

Bellerophon and Perseus: A Hero Recast?

The myth of the hero Bellerophon has developed through all the different ways that it has been told, and changed through the many generations that have heard the story. Bellerophon is most well known in myth for being the hero that slew the Chimera and then went on to tame the legendary horse Pegasus, both with help from Athena herself guiding him on his way to fame amongst the Gods. Bellerophon being mentioned in the Iliad definitely helped to spread his myth further with oral readings and stories.

Perseus was the hero chosen to replace Bellerophon in his own myth, changing both the way the hero himself was seen but also changing his reputation within his own myth. One example of this is how Perseus is such a different character, often portrayed as the “perfect” hero who is willing to do any task and be the perfect protector. Bellerophon, however, was portrayed as having committed horrible acts of murder and violence, even going so far as to be accused of something that he did not do by somebody else. The change from one man, who was seen as having committed acts of violence of his own will, to Perseus, who was a good man in his own stead and would do anything to appease the Gods’ wishes was something that happened during the Middle Ages and through into the Renaissance. The change was mostly visual, coming from the artwork and murals that were created in order to spread the story wider and therefore make it have a lasting impact on people who learnt about it.

Religion is one of the aspects in the story of Bellerophon, but also what caused his downfall from Olympus. The way in which he goes about his tasks seems to be purely with himself in mind, and only making the Gods happy with him. He doesn’t seem to think about what self-appointing himself as a God does to his own reputation with the real Gods, and causes his own fall. It could have been that the crimes Bellerophon was accused of also lead into the mindset that people had regarding him as a character and a hero. People may simply have not wanted his actions to be copied, therefore leading to his change and “recasting” of his entire character.



Bellerophon fighting the Chimera. Side A of an attic black-figured “overlap” Siana cup, ca. 575–550 BC. Found in Camiros (Rhodes).



Bellerophon riding Pegasus and slaying the Chimera. Central medallion of a Roman mosaic, 2nd to 3rd century CE. Musée Rolin, Autun, France



Andromeda freed by Perseus by Piero di Lorenzo in 1510 - circa 1515 - oil on panel

The *Genealogica Deorum Gentilium* (1) written by Giovanni Boccaccio in 1360 (a compilation of the complicated mythology and relationships within) identifies and puts Perseus atop Pegasus instead of Bellerophon. In addition to this, Perseus was presumably seen as sort of a “poster child” for the myth instead of Bellerophon, as his acts of violence may not have been received as well as Perseus’ acts of heroism in the face of danger. The replacement would have possibly happened around the time of the Middle Ages and carried on into the Renaissance.

Personally, I think that Bellerophon may have been replaced in popular culture by people who thought that he was too “human” of a hero and therefore people would try to learn from him, copying his actions. Obviously this would never be allowed, so he was replaced and “recast” with a more popular hero who preached better morals and was overall more typecast in the role. Such as when actors get replaced for specific roles, Bellerophon simply got recast with a different actor and a different name in an attempt to make him into a completely different character, but all of his character and personality are still very visible in the character of Perseus. Despite him being essentially a completely different person, his morals and teachings come across to the audience in exactly the same way as they did before he was changed to be more appealing to a wider audience.

REFERENCE LIST

(1 Boccaccio, G. (1487), *Genealogia deorum gentilium* , Sym. de Gabis , Vincentiae .

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