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## **Mortal women crossing geographical boundaries in Greek mythology**

Christina Poulos

*Royal Holloway, University of London*

### **ABSTRACT**

This paper will show some patterns between women in Greek mythology crossing both geographical and social boundaries, and that the consequences for these women are affected by their motives and influences for movement. My definition of crossing geographical boundaries is moving over land or sea to a new city, and my definition of crossing social boundaries is challenging the accepted standards of behaviour or moral views of society. The examples analysed here are women who travel with male heroes, either willingly or unwillingly. The paper discusses Cassandra, Andromache, Helen, and Medea. It demonstrates that a common consequence of these women crossing physical and metaphorical boundaries is that it results in death: either their own or the death of others. I argue that there is a link between Medea's geographical movement and her actions in a cycle of transgression and travel, and that breaking 'boundaries' is integral to her characterisation.

### **ARTICLE**

#### **Introduction**

In ancient Greek mythology, crossing geographical boundaries and travelling to new lands was more commonly an activity for men, often in order to conquer new territories or in pursuit of glory.<sup>1</sup> Mythic male heroes could freely move around Greek and foreign lands, whether for war and conquest, religious purposes, or in exile. Travelling was not an activity for respectable women, especially independently. However, there are stories of mythological

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<sup>1</sup> I am concentrating on archaic to Hellenistic sources, using evidence from Apollodorus and Pausanias as support for earlier lost Greek interpretations, but not looking at Roman treatments of these myths in this paper, for reasons of space.

women who do cross boundaries of land or sea, either willingly or unwillingly in the company of a man, through the influence of the gods, or in some cases through their own choice.

Women who are taken without their consent to new cities are often captives of war, for example Cassandra or Andromache.<sup>2</sup> In some cases women choose to cross boundaries, often with the gods influencing their decision. These include women who leave their homeland and move to new lands with a male hero, for example Helen with Paris, or having helped them on their quest, for example Medea with Jason. An analysis of why these women cross boundaries and the consequences of doing so provides an insight into the attitudes and inherent fears that Greek, and especially Athenian, society had regarding women's physical freedom of movement.

Women taken to new lands as captives of war, often following the defeat of their homeland, become slaves, concubines or wives of the conquering male heroes. In this context, the women have no control over their situation; they are still mourning their dead husbands, fathers or sons, as well as their own homeland. It is not their decision but that of the male hero to travel across physical borders of land or sea and take them to unfamiliar cities. The woman may have done nothing to warrant being placed in this situation, other than being misfortunate enough to be on the losing side of the battle. Not only does their geographical position change by moving through unfamiliar lands, but their social position also changes as they are no longer free women, but slaves of their enemy. To illustrate this, I shall look at Cassandra and Andromache.

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<sup>2</sup> In Euripides' *Trojan Women*, all the captive women are eventually led to the Greek ships and taken from Troy, further breaking up their community. Their fear of leaving Troy is highlighted by references to the Greek ships throughout the play: 159, 419-20, 777-8, 1047-8, 1092-4, 1123, 1268.

## Cassandra

Cassandra is the unmarried daughter of Priam and Hecuba.<sup>3</sup> After the sack of Troy and death of her brother Hector and her father Priam, she is chosen by Agamemnon to go back to Argos with him as his mistress, because of his desire for her (Euripides' *Trojan Women* 247-55). Cassandra is a priestess of Apollo, and can prophesy the future. In Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* (1202-12), Cassandra explains that Apollo gave her this gift but tried to seduce her, and her refusal is the cause for Apollo's curse; that no-one believes her, and she is thus regarded as mad.<sup>4</sup> Cassandra foretells that Clytaemnestra will kill Agamemnon (1107-29), and she tells the chorus that the reason for his murder is for bringing Cassandra home (1258-63), and that she will be killed as well. In *Trojan Women*, Cassandra morbidly celebrates her 'marriage' to Agamemnon (308-40),<sup>5</sup> and as well as foreseeing her own death, she credits herself and their 'marriage' as the cause of their deaths (356-64), and of Clytaemnestra's subsequent murder. Cassandra predicts Clytaemnestra's murderous reaction to her intrusion into her home, therefore she celebrates her captivity and 'marriage' for the consequences it will bring, as she sees Agamemnon's murder as revenge for the family that she has lost (404-5, 459-62). Agamemnon's introduction of Cassandra into his *oikos* therefore causes her death as well as contributing to his own, as it incites the jealousy of his

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<sup>3</sup> Although in the *Iliad* 13.361-69, Cassandra is betrothed to Othryoneus, he is killed in battle by Idomeneus. In Pausanias' *Description of Greece* 10.27.1, it is noted (although the source is unclear) that Cassandra was betrothed to a Koroibos, who was also killed in battle. In Euripides' *Trojan Women* 69-70, Athene tells of her outrage that Ajax took Cassandra by force in her temple. Gantz 1993: 651-2 also details the fragmentary sources that tell of Cassandra's rape by Ajax.

<sup>4</sup> Cassandra referred to as mad: Euripides' *Trojan Women* 168-72, 408, 414-417; *Hecuba* 120-2, 676-7.

