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Medea and the Rejuvenation of Pelias: *One Alternative Version*

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Abstract- The myth of Medea1has become familiar in the Greek literature since Homer's time. He told the story about the trip of the Argonauts guided by Jason. The mythical narrative has different versions that survived in various informative supports such as the texts of the dramatic poets and the images of the Greek vases. In this essay, we propose to analyse the remote information and reference of the action of the myth of Medea through the Greek vases. We selected to research about the episode that has been known as Pelíades. We may infer there are two versions about Medea and Pelias, in the most remote of them the priestess of Hekate belongs to the seventh century and, in this period, Medea has the ability to cure and rejuvenate an old person. This information shows the mythological narrative of Pelias and Medea is very ancient.

Keywords: *medea pelíades mythology.*

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Medea and the Rejuvenation of Pelias: *One Alternative Version*

Maria Regina Candido

Abstract- The myth of Medea[1] has become familiar in the Greek literature since Homer's time. He told the story about the trip of the Argonauts guided by Jason. The mythical narrative has different versions that survived in various informative supports such as the texts of the dramatic poets and the images of the Greek vases. In this essay, we propose to analyse the remote information and reference of the action of the myth of Medea through the Greek vases. We selected to research about the episode that has been known as *Pelíades*. We may infer there are two versions about Medea and Pelias, in the most remote of them the priestess of Hekate belongs to the seventh century and, in this period, Medea has the ability to cure and rejuvenate an old person. This information shows the mythological narrative of Pelias and Medea is very ancient.

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I. Introduction

Medea's success[2]began when the play was first performed in Athenian tragedy[3] competition in 431 BC. We believe the theatre audience in Athens was shocked when the priestess of Hekate killed her children in revenge for Jason's betrayal. Medea's revenge provokes a radical effect of violence because she destroyed the familiar basis connection. This scene became known as Medea's Infanticide[4] and supplanted all other versions of the story from the myth. Euripides seemed to be the first poet[5]to represent Medea murdering her children. The episode marked the universe of artisans and painters as shown in reproductions on a large number of attic vases in different museums in the world.

The Medea myth has become familiar in the Greek literature since Homer's time. He told the story about the trip of the Argonauts[6] guided by Jason (Odyssey, XII:70).The mythical narrative of Argonauts and Medea has different versions that survived in various informative supports, such as the texts[7] of the dramatic poets and the images of the Greek vases.

In this essay, we propose to analyse the remote information and reference of the action of the Medea's myth through the Greek vases. We selected to research about the episode that has been known as *Pelíades*. The king Pelias was mentioned in Iliad (v.710-715), the epic poem which tells about his daughters, and Odyssey which cited that Pelias was king at the prosperous lands in Iolkus (Odyssey, XI, v.255-256). This information shows the mythological narrative of Pelias and Medea is very old and has different versions.

The original structure that remained is "Jason travels to Colchis and takes the Golden Fleece with the help of Medea". The Golden Fleece became the remotest trace of connectivity between Greece and Kolchis through the hero Jason. Strabo confirmed in his Geography (II, 39) the process of ancient contacts between the Greek colonists with the population of Kolchis began with Jason. We must say that the Greek hero Jason was not the first Hellenic to arrive to the region of Kolchis. Iamze Gagua considers that Phrixus was the first Hellenic to sail to the region of the Black Sea and settled on the land of Colchis. Phrixus' arrival in Kolchis with a golden ram, Aeetes' kindly hosting him and establishing a new alliance by offering his daughterin matrimony, reflects those ancient contacts which existed between the Greekcolonist and the Kolchian population (GAGUA, 2012, p 88).

But, in classical period, Medea was famous to be a woman of cruel character and terrible nature, which was a quote by Euripides (Medea, v.100), and Sophocles said in his play Kolchides[8] (fr. 343) that

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[1] I thank Prof. Wander Stayner Barbosa Martins for reviewing and correcting the text in the English language.

[2] J.O.G. Hanson wrote The Secret of Medea's Success (1965), and he said the story of Medea is pieced together from the numerous references in both Greek and Latin literature and a most fascinating picture.

[3] In 431 B.C. Euripides competed against Sophocles and Euphrorion with three tragedies, Medea, Philoctetes and Dictys, followed by a satyr play Theristae, he was awarded the third prize, this information was attributed by Aristophanes of Byzantium, see: The Medea of Euripides by B.M.W. Knox, p.193 (Yale Classical Studies, vol. XXV: Greek Tragedy, Cambridge University Press, 1977.

