

Greek

Student 1: Low Excellence

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The myth of the Trojan War was popular to the Greeks for a multitude of reasons. Part of the myths attraction was due the many themes and morals in the story such as passion, brutality, dismay and hope, while presenting entertaining pathos and humour. The bulk of the Trojan cycle is told through the *Illiad* and the *Odessey*, two epic poems scripted by Homer. The knowledge of the myth would have been transferred orally, which ensured the survival of the tale, without texts.¹

Another reason why Greeks displayed scenes of this war on Greek vases was because of the importance that Greeks placed on warfare. Such examples of important wars are the Persian invasion, the battle of Marathon and the Naval battle of Salamis, which coincide with the predicted dates of the respective vases.

In regards to the Rape of Cassandra, seen on the Kleophrades vase, the Persian invasion of Athens could provide some explanation to why the Greeks illustrated in an antagonistic way. This may possibly be a way to show that morally, all raping and pillaging is wrong. Also the dramatic irony of Cassandra being raped is filled with entertaining pathos.² Greek myths possess great power and charm. Greek artist illustrated them with imagination and subtlety, creating works that inspired the culturally docile Roman and remain impressive to this day.³

Roman

In fact the Romans gained influence of all things Hellenistic and reinterpreted their religion, philosophy, government, mythology and art. The Greeks were far more civilised and sophisticated than the Romans and had a very rich store of tales about the origins of the world, the gods who controlled it and the heroes who had once inhabited it.⁴

In Regards to the Flight of Aeneas, the Romans may possibly have wanted to depict this scene as a way of establishing the origins of the Roman Empire, as in the myth it tells of him discovering the land on which Rome is built upon. The Emperor Augustus claimed to have been a descendant of Aeneas has commissioned works in the likeness of Aeneas to show his heritage, such as Augustus posing as Aeneas on the *Ara Pacis Augustae*. Patrons of the time would get artists to depict their features on that of the main character, to show the similitudes between them.

The most manifest example of replication by the Romans of the Greeks, is of the gods and goddesses. This may be because the Romans were not imaginative people and their tales couldn't compete to the fascination of Greek Myth and Greek Legend. This may have been why they equated Greek gods and Greek goddesses with their own colourless divinities and attached the myths that went along with the names to them. The Greeks gods had human personalities and displayed human emotions such as love, hatred, anger, greed, jealousy and spite. They had human relationships, fought battles and had vicious revenge on those who displeased them. The enthralment of various Greek gods and goddesses by the Romans could provide much explanation as to why they would portray a myth filled with the deities of the Greeks.⁵

Renaissance

The keeping of the Trojan Myth in art during what is generally termed as the renaissance period, is a tentative issue. Obviously we know that the Trojan Myth is painted during this period, but to definitely say why would be improper. Explicit statements made below are for the sake of my argument.

“The renaissance period gave confidence in modern artistic and moralistic achievement, whatever the political situation; it was placing the onus not on god but on man, and thus it had already made some advance into a rational universe.”⁶ This shift into holding artistic achievement in high esteem, may be a reason for commissioned works of various popular myths of antiquity, such as that of the Trojan cycle.

The renaissance period flourished and was concurrent to the Proto-humanist movement in Italy. These two correlating efforts may also be a causal explanation to the revival of myth in art. This movement was initially led by Petrarch in Florence, commonly known as the “Father of humanism.” When Petrarch exclaimed, “who doubts

¹ The Trojan War in Ancient Art – Susan Woodford page 7

² The Trojan War in Ancient Art – Susan Woodford page 8

³ The Trojan War in Ancient Art – Susan Woodford page 7

⁴ Roman Religion – Marion Findlay page 8

⁵ Roman Religion – Marion Findlay page 8

⁶ Early Renaissance – Levey Page 13

4 That Rome could rise up again were she only to know her self", and, in a more general way, hoped that the future would be able to "walk back into the pure radiance of the past", he indubitably conceived of this new efflorescence as a return to classical – in his opinion, Roman-antiquity.⁷

3 Humanism spread and became a part of the intellectual and wealthy academic society. Although still a minority, their financial influence was strong. Humanists examined texts with philological acuity, immersing themselves in Greek and Latin texts.⁸ Greek and Roman mythology had always been part of the elite culture. This gradual expansion of the humanistic universe from literature to painting, from painting to the other arts, and from the other arts to the natural sciences, produced a significant shift in the original of the process variously designated as "revival", "restoration", "reawakening", "resurrection", or "rebirth".⁹ This argues that the myths survival in art was due to the revival of general culture in antiquity.

3 Another reason for the continuation of the Trojan myth would have been the urge to establish tradition, much like what the Romans did. However, the Patrons of the Renaissance period would have commissioned such works to show their status as educated and wealthy, rather than to establish a lineage. The strong breakaway from Catholicism during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries also has a role in the revival of Greek gods and goddesses in art that had been forgotten in previous periods. "during and after the disruption of the western roman empire, the interrelated and overlapping processes of barbarization, orientaliation and Christianization had led to an almost total eclipse of classical culture in general and classical art in particular."¹⁰

2 The transition from Christianization arts to secular myths came with the interpretation of mythological scenes as Catholic, and the gradual inclusions of Greeks deities with Religious persons. For example, Aeneas fleeing may have been seen allegorically as salvation from destruction. Also Cupid in some renaissance paintings may have been seen by the uneducated pious as an angel.

"The figures of ancient mythology were not only interpreted in a general moralistic way but were quite related to the Christian faith."¹¹

3 Eventually the myths broke free from the subservience of catholic depictions of Jesus and Mary and returned to the past to stand away from the repressive culture of worship and the glorification of Christ. "It must be admitted that the renaissance is like a rebellious youth revolting against his parents and looking for support from his grandparents"¹² "Renaissance added something different from any simple notion of progress. It wanted to remain traditional, but chose the tradition of antiquity rather than Christianity – not at all in conscious opposition but as bringing an element of truth, nature, philosophy, that medieval Christianity had ignored"¹³

4 I can conclude that the lasting portrayal of the Trojan War in art throughout the ages was due to the interest in various themes and morals of the Myth itself and the great appeal it gave the patrons who commissioned the works. During the renaissance period, a vast majority of influences can be credited to the lasting of Myth in art. Although a few examples of the various influences are given above, it can be said with assurance that there are many more influences that have not been mentioned, that surely contribute to the perennial myth.

7 Renaissance and Renaissance in Western Art – Panofsky Page 18
8 Classical Myths in Italian Renaissance Painting – Luba Freedman Page 3
9 Renaissance and Renaissance in Western Art – Panofsky Page 19
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