<sup>5</sup> Seaford 1987: 128 describes how Cassandra's entrance with a wedding torch and singing a wedding song alludes to a reversal of normal marriage ritual. Due 2006: 144 describes Cassandra's entrance song as 'a horrible conflation of a wedding hymn and a funeral dirge'.

wife at the introduction of a rival.<sup>6</sup> In *Agamemnon*, Cassandra recounts the previous evils of the house of Atreus and sees the Furies (1090-2, 1186-93, 1217-22), and predicts the revenge Orestes will take for his father by killing Clytaemnestra and Aegisthus (1277-85, 1317-26).<sup>7</sup>

Although it is Agamemnon who has taken Cassandra from Troy to Greece, Cassandra believes that Apollo is responsible for her suffering (1080-2) and that he has led her to her death at Argos (1085-7, 1138-9, 1275-6). Cassandra's arrival contains elements of a bridal tableau,<sup>8</sup> yet Cassandra only finds a 'wedding in death', similarly to Polyxena and Iphigenia,<sup>9</sup> who are also tragic *parthenoi* who should have married royalty but instead were sacrificed as a consequence of the Trojan War.<sup>10</sup> Cassandra crosses a boundary from

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<sup>6</sup> In Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*, Clytaemnestra tells the chorus her motives for the murder of her husband: as vengeance for his decision to kill their own daughter Iphigenia (1414-20, 1431-7, 1521-9), for the insult of bringing a mistress home with him (1438-46), and for vengeance on behalf of Atreus (1497-1504).

<sup>7</sup> Similarities have been observed between Orestes and Cassandra in the *Oresteia* regarding their relationship with Apollo (Roberts 1984: 67) as they receive either a prophetic gift or oracle from him, are led or impelled to act from his commands, they can see Furies because of this, and feel betrayed by the god. There are also differences between them as his victims (Mitchell-Boyask 2006: 293-4) as Orestes is given the skill of persuasion, whereas Cassandra cannot persuade anyone of her prophecies, and Orestes grows to adulthood, whereas Cassandra's rite of passage is only completed in death.

<sup>8</sup> Seaford 1987: 128 analyses this scene as 'a sustained evocation of the negative elements in the situation of a bride'. Cassandra enters with Agamemnon in a chariot, having been taken from her father's home, lamenting; she is greeted at her new home; attempts are made to persuade her to get out of the chariot; she is compared to a captive animal; and Cassandra uses imagery of the unveiled bride to portray her own speech. Mitchell-Boyask 2006: 269-79 argues that Cassandra's language is in contrast to her staging as Agamemnon's bride, as it depicts her as the bride of Apollo who has led her (*agein*) from her father's house like the escorted bride.

<sup>9</sup> Due 2006: 144.

<sup>10</sup> Iphigenia is sacrificed to allow the Greek ships to sail to Troy so that the war can begin (Euripides' *Iphigenia in Aulis*), and Polyxena is sacrificed to appease Achilles' ghost after Troy is captured (Euripides' *Hecuba*). Seaford 1987: 108-10 discusses how Iphigenia's death in Euripides' *Iphigenia in Aulis* expresses associations with the losses of the maiden in

silence to speech: from her arrival with Agamemnon (783) to her exit into the palace (1330) she is silent for more than half of the total lines for which she is on stage, and only acknowledged briefly by Agamemnon (950-5) and Clytaemnestra (1035-68), before she finally moves out of her silence and into communication with the chorus (1072).<sup>11</sup> Cassandra's speech not only differentiates her from the silent Iole, as a comparable captive woman introduced into her captor's home with disastrous results,<sup>12</sup> but enables her to lament her fate, and to enlighten the chorus.<sup>13</sup> Although Cassandra's communication with the chorus uncovers the powers of knowledge and foresight she possesses, she is still powerless to escape her fate as a captive woman introduced into the home and, unlike Andromache, her lament is not

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marriage. Mitchell-Boyask 2006: 280-85 analyses the similarities in language and performance between Cassandra and Iphigenia in Aeschylus' *Oresteia*. Wohl 1998: 110-11 compares Cassandra in *Agamemnon* with Iphigenia as a silent virgin, bride and sacrificial victim, and also with Iole in Sophocles' *Women of Trachis* as 'a foreign princess, her conqueror's war booty and concubine... she is silent when confronted by the mistress of the house'. Wohl goes on to contrast the difference between these maidens and Cassandra, 'But whereas Iole was silent and Iphigenia gagged, Cassandra, after a long and dramatic silence, speaks'.

<sup>11</sup> Taplin 1977: 317-22 analyses Cassandra's presence, movement, silence and speech in this scene. See also Schein 1982: 13-15.

<sup>12</sup> Iole is another example of a woman taken captive by a hero, who travels to a foreign land. In Sophocles' *Women of Trachis*, Iole is taken by Herakles from Oichalia to Trachis after he has sacked her homeland (298-302, 325-7, 466-7) due to Herakles' desire for her (352-8, 427-8, 431-3, 476-8), and she is introduced into Herakles and Deianeira's *oikos* (329-33, 365-8, 376-8). The introduction of this beautiful young girl into the household upsets Deianeira as she is a rival for Herakles' affections (536-40, 545-51, 841-3), and the consequences are fatal as Deianeira inadvertently kills Herakles (739-40, 1138-9), and commits suicide (930-1). Although Iole is not killed, her introduction into the household causes death and disaster, and Herakles then gives her to his son Hyllus in marriage (1219-27), continuing her status as an object of exchange between men. See also Bacchylides 16.25-9 for Iole being sent to Herakles' household, and Deianeira's subsequent jealousy.

