



Jocasta: The Mother-Wife of Oedipus

Victoria Grossack , Alice Underwood

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Young and beautiful, born to a powerful family, Jocasta is destined to become Queen of Thebes... trapped in a loveless marriage, she cannot save her firstborn child from her husband's wrath... left alone on the throne after her husband's death, she must contend with the dangerous Sphinx and contrive a plan to protect her city... charmed by a foreign prince, she does not know she is falling in love with her own son...

"This well-written book, about an intelligent, observant and questioning woman to whom big events happen, is riveting." Associated Press

Jocasta: The Mother-Wife of Oedipus Details

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Author : Victoria Grossack , Alice Underwood

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From Reader Review Jocasta: The Mother-Wife of Oedipus for online ebook

Chris says

Disclaimer: For the sake of honesty, I picked up this book after one of the authors sent me an email. She had noticed that I placed a later book in the series on my TBR shelf and recommended reading them in order.

The concept behind this novel is interesting, and the writing is compelling. Taking the story of Oedipus, Grossack and Underwood recast it through the lenses of Jocasta, adding more depth to a woman who was known solely for her relationships.

The writing is good, and in particular, the inversions and solving of riddles of the story – such as the Sphinx, are great. They get huge bonus points for the Sphinx twist. It's strange then, that the central character of Jocasta is one that needs more depth. In some ways, she is just as unknowable in the novel as she is in the myth. Part of this is because of her reaction when the truth about her second husband is revealed. Quite frankly, shouldn't there be some more internal conflict, and part of it is that I am never quite sure why the people seem to think that she is a good queen, other than the fact that she shows herself to the people. It isn't a lack of skill on the part of the author, Jocasta's brother Creon is a fascinating done character, but perhaps limits of the character herself. It is this limit that makes the good, but not great. I shouldn't find myself wondering more about Niobe, say, than Jocasta.

I will, however, be reading other books in this series.

Crossposted at Booklikes.

Terence says

[for example, the Sphinx is Melanthe, the half-Egyptian Maenad priestess of Dionysus, who poses the potentially f

Becky says

I admit to being mostly unfamiliar with the Oedipus myth before I read this book. My knowledge was pretty much limited to "man kills father then marries his mother". I didn't know any of the details or nuances to the story. So I can't really say whether this is an accurate retelling or portrayal of the myth. I can only really discuss this story on its own, and in that light, it was good.

I had three major issues with this book (and incest wasn't one of them).

First, I didn't much care about Jocasta as a teen in the beginning of the book. I didn't dislike her, I just didn't care about her at all, which is in my opinion worse than dislike. She lived in ancient Greece, in a time where arranged marriages were common and expected, and yet her attitudes seemed out of place and far too modern. She rebels against a switch in her marriage plans after the first one becomes impossible, on the grounds that she's never even met the man she's now supposed to marry. So? Throughout history, women and girls have been married off to men (usually much older men) that they'd never met.

In a society where almost everything is at the will of the gods, and prophecy holds sway over all, why should one girl feel like she's being mistreated by her father handing her off to a different man to become her husband? Why should she expect anything else? This just seems like a more modern mindset than I would expect from a girl who lived then, as if she was expecting a marriage for love and respect instead of one arranged for power, alliances, or "the will of the gods".

Also, there was insta-love. Not a fan the insta-love. Probably this was due to the prophecy, which stated that she would love her husband and bear him lots of little Thebans, but it just felt like modern teen behavior to fall in love with the first attractive, powerful man to show her some attention.

Finally, the terms "my lady", "my lady queen", "my lord", and "my lord king" used throughout the book felt out of place to me. In a conversation with Victoria Grossack where I brought this up, she said, "[Regarding] Lord/Lady – Bronze Age Greece definitely had both nobles and kings/queens. We decided on these terms as the most accessible, giving the correct flavor without having readers stumble over unfamiliar terms such as wanix and spartoi."

While I can understand this decision, for me, it didn't work. Every time I would see "my lady queen" or the like, I would feel as if I was in England rather than Ancient Greece. Rather than helping immerse me in the world, they kick me right out of it. I'd personally rather "wanix" and "spartoi" be used if those were appropriate. As long as I'm given an explanation for an unfamiliar word, either outright or by context, then I'll acclimate to their use.

