

Andromeda: Myths and Retcon(stellations)

Intro

Jordan: Hi, I'm Jordan.

Kit: And I'm Kit.

Jordan: Welcome to Starry Time, where stars plus lines

Kit: equal stories.

Jordan: Today we're going to be continuing our exploration of the constellation Andromeda with a focus on the history and myths of this constellation.

Background

Kit: Yeah. So as we talked about before on our episodes on Cassiopeia and Cepheus, Andromeda was the princess of Aethiopia. But before we get into her story, let's talk a little bit more about the history of this constellation and what other culture saw in this part of the night sky.

Jordan: Some of the stars that the IAU puts into the constellation Andromeda were once part of an ancient Chinese asterism called Legs, which represented shocker, the

legs or perhaps feet of the constellation the White Tiger. Or maybe it's a wild boar?

Kit: Yeah. So the White Tiger is one of the four symbols in the, uh, of the ancient Chinese sort of astronomy and constellations which included seven mansions or positions of the moon. And so there's this sort of like nested nature to Chinese astronomy which we discussed a little bit in our episode on Cepheus.

Jordan: And other stars in the constellation that we now know in Andromeda were part of other Chinese constellations.

Kit: Right. There isn't a one to one correlation necessarily. Um, yeah. And other cultures saw this part or these stars in a completely different way. So in Arabian astronomy, this is um, part of a great fish. It's Grandmother Spider among the Cree People, uh, Gila monster among the Navajo People, part of, uh, porpoise among the People of the Marshall Islands. And so lots of other things people have seen in the night sky here. I definitely recommend and I will link in our show notes or on our socials, Judy Volkler's website which details some of these other stories, which I know I've mentioned the website before, but I'll be sure to link it again for anyone who wants to um, go on a deep dive for some of those other stories.

Jordan: Excellent. Be sure to check those out if you'd like to learn more. But yeah, this is one of those constellations here that the IAU has determined what stars make it up. And it's pretty arbitrary. So they're, like you said, isn't a one to one correlation with other cultures. All right, well, now it's time to get into the Greek myth of Andromeda, who's also known as the Chained Lady or the Chained Maiden.

Myth Retelling

Kit: Yeah. So, um, just to situate us before, uh, you know, before we get started, in case you didn't listen to some of our other um, episodes. If you didn't listen to Cassiopeia or you didn't listen to Cepheus, um, Andromeda is the daughter of King Cepheus.

Jordan: And first of all, why didn't you listen to those? Because they're out there and you're missing out. So give them a listen. If you like this one, and you're like, oh, I wish I knew more about this person's parents. Well, we have the episodes for you. Just give them a listen. King Cepheus, we had so little to say about him in his myth episode. We instead just diverted the conversation, talked about his great, great, great grandmother, his ancestor Io.

Kit: Right. So Andromeda - daughter of King Cepheus, who's eh And Queen Cassiopeia, who may or may not be more beautiful than all 50, uh, of the Nereids.

Jordan: I mean, she most definitely is.

Kit: Yeah, right.

Jordan: Right. So in prior episodes, we talked about Cassiopeia. And her boast. And of course, the story of Andromeda is linked to that story and it kept sort of intersecting with it. But we want to save the details of Andromeda for her own episode. And in some versions of the myth, Cassiopeia claimed that Andromeda was more beautiful than the Nereids, not Cassiopeia. While in other versions of the story it Cassiopeia making the vain boast about herself. Either way, the Nereids are incensed And Poseidon, King of the Ocean in the Zeus administration, punishes Cassiopeia, Cepheus and their

kingdom of Aethiopia.

Kit: Which, again, is a really excessive. It really does not seem like the punishment fits the crime.

Jordan: To be fair, it's a pretty bold boast, Kit.

Kit: I mean, is it? It's like. It's like being Miss America.

Jordan: Yeah. You shouldn't claim being Miss

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Jordan: America unless you are Miss America.

Kit: Great point. And if you do, your. Your entire town should be flooded.

Jordan: Destroyed even. Yes.

Kit: By a sea monster.

Jordan: Anyways, Poseidon either floods the kingdom as punishment for this heinous crime, that Cassiopeia has committed, or either he sends some sort of sea monster to terrorize their entire kingdom, some sort of sea calamity is coming their way.

Kit: It's really. I mean, it really is truly very extreme.

Jordan: I mean, it's so disastrous that Cepheus goes to the Oracle of Amon for guidance on how to make it stop. He's like, come on. My wife makes one bold claim. She had a few glasses of wine, we were having a nice night, just feeling good about herself. This is what I get. This is what she gets for just having some self confidence. So anyways, he goes to the Oracle of Ammon for some guidance. What the heck am I supposed to do? This punishment does not fit the crime.