<sup>13</sup> Due 2006: 153 notes the elements of the captive woman's lament in Cassandra's speech, 'a combination of lament for the dead, lament for a fallen city, and lament for present misery, contrasted with previous good fortune'. Taplin 1977: 322 comments, 'It is Cassandra's place to lead the chorus, and us, out of confusion and perplexity towards insight and perspective'.

enough to save her, as Cassandra has no man or god to protect her from the 'murderous designs of her captor's wife'.<sup>14</sup> Cassandra's movement over the boundary into the palace differs from Agamemnon's in that Cassandra walks into the house when she is ready (1313-30), in full knowledge of the death that awaits her, and not at Clytaemnestra's command (1035-68), unlike Agamemnon who enters in ignorance of Clytaemnestra's intentions (944-57).<sup>15</sup> Cassandra's journey with Agamemnon to Argos can also be seen as a reversal of Paris and Helen's disastrous journey from Greece to Troy, in that Cassandra brings destruction back to Greece.<sup>16</sup>

As a female commodity and prize of war she has no power over the decision to leave her homeland, or for her status to change from royalty to slavery, but is at the command of the Greek army and her new lord, Agamemnon.<sup>17</sup> The consequences are fatal for her as she not only crosses geographical boundaries but also social boundaries, as she arrives as a mistress to a married man and is introduced into his *oikos* (950-55).<sup>18</sup> Cassandra must physically cross the boundary into the palace, and her presence interferes in the existing marriage. Not only are physical and social boundaries broken, she also transcends the mortal and divine spheres through her relationship with

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<sup>14</sup> Due 2006: 151.

<sup>15</sup> Taplin 1977: 321 and Schein 1982: 13 discuss the contrasts between Cassandra and Agamemnon's journeys into the palace.

<sup>16</sup> Due 2006: 145. Cassandra is also seen as a quintessential captive woman and counterpart to Helen.

<sup>17</sup> Wohl 1998: 100-117 discusses Cassandra as a female commodity in the context of violence and the economics of exchange.

<sup>18</sup> Seaford 1987: 127 notes that in this situation 'the husband's new attachment creates a situation in which the mutual subversion of the two incompatible unions issues in the death of one or more of the three parties'. Foley 2001: 87-105 analyses examples of tragic concubines in the context of Athenian law and society, and highlights the difficulties of having a wife and concubine in the same house. Compare Ferrari's argument (2002: 194-200) on the status of the concubine and the children produced in the *oikos*.

Apollo and her gift of prophetic power.<sup>19</sup> In *Agamemnon*, Cassandra laments her fate at having been led to this deadly land (1275-6), and in *Trojan Women* she laments being taken away on Agamemnon's ship and leaving her family and ancestors (455-9). Therefore, Cassandra does not cross boundaries willingly, but is taken or led through them against her will. In her relationships with Agamemnon and Apollo, it is their masculine sexual desire that causes movement over boundaries; Agamemnon's desire for Cassandra requires her to travel home with him; Apollo's desire for her results in her gaining her prophetic gift and crossing the boundary of mortal experience. In both situations Cassandra does not want to fulfil their desires, and ultimately she suffers as a consequence as she cannot protect herself from their male control.<sup>20</sup> Apollo's curse that no-one believes her prophecies results in the loss of the trust of her community, and Agamemnon's desire for her results in her removal from what little was left of her community. Unlike Andromache, she has no male protector, and she dies isolated, with neither family nor gods to protect her.

### **Andromache**

Andromache, the wife of the fallen Trojan hero Hector, is claimed as a captive of war after the fall of Troy by Neoptolemus, the son of Achilles (*Trojan Women* 271-3), who killed her husband and her family.<sup>21</sup> Andromache had a

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<sup>19</sup> Schein 1982: 12 also comments, 'In thus witnessing her own death, she transcends a boundary of existence which was, for the Greeks, one of the defining limits of the human condition'.

<sup>20</sup> Mitchell-Boyask 2006: 295 argues that Apollo disrupts Cassandra's life because his 'marriage' to her is disrupted.

<sup>21</sup> In *Iliad* 6.405-430 Andromache attempts to persuade Hector not to return to the fighting, and recounts how Achilles killed her parents and brothers, and that Hector is now everything to her. Compare *Iliad* 24.723-45 for Andromache's lamentations at Hector's death and her fears for her future enslavement and the death of Astyanax at the hands of the Greeks. Rehm 1994: 129 notes that the same women present at the end of the *Iliad* are also the central characters of the *Trojan Women*, and that all captive Trojan women 'face some form of marriage to death, a union with the men who slew their husbands or their grooms-to-be'.



child with Hector, Astyanax, and she had earned a reputation as a respectable and ideal wife.<sup>22</sup> Andromache mourns the death of her husband (*Trojan Women* 587-90) and blames her good reputation even among the Greeks as the cause of her being chosen by Neoptolemus (645-64). In this passage, Andromache discusses the dilemma she faces in her relationship with Neoptolemus, as she wishes to remain faithful to Hector, but does not want to be hated or treated badly by her new master.