[4] Most of the scholars have discussed the problem of the relationship between the Medea of Neophron and Euripides. The surviving fragments of Neophron's Medea has language, style, and meter that belong to the fourth century. The third actor had been introduced, but Medea of Euripides requires two only.

[5] There was a debate about the reputation of Euripides' great work, we have convinced the chronological priority of Euripides' Medea as against Neophron. Suidas confuses Neophron with Nearchos, a tragedian of the fourth century. Neophron and Euripides' Medea by E.A.Thompson. The Classical Quarterly. Vol. 38, Cambridge University Press, 1944, p.10-14

[6] We find the Argonautic legends pre-Homeric because the verses in the "Odyssey" xii. 69-70 the poet says about "moving rocks" through which Ulysses had to sail and affirm that "the only ship that ever yet passed them was the famed Argo in her voyage from King Aeetes."

[7] Stesichoros whose poem "The Games for Pelias" (580 B.C.); the "Cyclic Nostoi" belong to about 700 B.C.

[8] Kolchides or The Women of Colchis: Medea helps Jason win the Golden Fleece by murdering her brother.

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Medea murdered her brother Apsyrtos and dismembered him to help the Argonauts to escape. Aeetes, king of Kolchis, was Medea's father and pursued Jason and her. Then, she decided to kill her brother to force her father to stop attacking them and to collect the parts of Apsyrtos' corpse. Robert L. Fowler defends that the episode of the Apsyrtos' murder, in Classical period, had been added in order to reinforce the fame of Medea as a barbarian and abominable woman (FOWLER, 2013, p.228). Euripides' *Peliades* was the poet's first[9] play, and he participated in the contest in 455 BC. Now, it's lost, but the fragments (fr.601-16) narrate how Medea convinced the old king Pelias and his daughters to believe in her magical power using special herbs and roots and cook him in a cauldron in order to renew his youth. The other lost plot, *Rhizotomoi* by Sophocles, brings Medea as a root cutter. She was specialized in handling the spell of the roots and herbs. John Scarborough highlights Sophocles as the one who introduced the priestess of Hekate in her *real professional function* of harvesting herbs for magical purposes (SCARBOROUGH, 1991, p.144). It has been accepted that plots about Medea were considered as the magical practices and confirmed that the priestess of Hekate persuaded the daughters of Pelias to destroy their father's life through the process known as rejuvenation. This process consisted of boiling the body in a cauldron with the magical herbs, which tragically resulted in Pelias' death.

The information about Medea allows us to suppose an alternative view: the priestess of Hekate, in the antiquity, was dealt with as a deity with the expertise and knowledge about herbs and roots for magical purposes. She was a *pharmakides* who handled the plants, herbs and roots to help ease the pain in the human body, improve health and cure the diseases. The Athenian's audience of the theatre might have been familiar to the herbs to cure one's illness since all of them knew some drug seller or a root cutter who could handle special plants.

On one hand, the Greek ancient world was dominated by agriculture, when one needed to know about edible plants and picked up all the herbs to cure and keep people healthy. Macrobius wrote that Medea had the expertise to handle *the poisonous herbs with her face turned away lest she perish from the strength of their noxious aromas, then pouring the herbs' juice into bronze jars, the herbs themselves being cut with bronze sickles* (SCARBOROUGH, 1991.p.145). Medea, as a specialist in herbs, knew about the poisonous characteristic of the odours produced by dangerous plants when the roots were turned from the ground.

On the other hand, Medea belonged to the traditional family of Titans, whose father Aeetes was the symbol of power for the kingdom of Kolchis. He is Helios' son and the Oceanid Perseis. The kingdom of Aeetes became prosperous with Phrixus' arrival with the golden ram, and as a result the young Greek remained under the protection of King Aeetes. Gagua states the relationship between the King Aeetes and Phrixus reflected the peaceful cohabitation among Greek migratory population and the local inhabitants of the territory of Kolchis (GAGUA, 2012, p 90).

Homer's Odyssey (X,37) told us that Circe is sister to King Aeetes and Parsiphae, the mother of the Minotaur, and both were Medea's aunts. Circe was an enchantress able to cast spells through drugs, herbs and charm singing. Circe and Medea were priestesses of Hekate, goddess of the Chthonian world who took care of the souls of the dead. That deity helped those seeking to avenge against his enemies by guiding the souls of the dead to rise when they were evoked by magic rites[10].

