

Brill's New Paulys entry for "Medea"

(Μήδεια/*Médeia*, Lat. Medea). Born in [Aea](#)/Colchis (M. Αἰαίη: Apoll. Rhod. 3,1136) as the daughter of [Aeetes](#), who was the son of Helios and the brother of Circe, and the Oceanid [Idyia](#) (Hes. Theog. 956ff., 992ff., Apollod. 1,129) or [Hecate](#) (Diod. Sic. 4,45,3). Sister of [Chalciope](#) [2] and [Apsyrtus](#) [1] (Apollod. 1,83.132), betrothed to Styus (Val. Fl. 5,257f.), wife of [Jason](#) [1] and by him the mother of Medeus (Hes. Theog. 1001) or [Mermerus](#) and Pheres (Apollod. 1,146). Subsequently she is the wife of [Aegeus](#) and mother of Medus (Apollod. 1,147). On the Isles of the Blessed she became the spouse of [Achilles](#) [1] (Apollod. Epit. 5,5; Ibycus fr. 291; Sim. fr. 558 PMG; Lycoph. 174; Apoll. Rhod. 4,811ff.) [1].

M. is closely connected with the myth of the Argonauts. Made to fall in love with Jason by Hera with Aphrodite's help (Pind. P. 4,213ff.; schol. Eur. Med. 527; Apoll. Rhod. 3,7ff. 275ff.; Val. Fl. 6,455ff.). In return for a promise of marriage, M. supports him in performing the tasks given to him by Aeetes in order to obtain the Golden Fleece (Apollod. 1,129-131; [Jason](#)) and flees with him from Colchis. To hold up their pursuers, M. cuts up her brother Apsyrtus (Pherecydes FGrH 3 F 32; Apollod. 1,133 [2. 83ff.]; in Apoll. Rhod. 4,421ff. she lures him into a fatal trap). Because of Zeus' anger, M. and Jason must be absolved of the murder by [Circe](#) (Apollod. 1,134; Apoll. Rhod. 4,557ff.). M. is saved from being turned over to her pursuers by a ruse of [Arete](#) [1], the queen of the Phaiaces: the immediate marriage of M. to Jason (Apollod. 1,137f.; Apoll. Rhod. 4,1004ff.). M. overcomes the bronze giant [Talos](#) (Apollod. 1,140f.; Apoll. Rhod. 4,1638ff.).

After the return to Jason's home in [Iolcus](#), M. avenges Hera (by convincing Pelias' daughters to commit patricide) (Apollod. 1,144; Soph. Rizotomoi fr. 534ff. TrGF 4; Eur. Peliades fr. 601ff. TGF) and Jason (whose parents and brothers had been driven to death by [Pelias](#)) (according to Nostoi fr. 7 PEG I; Ov. Met. 7,162ff., M. rejuvenates [Aeson](#) [1], in Pherecydes FGrH3 F 113, Sim. fr. 548 PMG Jason). Thereupon, [Acastus](#) banishes M. and Jason from Iolcus (Apollod. 1,14f.; Diod. Sic. 4,50ff.). Both go into exile in Corinth. M. bears Jason two sons.

This is where the early epics that still entered the mythographic collection of Pherecydes/Apollodorus attach: already Creophilus (PEG I 161: 7th cent. BC) fr. 9 knows of M. as the murderess of the Corinthian king [Creon](#) [2], her flight without her children and Jason to Athens (cf. Hdt. 7,62,1: pre-Euripidean [3. 114 n. 1]), pointing at her falling out with Jason presumably because of his liaison with the king's daughter, the slaying of the children by the Corinthians and the rumour of M.'s infanticide (cf. Apollod. 1,145f.). The Corinthian epic poet [Eumelus](#) [5] (PEG I 108: 8th cent. BC) even made Aeetes a Corinthian by birth (fr. 3; Pind. O. 13,53f.), so that M. as the heiress to the throne could go with Jason from Iolcus to Corinth (fr. 5; Sim. fr. 545 PMG; Apollod. 1,145f.). However, since no Corinthian descendants of Jason and M. other than Mermerus and Pheres are documented, the epic had to eliminate the two brothers from Corinth: Thus, the children perish during M.'s attempt (or Hera's, out of gratitude for M. rejecting Zeus' advances, schol. Pind. O. 13,74g) to make them immortal in the temple of Hera [Acraea](#) [2] (Eumelus fr. 5 PEG). Another version claims that the Corinthians killed the children, who were left by M. in the temple when she fled (Apollod. 1,146; Parmeniscus schol. Eur. Med. 264; cf. Eur. Med. 1379ff.). M. flees from Corinth on the snake-drawn chariot of her grandfather Helios (Apollod. 1,147). In Athens she