Like Cassandra, Andromache must sail away from her defeated homeland and into unknown Greece as a slave and concubine to one of the Greek warriors. She is forced to cross not only the geographical distance from Troy to Phthia, but also the social divide from royalty to slavery (614-5). As well as these ordeals, Andromache loses her son Astyanax, who is killed by the Greeks, thrown from the battlements of Troy for fear that he might one day avenge his father (719, 725, 740-56). Andromache laments losing not only her country and her husband but also her son (1130-35), who she is not even given time to bury (1145-6).<sup>23</sup> Andromache's marriage to Hector and her bridal

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<sup>22</sup> *Iliad* 6.369-89 shows the respectable places for a woman to attend without her husband: when Hector returns to the city, he only expects Andromache to be in the house, with his sisters or sisters-in-law, or in the temple of Athene. She is instead waiting for him on the walls of the city, but is attended by her nurse with their baby. Compare *Iliad* 3.139-45 where Helen goes to the walls of the city, attended by handmaidens.

<sup>23</sup> Andromache's farewell speech to her son in *Trojan Women* 740-79 contains many similarities with Medea's great monologue before she kills her sons in Euripides' *Medea* 1021-80. Both mothers express concerns regarding: their enemies killing their children (*Trojan Women* 741, *Medea* 1060-1), the death of their sons being the result of an action of their father (*Trojan Women* 742-3, *Medea* 1073-4), not seeing their sons grow up as they had hoped (*Trojan Women* 747-8, *Medea* 1025-7), the death of their sons as a sacrifice (*Trojan Women* 747, *Medea* 1053-4), their wasted pains in childbirth (*Trojan Women* 758-60, *Medea* 1029-31), and their impending physical departure from their sons (*Trojan Women* 778, *Medea* 1024). They also focus on their sons' hands (*Trojan Women* 750, *Medea* 1069-71), and cherish their skin, their sweet scent and their embrace (*Trojan Women* 757-8, *Medea* 1074-5). The fundamental difference is that Medea makes the decision to kill her own sons, whereas Andromache has no control over the decision to murder her son. Both of these mothers are unable to save their children: Andromache is unable to prevent her son's death at the hands

journey to a new household as his wife (673-8) are juxtaposed with this new 'marriage',<sup>24</sup> as she compares her happiness when Hector took her as a virgin from her father's house, with how she is now being forcibly taken from her home over the sea to Neoptolemus' household as a slave.<sup>25</sup>

In Euripides' *Andromache*, she has had a son with Neoptolemus in Phthia, although Andromache claims she did not willingly sleep with Neoptolemus (36-8, 390-1). She is being threatened by his Greek bride, Hermione, who was betrothed to Neoptolemus in Troy.<sup>26</sup> Andromache remains faithful to her dead husband and to her homeland as she still laments Hector's death and the sack of Troy (7-11, 97, 111-2, 399-400, 454-7),<sup>27</sup> as well as her change in

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of the Greeks (776-7) and Medea is unable to save her sons from her own hand, despite her internal conflict (1044-5). Rehm 2002: 267 comments that Medea is the enemy within herself and has the power to stop herself killing the boys, unlike Andromache who is powerless to stop their death. Mastronarde 2002: 335 also notes the similarity between *Trojan Women* line 760 and *Medea* line 1030.

<sup>24</sup> Rehm 1994: 131 analyses the imagery of Andromache being carried in a wagon as Neoptolemus' concubine in lines 569-76 as resembling 'a marriage cart that bears the bride to her new home'. See also Seaford 1987: 130 for analysis of Andromache's departure from Troy as 'a perverted bridal journey'.

<sup>25</sup> Lloyd 1984: 303 compares Andromache's ideal marriage to Hector with 'Cassandra's perverted "marriage" to Agamemnon and with Helen's destructive marriage to Paris. The departure of the Trojan women for marriage in Greece balances Helen's earlier departure from Greece for marriage in Troy'.

<sup>26</sup> Although Andromache states that Neoptolemus has married Hermione (29-31), Orestes explains that Hermione was initially betrothed to him, and subsequently betrothed to Neoptolemus during the Trojan War (966-70). Neoptolemus and Hermione's marriage is therefore established prior to Andromache's arrival, and Hermione is his Greek bride whereas Andromache is only a foreign concubine. It is relevant that Hermione has not had any children with Neoptolemus, as this would confirm the validity of their marriage, and affect the consequences for Andromache as a rival.

<sup>27</sup> Seaford 1987: 129-30 and Due 2006: 157 associate Andromache's enslavement as a reversal of her wedding to Hector and the wedding of Helen to Paris, as Helen was taken from Greece into a bridal chamber in Troy and Andromache was taken out of her Trojan bridal chamber to Greece.

social status (12-15) and loss of freedom (98-9, 109-10, 401-3).<sup>28</sup> Hermione accuses Andromache of using witchcraft to turn Neoptolemus against her and prevent her having children (32-5, 156-60), in order to supplant her as his wife. Hermione attempts, with her father Menelaus, to kill Andromache and her son whilst Neoptolemus is away at Delphi (255, 316-8, 381-2, 431-2, 516-9, 569-71).