But those complaints aside, I did eventually begin to gel with the writing, and once Jocasta was out of her teens, I definitely began to like her more. There was a lot of political maneuvering and religious practices that give us an idea of what living back then might have been like. I liked how things were hinted at, and left interpretable.

I liked also how the more fantastic elements of the story, the prophecies and the Sphinx, were brought into the realm of the real world, and it was shown how these things could have really happened.

Overall, this was a good book. I would have liked a little more information pertaining to what happened after, but I thought that the ending was appropriate.

Two things to remember:

- 1) Never ask the Tiresias to dinner.
- 2) Thebes is fickle.

Kimberly says

I have 82 books that I have purchased from library book sales staring at me from my bookcases. The majority of them have been on the "Bestsellers" list. Many of them I am grateful to have discovered through Goodreads. I am looking forward to reading every one of them. So imagine my surprise when, after years of paying \$1-\$4 for books, I decided to not only pay for a book at regular price online, but I bumped the book to the front of my TBR pile! Clearly Jocasta's Gods were influencing me. Let me tell you, they didn't steer me wrong! I loved everything about the book. I do not want to give any spoilers away, so I will let you read others more in-depth reviews. Chrissie's review on Historical Fictionistas is what originally peeked my interest. Just know that you will not only get your money's worth, but you also get extra bonuses as well. If you are visual like me, there is map of the city of Thebes in the front of the book for reference. You also can go to www.tapestryofbronze.com to HEAR the correct pronunciation of names. You don't even want to

know how I was pronouncing some of them in my head an hour into the book. Hearing it made it more enjoyable. Along with the book being a page-turner, I like that I learned about the different Gods and what each was worshipped for. Definitely worth the bump up to the front of my TBR pile and money well spent :)

Chrissie says

NO SPOILERS!!!

On completion: The myth about Oedipus will, after reading this book, always mean more to me than just the twist and turns of the legend. It is strange to feel Jocasta's love for this man whom we know is her son. I think Jocasta's emotional reaction when she discovers the truth would be interesting to discuss in a group. A reader, knowing more than what Jocasta knows at certain points, is given a curious perspective; we feel both her passion and a definite disgust. We experience with her the discovery of the truth, an emotional ride indeed!

Intellectually the reader learns about the different gods of ancient Greece:

There before us, each in their proper place, were the gods of the royal house of Thebes. Mighty Zeus and his wife and sister Hera, the king and queen of heaven. Beautiful Aphrodite and the warrior Ares, the parents of Harmonia. Demeter, goddess of the harvest and Dionysus, descended from Kadmos himself. Sly Hermes, hardworking Hephaestus, and wise Athena. Graceful Artemis, goddess of the hunt. And her twin brother Apollo, lord of healing And Poseidon, who was not just the lord of the seas, but the god of horses and the dreaded shaker of the earth. (85%)

These separate gods and goddesses are listed here, but many of them have also played pivotal roles in this myth. I have learned of their idiosyncrasies, the rituals and sacrifices they demand and how mortals perceive them. How people reacted to their gods' plans and what we today feel when life throws stones n our path are really quite similar!

Reading this book was lots of fun; it has been both entertaining and informative. I do wish the authors had ended with an authors' note. The myth has several variants. An expose explaining their choices would have been interesting. I was told by one of the authors, but will others get this information?

I have read 53% of the book. I wondered when I began if it would sag in the middle and if the writing would be choppy due to there being two authors, each writing alternate chapters. The answers are NO and NO again! I see absolutely no difference between the different chapters. Rather than being choppy we have two authors who have put their heads together and given us double what perhaps one author could have provided.

Yesterday I read it many hours while traveling in a car. I looked up at one point and said to my husband, "This is **good!**" The story is exciting. Years and years ago I read Bullfinch's book on mythology. It certainly didn't bring to life the ancient myths as this does.

One fabulous quality of this book must be pointed out. I keep thinking this over and over again. The authors have made a time-period, with beliefs so foreign to our own, seem real and completely acceptable! How can I empathize and feel so close to these characters believing in fate and numerous gods. How is this possible to convince you I have chosen to quote a passage:

Democharus began the announcement, his rich voice booming across the heads of the crowd. "People of

Thebes! The city gates are shut! And they will remain so, until a new king for Thebes is found!".....

