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Mother of Dragons

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Abstract. Daenerys Targaryen's metamorphosis scene is analyzed in this article, with accordance to the millennia old structure of the motif of "the woman and the dragon". It is suggested in this article, that the visual manifestation of Daenerys in the HBO series *Game of Thrones*, is a reception of ancient Greco-Roma, and Early modern art. This article follows the iconography of four examples: the Minoan figurine of a priestess or goddess that holds serpents in her hands, Medea's apotheosis on dragons-driven chariot from a vase painting, Saint Margaret wooden relic statue with the tiny dragon, and Cleopatra's death by snakebites image. By following these examples an iconological line is drawn to connect between Daenerys visualization and the historic examples of the motif, demonstrating reception of not only visual issues but also concepts and meanings. Understanding iconographic and iconological reception in Daenerys television image reflect on conscious and unconscious aspects of her character and the way her figure engages with the viewers.
Keywords: Daenerys Targaryen; Dragons; Great Goddess; *Game of Thrones*; *A Song of Ice and Fire*.

[es] Madre de dragones

Resumen. En este artículo se analiza la escena de la metamorfosis de Daenerys Targaryen, de acuerdo con la estructura milenaria del motivo de "la mujer y el dragón". Se sugiere que la manifestación visual de Daenerys en la serie de HBO *Juego de Tronos*, es una recepción de los antiguos greco-romaníes y del arte moderno temprano. Este artículo sigue la iconografía de cuatro ejemplos: la estatuilla minoica de una sacerdotisa o diosa que sostiene serpientes en sus manos, la apoteosis de Medea sobre un carro conducido por dragones de una pintura de jarrón, la estatua de madera de Santa Margarita con el pequeño dragón y la imagen de la muerte de Cleopatra por mordeduras de serpiente. Siguiendo estos ejemplos, se traza una línea iconológica para conectar entre la visualización de Daenerys y los ejemplos históricos del motivo, demostrando la recepción no solo de cuestiones visuales sino también de conceptos y significados.
Para comprender la recepción iconográfica e iconológica en la imagen televisiva de Daenerys, se reflejan los aspectos conscientes e inconscientes de su personaje y la forma en que su figura se relaciona con los espectadores.
Palabras clave: Daenerys Targaryen; dragones; Gran Diosa; Juego de Tronos; Canción de hielo y fuego.

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1. Introduction

In the last episode of the first season of the popular HBO series *Game of Thrones*, Daenerys Targaryen, also known as Khaleesi, goes through a metamorphosis[2]. Her character has a key role in the series, written by David Benioff and D. B. Weiss, adapted from George R. R. Martin's book series *A Song of Ice and Fire*. At the culminating moment of the first season, Khaleesi's beloved husband, Khal Drogo, has just passed away, and she, in a desperate attempt to save him, has lost her unborn baby. His cremation is arranged in the form of two circles of fire. Daenerys's wedding gift – three ancient dragon-eggs – are placed on Drogo's pyre, and the witch Mirri Maz Duur, who failed to save his life, screams in the background as she is burnt alive with him. Suddenly, Daenerys begins to walk into the fire, desperate and longing to die with her lost husband. When the fire sub-

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[2] George R. R. Martin, *A Song of Ice and Fire* (New York: Bantam Books; Voyager Books, 1996), 798-807; David Benioff, and D. B. Weiss, *Game of Thrones*, HBO (2011-19), 1.10.40-49.

sides and a new day dawns, the audience is surprised to discover that Daenerys Targaryen possesses her ancestors' powers and has not been harmed by the fire. Even more surprising, three baby dragons have miraculously hatched from the eggs that were thought dead, yet were revived by the fire and through her intervention (Fig. 1). Until then, Daenerys had been a foreign wife sold into marriage by her brother, a descendant of a lost civilization who had to learn to love the husband forced on her. In this fiery moment, she is transformed into 'the mother of dragons' and a ruler in her own right, before whom all of her *Dothraki* tribe bow. The addition of three tiny dragons to her image envelops the watching crowd and television viewer in a structure of power and domination that completely changes her character and our attitude toward her.

Figure 1. Drawing of *The Birth of the Dragons*, after a frame from *Game of Thrones*, season 1: chapter 10: 44.48, HBO Production (June 19, 2011). Source: Sharon Khalifa-Gueta.

The moment has a profound effect on the audience's beliefs about her: she instantly changes from a queen by marriage and part of a barbarian tribe of little importance to a force to be reckoned with, a powerful figure worthy of the coveted Iron Throne that was taken from her ancestors. Why does this happen? In her chapter "Woman with Dragon: Daenerys, Pride, and Postfeminist Possibilities" Rikke Schubart sees the transformational moment as a trial of Daenerys's character, stating that "Martin's novel is, as far as [she] knows, the first text to establish a positive relationship between a heroine and dragons"[3]. Based on my study of the visual motif of "the woman and the dragon" in Western history, I maintain that encounters between women and dragons, of which there are hundreds throughout history, are almost always positive[4]. In this essay, I compare Daenerys's visualization in this scene with four iconographies of the motif of "the woman and the dragon", all belonging to the same ichnologic structure, in order to show their common inherent meaning.

This investigation is supported by traditional art history methods: Panofsky and Warburg initiated the method of iconography-iconology which other scholars follow. This method also has an aspect of the reception of ancient signs and motifs and their meanings in contemporary art[5].

My investigation of three millennia of Mediterranean and Western European art establishes the motif of 'a woman and a dragon' as separate from but emanating from 'the dragon-slayer' topos and requiring different analytical methods.

2. The Metamorphosis Scene: Description Versus Image

When George R. R. Martin wrote *A Song of Ice and Fire*, he was not only cognizant of other fantasy literature but also influenced by reception the motif of "the woman and the dragon". Although a consensus has been established among writers of fantasy literature that the medieval period is its greatest reference[6], the roots of the woman and the dragon theme are much older and can be found in Egyptian, Mesopotamian, and Greco-Roman periods, and even further back to pre-history. Yet Daenerys metamorphosis scene was changed when adjusted to the visual arena. In this section, I compare the textual description with the visual manifestation of the scene.

There are several signs described in Martin's books that were treated differently when the scene was screened in the HBO series. In Martin's book, as Khal Drogo's cremation pyre is being built, the author relates: "They laid the wood east to west, from sunrise to sunset,… north to south, from ice to fire"[7]. This passage creates the image of a cross, symbolizing the pillar of the world[8]. The Christian connotation of this image is also suggested when Daenerys is given a boiling bath as part of the purification ceremony prior to the cremation[9]. This alludes to Saint Margaret being tortured in a boiling bath, which did not harm her and made the crowd who

3 Rikke Schubart. "Woman with Dragon: Daenerys, Pride, and Postfeminist Possibilities", in *Women of Ice and Fire: Gender, Game of Thrones and Multiple Media Engagements*, eds. Rikke Schubart and Anne Gjelsvik (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016), 120.

4 Sharon Khalifa-Gueta, "The Dragon and Femininity in *Saint Margaret* Paintings by Raphael and Titian", PhD diss. Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, 2020.