The introduction of Andromache into the home, as captive and concubine to the hero, therefore incites the jealousy and murderous intent of his wife.<sup>29</sup> Andromache has been taken into the boundaries of Neoptolemus' *oikos* and her presence provokes Hermione, further disrupting their existing marriage by producing children when Hermione has had none.<sup>30</sup> However, this does not result in Andromache's death, as Achilles' father Peleus comes to the aid of her and her son, and drives Menelaus away.<sup>31</sup> Hermione then flees with Orestes, who organises the murder of Neoptolemus at Delphi. Thetis ordains that Andromache will marry Helenus, and her son will rule Molossia (1242-9). So Andromache manages to survive the threats of the existing wife, but only with the support of a man, Peleus, and the prophecy of a goddess, Thetis.

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<sup>28</sup> Due 2006: 154 outlines the importance of the laments of the Trojan women in order to express their suffering as prizes of war and objects of exchange. Andromache's laments gain her sympathy and are 'her sole defense in a land of strangers against a hostile and indeed murderous mistress'.

<sup>29</sup> Due 2006: 151 discusses the theme of the captive war prize being introduced into the home and causing death and destruction. Storey 1989: 17-21 analyses the disruption of the relationships in this play, and the theme and reversal of the bridal procession. This includes Hector and Andromache's ideal marriage (disrupted by war), Neoptolemus and Andromache's forced relationship, the failed marriage of Neoptolemus and Hermione and of Peleus and Thetis, and the dislocated union of Hermione and Orestes.

<sup>30</sup> Hermione comments at 941-2 that if she would have had children with her husband they would be legitimate, in comparison to Andromache's inferior child. Compare Hermione's behaviour towards Andromache and her child with Andromache's recollection of her treatment of Hector's illegitimate children (222-5).

<sup>31</sup> Andromache and Neoptolemus' son is not named in the play. In Apollodorus' *Library* Epitome 6.12 he is named as Molossos.

The outcome of being forced to cross boundaries as a captive of war, and interrupt another woman's marriage, is not fatal for Andromache as it is for Cassandra. However, Andromache's survival only continues her position as an object of exchange from one husband to another. Andromache's relationship with Neoptolemus was validated with a child, and she was therefore protected by his grandfather from her attempted murderers. Hermione's marriage to Neoptolemus was not confirmed by offspring, unlike Clytaemnestra's marriage to Agamemnon. Cassandra, although crossing the boundary of the household and entering as a rival to Clytaemnestra, did not have any children with him, and had no-one to protect her from her attacker.

The themes of abduction and the geographical movement of these captive women into the unknown are also associated with marriage rituals, and represent some of the fears of the bride toward marriage. These 'marriages' are disastrous and are linked with death, and the women must deal with a drastic change in social status, from freedom to slavery. Depending on the status of the marriages that are disrupted and the production of offspring, the boundaries these captive maidens are taken through can also result in their own death, as well as that of the heroes that led them there. I shall now proceed to look at two women who cross boundaries willingly: Helen and Medea.

## Helen

Helen is taken by Paris from her husband Menelaus and travels from Sparta to Troy with him; it is this abduction which causes the Trojan War. Some interpretations represent the view that she went willingly with Paris (Euripides' *Andromache* 602-6; *Trojan Women* 372-3, 498-9, 987-99, 1037-9), whereas others represent her as being abducted (*Iliad* 3.443-4, 6.289-92, 7.362-4; *Agamemnon* 399-402; *Trojan Women* 861-6, 962; Herodotus' *Histories* 1.3).<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Gorgias' *Encomium to Helen* (6-9, 20) defends Helen's departure for Troy as she was the victim of either: the will of the gods, having been forced or abducted, or having been persuaded by Paris' words.

The contest between the goddesses and the judgement of Paris is also cited as the cause of Helen's abduction, as Aphrodite promises to Paris that he could have Helen as his prize (*Iliad* 24.28-30). Therefore arguments are put forward that the gods are responsible for making Helen leave with Paris (*Iliad* 3.399-402; *Odyssey* 4.259-64; *Andromache* 680-1; *Trojan Women* 939-50).<sup>33</sup> There are also interpretations in which Helen was not taken to Troy at all,<sup>34</sup> but instead locate her in Egypt with Proteus (Herodotus 2.113-119) whilst a phantom is in her place in Troy instead (Euripides *Helen*; *Electra* 1280-3).<sup>35</sup>

She has not only travelled the physical distance from Greece to Troy (or Egypt), but in doing so has abandoned her home, her husband and her child, and broken the social boundaries of marriage by moving from one *oikos* to another. In each interpretation a man or god has taken her from one place to the next: she left Sparta with or abducted by Paris, or she was taken by Paris or Hermes to Egypt, she was taken back by Menelaus from Troy or Egypt, and ultimately moved from the mortal to divine sphere with her brothers, the Dioscourai.<sup>36</sup> Helen is the ultimate cause and prize of war, and has been analysed as a commodity in the relations of exchange between men.<sup>37</sup> The

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<sup>33</sup> According to the scholia to *Iliad* 1.5, the *Cypria* has Zeus cause the Trojan War to lighten the burden of mortals on the earth. Helen is shown as a tool for fulfilling this purpose in Euripides' *Orestes* 1638-42, *Electra* 1280-3 and *Helen* 36-41.

