused a spring to burst from a rock with a stroke of his trident. In historical times, the spring Amymone was still shown near Argos.

Other Argive Heroes

Important Argive heroes were the seer Melampus (p. 57) and the heroes who took part in the expedition of the Seven against Thebes. Among these was Tydeus, whose son Diomedes, a leading Greek hero in the Trojan War and the last great mythical prince of Argos, was widely worshiped as a hero after his death. Pindar says that Athena gave him the immortality that she denied Tydeus.

APPENDIX TO CHAPTER 21

Bellerophon and the Chimera

The famous mythological horse Pegasus is sometimes given to Perseus but he really belongs to Bellerophon. Here is his legend, which tells how he received, harnessed, and mounted Pegasus, and performed mighty deeds.

Bellerophon, grandson of Sisyphus, was the greatest of Corinthian heroes. His legend is told in Homer by the Lycian leader Glaucus, when he meets Diomedes in battle. It is set both in the Argolid and in Asia Minor. Bellerophon may even have been introduced into Greek legend from the East.

Bellerophon was only one of several significant heroes associated with the important city-state of **Corinth**. The Corinthian poet Eumelos identified the Homeric “Ephyra” with Corinth. Homer (Iliad 6. 152–159) says:

There is a city, Ephyra, in a corner of horse-rearing Argos, and there lived Sisyphus, who was the most cunning of men, Sisyphus, son of Aeolus. He was father to Glaucus, and Glaucus was father to virtuous Bellerophon, to whom the gods gave beauty and lovely manliness. But Proetus devised evil against him in his heart and drove him out from the people of Argos, since Bellerophon was a better man than he. For Zeus had made him subject to Proetus.

Originally Ephyra was no more than a minor city in the kingdom of Argos (which includes Tiryns, normally given as the city ruled by Proetus), and its rulers, Sisyphus and his grandson Bellerophon, were minor chieftains subject to the king of Argos. By identifying Ephyra with Corinth, Eumelos magnified the status of the city and of its rulers. According to him, Sisyphus became the king of



Bellerophon and the Chimera. Byzantine ivory plaque, fifth century; $8\frac{1}{2} \times 3\frac{1}{2}$ in. Bellerophon rides on Pegasus to the right and thrusts his lance into the lion's mouth, as the monster collapses on its front paws. Its serpent-tail twines round one of the three trees that represent the landscape setting, and the goat's head melds with another. (© *The Trustees of the British Museum*)

Corinth (which had been founded by the son of Helios, Aeëtes) after Medea left. Others make Sisyphus the founder of Corinth. In this way, the hero Bellerophon and his exploits became famous.

Born in Corinth, he left home, perhaps because of blood-guilt after unintentionally killing a brother, and went to the court of Proetus, king of Tiryns, who purified him. There Proetus' wife **Stheneboea** (or Antea, as Homer calls her) fell in love with him. When he rejected her, she accused him before Proetus of trying to seduce her. Proetus therefore sent Bellerophon to his wife's father Iobates, king of Lycia, with a sealed letter that told of Stheneboea's accusation and asked Iobates to destroy Bellerophon. Accordingly, Iobates sent the hero on a number of dangerous expeditions (Homer, *Iliad* 6. 179–193):

First he bid him kill the fearsome Chimera, which was of divine, not mortal, breed—a lion in its forepart with a serpent's tail and in the middle a goat, and it breathed fire. He killed it, trusting in the gods' signs. Next he fought the mighty Solymi, and this was his most violent battle with men. Third, he slew the warrior Amazons. And as he returned, the king devised another

plot against him; he chose the most valiant men in all Lycia and set them in ambush. Not one of them returned home, for gallant Bellerophon killed them all.

So when the king realized that he was truly of divine descent, he kept him there in Lycia and gave him his daughter and the half of his kingdom. 10

Bellerophon became the father of Hippolochus (Glaucus' father) and of Isandrus, who was killed fighting the Solymi, and of a daughter, Laodamia. She was loved by Zeus and by him became the mother of Sarpedon, whom Patroclus killed at Troy. Laodamia was "killed by Artemis in anger," and Bellerophon ended his days in sorrow; "hated by the gods he wandered over the Alean plain alone, eating out his heart and avoiding the paths of men" (Homer, *Iliad* 6. 200–202).

In Homer, Bellerophon is the hero who performs certain tasks and wins the prize of a kingdom and a princess. His tragic end, to which Homer refers in vague terms, is the theme of Euripides' tragedy *Bellerophon*, in which Bellerophon tries to mount to heaven itself and fails.

Both Euripides and Pindar introduce the winged horse **Pegasus** into the myth of Bellerophon. Poseidon gave it to him, but he could not master it, as it stood by the Corinthian spring Pirene, until Athena appeared to him in a dream and gave him a magic bridle with golden trappings (Pindar, *Olympian Odes* 13. 63–92):

Much did he labor beside the spring in his desire to harness the offspring of the snake-girdled Gorgon, until the maiden Pallas brought him the gold-accoutred bridle, and quickly his dream became reality. "Are you sleeping," said she, "King, descendant of Aeolus? Come, take this charm to soothe the horse and sacrifice a white bull to your forefather Poseidon, the Tamer of Horses."