5 Erwin Panofsky, *Meaning in the Visual Arts* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1955); Aby Warburg, *The Renewal of Pagan Antiquity: Contributions to the Cultural History of the European Renaissance*, intro. Kurt W. Forster, trans. David Britt (Los Angeles, CA: Getty Research Institute for the History of Art and the Humanities, 1999); Barbara Baert, Ann-Sophie Lehmann, Jenke Van Den Akkerveken, and Niels Schalley, *New Perspectives in Iconology: Visual Studies and Anthropology* (Brussels: Academic and Scientific Publishers, 2011); Georges Didi-Huberman, *The Surviving Image: Phantoms of Time and Time of Phantoms; Aby Warburg's History of Art*, trans. Harvey L. Mendelsohn (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2017).

6 Shiloh Carroll, *Medievalism in A Song of Ice and Fire and Game of Thrones* (Woodbridge, UK: DS Brewer Woodbridge, 2018).

7 Martin, *A Song of Ice and Fire*, 799-800.

8 Edwin O. James, *The Tree of Life: An Archaeological Study* (Leiden: Brill, 1966); Roger Cook, *The Tree of Life: Symbol of the Centre* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1974); Barbara Baert, *A Heritage of Holy Wood: The Legend of the True Cross in Text and Image* (Leiden: Brill, 2004).

9 Martin, *A Song of Ice and Fire*, 801.

witnessed it spontaneously convert to Christianity[10]. In his description, Martin prepares the reader for a change of heart experienced by the Dothraky tribe and shared by the reader. The attribution to Saint Margaret is no coincidence, because she is the female saint who actualized the dragon.

Daenerys's metamorphosis scene in the HBO series *Game of Thrones* depicts this differently. The pyre of Khal Drogo is in the centre of a double-circle fire maze, with connotations of Hindu cremation rituals, during which the wife usually joins her husband's body and is burned alive (Fig. 2)[11]. This is the association the viewer is supposed to make when Daenerys walks into the fire, as confirmed by the words of Ser Jorah Mormont (an exiled knight in Daenerys's service): "I know what you intend; do not! […] Don't ask me to stand aside as you climb on that pyre. I won't watch you burn"[12]. But in fact, only the witch is being burned alive with Khal Drogo. The two circles of fire are arranged in a manner that symbolizes mazes in Medieval art (Fig. 3). Like caves, mazes are considered a womb of the earth, which upon entering and exiting, lead to an experience of death and rebirth[13]. Caves and mazes symbol the womb of the Great Mother Goddess –the great womb of the earth, and the Ouroboric dragon– a dragon that bites its tail to create a full circle, symbolizing the eternal cycle of time[14]. The maze of fire is the liminal location of Daenerys's metamorphosis; the location where her old self dies and she is reborn as the "mother of dragons," as this is where the dragons are born. It is important to remember that within the *Game of Thrones* lexicon, fire is a divine entity worshipped and capable of killing and rejuvenating.

The image that appears after the fire subsides is also different in the on-screen version. The text informs us that, unlike the rest of her body, Daenerys's hair was not resistant to the fire and was burned completely off her head[15]. Hair is a symbol of identity and strength throughout women's history. An ancient Greek bride would have her hair cut as a symbol of the surrender of her familial identity. Khal Drogo's long hair is a symbol of male heroism and ascendancy akin to the long, flowing hair of Heracles and biblical Samson, which makes them look fearsome in battle and is the source of their strength[16]. Mythological descriptions of women with long, flowing hair indicate them to be witches or virgins, such as the description in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* of Medea loosening her hair when consulting the dragons and the agents of the night to create a potion of death and rejuvenation[17]. Martin's decision to burn Daenerys's hair symbolizes an identity metamorphosis; like an ancient bride, she sheds her previous identity. Daenerys's loss of her hair also removes her as far as possible from the connotations of witches, as Schubart asserts[18]. It is the witch herself who is being burned away, physically and metaphorically, in the cremation ceremony takes place.

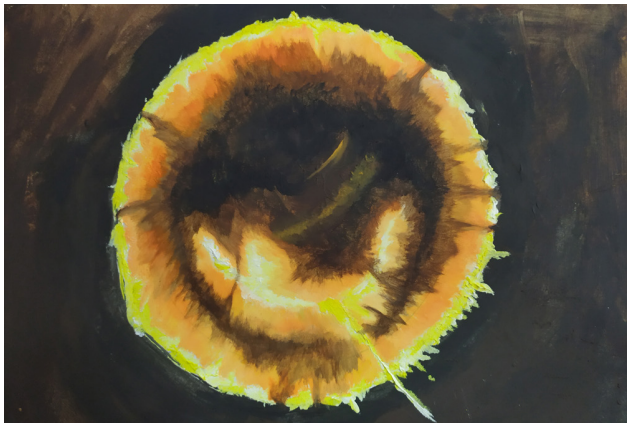

Figure 2. Drawing of *Khal Drogo's Cremation*, after a frame from *Game of Thrones*, season 1, chapter 10: 47.21, HBO Production (June 19, 2011). Source: Sharon Khalifa-Gueta.

The choice to visualise Daenerys with long, flowing hair stress her femininity, but at the same time it is a warning sign of how dangerous she can be. Images of women with flowing hair and a dragon symbolize voluptuousness and seduction but are also related to the popular Medieval and early modern images of Saint Margaret seated inside the dragon she summoned with the power of her prayer (Fig. 4). The theme of fertility and infertility re-emerges in this scene, when after losing her unborn human baby, Daenerys becomes the 'mother of dragons', giving miraculous and grotesque birth to the three ancient eggs. This, again, reconnects to Saint Margaret: a virgin saint protector over childbirth and infants, and imaged as delivering herself from the creature's belly[19].

10 Ellen M. Ross, *The Grief of God: Images of the Suffering Jesus in Late Medieval England* (New York: Oxford University Press 1997), 98-104.

11 Howard M. R. Williams, "Burning Ambitions: Cremation in Game of Thrones Season 1", *Archaeodeath,* May 20, 2016: https://howard-williamsblog.wordpress.com/2016/05/20/burning-ambitions-cremation-in-game-of-thrones-season-1/.

12 Benioff and Weiss, *Game of Thrones*, 1.10.44.23-33.

13 Hermann Kern, *Through the Labyrinth: Designs and Meanings over 5,000 Years*, trans. Abigail H. Clay, Sandra Burns Thomson, and Kathrin A. Velder (Munich: Prestel, 2000), 30-31; Yulia Ustinova, *Caves and the Ancient Greek Mind: Descending Underground in the Search for Ultimate Truth* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 3, n. 14.

14 Arthur B. Cook, *Zeus: A Study in Ancient Religion* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1914-40), vol. 1, 197-299; Erich Neumann, *The Great Mother: An Analysis of the Archetype*, trans. Ralph Manheim (New York: Pantheon, 1955), 211-239; Joseph Fontenrose, *Python* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 313; Dana M. Reemes, *The Egyptian Ouroboros: An Iconological and Theological Study* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2015).

15 Martin, *A Song of Ice and Fire*, 807.

16 Molly M. Levine, "The Gender Grammar of Ancient Mediterranean Hair", in *Off With Her Head!: The Denial of Women's Identity in Myth, Religion, and Culture*, eds. Howard Eilberg-Schwartz and Wendy Doniger (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 82-88.