The herald continued. "In accordance with the will of Dionysus, as made known to us through his servant the Sphinx Melanthe: the new king of Thebes will be chosen through contest of wit! The contest will take place in three months' time, on the last day of winter; and the marriage will occur eight days later! These are the words of our regent, lord Creon! And of the god Dionysus!"

Silence held for a moment; then a ripple coursed through the crowd. Soon the common folk began to cheer; we had captured their interest. The contest would offer drama and spectacle, the wedding feasting and merriment. I relaxed my grip on the thyrsus. The peasants would no longer mutter that Thebes needed change: we were giving them change, by the will of a popular god – but this change we could control. (53%)

In addition I feel secure in the knowledge that the historical myth is properly conveyed. Many historical media sites have acclaimed the trustworthiness. I, myself, cannot judge, so I trust their views. So I am learning and enjoying myself at the same time.

Some of the lines are so perfect:

Jocasta you're right, you're only part of a tapestry. But that's true for all of us. We are all strands woven into gods' great tapestry. You want to choose your own place, your own colors. But none of us has that choice - our fates are already decided. (15%)

What a beautiful way of expressing fate. Over and over again I am struck by how ancient beliefs seem feasible to me, a modern person. I am also stuck by the thought that these people were living 1500 B.C. It is amazing to be there among them living so long ago.

ETA: after reading the first chapter.

One more thing: Jocasta is young, only 14 when she will wed the Crown Prince Alphenor. A woman/child of this age will certainly have a vivid imagination about love and sex. And yet she looks at her betrothed and feels NOTHING!

He approved of me, he seemed kind; surely these were good attributes in a husband. Yet still I felt nothing. His touch was warm but otherwise unremarkable. He squeezed my fingers lightly, and released my hand.

I must be dazed, still, from the prophecy - that had to explain my utter lack of interest. I felt as if I floated in a void, removed to some great distance. (7% through the book)

This struck a chord with me. This is the first meeting between the two. I happen to think that two people who love each other feel something at the start, and here there was nothing, nothing to build upon. Can you imagine one minute being told by the Prophetess Tiresias that she would marry, have a loving relationship and many children, and then she feels nothing..... Her confusion!

Religious beliefs current at this time period do not feel bizarre and strange to the modern reader. I loved Creon's explanation of historical events. His statements first appear heretical, and then he explains why there aren't at all! Or are they?! He stumps Jocasta and has the reader smiling. You have characters of a different time-period, but their thoughts and queries are very similar in nature to our own. If you follow the dialog you

realize the ancient belief in numerous Gods and fate are not diametrically opposed to modern thought. It all depends on how you think it through. In any way, the reader is left feeling comfortable with these characters who have a religious belief system so different from our own.

Most of us know the general story of Oedipus, the man who killed his father and slept with his mother. This is general knowledge. I have always been curious to know more details. The poet Homer refers to this myth, and it is originally described in plays by Sophocles written 500B.C. The myth itself is said to have occurred during the Greek Bronze Age, which I believe is about 1500 B.C. Many of us already know more of the mythical details. I will not mention them here. that could be a spoiler for some. The full story is more involved, and although there are several versions, particularly of the ending, reading this book will put meat on the bones of my sketchy knowledge. I want to fall into the story, be there in the ancient times and experience firsthand what happens.

I want a novel to grab me from the start. Honestly, why must one struggle through the first 100-150 pages? I have only read the prologue and the first chapter. It is exciting from the very start! Jocasta, Oedipus' mother and wife will die before dawn breaks. And so she tells to her daughter, why and how these terrible events have come to pass. Jocasta had not known that Oedipus, her husband, was also her son. How did this happen? That is the story. Right smack in the first chapter you are there when the Prophetess Tiresias speaks the words of Apollo and declares who will be the next Queen of Thebes. The prophetess is blind; this is a requirement for the position. She blinded herself! There is a choice between four girls. Each girl has a different temperament and through the authors' words you have already begun to understand their temperamental differences. What kind of person is Jocasta's brother, Creon, who bring to her a vial of poison so she need not be torn limb by limb at dawn? I feel I have already begun to distinguish different character traits of the individuals. I see the clothes they are wearing. The prophetess, Queen Niobe, Jocasta, her brother, Jocasta's nurse: each are each dressed differently in clothing appropriate to their rank. Their actions and words depict different character traits. Thebes is described: the food served, the house construction, the sun. the noises... Well, I like it. This is how I want a novel to start.

