

MEDEA WITH CHILD

**“AMAZING SIGHT.
SHE’S A BARBARIAN”**

The word “**Barbarian**” derives from the Greek *βάρβαρος* (*bárbaros*), used to define people whose language they did not understand, said to be saying “Bar-bar-bar.”

Simply put, a “barbarian” was anyone whose mother tongue was not Greek.

After the 5th century BCE, the word was used almost exclusively to denote those of the Persian Empire (a long-time enemy of Athens, and the governing body of the land of Medea’s birth).

Here’s the wrinkle: the Persians were in no way “savage, primitive, or uncivilized” in the way we would think of a barbarian today. They may have been thoroughly un-Greek, but they had an extensive history of art, a masterful control of architecture, and a thoroughly civilized culture.

So, what do we take from this? As is so often true, the Greeks dismissed and denigrated anything that was “un-Greek.” Medea came from a country and empire rich with culture, history, and wealth:

This was not a “primitive” civilization, just one Jason could not understand.



THE MEDEA MYTH

A quick summary of the Medea Myth:

Jason and the Argonauts are sent to Clochis to retrieve the Golden Fleece. Medea, daughter of the King of Clochis, falls in love with Jason, helps him retrieve the Fleece, and they flee to Corinth where they have two children. Years later, Jason arranges to marry Glauce, the daughter of Creon, King of Corinth. Medea sends a poisoned wedding gown to Glauce, killing her and Creon, then murders her and Jason’s children and flees Corinth for Athens, where she marries Theseus’ father and has a son. When Theseus returns to Athens, Medea attempts to kill him to protect her own son’s inheritance, fails, and flees back to Clochis, where she retakes the city for her father.

An interesting note:

Euripides’ Medea was the first version of the myth where Medea was blamed for her children’s deaths. In earlier cases, it was sometimes an accident, in others it was ordered by the people of Corinth.



Cast of *Medea with Child* (in the original Greek)

Media: Medea
Chasten: Jason
Crayon: Creon
Glossy: Glauce (or Creusa)
Murmurous: Mermeros
Faires: Pheres

EURIPIDES

Euripides, born between 485 and 480 in the Athenian *deme* of Phyla, was the playwright credited with writing Medea. His father was Mnearchides (Walton 96), most likely a member of a leading family in the *deme* (Sommerstien 48). Playwrights, properly called *didaskalos*, or “trainers,” of the Athenian stage came nearly uniformly from the wealthier, landowning class; without the surplus of time, money, and prestige which came with this rank, the education necessary for this profession could not possibly be procured (Wiles 173). He is credited with writing as many as 92 plays, 19 of which survive today (Sommerstien 49). He is known to have entered twenty two sets of four plays in the Great *Dionysia*, a yearly Athenian festival in praise of Dionysus which in part constituted a large Dramatic competition. There are records of only five first prizes awarded to him in this competition, the last of which was awarded posthumously (Woodruff xvii). He died in self imposed exile in Macedon, in the year 406 (Walton 96).

Works Cited

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