<sup>34</sup> Stesichorus' *Palinode*, according to Plato's *Phaedrus* 243a and *Republic* 9.586c.

<sup>35</sup> In *Helen*, it is explained that Zeus sent Hermes to take Helen from Sparta to Egypt, while Hera fashioned an *eidolon* which Paris took to Troy instead. Throughout the play there are many references exonerating Helen as the cause of the Trojan war, as she was unjustly blamed having not been adulterous with Paris or gone to Troy (42-55, 58-9, 196-9, 233-51, 270-2, 582-6, 609-11, 614-5, 682-3, 720-1, 929-32, 1506-11). There is instead emphasis on the gods as conspiring to bring about the war (31-41, 641-3, 666-81, 694-7, 704-8).

<sup>36</sup> Rehm 1994: 121-7 argues that Helen takes on the role of Demeter and Persephone in Euripides' *Helen*, and the mythic pattern of return is adopted, along with the juxtaposition of (fraudulent) wedding and funeral themes.

<sup>37</sup> Wohl 1998: 83-5. Wohl also discusses (91) how the men who fight for Helen become commodities themselves, as they return as dust in urns. Helen's exchange value is linked to her elusiveness in mythology (93), as she is always in circulation and defined by her absence because she leaves before she is possessed.

results are disastrous for Greeks and Trojans alike, who engage in a ten year war, involving much suffering and bloodshed, in order for Menelaus to bring her home from Troy. Even in the interpretations which place Helen in Egypt, she is believed to be in Troy, and therefore the war is initiated on her behalf.<sup>38</sup>

In all interpretations there are serious repercussions from Helen crossing boundaries. Ultimately Troy is destroyed, and in various interpretations Helen is blamed for the misfortunes of both the Greeks and the Trojans, particularly by the Trojan women who have lost their children, husbands and sons, as well as their city and their freedom (Euripides' *Hecuba* 440-3, 942-50; *Andromache* 103-10, 248; *Trojan Women* 131-7, 210-11, 367-9, 766-73, 892-3, 1213-5). Helen's movement destroys all Trojan husbands, perverts the wedding rituals of the Trojan women, and brings destruction from Greece to Troy.<sup>39</sup> However, Helen manages to survive after the sack of Troy, despite Menelaus threatening to kill her (*Trojan Women* 1055-9).<sup>40</sup> After Paris is killed Helen is married to Deiphobus against her will (*Odyssey* 4.276; *Trojan Women* 959-60) and after the sack of Troy she returns to Sparta with Menelaus (*Odyssey* 4.120-302). In Euripides' *Helen* (1662-70), Castor and Polydeuces foretell that Helen will return home and ultimately be deified.<sup>41</sup> Helen therefore survives her actions as she is protected in Troy by her relationship with Paris, or by

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<sup>38</sup> Papi 1987: 29 analyses how Helen's double role as victim of the gods and vindicated beauty who resists the advances of Theoclymenus in *Helen* reflects 'the reality of human life in its complex interrelation with human and divine motivations'. Zweig 1999: 161-5 links Helen's dual status in Spartan cult, representing both the unmarried *parthenos* and the newly married bride, with her ambivalent role in mythology and discusses how Euripides exploits this through the language, structure and action of *Helen*.

<sup>39</sup> Due 2006: 157 discusses the theme of marriage in lament, and how Helen and Paris' marriage is blamed by all the Trojan women in their laments as destroyer of previous marriages, ruining future marriages, and corrupting the wedding rituals of the captive women.

<sup>40</sup> Compare *Andromache* 627-31. Peleus here insults and criticises Menelaus for having the opportunity to kill Helen after the capture of Troy but not taking it, instead giving in to his lust for her. Also in *Helen* 980-90 Menelaus threatens to kill himself and Helen if he cannot take her back from Theoclymenus.

<sup>41</sup> Alternatively in *Orestes* 1629-38, Apollo explains that Helen has escaped Orestes' attempted murder and been deified at Zeus' will.

Proteus in the Egypt interpretations, and when Troy is destroyed she is taken home with Menelaus, and resumes her role as his wife in Sparta. Therefore it is the protection of a man, whether Paris, Proteus or Menelaus, or male divinities, including Zeus, Hermes or the Dioscouroi, which secures Helen's safety from the consequences of her actions.