Sophron of Siracusa told us how to organize the rite to Hekate: you need to take a lump of salt in your right hand, and laurel by your ear, and pick an axe to sacrifice a puppy to her. Finally, you evoke the deity and say: Lady, receive your feast and offerings (Sophron, fr.4A.1214). The rites in the worship of Hekate consist of the sacrifice of blood of a black dog and eggs, both used to purify the body and the soul. The black dog's blood and the eggs must be offered to Goddess Hekate on triple roads because the street was a sacred place of Hekate (CANDIDO, 2017b, p.268). Diodorus Siculus reminds us that Aeetes, Medea's father, worshipped the Goddess Hekate and he always ordered to kill all foreigners in sacrifice to her (Historical Library, IV, 46-47). The human sacrifice was a custom of the Kolchis inhabitants, and the knowledge of the ritual was widespread in the Black Sea, aiming to frighten the Helenian sailors (GAGUA, 2012, p 91).

Hence, since antiquity Medea is known as daughter of Aeetes, niece of Circe and priestess of Hekate, confirming she was heiress to the magical practice and to all expertise in handling root, herbs and drug spells. We believe the knowledge of Medea in magical practice and her ability to handle the special plants caught the old king Pelias' eye. The episode of the rejuvenation of the king Pelias through the dismemberment in a cauldron, having Pelias' daughters as eyewitnesses and assistants, became a success among the Attic ceramists in the VI century. This can be noticed by the production from the painters' workshops

[9] See Euripides' First Play by Herbert Edward Mierow, 1946, p.106-108.

[10] Archaeology of Kerameikos, Athens found a lot of curse tablets i buried in graves or tombs. They are very thin sheets of lead with the text with evocation to Medea, Hekate and Hermes. Generally, they were often rolled, folded, or pierced with nails. Tablets were named katadesmoi or defixiones and were used to curse someone or wish death someone. There is curse tablet with small doll also pierced by nail.

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in the Attica and the south of Italy, and the workshops in Kerameikos (GUIRAUD, 1996, p.209).

The remote corpus from Medea's image is part of the Attic black-figure vases group. We applied the methodological analysis by Claude Berard, named*/ conographie-iconologie-iconologique* (1983). Following the author's proposal: *The Anatomical Elements* from the image show: two young women, one standing on the left is in profile with her left hand raised and looking at the cauldron in the centre of the scene. She has her hair tied, she wears a long chiton under a himation wrapped around her waist; the other woman is standing on the right side in profile, facing left, her hair is tied, she wears a chiton with a himation wrapped, she has something in her left hand, sometimes it's one dagger. In the centre of the scene there is a ram inside a large cooking potsometimes identified as*lebes*, tripods (considered more modern styles), sometimes it shows a pot of a more rustic style or even of an ancient model (*empyribete* type), always on a burning brazier. The ram faces left with the front legs out of the cauldron.

We shared and analysed the images and realized that part of them showed the king Pelias sitting down in front of Medea, and she is giving him an evidence of her magical power by rejuvenating an old ram. The old king closely followed the process as eyewitness when he sees an old ram transformed into a lamb. Then, he decided to take part in the experiment himself. After that, Pelias decided to cooperate in this rejuvenation and persuaded his daughters to help Medea to cure him. We may deduce there are two versions of Medea and Pelias, one was the version propagated in the classic period through the playwrights of the time, like Euripides, and the most remote of them where the priestess of Hekate belongs to the seventieth century. By then, Medea has the ability to cure and rejuvenate an old person. Christine Harrauer says that Medea was firmly connected to the Argonauts' myth from the beginning, and both were the oldest narratives of the Greeks spread all over Greece (HARRAUER, 1999, p.6).

The most remote Greek literature reference about the relationship among Medea, Jason and Pelias within The Funeral Games was Stesichorus, who wrote a poem in 580 B.C., he said: *But before him (Panyassis)] Stesichorus or Ibycus in the poem entitled The funeral Games [for Pelias] was the first to say that the gifts brought for the girl were "sesame cakes and groats and oil-and-honey cakes and other cakes and yellow honey"*[11] (Cingano, 2017, p.28). The contest happened to celebrate the decease of a Greek hero. Lynn E. Roller states that the Funeral Games[12] for Pelias was represented in Greek art for the first time in the early sixth century, and rapidly became popular (ROLLER, 1981, p.107). We reckon the popularity and success of the poems can be justified because they reported the heroes' mythological adventures and the Argonauts' journey that sailed to the unknown world.

There are other references, such as the epic poem by Eumelus of Korinth, *Korinthiaca,* which reconstructs the past of his hometown, and the adventure of the Argonauts. According to the version chosen by Eumelus, the legend happens in Iolkus. Jason married Medea and stopped by Iolkus after the expedition from Kolchis. Stesichorus, Eumelus of Korinth and Simonides[13] have told different versions of the mythological narrative of Medea. They depict the expertise of Medea with the herbs and roots, nonetheless there was a beneficial result from curing and rejuvenating people. This narrative became famous and popular in the Greek world because we can find a lot of painters' vases on the topic between 530 – 525 BC (DUGAS, 1944, p.06).