17 Ovid. *Metamorphoses*, trans. A. D. Melville, intro. and notes by Edward J. Kenney (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 7.183-90.

18 Schubart, "Woman with Dragon…", 120-122.

19 Jacobus De Voragine. *The Golden Legend: Readings on the Saints*, trans. William Granger Ryan, introduction by Eamon Duffy (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012), book 93; Juliana Dresvina, *A Maid with a Dragon: The Cult of Saint Margaret of Antioch in Medieval England* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016).

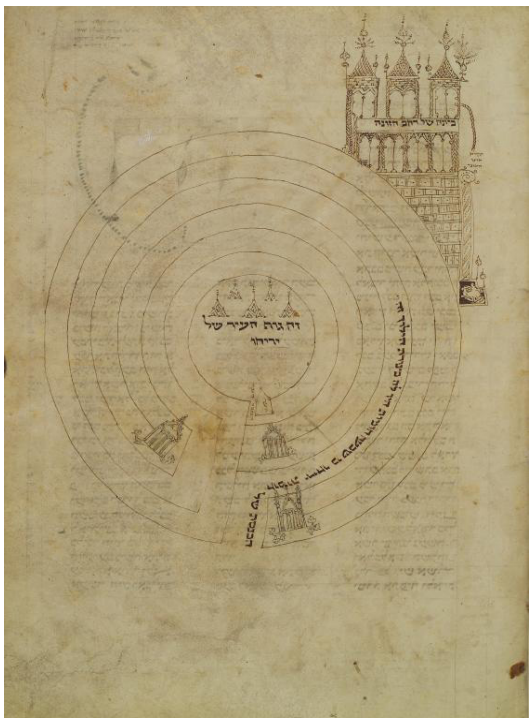

Figure 3. *The Walls of Jericho*, miniature illustration pen and ink, 39 x 29, 5 cm., Hebrew Bible, fl. Ir, written by Joseph of Xanten, New York Public Library, Spencer Collection (1294). Source: The New York Public Library *Digital Collections*: https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/510d47df-c97d-a3d9-e040-e00a18064a99

Figure 4. *Saint Margaret of Antioch*, miniature from book of *hours*, produced in two stages, Walters Museum, Baltimore (1425-1475) (MS 168, f. 222r). Source: Flickr, https://www.flickr.com/photos/medmss/6984783557/in/pool-678065@N22

The scene of Daenerys metamorphoses ends with one tiny dragon in Daenerys's arms, another on her shoulders, and a third climbing up her thigh. Although she is naked, her stable standing pose is not erotic. There is nothing titillating or lustful in her image. Although she appears fragile and her dragons are tiny, she is transformed in the viewers' minds into a 'power figure'. She stands covered with ash like a Phoenix rising from ashes to reclaim its golden glory. The Dothraki crowd instantly bows down to her, as if seeing her with the tiny dragons instantly removes her from the patriarchal order in which they grew up and associating her with a structure of power and domination. Thus, the writer, director, and audience harness the visual scheme of women with dragons, with its overtones of power and fertility, to create a climax.

3. The Ancient Meaning of Dragons

Previous studies of mine analyzed images of female figures with dragons from the Greco-Roman era to the Italian Renaissance era. It was ascertained that dragons, which originated from and were often referred to interchangeably with serpents[20], were not perceived as evil in antiquity, yet male mythological characters often find themselves combatting them. When we take the syntagma 'man and dragon' and paradigmatically change 'man' to 'woman', a different signified emerges: women do not fight dragons!

The topos of 'the man and the dragon' or 'the dragon slayer' has been thoroughly studied by scholars such as Neil Forsyth, Joseph Fontenrose, Bernard F. Batto, and Daniel Ogden, all of whom agree that it generally presents man and dragon as adversaries, and that the topos is part of the ruler's propaganda as a good, wise, just, and strong ruler who can vanquish a dragon, proving him worthy to rule the city[21]. The motif of "the woman and the dragon" tells a completely different story. Throughout history, women do not strive to overpower dragons, but to communicate, collaborate, and fuse with them and are assimilated to them. The motif relates to issues of fertility and liminality. Although I investigated the motif in a wide panorama[22], I will connect the iconography of Daenerys's metamorphoses scene with four iconographic examples: the Minoan figurine of a priestess or goddess from the Palace of Knossos (Fig. 5), Medea's apotheosis from the *Cleveland Medea* crater from the Cleveland Museum of Art (Fig. 6), Saint Margaret wooden relic statue from Frauenhaus in Strasburg (Fig. 7), and Cleopatra in the image of *Death of Cleopatra*, a miniature illustration in Antoine Dufour's *Life of Famous Women*, in the Musée Dobree, dated to1505 (Fig. 8). These examples are study cases that can shed light on greater ichnographic threads that developed over time, and which inspired the image of Daenerys and her character.

[20] Sharon Khalifa-Gueta, "The Evolution of the Western Dragon", *Athens Journal of Mediterranean Studies* 4, no. 4 (October 2018): 265-290.

[21] Fontenrose, *Python*; Neil Forsyth, *The Old Enemy: Satan and the Combat Myth* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1987); Bernard F. Batto, *Slaying the Dragon: Mythmaking in the Biblical Tradition* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992); Calvert Watkins, *How to Kill a Dragon:↑Aspects of Indo-European Poetics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001); Ariane Delacampagne and Delacampagne, Christian, *Here Be Dragons* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003); Jonathan D. Evans, *Dragons: Myth and Legend* (London: Apple, 2008); Daniel Ogden, *Drakōn:↑Dragon Myth and Serpent Cult in the Greek and Roman Worlds* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013); Daniel Ogden, *Dragons, Serpents and Slayers in the Classical and Early Christian Worlds: A Sourcebook* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013); Martin Arnold, *The Dragon: Fear and Power* (London: Reaktion Books, 2018).

[22] Khalifa-Gueta, "The Dragon and Femininity…".

4. The Minoan Figurine: A Goddess or a Mistress of Dragons

The Minoan figurine from the Palace of Knossos, is dated to between 1700-1450 BC (Fig. 5) and is the most famous of many similar images found from the Minoan and Micanian periods[23]. All of them present the same iconography: a dressed woman with only her breasts exposed, holding serpents in both hands. The iconography of a goddess holding serpents is typical of images of goddesses throughout the Mediterranean, and their depiction as holding a serpent in one or both hands is a symbol of their connotation with fertility –of the land and of animal and mankind– and of magical powers. Her exposed breasts also symbolize her connotation with fertility. These images are typically small-scale and portable, with amuletic implications, and were usually attributed magical protection powers over the specific household in which they were placed for personal devotion.