Kit: Uh, but the Oracle, the oracles never have good ideas.

Jordan: The Oracle insists that he must chain her to a rock for the sea monster Cetus eat if he wishes for this punishment to end.

Kit: This is like the most Oracle thing that I've everd. Like I just can't.

Jordan: Yep. I mean shocker. The Oracle didn't say Cepheus chain yourself to a rock

Kit: Right?

Jordan: Oh no.

Kit: Right.

Jordan: Never works out that way.

Kit: Mhm.

Jordan: But yes, this is where the idea that we brought up in the Cepheus episode that

he's a bit of a coward comes into play because yes, he abides the Oracle sorta decides yeah, this chaining up of Andromeda to a rock by the ocean, uh, that makes sense to me. So yeah, let's do it. See you later, kiddo. Luckily for Andromeda however, a certain guy, a certain tech savvy hero happens to fly by her right as she's being chained to the rock and sent to death.

Kit: Yeah. And so he, he might be on the winged horse Pegasus or he might be on winged sandals. So he's, he's literally flying by.

Jordan: Right. And Peresus right now he's at the top of his game. He's feel pretty good about himself. I mean he just wiped out the Gorgon Medusa who.

Kit: Right.

Jordan: Been a real thorn in the side for a while.

Kit: And remember that Medusa is the snake hair will turn you to stone, uh, with a look that that's if you're not familiar with Medusa, that's who we're talking about here.

Jordan: We'll get to Peresus later. But he is quote a hero of this story.

Kit: Yeah. We're not gonna deep dive into Peresus because he has his own constellation. And we'll be able to debate his hero status in greater detail when we get to him.

Jordan: So suffice it to say, Peresus sees Andromeda. She's chained to this rock. Thanks dad. She might be naked. And you know what star eyes, heart eyes. Peresus

falls in Love.

Kit: That's how true love works

Jordan: Kit, that is exactly how true love works. Yeah. So Peresus, he rescues her, kills Cetus either with a special sword or he's still carrying around the head of Medusa, like some sort of sociopathic murderer as this trophy. And then again there's a bit of a dilemma. Actually, though, after Peresus rescues Andromeda and wants to marry her because, in fact, before this whole incident, she'd been promised to another person.

Kit: But--and You'd have to think that chaining your daughter to a rock as a sacrifice would nullify any sort of future marital arrangements. But, you know. What do I know?

Jordan: Kit, these were different times. Different times. If she survives, we're gonna honor the marital arrangement. Okay. Anyways, Peresus deploys the Medusa head and turns Andromeda's betrothed, who also happens to be her uncle, into stone. And then the pair, Perseus and Andromeda go off on some additional adventures and rule a kingdom and have between six sons and a daughter, or seven sons and two daughters, depending on the source.

Kit: Yeah, not quite 50 of Nereus and Doris, but still, there's a lot of kids.

Jordan: And that's pretty much all we know about Andromeda. Though, of course, we have more to say about Peresus, and we will.

Myth Analysis

Kit: Yeah. And I think that's kind of the big takeaway about this myth. Um, Peresus is the story. Andromeda is this underdeveloped or undeveloped character with no desires, no agency, nothing to herself.

Jordan: Absolutely. Yeah. She's an archetype. She's a

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Jordan: damsel in need of saving. And her saving is dependent on her attractiveness and Perseus's desire to have her.

Kit: Right. What if she wasn't the daughter of a woman more beautiful than all the Nereids? Would he have even stopped?

Jordan: Real talk? Maybe not. Who knows? I mean. Anyways, there's already an existent analysis of this myth from a feminist perspective that was done by Dr. Adrienne Munich in her book titled *Andromeda's Chains*, which dates back to 1989. There's a pretty detailed argument in this book, and Munich is focused particularly on the depiction of this myth in Victorian art. Her argumentation is linked to this idea of construction of masculinity and femininity and how this story works to reinforce those constructions.

Kit: So, on the one hand, we have Peresus, this hero who's just the bad or monstrous Medusa, who is clearly a misbehaving woman or a woman with power.

Jordan: While, on the other hand, Andromeda is a woman forced into submission, literally, in the form of chains to a rock. She's nude, she's virginal, and yet she's also a

princess, a woman of nobility. Thus, she is worthy of saving and in need of rescue.

Kit: And yet no story of her own. Uh, we don't know anything about her as a person.

