

Perseus and Andromeda (IV.663-764)



Perseus & Andromeda - J.A. Thelot, 1686

Perseus and Andromeda (IV.663-739, 753-764)

As Perseus wends his way back to help his mother Danaë rebuff the unwanted advances of King Polydectes on the island Seriphus, he sees a girl tied to a rock and asks her what her confinement is all about. Before Andromeda can tell all the details, the monster approaches. Her mother Cassiope had boasted that she was more beautiful than the Nereids, who had complained to Neptune; the god sent a flood and a sea beast to ravage the kingdom of her husband (Andromeda's father) Cepheus. To appease the beast Cepheus had been advised to tie his daughter to a rock just off the coast. Perseus strikes a quick agreement with the distraught parents and in a battle scene that stretches over nearly thirty lines he defeats the wild beast and frees the maiden from her chains to great acclaim. In a brief section omitted here, he puts down Medusa's head on some seaweed, which is turned to stone; when the sea nymphs touch other seaweed with the new material, it also hardens and thus coral is created; this event fulfills Ovid's need for a metamorphosis in the story. The closing scene is the great marriage ceremony that follows.

Perseus stays with his new wife, who bears him a son Perses, who will become the eponymous ruler of the Persians. He then takes his family to Seriphus and turns King Polydectes and his court to stone with the Medusa head he had used to transform Atlas into a mountain range; he then dedicates the head to Minerva/Athena, who places it on her aegis or shield, where it is found in almost all depictions of the warrior goddess. Then he returned to his birthplace in Argos where his grandfather Acrisius continues to avoid him, fearing a prophecy that Danaë's son would kill him. Finally convinced of the young man's good will, Acrisius agrees to a discus throwing contest, which turns fatal when Perseus' throw accidentally strikes the king. In sorrow Perseus flees to Asia where his son becomes the ruler of the people who become the Persians. Interestingly, each of the characters in this story, Cephesus and Cassiope, the parents, Perseus and Andromeda, the young lovers, and the sea beast, known as Cetus, all are eventually turned into constellations.

Outline:

663-677 Perseus flies over Ethiopia, sees Andromeda chained to a rock, and falls in love.

678-690 Asked to tell her story, Andromeda barely gets to tell why she is there when a sea monster appears.

691-705 Andromeda's parents agree to marry her to Perseus if he saves her.

706-734 Perseus battles and kills the monster.

735-739 The crowd goes wild as the girl is released.

(740-752 Medusa's head hardens seaweed and the nymphs playing leads to the creation of coral.)

753-764 Perseus sacrifices to three gods and the marriage ceremony begins.