Dugas defended the episode of Pelíades seemed a narrative to justify Medea's action, as she ceased to be the person who healed the old age diseases to become, herself, a maleficent character (DUGAS, 1944, p.08). We have considered this narrative an ancient version, in which Medea was seen as the healer, and it belongs to the *Iolkus epic cycle.* The poems by Stesichorus, Eumelus of Korinth and Simonides said Medea and Jason came from Kolchis to Korinth, and stopped by Iolkus to participate in the funeral games for Pelias. And the kingdom of Iolkus received Medea as queen of Korinth, and Eumelus and Simonides confirmed this narrative. (frag 20/WEST, Korinthiaca).

This festival was an honour worthy of the king. The episode was described by Pausanias, an eyewitness to the event, and one of the scenes that he had seen portrayed was the love story between Jason and Medea, recorded on the Chest of Kypselos at Olympia, dated before the second quarter of the sixth century, and at the throne of Apollo at Amyklai (Pausanias, V.17. 9). Both are the earliest portraits of the funeral games for Pelias (ROLLER, 1981, p.116). The mythological narrative about the funeral games for Pelias tells about the couple Medea and Jason's arrival to Iolkus when king Pelias had already died. There was a version which said that the priestess of Hekate could have performed a magical ritual to bring Pelias back and make him young again. Medea's rejuvenating expertise

[11] Athenaeus (4.172EF =Simon. PMG 564 = F 273 Poltera, apud. Cinganop, 2017, p.28

[12] The reason of success and the interest in the funeral games together the Greek myth may have been the foundation of the three Panhellenic athletic festival as the Pythian Games, Isthmian and Nemean Games.

[13] See Richard Rawles, *Simonides the Poet*, Cambridge University Press, 2018; Edouard Will. *Korinthiaca*. de Boccard,1955 and Ettore Cingano, *Interpreting epic and lyric fragments: Stesichorus, Simonides, Corinna, the Theban epics, the Hesiodic corpus and other epic fragments,* Adolf Hakkert Editore, 2017.

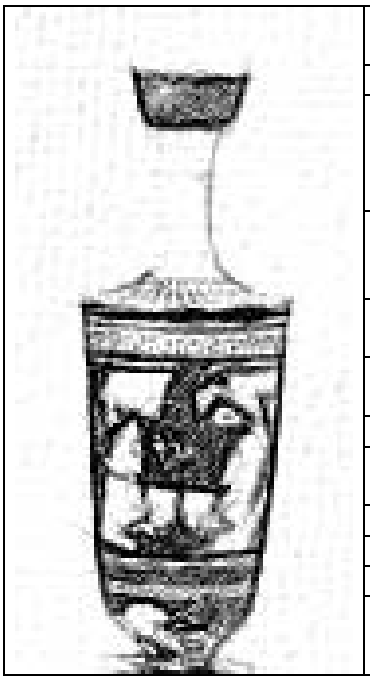
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was narrated by Plautus in *Pseudolus*, he said: *Remember how Medea boiled old Pelias, in a stew of her special herbs and poisons and made him a tender and juicy young man again? What Medea did for Pelias, I'll do for you today* (PLAUTUS, *Pseudolus*, v.868-872).

Sophocles, in the *Rhizotomoi* plot fragments, showed Medea's need to care for roots, maybe to use them in Pelias' rejuvenation. The dramaturgy title suggests the association between medicinal knowledge and sorcery with the use of roots and herbs. The rejuvenation made by Medea was mentioned in *Nostoi's* fragment[14], where Jason's father, Aeson, was transformed into a nice and handsome youth. Medea had stripped away his old skin by her expertise and boiling him with various *pharmaka* in her golden cauldron (West, 2003, p.158.). The Greek noun *rhizotomos* means root, and it is known as *pharmaka* that can be handled by sorceresses (*pharmakides)* and doctor (*iatros*). In the Odyssey, *the pharmakides* Circe enchanted Odysseus by handling the molly root into the wine (ODYSSEY, X. 302) and Theophrastus warned about some *pharmaka* that could be used as poison, making wine and honey become lethal drinks or cause some sort of illness (THEOPHRASTUS, IX,15.5-6).