Figure 5. *Snake Goddess*, neopalatial Minoan statue from the Palace of Knossos, Heraklion Archaeological Museum, Heraklion (1700-1450 BC). Source: Wikimedia, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:%CE%98%CE%B5%CE%AC_%CF%84%CF%89%CE%BD_%CE%8C%CF%86%CE%B5%CF%89%CE%BD_6393_(cropped).JPG

The Minoan figurine, presumed by some not to be an accurate reconstruction[24], was discovered underneath the throne in the palace of Knossos. It is enigmatic, because it is not certain whether it presents a goddess or a priestess. This confusion is further enhanced because of earlier and later iconographic traditions. She is the continuation of an iconography of Great Egyptian and Levant Goddesses, such as the Qudshu-Astarte-Anat(-Hathor), as depicted on the "Triple Goddess Stone" from Winchester College in Winchester and dated to the age of Rameses III (1198-1166 BC) (Fig. 9). This syncretic image of the Goddess standing naked and exposed, stretching her hands to the sides and holding a serpent and a scepter, is a composite of several Great Goddesses of the Levant and Egypt that radiates powers of fertility and protection[25]. Later examples are of Greek goddesses accompanied by serpents, such as Athena *Parthenos* –the goddess of just wars, wisdom, and domestic labors, and protector of Athens, and Hygieia– the goddess of healing and hygiene. The iconography of divine beings holding serpents in both hands is also presented in images of the Erinyes/Furies-goddesses of vengeance. Thus, the Minoan figurine is a link in an iconological chain of visual formulas for dominant female divinities, which is especially relevant in the presumed matriarchal Minoan culture.

Figure 9. *"Triple Goddess Stone" Qudshu-Astarte-Anat(-Hathor)*, painted limestone, Winchester College, Winchester (age of Rameses III, 1198-1166 BC). Source: Wikimedia, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Qetesh_relief_plaque_(Triple_Goddess_Stone).png

On the other hand, there are documentations of real ceremonies that took place in Greece and Rome, such as the *Thesmophoria* and the *Lanuvium*, in which woman sacrificed food to serpents to ensure a fertile year[26].

[23] Nanno Marinatos, *Minoan Religion: Ritual, Image, and Symbol* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1993), 148, 157-159, 222-223, 276-279, 292; Kenneth Lapatin, *Mysteries of the Snake Goddess: Art, Desire, and the Forging of History* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2002); Alena Trčová-Flamee, "The Motif of the Snake and Its Meaning in Minoan Iconography: The Relation between Crete, Egypt and Near East", *Eirene* 39 (2003): 119-149; Geraldine. C. Gesell, "The Snake Goddesses of the LM IIIB and LM IIIC Periods", *British School at Athens Studies* 18 (2010): 131-139; Ogden, *Drakōn…*, 7-8, 198-199.

[24] Lapatin, *Mysteries of the Snake Goddess…*, 60-90.

[25] David R. West, *Some Cults of the Greek Goddesses and Female Daemons of Oriental Origin: Especially in Relation to the Mythology of Goddesses and Daemons in the Semitic World* (Kevelaer: Butzon and Bercker, 1995).

[26] Herodotus, *The Histories*, trans. Robin Waterfield, intro. and notes Carolyn Dewald (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 6-60; Lucian of Samosata, "Dialogues of the Courtesans: The Scholium to

From evidence of the traditions of later and earlier cultures it becomes clear that the iconology of this image is related to the power of Great Mother Goddesses of fertility, and that it possesses majestic-amuletic qualities related to the protection of the fertility of the land and of human-beings. It must be understood that in ancient times, serpents were presumed to have been wise and to have prophetic and healing qualities, and were worshiped in many Mediterranean cultures[27]. Most of these holy serpents were worshiped and waited on by priestesses. A union with serpents symbolizes great power and communication with other spheres of existence, particularly regarding the realm of the dead. The fact that women were perceived as able to communicate and collaborate with dragons shows what extraordinary powers they had.

Because serpents live underground and are venomous, they were thought in antique cultures to be messengers of the underworld (with no negative connotations). This, alongside their ability to shed their skin, made them considered wiser than humankind. Moreover, the ingredients of venom were presumed to manifest knowledge beyond that possessed by humans. That is why serpents were occasionally worshiped, and their images as *Agathos Daimon* (the good spirit) decorated houses for protection. Thus, fighting a dragon and prevailing proves one to be both strong and wise. Unfortunately for male heroes, most dragons they fought were holy serpents that guarded something sacred. Even the god Apollo, slayer of Python, had to repent to Gaia by being exiled from his temple for several months every year. Dragons were associated with death, time, healing, and prophetic knowledge[28].

An example of holy serpents worshiped by women, central to an understanding of the Minoan figurine as a priestess, is the Pythia-the oracle priestess of Apollo in his temple at Delphi. The Pythia dwelt in the cave of the dead dragon Python and inhaled the toxic fumes rising from a spring that is analogous to the stench that arose from Python's toxic blood. She was seated on a tripod supposedly made of Python's bones, and as the spirit of the dead dragon pulled her hair, she listened to its whispers and prophesized[29]. The Pythia's name alone associates her with Python. It was unusual for a female priestess to be in a temple dedicated to a male god and worshiped by male priests, but then she was the only one capable of conversing with the dead dragon[30]. I suggest that the Pythia was able to converse with Python since the dragon was a messenger of a Great Goddess or emblematizes the Great Mother Goddess herself – which required a priestess. My claim relies on a study of "the previous owner" myth that suggests that the temple was originally dedicated to a matriarchal goddess– Gaia (earth) or Themis-and was occupied (or inherited) by Apollo. This is supported by excavations in the temple of Delphi that exposed a layer containing a Mycenaean temple, probably for the worship of a goddess[31]. Python is a mythic refinement of the historic event that led to the expulsion of Gaia from the temple and embodies her-the dragon is the Great Mother Goddess. The Minoan statue may be a depiction of an earlier variation of such a priestess, who probably served a female goddess. The union of a woman with a dragon implies female powers of knowledge and wisdom from a different dimension than that of mankind.

The Minoan figurine is probably such a Great Goddess; but what does this mean? A Great Goddess manifests the earth: she is a source of life and the location of death; she is the mother of all things and all return to her; she has the ability to generate life, which is exclusively granted to women in the human realm[32]. The tiny Minoan figurine manifests immense powers of creation and the fertility of the land and everything on it, but also the process of deterioration and death, and the cycle of seasons –the process of time–. Images of Great Mother Goddesses, similar to dragons, manifest oppositional qualities; life and death, creation and destruction. Therefore, when an image of a Great Mother is accompanied by a dragon, it is sometimes suggested that she is herself the dragon, an amplification of her power and domination. On other occasions, the dragons are her

Lucian", *Lucian*, trans. Austin Morris Harmon, K. Kilburn, and M. D. MacLeod, vol. 7 (London: Heinemann; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1913-67), 358-365. Karen R. Joines, "The Serpent in the Old Testament," ThD diss., Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, 1967, 68-145; Prytz Johansen, "The Thesmophoria as a Women's Festival", *Temenos* 11 (January 1975): 78-87; Walter Burkert, *Structure and History in Greek Mythology and Ritual* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979), 138-140; Jean-Marie Pailler, "La vierge et le serpent de la trivalence à l'ambiguïté", *Mélanges de l'Ecole française de Rome antiquité* 109 (1997): 516-523; Michael Patterson, *Women at the Thesmophoria* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005); Hugh Bowden, *Mystery Cults of the Ancient World* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010), 26-48; Ogden, *Drakōn*, 203-206, 347-382.

