

Medusa

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A well-known ancient image of the Gorgon Medusa, according to common interpretation, belongs to a vile monster, which could turn people into stone. She was killed by the hero Perseus, which became one of his greatest feats. However, the details of her biography and the sources, as a matter of fact, allow another interpretation. Medusa, from this point of view, is not a monster, but a poor victim of the will of gods and prejudice of people.

According to various and often contradictory sources, Medusa is a female creature. The legend of the Gorgon Medusa was finally formed by the 8th century B. C. In the era of Homer, Gorgon was such a famous character that he only mentions her in his poems without describing her history, which was, apparently, well-known to the Ancient Greeks. Zeus was putting fear in heart of his enemies by the shield of Athens – the aegis with the picture of Gorgon's head.

No one of the ancient authors mentions how she obtained her outstanding abilities. In Homeric times the images of Medusa spread everywhere: they could be seen on the coins, wine glasses, bread forms, over the front doors at the hearth in many Athenian homes. It was believed that a drop of her blood in an amulet would protect its owner from misfortune. After Homer a significant contribution to the development of the image of Medusa was made by Hesiod (late 8th –early 7th century B. C. E.

). In his poem Theogony and Shield of Heracles two of the five Gorgon sisters are mentioned: Stheno and Euryale, the monsters living at the edge of the world. Hesiod also describes the killing of Medusa by Perseus. Compared

with a brief mentioning by Homer this is important information. Aeschylus (525-456 B. C.

E.) adds some more details. In *Prometheus Bound* he describes the sisters of Medusa: winged women with snakes in place of hair who could turn the person looking at them into stone. In two other tragedies by Aeschylus a disgusting image of Medusa symbolizes the evil and ruthless nature of man. The notes made by Pindar in the telfth Pythian Ode are of particular interest concerning the story of Medusa. In the passage on the origin of the flute, he says that the tool was created by Athena under the impression of Gorgon's sisters crying on the day of her death.

Pindar describes the beauty and attractiveness of Medusa, which has inspired romantic poets for centuries. Also, he shared important information that the victims of Gorgon were turned into stone by looking into her eyes. A valuable contribution to the development of myths about Medusa was made by Euripides (the 5th century B. C.) In *Ion* one of the characters of this poem (Creusa) describes two small hollow amulets inherited from her father (Erechtheus), who, in turn, received them from Athens. Each of the amulets contained a drop of Medusa's blood.

One of the drops had healing properties, and the other was the poison from the snake's body. Euripides, like Pindar before him, described Medusa as a double-natured creature. The most known complete and significant description of Medusa, which had a great impact on world mythology, was made by Ovid in the fourth and fifth books of his *Metamorphosis*. In his story the main character was a bold, brash and violent hero Perseus. To

emphasize the importance of Perseus' victory over Medusa Ovid speaks in detail about the origin and the abilities of his monstrous serpent-haired opponent. The description made by Ovid was followed by most of the writers and artists of the subsequent centuries.

Due to the writings of Ovid the story of Medusa became a legend. The daughter of Phorcys and Ceto, Medusa is the youngest of Gorgon sisters (according to Ovid, there were two senior Gorgon sisters, who were born old and shared one tooth and one eye). Although all three junior Gorgons are snake-haired, only Medusa had a wonderful gift to bewitch people by her look (both in a positive and in a negative sense of the term), and she was the only mortal of the three sisters. Ovid presents Medusa's genealogy in detail and mentions that she was cursed by a jealous and envious Athena. He tells that in her youth Gorgon was very beautiful and her hair was her main pride.

Though, everything changed after Poseidon raped her in the temple of Athena. Enraged by desecration of her sanctuary (and perhaps being jealous of the beauty of Medusa) Athena turned her beautiful hair into snakes. The virgin warrior was furious, and not only turned a poor girl into a winged monster, but gave her a terrible power to turn to stone every living being. Poor Medusa was forced to hide her ugly face from other people, and she escaped to the ends of the earth, a lost remote island. Years passed, but Athena still could calm down. Finally, she found the hero Perseus, son of Zeus and Danae, who accidentally dropped a promise to bring the head of Medusa.

Athena accompanied him on this feat, having warned him not to look at Medusa, but only at her reflection, and gave him her polished shield. Hermes also helped Perseus and gave him a sickle, with which he could cut off Medusa's head. Perseus also got hold of winged sandals, a black cap of invisibility and a magic bag to the head of the victim. Equipped in this way, Perseus flew to the country of the Hyperboreans, where among the petrified statues of people and animals he saw the sleeping Gorgon. Looking in the mirror shield reflecting Medusa, Perseus cut off her head with a sickle.

Conclusion A lot of details of the above-mentioned story show Medusa as a poor victim.

First, her only fault was her beauty. Due to it, she was raped by Poseidon and cursed by Athena. Though she was turned into a monster, she did not want to harm people and voluntarily escaped into an exile to a distant island. However, people did not want to leave her alone. More and more “ heroes” came to the island in order to kill her without any apparent reason, but merely out of the desire to become famous.

They were turned into stone, which, of course, was an act of self-defense. She was not even considered as a living being by Perseus when he made a bet on her head. This murder was not even an act of revenge, but a selfish killing of an innocent creature.