Then, we assume that Medea was known in the antiquity as the priestess who had the expertise to handle different *pharmaka* to cure and rejuvenate old people. The archaeological material information about the ancient mythological narrative of Medea could be seen through the images on Beldam's lekythos. We catalogued almost twenty-seven Greek vases with images of Medea and Cauldron, and five Greekvases caught our eye because they are *lecythoi* vases from Athens and provided by Beldam's workshop. Beldam took over the production of this specific vase type in the 5th century BC., described as chimney *lekythoi,* named after its distinctive mouth, the curve of the body at the joint that is characteristic of the Beldam's workshop. This shape was made in the Beldam workshop and scholars have attributed chimney *lekythoi t*o the hands of the Painter Beldam (ROSENBERG-DIMITRACOPOULOU, 2015, p.88). The lekythos defined as a perfume vase, was dedicated exclusively to funerary uses. It was placed near the deathbed to anoint the corpse. We chose five of the patterns of lekythoi that were used as grave offerings and they were found in the Kerameikos cemetery.

We drew and present the reproduction of the model by Painter Beldam



Iconographic repertory	Peliades, rejuvenation of King Pelias
Support	lekythos of black figures, Painter of Beldam
Woman standing on the left	.One of King Pelias' daughters, wearing an embroidered himation, looks toward the cauldron that is in the centre of the image, carries a stick in her right hand and a kylix in her left hand
Woman standing on the right	Medea, ministering the magic instructions with her right hand raised, seems to hold a stick in her right hand and a kylix in her left hand.
Old Man seated/ standing	absent
Cauldron	Rustic model of the type *empyribete* tripod with a ram inside
Phoriamos	absent
Ram	adult animal, facing to the right with the forelegs raised
Fire	Bonfire under the cauldron
Side B	Image absent
Makaira/dagger	absent
Minimas Formal Units	**adult woman tripod/*empyribete* sheep**

[14] PEG F7(= F 6 D. = F 6 W.), from the hypothesis (a.). The Greek Epic Cycle and Its Ancient Reception: A Companion; The drug to anoint himself with, and the Hekate sacrifice: Pind. Pyth. 4.221–2, 233; Ap. Rhod. 3.843–68, 1029–51, 1169, 1246–8 (the scene is clearly modelled on the nekuia, consultation of the dead, in Od. 11); Apollod. 1.129–30. Eur. Med. 9–10, 486; Euripides' play Peliades dealt with this myth: TGF F601–24. Aison (Jason's father) and Jason rejuvenated: Nostoi F7 (PEG)

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The five vases from the Beldam workshop have the same image: the figure of Medea, as the queen of Korinth on the right side of the picture. She wears an embroidered *peplos* and *himation* with many folds. She spreads a pinch of her magical herbs into the cauldron, and she keeps a little box in her left hand, which is named *phoriamos* (box with the poisons and magical herbs).There are other pictures where she holds a knife on the right hand. On the other side of the picture, there is a woman, we suppose she is one of Pelias' daughters. She wears the same Greek clothes as Medea, and these pieces of garment belong to the Greek fashion. That means Beldam was following the Hellenic mythology, which probably is from the oldest episode: *Iolkus epiccycle.*

The vases show the cauldron placed on the centre of the image with the fire amidst the flaming wood. We can realize that type of cauldron is very ancient, it is large and rustic, and it is known as *empyribete*. Medea shows her expertise at the specific moment when the animal is inside the cauldron in process of being rejuvenated. Crossing the information between the text and the image, we could state that the picture with Medea in these *lekythoi* vases refer to the remote characteristic of hers, and the pictures of the *lecythoi* belong to the *Iolkus epiccycle*. Medea was designed as the young wife of Jason and as a priestess of Hekate with the ability to cure from diseases and to rejuvenate the old and sick people.

As our partial conclusion, we believed in the alternative interpretation of Medea's myth: the family of the dead ordered this kind of Greek vases and the specific picture of Medea because they believed in her ability to cure the dead or relieve his pain in the world of the dead. The image of the specific Greek vases named *lecythoi* and Medea must have been reference to the traditional connection with the Greek athletic context. Maybe, the homage to the deceased could have been due to the fact he had participated in the athletic games. His relatives followed the tradition of celebrating his death with the image of Medea on the lekythos. We argue that, nobody would spend the money to order the funeral gift for a close deceased relative or offer the image and myth of a cruel and murderous character to him. Beldam's workshop belonged to the end of the sixth century, time when the journey to Hades had begun to be elaborated, and the painters and the families of the dead took the reference point in the context of the epic mythology. Maybe, the most popular myth, at that time, that could cure the soul of the dead and help him in the new journey to Hades…was Medea.

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