27 For further discussion of serpent worship, see Joines, "The Serpent in the Old Testament"; Ranuccio B. Bandinelli, *Rome, the Centre of Power: Roman Art to AD 200*, trans. Peter Green (London: Thames and Hudson, 1970), 311; Jennifer Larson, *Ancient Greek Cults* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 21-23, 45-47, 62-69, 103-120; Jocelyn M. C. Toynbee, *Animals in Roman Life and Art* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1973), 223-236; Ogden, *Drakōn…*, 272-309.

28 Khalifa-Gueta, "The Evolution of the Western Dragon…", 270-274.

29 Hyginus. *Fabulae*, ed. Peter K. Marshal (Munich: K. G. Saur, 2002), 140-145; Nonnus of Panopolis. *Dionysiaca*, trans. William Henry Denham Rouse, intro. and notes. Herbert Jennings Rose, notes. Levi Robert Lind (London: Heinemann, 1962-63), 9.547-42; Servius, "Commentary on the Aeneid of Virgil", in *Servii Grammatici qui Feruntur in Vergilii carmina commentarii*, eds. Georgius Thilo and Hermannus Hagen (Hildesheim: Olms, 1961), 3.92, 260, 360; Menander Rhetor. *Peri epideiktikon*, 3.17, translated in Ogden, *Dragons, Serpents and Slayers*, 43. Herbert W. Parke and Wormell, D. E. W. *The Delphic Oracle* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1956), 24-26.

30 Joan B. Connelly, *Portrait of a Priestess: Women and Ritual in Ancient Greece* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007), 2, 44.

31 Marie Delcourt, *L'oracle de Delphes* (Paris: Payot, 1955), 28-32; Parke and Wormell, *The Delphic Oracle,* 6-13; Hubert G. De Santerre, *Délos primitive et archaïque* (Paris: E. De Boccard, 1958), 150-151; Christiane Sourvinou-Inwood, "Myth as History: The Previous Owners of the Delphic Oracle", in *Interpretations of Greek Mythology*, ed. Jan N. Bremmer (New York: Routledge, 1988), 215-241; Khalifa-Gueta, "The Dragon and Femininity…", 145-159.

32 Neumann, *The Great Mother…*, 144-145; Erich Neumann, *The Origins and History of Consciousness*, foreword. Carl G. Jung, trans. R. F. C. Hull (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1970), 49, 131-145.

ambassadors and as such manifest the same powers of destruction and rejuvenation as she does.

Presenting Daenerys naked, standing erect –not shifting weight from one foot to the other–, in frontal view and with tiny dragons on her, associates her with this iconographic tradition. Presenting her in the visual formula of a powerful Great Goddess symbolized by her union with dragons, is a reception of an iconography that implies an ancestorial feminine power rooted in her character[33]. She is outside the patriarchal order, because she is presented as a goddess or a disciple of one. Furthermore, presenting her as the cause of the dragons' birth imbues her with Great Goddess qualities, to the point where she becomes almost equal to a goddess of creation. But it also comes with a warning of her destructive abilities.

5. Medea: The Goddess and the Witch

In time, the image of the woman with two serpents was transmitted to Medea, in a fifth century vase series, in one of which she is mentioned by name, that presented her head flanked by two serpents. The *Cleveland Medea* vase painting (Fig. 6) presents Medea in a dragons-driven chariot surrounded by the cycle of the fiery sun. This is the next iconographic inspiration for Daenerys' metamorphosis scene to follow.

Figure 6. *Cleveland Medea*, Lucanian red figured calyx crater, Cleveland Museum of Art, Cleveland, Ohio (c. 400 BC). Source: Wikimedia, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Pittore_di_policoro_(ambito),_cratere_a_calice_con_scene_della_medea_e_del_telephos_di_euripide,_lucania_400_ac_ca._01.jpg

Medea is the mythical prototype of the witch; she can rejuvenate and murder, and her story is replete with dragons. She used to be a dragon mistress, but she betrayed the dragon of Colchis and helped Jason to steal the golden fleece the dragon was guarding. The scene on the *Cleveland Medea* vase is the final scene in her story in Cerinthus. After she murdered Jason's intended bride and her own children –their bodies are lying on an altar in the vase painting– she gains *apotheosis* (transformed into a goddess) on a dragons-driven chariot sent by her grandfather Helios, the god of the sun, in a solar cycle of fire. She becomes a goddess of fertility and agriculture for the people of Marsi. Her apotheosis is her reward for the horrific acts she perpetrated. The solar cycles and Medea's connection to dragons are visual manifestations of ancient philosophical discourses on her consuming rage and stereotypes with regard to women[34].

The connection between dragons and the element of fire is well attested in antiquity. Ogden outlines the literary evidence that connects dragons to fire. A fragment from Euripides allegorizes the sun as a dragon-driven chariot, and Roger Beck claims to prove the profound ancient connection of the sun and fire to serpents. Bernard M. W. Knox studied the allegorical connection between serpents and fire[35]. The connection of Medea to serpents and fire is explained by Martha C. Nussbaum's "Serpents in the Soul: A Reading of Seneca's Medea", which presents the snakes as an allegory of Medea's uncontrolled desire. Nussbaum analyses the philosophical tradition of both Stoic and Neoplatonic schools, which presented Medea's actions as demonstrating how women's uncontrolled rage is analogized to serpents. Epictetus, a philosopher of the end of the first century AD who was probably quoting the third-century BC Stoic scholar Chrysippus, described Medea's metamorphosis into a serpent when in a raging passion: "Why, then, are you angry with her, because the poor woman has gone astray in the greatest matters, and has been transformed from a human being into a viper?"[36] This philosophical debate can be traced back to Euripides's play *Medea*, which probably inspired the iconography of the *Cleveland Medea* where her burning rage is symbolized by the dragons-driven chariot and the cycle of fire[37].

[33] On the methodology of reception, see Lorna Hardwick, *Reception Studies* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003); Charles Martindale and Thomas, Richard F., eds., *Classics and the Uses of Reception* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006); Lorna Hardwick and Christopher Stray, eds., *A Companion to Classical Receptions* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2008).

[34] Daniel Ogden, "Medea as Mistress of Dragons", in *Contesti magici*, eds. Marina Piranomonte and Francisco Marco Simón (Rome: De Luca Editori d'Arte, 2012), 267-277.

[35] Augustus Nauck, ed., *Tragicorum graecorum fragmenta* (Hildesheim: G. Olms, 1964), 663, Euripides: fr. 937; Macrobius Ambrosius Aurelius Theodosius, *Saturnalia*, ed. and trans. Robert Kaster (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011), 1.19.18. Bernard M. W. Knox, "The Serpent and the Flame: The Imagery of the Second Book of the Aeneid", *American Journal of Philology* 71, no. 4 (1950): 379-340; Roger Beck, *Planetary Gods and Planetary Orders in the Mysteries of Mithras* (Leiden: Brill, 1988), 55-56; Ogden, *Drakōn*..., 218-225.

[36] Epictetus, *The Discourses as Reported by Arrian, the Manual and Fragments*, trans. William A. Oldfather (London: W. Heinemann, 1926-1928), Chrysippus *Discourses*: 1.28.7, slightly emended by John M. Dillon.