## Medea

Some maidens leave their homeland willingly to travel over geographical boundaries in order to help the heroes that they have fallen in love with on their quests.<sup>42</sup> An obvious example is Medea, who helps Jason to win the Golden Fleece in Colchis. In Pindar, Aphrodite is the influence for Medea falling in love with Jason (*Pythian* 4.213-9) and Medea allows Jason to take her away from Colchis (4.248-50).<sup>43</sup> She betrays her father Aeetes and assists Jason in accomplishing the tasks set by her father to yoke the fire-breathing bulls, plough the field with dragon's teeth, and fight the sown men, as well as overpowering the dragon and allowing Jason to take the Fleece

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<sup>42</sup> Another example is Ariadne, who falls in love with Theseus and helps him with the task Minos sets for him in Crete, to defeat the Minotaur and the Labyrinth, and then leaves with him for Athens. In *Odyssey* 11.321-5, Ariadne is taken with Theseus from Crete on the way to Athens, however she is killed on the island of Dia by Artemis. According to Pherecydes, as cited in the scholia to *Odyssey* 11.322 (3F148 *FGrHist*), Theseus abandons Ariadne on the island of Dia. Some sources have Ariadne married to Dionysus and made immortal (Hesiod's *Theogony* 947-9), possibly after her abandonment by Theseus (Euripides' *Hippolytus* 339). Apollodorus (*Library Epitome* 1.8-9) notes that Dionysus fell in love with her and took her from the island of Naxos, rather than Dia. In the various interpretations, the consequence of Ariadne crossing geographical boundaries with Theseus is either her death by Artemis, or her abandonment by Theseus and / or her subsequent marriage to Dionysus. Therefore Ariadne loses her mortal life as a common result; either through her death at the hands of the goddess, or through being made immortal due to the desires of a god.

<sup>43</sup> O'Higgins 1997: 107 analyses women as the 'currency of marriage, a silent sign in the language of exchange between households; Pindar's Medea bridges a gulf between Greece and the distant cultures of the East – and of Egypt – and she epitomizes the conflicts inherent in the process of exchanging women'.



(Euripides' *Medea* 476-82, Apollonius' *Argonautica* 3.1026-62).<sup>44</sup> Euripides highlights Jason's arrogance by not crediting Medea with the help she has given him, and echoes Pindar in representing Jason's view that Aphrodite is the cause of Medea's love (*Medea* 527-31). In Apollonius, Hera convinces Aphrodite to make Medea fall in love with Jason (3.25-9) so that Jason can obtain the Fleece, as Hera's motive is ultimately to ruin Pelias for dishonouring her (1.12-14, 3.61-75). It is due to this divinely inspired love that Medea agrees to help Jason, and in doing so, she disobeys her father. Through fear of the consequences of having helped Jason, Hera makes her decide to flee her home (4.18-21).<sup>45</sup> Medea asks Jason to take her with him, promising the Fleece along the way (4.84-6).

What these different versions share is the theme that the inspiration of the gods causes Medea to fall in love with Jason, and to help him in his quest.<sup>46</sup> To do this, Medea betrays her father and leaves her homeland to travel to Greece with Jason. She is not taken by force or through fear of violence or enslavement from Jason, but rather she actively decides to leave and requests that he take her with him. Her decision is motivated by both fear of the consequences of her own actions, and her feelings for Jason, which are influenced by the gods.

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<sup>44</sup> Clauss 1997: 157-71 compares Apollonius' Medea as helper-maiden to the hero Jason with Nausicaa as helper-maiden to Odysseus in the *Odyssey*, in regards to their location inside and outside, their speech, and the degree of help they provide, highlighting Medea as more powerful, whilst Nausicaä is left behind, and also noting that Medea will not allow herself to be abandoned like Ariadne was by Theseus. Hunter 1993: 181 sees Apollonius' Medea as a reworking of Nausicaä, as Medea acts without her parent's consent.

<sup>45</sup> Hunter 1993: 65-67 analyses Hera's involvement in Medea's decision to abandon her homeland and help Jason, and compares Medea's movement towards Jason in scenes in Books 3 and 4 as a journey. Hunter explores the simile (4.35-40) between Medea and a girl going into slavery as a prize of war, which evokes Andromache's fate, Medea's future diminished status, and the similarities between marriage and funerary rituals in Medea's departing gestures.

<sup>46</sup> In *Theogony* 992-1002, there is no emphasis on Medea's involvement in the tasks Jason is set by Pelias, however it is through the will of the gods that she is taken from Aeetes and brought to Iolchus as Jason's wife.



As well as leaving the physical boundaries of her homeland by sailing away with the Argo, Medea also betrays the loyalty to her father and family, by murdering her brother Apsyrtus. In Euripides, Medea has killed her brother before embarking on the Argo (*Medea* 1333-5). In Apollonius, Apsyrtus is a grown man who chases Medea by order of their father Aeetes. Medea tricks her brother into meeting her, so that Jason can kill him (4.465-7).<sup>47</sup> Jason and Medea go to Circe as suppliants to receive purification for this murder, in order to end Zeus' anger (4.556-60) but, although Circe purifies them, she does not approve of Medea's actions or her flight aboard the Argo (4.746-7). Whilst travelling from Colchis on the Argo with Jason, Medea helps the voyagers by killing Talos, the man of bronze, who was preventing the Argonauts reaching Crete (4.1635-1686).<sup>48</sup> This murder is a consequence of her journey with Jason, as she encounters obstacles and individuals along the way that she would otherwise have had no contact with or reason to kill.