Jordan: But this kind of story is not unique to Perseus. We see this a lot with other heroes in quotes of Greek myth. Theseus, Hercules, Jason, and so on. So thinking about this rescue myth and how it serves a particular hierarchy is important, I think.

Kit: Yeah. And there's also been really interesting discussions about Andromeda's race or ethnicity. So in contemporary depictions of her in art, she's white, but Ovid describes her as having dark skin, which would make sense as a princess of Aethiopia, which, of course, might not be exactly where present day Ethiopia is, but certainly was in Africa or even maybe India.

Jordan: And that issue of race is just another layer in thinking about it as a rescue myth.

Kit: Absolutely. And ultimately, I think that what we have here is a myth that reinforces these patriarchal gender norms and situates women not as people with their own lives and choices, but as things to be saved, tamed, won, or, you know, um, defeated in some way.

Jordan: 100%. Yeah. And you could write hundreds of pages about this myth and this archetype and the way it keeps popping up in cultures.

Kit: We'll be sure to link Munich's work on the show notes and on our socials, so be sure to follow us at starrvertimepod on Twitter or, um, starrvertimepod on the Universeodon server of Mastodon.

Jordan: Let's take a quick break, and it's time for us both to ret- constellation this myth.

Retconstellations

Kit: Welcome back to our segment Ret-Constellation. In this segment, we reimagine, reboot, and revise the myth of our monthly constellation in hopes of modernizing, subverting, or deepening the story. Sometimes, though, we just try to make them less cringy. Do you want to start us off this week, Jordan? I know you were really excited about your retcon, so.

Jordan: So my ret constellation brings us all the way back to Andromeda's youth. She's always wanted to explore the oceans. She's been named Andromeda. Mindful of Man. She hates it. She hates being a princess. She really hates being promised to her uncle. And she doesn't have a lot of friends, growing up in this nobility, you could think, maybe Princess Jasmine, maybe Moana. She doesn't have any friends at this point, and she's fiercely independent. She spends her time going to the seashore, where she's walking alone one day and finds a beached baby whale Andromeda names this baby whale Cetus um, and they become best friends, and they grow up together. And Andromeda, again, she hates her parents, her mom's constantly talking about how beautiful she is, and her dad's total milk toast pushover. So she spends a lot of her time actually hanging out with her whale friend Cetus. And eventually they even work out ways to communicate with each other. As time goes on and she gets older, she even takes to riding Cetus at night while her parents are asleep. It's like a dragon, a Water dragon that keeps her company on these lonely nights. But Andromeda, of course,

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Jordan: keeps their friendship secret. Eventually, the time comes where Andromeda is to be promised to her uncle to be married. And you know what, Andromeda? This isn't really what she's been looking forward to. So she actually cooks up a master plan to chain herself to a rock and be saved by her friend Cetus making it look like she's been eaten to get out of the marriage proposal. So in my version, Andromeda is actually the original marine biologist.

Kit: Oh, uh, I love that.

Jordan: Cetus is her best friend and she's also known forever as the Whale Whisperer.

Kit: I love it.

Jordan: So that was my Ret- Constellation.

Kit: Wow.

Jordan: And, um. Yeah. Yeah. Did I spend months thinking about it? Sure. Kit, where did you take this myth? How did you try to reimagine it?

Kit: Well, I. I didn't do as much work on this, which I'm glad you did. Um, basically, my retcon was very simple. It was that, you know, um, everything happens as as before, um, except when Andromeda gets chained to the rocks, she waits until her, you know, family leaves, and then she breaks free. She's able to, like, uh, you know, rip the chains from their rock. And then she fights Cetus with the chains, like, you know. Yeah, like. Like a weapon. Uh, she's able to defeat the sea monster herself. And then she, um, leaves, um, to, uh, join up with Sagittaria. Our, uh. If you don't know who Sagittaria is,

you need to go back to the Sagittarius.

Jordan: Yeah. If you're not aware of our retconstellation extended universe, go back to our first episode, Capricorn, and, uh, start from there.

Kit: Right. Um, basically, long story short, Sagittaria is a centauresse who is, um, in my in my, um, podcast canon, the inventor of the bow and arrow and the leader of the Amazons. And now, uh, takes Andromeda in as well. And, uh, that's it. I didn't really change any of the other parts of the story. I just ignored Peresus. And, um, yeah, not quite as well developed as as yours.