[37] Oliver Taplin, *Comic Angels: And Other Approaches to Greek Drama through Vase-Paintings* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 17-27; Martin Revermann, "The 'Cleveland Medea' Calyx Crater and the Iconography of Ancient Greek Theatre", *Theatre Research International* 30, no. 1 (2005): 3-18; Oliver Taplin, *Pots and Plays: Interactions between Tragedy and Greek Vase-Painting of the Fourth Century BC* (Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum, 2007), 117-125; John M. Dillon, "Medea among the Philosophers", and Martha C.

Daenerys also emerges from cycles of fire as the one that cannot be burned and with fire-breathing dragons. Both Daenerys and Medea are demigoddesses born in circles of fire, and both lost their children before their metamorphosis. The difference is that Medea is the witch who killed her own children, whereas Daenerys burns the witch alive. Nevertheless, the Medea stereotype of the witch as consorting with dragons lingered for millennials and is present in Daenerys's image with the dragon. The iconography of her with dragons conveys a warning signs of feminine danger. Thus, Daenerys's iconology alludes to both feminine power and feminine danger.

Mythology is not a uniform collection of stories and images. There are many stories about Medea from different parts of the Peloponnese. The evidence from Corinthian myths tells a different story: Medea declines Zeus's courtship, and Hera chose to reward her by making her children immortal. But the children were neglected in Hera's temple and died. The Corinthian ritual of dressing fourteen youths in black and addressing them for a year as if they were dead was attributed to Medea's children's cult. Sarah I. Johnston claims this to be the residue of a ceremonial sacrifice of children to either Medea or Hera, which was meant to purify a *miasma* (a wrongdoing toward man or god that needs to be purified). This myth and ritual might contain an answer for the puzzling placement of Medea's children on an altar in the *Cleveland Medea.* This mythic aspect of Medea was recognized by the Athenian Euripides (480-406 BC) at the end of his play *Medea* when a festival is dedicated to her children. Therefore, the presentation of the children on an altar in the *Cleveland Medea* is inspired by Euripides's play and the Corinthian cult of the children of Medea[38].

In Daenerys's metamorphosis scene, the dead Khal Drogo is being cremated on an altar, and the witch is being burned alive. Deanery's lost baby is reborn in the form of dragons, which resulted in her apotheosis. Whereas Medea is physically elevated by the dragons, Daenerys's elevation is conceptual. Both encounters with dragons originate in their ancestry; Daenerys manifests her ancestral powers, and Medea is rescued by her grandfather's messengers. The encounter with the dragons changes both women's social status from being victims of androcentricity to being above it. Daenerys's transformation is stressed by the bowing of the *Dothraki*.

But the example of Medea is also a reception of a warning sign. She is too powerful, she commits the most horrific and immoral acts, and her union and assimilation with the dragons symbolize the danger from a too powerful woman. The connection of Daenerys with dragons not only breaks the androcentricity of the *Dothraki* and of Westeros, but also of her own ancestral Targaryen house. Her being a woman with three dragons activates a stereotype that began with Medea of a woman who is too powerful.

6. Saint Margaret Emerging from the Dragon

Saint Margaret is another manifestation of "the woman and the dragon" motif that helps to understand the iconology of Daenerys's metamorphosis scene. A Saint Margaret wooden relic statue (Fig. 7) presents her as holding a tiny dragon. The statue is votive and was an object of adoration, believed to have religio-magical qualities.

Figure 7. Niclaus Gerhaert von Leyden and Workshop, *Saint Margaret*, wooden relic statue, 50,8x45,5x29,6 cm., from Frauenhaus in Strasburg, The Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago (1465-1470). Source: Wikimedia, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Saint_Margaret_of_Antioch,_Nicolaus_Gerhaert_van_Leyden.jpg

The most popular version of Saint Margaret's life is in the *Golden Legend* by Jacobus de Voragine, which begins with the etymology of her name, which means "pearl". The story takes place during the reign of the Roman emperor Diocletian. She was a noble girl from a pagan family in Antioch who was sent to be raised by a Christian wet nurse. This caregiver had Margaret baptized, for which she was banished by her father. Margaret's beauty attracted Olibrius, a pagan prefect, who desired her as his wife or concubine. As a Christian, Margaret refused Olibrius and, as a result, was condemned to be tortured. She is so disfigured by her torture that the hideous sight is too much for Olibrius, and he sends her away. In her prison cell, she prays to "see her

Nussbaum, "Serpents in the Soul: A Reading of Seneca's *Medea*", in *Medea: Essays on Medea in Myth, Literature, Philosophy, and Art*, eds. James J. Clauss and Sarah Iles Johnston (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997), 211-252.

[38] Euripides, *Medea*, trans. Michael Collier and Georgia Machemer (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 1389-1390. Sarah I. Johnston, "Corinthian Medea and the Cult of Hera Akraia", and Christiane Sourvinou-Inwood, "Medea at a Shifting Distance: Images and Euripidean Tragedy", in Clauss and Johnston, *Medea: Essays*, 44-70, 253-296, particularly 272; Revermann, "The 'Cleveland Medea'…", 4-6, 8-11.

enemy", and a huge dragon appears. She makes the sign of the cross, and the dragon vanishes. Voragine informs of another variation in which Margaret is devoured by the dragon and when inside it, she makes the sign of the cross and bursts forth from it. When the dragon vanishes, a black demon appears, and Margaret exorcises him. The next day, her torture continues with torches and boiling water, after which she is sentenced to death by beheading. In her prayer, she calls for women in labor to pray to her to ensure healthy children. She is beheaded, and her head is taken to Heaven by angels[39].

Saint Margaret's popularity soared in the ninth century to the point that she was considered one of the fourteen most important protective saints of the Catholic Church. She is the patron of childbirth, the protector of children from illness, and the patron of agriculture. The saint emerging from the dragon is her most popular iconography. In most images, the saint is seated on or rather united with the dragon as an anguipede. The relic is of only the bust of the saint[40]. The enormous dragon is miniaturized, as if were a pet. The miniaturization of the dragon is typical of Medieval images-making it an attribute. Her hair style and crown are designed to mirror the contemporary high-class female viewers. This statue is portable and was probably brought to high-class women during and after pregnancy. The dragon in Saint Margaret images seems docile and cooperative; there to help her chase away demons. Margaret generated the dragon using the power of her mind and made it collaborate with her. As a relic, the tiny image of the dragon concentrated great powers.

The motif of "the woman and the dragon" alludes to fertility and agriculture. The communication and collaboration of Saint Margaret with the dragon suggest that her image was intended to protect fertility. It particularly came into play during childbirth as an image of apotropaic protection. Stephen R. Wilk translates the word "apotropaic" as "to turn away"[41]. For example, the snake-haired monster Medusa is put in front of temples to chase off like demons. The apotropaic function of Saint Margaret's image is crucial, because female demons considered dangerous to childbirth and infants were depicted as angipedians/*dracontopede* – half woman and half serpent/dragons[42]. Thus, depicting a saint joined with a dragon was intended to chase away similar images. The image of Saint Margaret is both that of a holy woman and of a malicious dangerous demon[43].