These were the words which the maiden with the dark aegis seemed to speak as he slept; he leaped to his feet and took the divine object that lay beside him. And strong Bellerophon, after all his efforts, caught the winged horse by putting the gentle charm around its mouth. Mounting it straightway, he brandished his arms, himself in armor of bronze. With it he slew the archer army of women, the Amazons, shooting them from the unpeopled bosom of the cold upper air, and he slew the fire-breathing Chimera and the Solymi. His fate I shall not mention; the ancient stalls of Zeus' stable in Olympus shelter the horse. 10

Bellerophon, then, met his end in attempting to rise too high. This theme of Euripides' *Bellerophon* is also expressed in Pindar's words (*Isthmian Odes* 7. 60–68):

If any man sets his eye on a distant target, he is too short to reach the brass-paved home of the gods. For winged Pegasus hurled his rider Bellerophon, who wished to enter the palaces of Heaven and join Zeus' company.

Euripides wrote two tragedies on Bellerophon's saga. His *Bellerophon* included the hero's fall from the heavens and ended with the announcement that Pegasus had been "harnessed to the chariot of Zeus, carrying his lightning."¹⁰ He also

wrote a *Stheneboea* (now mostly lost), in which Bellerophon returned to Tiryns after his labors in Lycia and killed Stheneboea by luring her onto Pegasus and throwing her down as they flew high over the sea. For Euripides, Bellerophon's end is that of a human being who fails in a high endeavor, but originally he must have been punished, like Tantalus and Ixion, because he abused the friendship of the gods.

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- Wilk, Stephen R.** *Solving the Mystery of the Gorgon*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2000. An exploration with illustrations of various facets of the legacy of the Gorgon and her imagery from ancient to modern times.
- Woodward, Jocelyn.** *Perseus: A Study in Greek Art and Legend*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1976 [1937].

PRIMARY SOURCES

Sources in the Chapter

Homer	<i>Iliad</i> 6.152–159, 179–193 (Bellerophon)
Pindar	<i>Isthmian</i> 7.60–68 <i>Nemean Ode</i> 10.1–11 <i>Olympian Ode</i> 13.63–92 <i>Pythian Ode</i> 10.29–48; 12.5–23
Ovid	<i>Metamorphoses</i> 4.740–752

Additional Sources

Aeschylus	<i>Suppliant Women</i> (legend of the daughters of Danaüs)
Apollodorus	<i>Library</i> 2.4.1–2.4.5
Herodotus	<i>History of the Persian Wars</i> 2.91

ADDITIONAL MATERIAL

CDs

- Opera*: Haydn, Michael (1733–1806). *Andromeda e Perseo*. Fodor et al. Savaria Symphony Orchestra, cond. Pál. Bongiovanni. Based on Corneille's tragedy *Andromède* and Ovid's *Metamorphoses* but ending happily with Perseus forgiving his rival Phineus.
- Cantata*: Lekeu, Guillaume (1870–1894). *Andromède*. Bryant et al. Orchestre Philharmonique de Liège, cond. Bartholomée. Ricercar. Lyric poem for soloists, chorus, and orchestra about Perseus' rescue of Andromeda.
- Music*: Vivaldi, Antonio (1678–1741). *Andromeda Liberata*. Kermes et al. Venice Baroque Orchestra, cond. Marcon. Arkiv Production. Others, not only Vivaldi, may have been involved in the composition of this Venetian serenata.
- Song*: Guettel, Adam. "Pegasus." Rock song. In *Myths and Hymns*. Various artists.



For more comprehensive listings of all of the following materials, consult the companion website at www.classicalmythology.org.

Nonesuch. Includes “Saturn Returns with Reprise,” “Icarus,” “Hero and Leander,” and “Sisyphus.” Guettel is the composer of the acclaimed musical *Light in the Piazza*.

DVD

Film: Clash of the Titans. Warner Brothers. Harry Hamlin and Burgess Meredith among a stellar cast (including Laurence Olivier as Zeus). Special effects by Ray Harryhausen. Warner Home Video. One of the best movies based on classical mythology.

NOTES

1. For Proetus and Bellerophon see the Appendix to this chapter.
2. The Roman poet Horace (*Odes* 3. 16) changed Danaë’s prison to a brazen tower, which has become the traditional version.
3. The Athenian historian Pherecydes (early fifth century B.C.) is an early authority for the saga.
4. The word *kibisis* is not Greek and in antiquity was believed to be Cypriote.
5. Hermes wears the Cap of Darkness in the Gigantomachy and is regularly portrayed with winged sandals. Athena wore the Cap of Invisibility at Troy (*Iliad* 5. 844–845).
6. It is also placed by others in the far north, among the Hyperboreans, or in the far south, among the Ethiopians.
7. For their origin, see pp. 172–173.
8. The Gorgon Euryale is mourning for her dead sister, Medusa.
9. In the first century A.D. the marks of Andromeda’s fetters were still being shown on the rocks near the city of Joppa.
10. Euripides is following Hesiod, *Theogony* 285–286.