Jordan: Kit, I think we just thought about the story differently. You thought of it as a puzzle piece in your ret constellation Uh, for you this was just like Ant Man 2, but it's not one of the films that's designed to make a billion dollars. But again, I do like that you've cast Andromeda as the heroine. She has some real Xena qualities. I feel like defeating the monster like no Perseus necessary. And that's something we both had come in common with our ret- constellations. Let's at least give Andromeda some agency. Let's at least make her a character worth rooting for, whether she breaks chains and fights monsters, or whether or not she has secret relationships with super intelligent whale monsters. Let's give Andromeda her due, her place, and let her tell a story of her own.

Kit: Absolutely.

Oracle AI

Jordan: Alright Kit. So you've told me yours, I've told you mine. We both did our best to

modernize or adapt this myth. Can you tell us what the Oracle AI had to say about Andromeda?

Kit: Yeah. So I'll give the prompt and then, um, I'll let you do the reading of it because I feel you did such a good job last last time. So, um, we asked Oracle AI to summarize the myth of Andromeda first. Um, and to uh, sort of summarize what they saw as the themes of the myth. And so, um, the Oracle listed as themes of this myth heroism, vanity and hubris, love and marriage, resilience. Um, and I was like u uh huh. So then we asked the Oracle to identify what was problematic about the myth. And in brief, the Oracle identified the following issues. Gender roles, victim blaming, Perseus's violence against the sea monster.

Jordan: Yep.

Kit: Saying nothing about the weirdness that he's married some random person he's just rescued. But fine.

Jordan: Yep. Well, I mean, she's hot.

Kit: Objectification of women, lack of agency for Andromeda, and cultural insensitivity. But I'm not really sure about this last one because the Oracle was like talking about, you know, being judgmental about divine punishment and saying that it might perpetuate bias against that

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Kit: practice. I was like, what?

Jordan: You know, eventually the fumes take over and the Oracles just riding them out and that they can.

Kit: So after we finally got a list of the problematic elements, uh, we asked the Oracle to tell us a one paragraph, um, story of the version of the myth that updates the myth to avoid the problematic features. And um, I'll just say this, that when I asked the Oracle had a meltdown, really struggled, um, had to be restarted. And then once it did start writing again, each word was coming so slowly that I was worried that I was gonna break it again. Um, so with that, that's just all intro. Do you want to um.

Jordan: Kit, it's my honor to speak on behalf of the Oracle. And yeah, it got a lot of the problematic components correct, but I can see how I went with struggling then to tell a story knowing that all of these things were wrong with the original myth. Where do you go from there? If I was an Oracle, uh, it would really test my creativity and improvisation skills as well. But it's my pleasure to speak on behalf of AI Oracle ChatGPT. In a coastal kingdom beset by a fearsome sea creature, a sense of unity and resolve takes hold as the people, led by the resourceful Andromeda, confront this looming threat. With her unwavering determination, Andromeda rallies the kingdom's leaders, setting the stage for a daring plan. In the spirit of collaboration and collective strength, they enlist the aid of the renowned hero Peresus. No longer a tech-savvy every hero authors note, whose wisdom and martial skills prove invaluable. Together, they embark on a high stakes adventure, devising a plan to confront this sea creature head on. Bravery and cunning guide their efforts, and in a climactic showdown, they outwit and pacify the beast without even having to resort to violence. This myth champions the power of teamwork, resilience, and creative problem solving. In the face of daunting challenges, it offers a thrilling narrative that shatters gender stereotypes and harmful narratives, celebrating the collective agency of its characters.

Kit: I mean, this is much better. Um, it does seem to gloss over why the sea creature's there. Seems like Cepheus and Cassiopeia are dead. Um.

Jordan: I mean, maybe for the better, at least, at least where Cepheus is concerned.

Kit: But it's it's certainly not neutral and, and I kind of like, again, I wish to would have. I wish they would have pushed it further, gotten rid of Peresus or made Peresus the villain, but but, you know, um, okay, okay, okay.

Jordan: I mean, the Oracle, you know, we've had some real bad ones, we've had some good ones. This one, I think is somewhere in the middle.

Kit: Yeah.

Jordan: I mean, it is trying to have Andromeda and Peresus as co equals, taking on this challenge together. I think that alone is improvement over, uh, save the princess myth. It doesn't give us a lot of details. It gives us a very 3,000 foot level view, uh, of the story. But yes, we have teamwork. We have collaboration. We have collective strength. All of these things are at least a step up from the original myth, which, again, we all agree, leaves a lot to be desired.

Outro

Kit, that brings us to the, um, end of our episode this week. Join us next week for the pop culture segment of our exploration of the constellation Andromeda.

Kit: This has been Kit

Jordan: And Jordan,

Kit: Sisters. lovers of stars and stories.

Jordan: And we'll see you next time

Kit: On Starry Time.

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