Saint Margaret is usually presented with long hair, thus mimicking female fertility demons' such as Lilith depicted as the serpent of Eden (Fig. 10) with long hair and a crown. The long hair is indicative of seduction and danger. When Medea is described by Ovid (Publius Ovidius Naso, 43-17/18 AD) when creating the potion to restore Aeson's youth, the first thing she does is to loosen her hair:

> "…she sets out walking barefoot from her house, with garments loosened and with unbound hair cascading down her back…and not in vain does my chariot appear, drawn by its matched pair of flying dragons… she stroked her dragons' necks and flicked their reins lightly, and they ascended"[44].

Figure 10. *Adam and Eve*, relief under the feet of Mary from the Portal of the Virgin, Cathedral of Notre Dame, Paris (1160-1260). Source: Wikimedia, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Temptation_Adam_Eva.jpg

The loosening of the hair symbolizes promiscuity, and irrationality, and is the first act when one transforms into a witch. The loose hair also alludes to serpents. Charms for the protection of the womb named *Hystera* (womb) carried the image of Medusa, with her serpentine-hair as a radiating sun (Fig. 11). Gananath Obeyesekere anthropological investigation concluded that wild and uncontained hair indicates women's social border-

[39] Voragine, *The Golden Legend*, book 93. Jocelyn G. Price, "The Virgin and the Dragon: The Demonology of Seinte Margarete", *Leeds Studies in English* 16 (1985): 349-357; Jean-Pierre Albert, "La lègende de Sainte Marguerite: Un mythe maïeutique?", *Razo* 8 (1988): 19-31; Catherine Pearce, "The Cult of St Margaret of Antioch", *Feminist Theology* 6, no. 16 (1997): 70-85; Wendy R. Larson, "The Role of Patronage and Audience in the Cults of Sts. Margaret and Marina of Antioch", in *Gender and Holiness: Men, Women, and Saints in Late Medieval Europe*, eds. Samantha J. E. Riches and Sarah Salih (New York: Routledge, 2005), 23-35; Dresvina, *A Maid with a Dragon*…

[40] Oswald Goetz and Meyric R. Rogers, "A Medieval Masterpiece Rediscovered", *Bulletin of the Art Institute of Chicago* 38, no. 4 (April-May 1944): 53-58. Khalifa-Gueta, "The Dragon and Femininity…", 242-243.

[41] Stephen R. Wilk, *Medusa* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 42.

[42] Alice Kemp-Welch, "The Woman-Headed Serpent in Art", *Nineteenth Century and After: A Monthly Review* 52, no. 310 (1902): 983-991; Georges Hulin, "Nos premiers parents dans l'art: Adam, Eve, Lilith", *Mélanges Hulin de Loo* 1 (1931): 116-122; Jeffrey M. Hoffeld, "Adam's Two Wives", *Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* 26, no. 10 (1968): 430-440; Henry A. Kelly, "The Metamorphoses of the Eden Serpent during the Middle Ages and Renaissance", *Viator* 2 (1972): 301-328; Irven M. Resnick and Kenneth F. Kitchell, "'The Sweepings of Lamia': Transformations of the Myths of Lilith and Lamia", in *Religion, Gender, and Culture in the Pre-Modern World*, eds. Alexandra Cuffel and Brian Britt (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 77-104.

[43] Khalifa-Gueta, "The Dragon and Femininity…", 19-58, 242-243.

[44] Ovid, "Medea," trans. Charles Martin, *Arion: A Journal of Humanities and the Classics*, ser. 3, 6, no. 2 (Fall-Winter 1998): 121-123. Levine, "The Gender Grammar of Ancient Mediterranean Hair…".

line in modern times[45]. The saint mimics her counterparts; thus, her abundant hair has an apotropaic function. Long hair was also commonly attributed to high-ranking maidens. A saint with long hair was intended to mitigate the bias against these maidens and stress the virgin saint as their role-model.

Margaret generated the dragon using the power of her imagination. This was believed in the Medieval period to be the ability to create realities, too powerful for a woman, even a saint. Alongside her image as taming a dragon. Together, they inform of this relic's immense power and its dualist meaning. Daenerys also created new realities and generated dragons. Her depiction with tiny dragons still implies the great powers these tiny images emblematize. Choosing to present her with her hair stresses her maidenhood but also the dualist saintly and dangerous aspects of her persona. Daenerys's tiny and fragile appearance, also drawn from Saint Margaret, emblematize enormous powers. The concept of a woman that formed dragons and collaborated with them to chase away evil, is there in Daenerys' image –the birth of the dragons are a portent of positive change–.

Figure 11. *Medusa Hystera ring amulet*, Mediterranean, silver, 4,4x4,4x0,3 cm. Menil Collection, Houston, Texas (6th-8th century) (490.824) Source: ©Paul Hester, Menil Collection, Houston.

Saint Margaret's story also tells of her being burned with torches and baptized in boiling water, none of which caused her any harm. Thus, Daenerys resistance to fire and scalding water is similar to Saint Margaret.

7. Cleopatra: The Dragons as Messengers of Death

In Martin's novel, the mother of dragons is described breastfeeding her dragons: "The cream-and-gold dragon was suckling at her left breast, the green-and-bronze at the right"[46]. This image follows the Medieval iconography of Cleopatra, such as in the miniature illustration of *the Death of Cleopatra* (Fig. 8). The breastfeeding in the television metamorphosis scene takes eleven seconds. The immediate resemblance between the two scenes requires further elaboration.

Figure. 8. *Death of Cleopatra*, miniature illustration of Antoine Dufour's *Life of Famous Women*, Musée Dobree, Nantes (1505). Source: Wikimedia, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Les_vies_des_femmes_c%C3%A9l%C3%A8bres_d%27Antoine_Dufour_-_Cleopatra.jpg

Cleopatra VII Philopator (69-30 BC) was the last in the pharaonic dynasty. She formed an alliance with Mark Antony (83-30 BC), who was at the time the most prosperous and decorated Roman warlord and expected to succeed Julius Caesar (100-44 BC). Defeated in battle by Gaius Octavius (later known as Caesar Augustus: 63 BC-14 AD), Antony committed suicide, after which Cleopatra did the same. She is remembered throughout western history as an evil, seductive opportunist[47]. Her iconography depicts her suicide, showing a serpent attached to each of her breasts, granting her the bite of death. However, she is portrayed very much alive, as if she were breastfeeding the serpents, as Daenerys does in Martin's book, bringing a dualistic meaning into play. The dragons function here as messengers of death. And the union between the stereotyped woman and the dragons alludes to the death and destruction she can bring to a man.

She is discussed in Giovanni Boccaccio's *Famous Women* as an example of a powerful, dangerous, and deceptive woman who led to the fall of an ancient empire:

[45] Jeffrey Spier, "Medieval Byzantine Magical Amulets and Their Tradition", *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 56 (1993): 25-62; Gananath Obeyesekere, *Medusa's Hair: An Essay on Personal Symbols and Religious Experience* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981).

[46] Martin, *A Song of Ice and Fire*, 806.

[47] Brian A. Curran, "Love, Triumph, Tragedy: Cleopatra and Egypt in High Renaissance Rome", in *Cleopatra: A Sphinx Revisited*, ed. Margaret M. Miles (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 96-131; Dennis Geronimus, *Piero di Cosimo: Visions Beautiful and Strange* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 61-64, also fig. 41.