becomes the wife of [Aegeus](#) and mother of Medos (Apollod. 1,147; cf. Eur. Med. 663ff.; in Diod. 4,54,7 M. flees to Hercules in Thebes). After the failed attempt to murder [Theseus](#), the son of Aegeus (Eur. Aegeus fr. 1ff. TGF), M. returns with Medos to her homeland, where she reinstalls Aeetes as ruler after killing [Perses](#) (Apollod. 1,147) and names the Medians after herself (Hdt. 7,62,1). After her earthly existence, M. as a goddess becomes the wife of Achilles in the Islands of the Blessed (Apollod. Epit. 5,5).

M. is a creation for the Thessalian Argonaut myth [4. 18ff.]. Her nature is explained by her origin in Colchis, the land of sorcery *par excellence*, and by the fact that descent from Helios is generally associated with [magic](#). Homer fashioned his Circe after M. (Str. 1,2,40). The fairy tale of the king's daughter who helps the foreign youth against her own father [2. 149ff.; 5. 167; 6. 325ff.] underlies even the earliest version only to a limited extent because M. merely serves as a tool of Hera's revenge on Pelias there (there is no animosity between the latter as the legitimate ruler and Jason: Pherecydes FGrH 3 F 105; Apollod. 1,109; Pind. P. 4,250; Apoll. Rhod. 3,66ff. 1134ff.; schol. Eur. Med. 527 [4. 12ff.]) and because M. is a goddess herself (Hes. Theog. 956ff., fr. 376; Alcman fr. 163 PMG; Apollod. 1,129; Musaeus 455 F 2 [7. 234f.]), whose relationship with a mortal is evident in the son Medeius named after her [4. 25ff.] and who lives in [Elysium](#) after her earthly existence. Neither can a '*M. initiatrix*' [2. 39ff.] and a founding heroine [2. 71ff.] or prophetess/muse M. [2. 103ff.] be documented, because in Pind. P. 4 M. only foretells the founding of Cyrene in Delphi's stead [4.262f.].

There is no literary evidence for splitting the M. character into a Thessalian (or Aeaeian-Colchian) and a Corinthian heroine [1. 48ff.], whose place was then taken by an infanticidal Hera as a '*reproductive demon*' and it is also superfluous [2. 57ff.]. The relocation of M., who was associated with Hera from the beginning, to Corinth was favoured by the cult of Hera Acraea and her temple legend of the graves of two times seven heroes there [2. 46ff.; 5. 173ff.; 7. 230f., 240ff., 322f.] as well as by the Helios cult [8. 64].

The infanticide was introduced to the Attic stage by Neophron (TrGF 1 no. 15) and (according to Dicaearchus fr. 63 Wehrli; Aristot. fr. 635) after him especially by [Euripides](#) (Med. 1271ff.), from where it entered inseparable from M.'s name into Roman (Sen. Med. 969ff.; Val. Fl. 5,442ff.; but cf. Ov. Met. 7,1-424; Ov. Epist. 12) and world literature [2. 297ff.; 6; 9], including Christa Wolf's novel [10]. On M. in art, see [1. 56-64; 2. 253ff.; 10. 127ff.; 11; 12. 91-100; 13; 14].

[Argonauts](#); [Euripides](#) [1] (B. 2.; D. 2.)

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