At the site presenting this book and several other books which the authors have written together, I have found a map, a pronunciation guide (where I can hear the correct pronunciation not just read it) and an interesting article on how two authors work together. That does seem tricky, doesn't it? Here is a link to the site where all this is available: <http://www.tapestryofbronze.com/index...> I always need a map.

I want to see if the suspense and my engagement will continue. I want to see if the story lags in the middle. I want to see if I can distinguish which author has written which chapter, or will the writing be smooth? So far I am more than pleased. So far this is a great read.

BEFORE READING:

I have for a long time been curious to know more about the Oedipus myth. Then I heard about this book, and saw the following reviews at Amazon:

A real page-turner . . . a wonderfully nuanced novel that repays previous knowledge of its subject matter - but never requires it" -- Historical Fiction Review, August 15, 2004

...very easy to stay engrossed in Victoria Grossack and Alice Underwood's story of Oedipus, told by his

wife/mother Iokasta -- Ancient History About, February 1, 2005, N S Gill

An absorbing, quasi-historical portrait of ancient Greece ... well-balanced update that maintains the original mythic suspense. -- Kirkus, May 2005

Enthralling from cover to cover ... I'd recommend "Iokasta" to anybody who likes authors who write intelligent stories for intelligent readers. -- Actuarial Review, February 2005

The authors bring the turmoil of ancient Greek mythology to life...not only educational, but a page turner -- BPC Broadsheet, October 28, 2004

I read a snippet and liked the prose style. And then I happened to meet Victoria Grossack, one of the two authors, here at GoodReads! She wanted to know my honest opinion of her book. Of course I was terribly flattered. So now I am reading this book which she has lent to me via Kindle! Nice huh?!

Libbie Hawker (L.M. Ironside) says

Jocasta: The Mother-Wife of Oedipus is a terrific re-imagining of the familiar Oedipus myth, set in "the real world," so that the myth's more fantastical elements feel as if they could have happened in real, non-magical history. Authors Grossack and Underwood have taken meticulous research into ancient Greek history and blended it seamlessly with the particulars of the Oedipus story. It's an enjoyable read, fast-paced and highly accessible, with a narrative voice that's simple enough to appeal to young readers and adults alike (although of course we're talking about the Oedipus story here -- obviously it might not be appropriate for all young readers!)

I particularly enjoyed the creative way the authors worked the riddles of the Sphinx into a believable, real-world setting. (view spoiler)

Other characters in the book were also well-defined. Creon, Jocasta's brother, struck me as being unique and reliable (in terms of character definition) and Antigone was delightful as the surly teen girl. Laius, Niobe, Pelorus, Jocasta's ultra-religious father Menoeceus, -- there were so many well-defined, individual characters in this book.

And that brings me to my chief complaint with the book, and the reason why it rated three stars for me, and not four.

I never felt sympathy for Jocasta, the main character and narrator. She starts out as a deeply self-centered teen girl, so focused on herself...(view spoiler) One of the authors stated in a discussion on the book that their decision to make Jocasta a self-centered teen was a deliberate choice, because of her age at the time. And that decision makes sense, but perhaps they went a bit too far for this reader's taste. Jocasta comes across as so selfish early on that I never found any sympathy for her at all...(view spoiler) I found it impossible to connect with her, so that the emotional impact of the book's well-known climax lost much of its potential power.

On the subject of Jocasta, I found it implausible that she was the beloved of all Thebes. Yes, she was a gorgeous young woman, but what did she *do* for Thebes to earn the oft-mentioned adoration of the people? Many characters in the book assure Jocasta, and she assures herself, that she is an excellent ruler, unlike her drunkard husband Laius. Yet we never see evidence on the page of her just or wise rule. I do not recall any political scenes, in fact, where Jocasta made crucial decisions that set her apart from the other characters as

an excellent ruler. (view spoiler) Her frequent lauding as a great queen -- or at least a more competent ruler than Laius -- felt unfounded to me.