"…she acquired a universal reputation for her greed, cruelty, and lust"[48]. Her image is one of a long series that began with Medea and portrayed the union of women with dragons as dangerous and destructive. It alludes to stereotypes constructed against powerful women who challenged androgenic social boundaries and is inflamed with political agendas to contain and control women's assets and education, and to tame them to be under masculine control[49].

The description of Daenerys breastfeeding the dragons symbolizes new life, new hope, and a new identity. But it is also a warning sing; a stereotype against a too powerful woman who has the capacity to be herself a messenger of death and destruction. She is the giver of life to messengers of death, and can overcome death as she overcomes the burning of fire. Cleopatra and Daenerys are mirror images of each other – one joins dragons to cause death and the other to overcome it.

Cleopatra and Daenerys have several contact points in their story: both are the last descendant of a legendary ruling clan; both aspired to reclaim past glory by enlisting the services of a champion male to help them revive their ancestors' past glory. When these men died unexpectedly, they both seemed to desire death for themselves. The difference between them is that the serpents clinging to Cleopatra's breasts are messengers of death, while the dragons leaning on Daenerys's breasts have the opposite function of bringing new life, new hope, and a new identity for the queen. This new identity changes the mind and hearts of the people that surround her and of the reader.

This also sheds light on Daenerys's persona. She is the opposite of Cleopatra. Cleopatra was a ruler by birthright, but she did not use her power well, which led to the fall of her Empire. This is already a reality for Daenerys –she is denied her birthright–. The image of the miracle birth and breastfeeding of the dragons is associated with the death of Cleopatra. Daenerys is a sphinx, reborn by fire. She regained her ancestorial glory by giving birth to dragons. By doing so, she becomes the rightful heir to the crumbling Westeros. She is also the reverse bias against women –the opposite of Cleopatra, and her character negates everything Cleopatra stands for–.

8. The Power of the Goddess and Its Meaning

In the *Game of Thrones* television production, Daenerys is presented as part of the iconology of "the woman and the dragon" motif. She is a female protagonist whose instant metamorphosis grants her *apotheosis*. At the beginning of season one, she played her part within the patriarchal social structure: being sold into marriage, raped, and subordinated. Her union with the dragons undermines this social structure and raises her status within the hierarchy so greatly that she actually changes the social structure around her. She becomes a demigoddess, a guarded sanctuary no one dares to take by force, a source of life and rejuvenation, and the resumption of an ancestral force. Her image challenges the bias against woman with extreme power, yet, at the same time, manifests it and is a play on the dualist meaning of the motif.

Daenerys's firm and balanced stance with dragons is a reception of Great Mother Goddesses and female saints. The firm stance of female divinities makes them pillars of the world. Saint Margaret is one of four female saints who are considered the foundations on which the world stands, but the most salient image in this aspect is the Madonna[50]. The firm stance also eliminates eroticism and sexuality, as previously mentioned with regard to the iconography of the Minoan snakes goddess; it alludes to her analogy with the Earth. The reception is not merely visual but also replete with meaning.

Prior to this scene, Daenerys had almost no power and was on the point of losing what little hope for power she had with the death of Khal Drogo. Yet in entering the fiery maze, as if entering the womb of the Goddess, she sheds her old self and is reborn as a woman united with the forces of genesis –a demigoddess–. She transforms from a socially vulnerable and powerless being into a force to be reckoned with; her powers are emblematized in the image of the dragons. The scene manifests the transformation of a woman from being subordinate to a patriarchal order to becoming united with her primaeval power and carve her own path toward a new order. In her new role, she is no longer an object for sexual abuse but is protected; she becomes a temple.

Almost all Great Goddesses have a dualist nature. A Great Goddess is a creator of life and rejuvenation, but also a source of death and destruction. The balance and stability of Daenerys image and her acceptance of her metamorphosis exhibit her extraordinary genesis and fertility abilities, and shed light on several, sometimes contradictory, aspects of her persona; her past and future, her darkness and light, her fragility and power, her ability to create and destroy life, and to fall, and rise again. Her latent power has suddenly exploded in the form of dragons. At this moment, she poses the ultimate threat to the patriarchy of Westeros. But her power is positive and feminine in contrast to the Westeros's destructive and terrorizing masculine domination. Daenerys's power is based on genesis, re-emergence from ash, and the ability to give birth, although she also has destructive aspects. She is the master of her fate and is never again to be sexualized in order to get help from men.

The paradox is that, at the moment Daenerys emerges from the fire, the dragons are tiny –they cannot harm or pose any danger to anyone– so the transformation actually occurs in the mind of the viewer. Like Saint Margaret, Daenerys materialized her inner self, and created a magical being that was thought to have vanished from the world. The connection of this scene to Christianity is

[48] Giovanni Boccaccio, *Famous Women*, ed. and trans. Virginia Brown (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), 178-184: 88.

[49] Hulin, "Nos premiers parents dans l'art"; Sharon L. Jansen, *The Monstrous Regiment of Women: Female Rulers in Early Modern Europe* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002); Katherine A. McIver (ed.), *Wives, Widows, Mistresses, and Nuns in Early Modern Italy: Making the Invisible Visible through Art and Patronage* (Farnham, UK, and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2012).

[50] Katherine T. Brown, *Mary of Mercy in Medieval and Renaissance Italian Art: Devotional Image and Civic Emblem* (New York: Routledge, 2017), 28, 30-32.

not only through Saint Margaret, but also through Christ himself, who was often allegorized as a dragon, particularly the copper serpent[51].

The multiple, disparate aspects underpinning this image cause a transformative reaction in the viewer/the reader to her character. They are forced to expand their intellectual approach toward a character with oppositional features and undergo a metamorphosis themselves, reevaluating their judgments and rethinking their categorization of her figure. The metamorphosis disrupts the viewers' established mindset, and forces a reassessment of the stereotypes that previously defined her character.

Thus, what can be considered the postfeminist, multi-meaning aspects of Daenerys's metamorphosis image are suggested here to have been carried over from antiquity and Renaissance art. The fact that her single image can signify multiple, even contradictory aspects, relates to the reception of the motif of "the woman and the dragon". The scene has various contradictory aspects –death and birth–, destruction and creation, witchcraft and miracles (both are interventions in the natural order, one a manipulation of faith and the other a godly intervention), great feminine power and fragility, and the inherited binary connotation of dragons as positive and negative symbols.

9. Conclusions

To conclude, Martin and the HBO directors and script writers of *Game of Thrones* were reacting to the conceptual motif of "the woman and the dragon" and, consciously or not, harnessed the iconographic tradition of the motif to convey meanings. The ancient motif that had been embedded with concepts of holiness, healing, genesis powers, destruction, witchcraft, and temptation was applied in Daenerys's metamorphosis scene to convey her extreme change and the potential change of the world that surrounds her to follow. The reception of such an old motif and its varied aspects stirs layers of meanings –some positive and some negative– that inflate the scene and Daenerys's new acquired identity. The brief outline of the motif here suggests that Daenerys's image is connected with and a recipient of this ancient motif.

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