Despite its flaws, this novel had plenty of strengths in its pace and supporting characters. The prose itself was more spare, less richly descriptive, and more "young adult" in tone than I tend to prefer, but that's merely a personal preference. It was well written and stayed true to its style throughout -- an accomplishment in any book, but particularly one that's co-authored. I enjoyed it enough that I look forward to reading the rest of the books in The Tapestry of Bronze series, particularly the one about Chloris and Niobe. And I will continue to harbor my hope that Melanthe will get a novel of her own!

Iset says

In the tradition of Mary Renault's duology *The King Must Die* and *The Bull From The Sea*, Grossack and Underwood have decided to go down the route of taking a classic Greek myth and grounding it firmly in historical reality, and part of the interest in *Jocasta* when one already knows Oedipus' story is not just from seeing how the authors have crafted the prophecy's unravelling, but discovering how they handle and explain the fantastical elements of the myth – how could creatures like the Theban sphinx be grounded in historical reality, and how did Tiresias manage to live so long and switch genders in the Oedipus myth? It's interesting to see what explanation Grossack and Underwood come up with.

It also makes perfect sense that in Grossack and Underwood's version of the myth Jocasta has little or no knowledge of the prophecy passed on to Laius that his son will grow up to murder his father and marry his mother – in the myth it seems harsh to our modern sensibilities that the two parents upon hearing this prophecy would happily agree to expose the baby, and also strange that years later Jocasta would not be able to connect the dots and realise who Oedipus was until it was far too late. (view spoiler)

Although the story of Oedipus is reasonably well known and the ending didn't come as a surprise to me, telling the tale from Jocasta's point of view was a fresh angle on the myth, and the drive to get to the end was still there because as a reader you still want to know how the iconic tale unspools, who discovers what first and how do the confrontations play out and the revelations affect the characters. Reading *Jocasta* really reminded me of reading classic Greek myths as a little girl, there was that sense of warm nostalgia, but there was something different about it: telling *Jocasta* from the first person perspective transformed the epic adventure tale into something more intimate, and I think really lets the reader connect with Jocasta and her story.

The writing style was clear and easily accessible, there were the usual odd typos once in a while but nothing that really made me stumble or interrupted the flow, and it was easy to get caught up in the story and tell yourself that you'll read just ten more pages and have it turn into fifty pages. I think the story would be as easily accessible and enjoyable to young adults and teens as I found it, although since it does on one or two occasions deal with quite adult themes I would steer clear of recommending it to younger children. The level of detail in the descriptions dropped in just enough of the quirky information of the environment and daily life of the world that the characters moved in to intrigue and delight without becoming overblown, longwinded or pompous.

The reason why I didn't give the novel full possible marks is really because a couple of reasons, nothing major that marred the story or really glared, but just niggles. I would have liked a little more epic scope - exploration of the wider world in which Thebes sits - and exploration into the dark hearts of the characters and their driving motivations. Also I felt like the story went by too quickly - I wanted more! More going on, more filling in of the years in Jocasta's life that we only get an overview of in the book - but this was a good

niggle in a way because I wanted more of what I was getting.

All in all, enjoyable, entertaining, a really interesting take on the Oedipus myth.

JoLene says

The novel **Jocasta: The Mother-Wife of Oedipus** is a retelling of the myth of Oedipus from the woman's point of view. I wasn't sure that I would enjoy this story, as the Oedipus myth is not one of my favorites -- partly due to the ick factor. However, this re-telling focuses on the entire life of Jocasta from her teen-age years to her death and the story makes it seem somehow plausible for the events to take place. One of the things that I really loved is that the mystical elements of the story were given real world explanations, but I don't want to give them away in the review.

The story reads a bit like a young adult novel (which I love to read so it's not a put-down), going from vignette to vignette, but for me, without some of the deeper connection to the character of Jocasta. The reader follows Jocasta as she matures from a teenager who has just been chosen to marry the prince to her life during her 40 year reign as Queen of Thebes. I understand how events could have happened, but I didn't really like her very much. Also, she talks about how she is a great Queen, but I didn't really see a lot of example of her being a good queen. I suppose that might have slowed down the story.

The authors have done an amazing job of weaving period details into the fabric of the story. However, because the story is told from in the first person, sometimes there is not a lot of explanations for why things were done a certain way. The role of the gods features prominently throughout the work and I enjoyed the descriptions about how the gods played together and with the humans.

All in all, it was a good story about Bronze age Greece. Although I already knew the main plot points, the authors managed to keep the suspense. Also, I should mention that this book was co-written by two authors --- this was the most seamless collaboration that I've ever seen. I hope to pick up some of the other novels in the Tapestry of Bronze series soon.

Julia Gallagher says

I was fortunate enough to win the e-book version of this novel in a group giveaway at Historical Fictionistas. I got a bit behind having been down for the count with the stomach flu last week, but I was looking forward to reading this book. I was a little nervous that it would be a bit dry, and I'm happy to report that this wasn't the case. The book read fast for me, and I found myself immersed in Jocasta's world. Despite an interest in mythology, I knew little more than the basic story of Oedipus prior to reading this one. I love how the authors took the story and expanded it into a novel told from Jocasta's point of view.

It's one of those stories where you know what happens, so it's really about the journey rather than the destination. And this journey is a good one!

Holly Weiss says

Even if you don't know the story of Oedipus in ancient Greek mythology, this take on "how it may have unfolded" rewards greatly. Jocasta, queen of Thebes is given a human side. Jocasta and her brother Creon are embroiled in political intrigue. She wants both love and the best for Thebes, struggling with the conflict the two bring. The authors take the Greek myth and demystify it. Tension and suspense drive the plot. The period detail is impressive. What appears to be a heavy subject is remarkably illuminating and accessible.

There will be two sequels highlighting other figures from ancient Greece.

Read as part of the Historical Fictionistas Featured Author program.

Belles Livres says

This book is one of those, whether you know the story or not, you will enjoy. It is one where you feel you are with the characters right away, inside the story, in their scenes. The characters are all vibrant and different: Jocasta, Creon, Laius, Oedipus, the Tiresias (three different Tiresiases!), the Sphinx, and even the various servants.

The heroine, Jocasta, is sympathetic and believable. She's beautiful, of course, and although I have a slight prejudice against the tendency of authors to make their characters beautiful, I don't think the story would work otherwise. At least the authors don't make her perfect – she hates her husband's mistress, who is more trapped in her bad situation than Jocasta – but she is charming. I was reminded a little of the Diana-Charles-Camilla triangle, with Jocasta in the position of Diana. But don't let that comparison stop anyone from reading this!

When Oedipus appears, she does fall rather quickly in love, to which some might object. But attraction between many people is instantaneous, and in this case it is more believable because on one level she recognizes him.

Many scenes really grabbed me. The birth of Oedipus; Oedipus's riddle-scene with the Sphinx; Jocasta's temptation when she realizes that Pelorus-Tiresias has figured out her secret. Mostly this is a book about secrets. They all have them, and eventually they all get exposed.

One small quibble because I read the Niobe prequel trilogy, which I also heartily recommend: the authors changed the spelling from Kreon to Creon. Both are transliterations, so I guess it doesn't matter.

Some may think that with all these hard names, that it's going to be a hard book. It is not a hard book. Nor is it a shallow book. Despite the suck-you-in nature of the story, deeper issues are explored. Many Greeks had an attitude that your score at your death determined whether or not you led a happy life – but Jocasta challenges this, and challenges those around her, to live and love despite what the Fates have planned.

Sarah says

Engrossing story, very well written. I read it from the original edition, then gave it to a friend, and it went out of print before I could get another copy... glad to see it's available again.

Amelie says

super intense ... almost painful (but in a good way)

LemonLinda says

Even though this book is steeped in Greek mythology, it reads much more like historical fiction than fantasy. Those who are connected to the Greek Gods are seen as humans, albeit royal humans. And the story of Oedipus is told through the eyes of Jocasta, his mother-wife and Queen of Thebes. For those who previously knew the story this becomes a most readable and reasonable explanation of their relationship and how it could have come to be. For those that do not know the mythology, read it and you will be totally absorbed in the story.

Melisende d'Outremer says

The book begins with Jocasta facing a crucial turning point in her life and so she recounts to us all her tale. The book begins well and culminates in the final few chapters. Not once was I tempted to put the book aside due to lack of interest - this story will hold your interest until the very end. If only I could have read it in one sitting I would have. A must read for those with an interest in the much maligned women of Greek mythology.