Further consequences of her travels with Jason are her actions when she reaches Iolchus, where a cycle of murder and geographical movement begins to form. Having travelled around the Mediterranean on the Argo, Medea and Jason arrive in Iolchus, where Medea murders Pelias by tricking his daughters into killing their own father (*Medea* 6-11, 484-7).<sup>49</sup> Medea kills the ruler of a city which is foreign to her, as well as destroying family bonds, despite not

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<sup>47</sup> Alternatively in Pherecydes, according to the scholia to *Argonautica* 4.223 (3F32 *FGrHist*), Apsyrtus is a child that Medea takes with her when she leaves Colchis, and then kills him aboard the ship, mutilating his body and throwing his limbs overboard in order to slow down her pursuing father (also in Apollodorus *Library* 1.9.24). Bremmer 1997: 83-100 discusses the independence and the lack of family protection Medea has after killing her brother.

<sup>48</sup> In Apollonius, Medea's incantations and spells cause Talos' death. In Apollodorus 1.9.26, there are variations noted in which Medea causes his death through trickery and deceptive words, or through her drugs.

<sup>49</sup> Medea convinces Pelias' daughters that she can rejuvenate their father with her drugs. However, after following her instructions, they unknowingly boil and kill him. See also Pausanias 8.11.2-3 and Apollodorus 1.9.27. Gantz 1993: 366 discusses how this episode may have featured in Sophocles' lost *Root-cutters* and Euripides' lost *Peliades*.

having had any personal involvement with Pelias prior to arriving there. Her actions fulfil Hera's motive for Medea leaving Colchis with Jason and arriving in Iolchus; to exact revenge on Pelias as punishment for insulting the goddess (3.1133-6, 4.241-3).<sup>50</sup>

The cycle of transgression and travel continues as, having killed Pelias, Medea and Jason then move on to Corinth, where they settle and have two children. But when Jason forsakes Medea as his wife and takes a Greek princess as his new bride, Medea kills both the princess and her father Creon in vengeance (*Medea* 374-5, 783-9, 1125-6).<sup>51</sup> Not only does she murder another king of a Greek city, but her revenge leads her to break familial boundaries once again, this time by killing her own children.<sup>52</sup> In Euripides'

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<sup>50</sup> Apollodorus notes this version in which Hera's wrath influenced Medea to punish Pelias (1.9.16) but also mentions a different interpretation (1.9.27) in which Pelias had killed Jason's father and brother, and Jason therefore asked Medea to punish Pelias in vengeance for this.

<sup>51</sup> Boedeker 1997: 139 notes that Medea, due to her stony temperament and wish to strike her enemies, resembles the Symplegades, which the Argo passed through on the journey to Colchis as the threshold between Jason and Medea's worlds, and which started their troubles. Rehm 2002: 252-5 states that Euripides' *Medea* dominates the space on stage, and that the spatial boundaries played out in the play are linked to the journey through the Symplegades, which is also linked to the wedding night and childbirth. Boedeker (143) also sees similarities between Medea and the princess in relation to their status, appearance, and susceptibility to Jason, therefore Medea kills a younger version of herself.

<sup>52</sup> Pausanias 2.3.11 tells us that in Eumelos' epic *Corinthiaca*, Medea left her children in the shrine to Hera in the hope they would become immortal, although she was unsuccessful and they died. After this, Jason leaves her for Iolchus and she then departs to Corinth. The scholia to Pindar *Olympian* 13.74g provides a possible explanation for Medea leaving her children in the temple: Zeus is said to have fallen in love with Medea but she resists out of respect for Hera, and so Hera promises immortality to her children, but after their death the children are honoured with a cult in Corinth. Therefore, in Eumelos' epic, Medea unintentionally kills her children. There are two variations on Medea unintentionally causing the death of her children from the scholia to Euripides' *Medea* 264. One version is ascribed to Parmeniskos: that Medea has seven sons and seven daughters and the Corinthians, who are unhappy with Medea ruling Corinth, kill them at the altar to Hera Akraia. The other version Didymos ascribes to Kreophylos: that after Medea has killed Creon, she leaves the children on the altar to Hera Akraia for protection before she flees to Athens, but the Corinthians kill the children

play, she does this in order to make Jason suffer for abandoning her as his wife, and not honouring the oaths of marriage he made to her when she helped him in Colchis (1364-70, 1391-2).<sup>53</sup> Euripides represents Medea's conflict over this decision (1021-80) and offers as one of her justifications for this crime that she believes the children will be killed for her actions anyway, since she sent them with the poisoned robe to the princess (956-8, 969-73, 1240-1).<sup>54</sup> After Medea murders her children, she escapes the conventional consequences of kin-killing, as she is not plagued by Furies, murdered or ordered into exile, and she does not commit suicide or metamorphose.<sup>55</sup> Instead, Medea crosses a boundary between the mortal and divine by flying off on the Chariot of her grandfather Helios (1320-2), to her promised refuge in Athens. In Euripides' play, Medea's chariot was likely to have been on the roof of the *skênê* building, and she was therefore in the position of the *dea ex machina*; a domain for the gods in tragedy.<sup>56</sup>

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and blame Medea. The scholia to *Medea* 9 also ascribe a story to Parmeniskos where the Corinthians pay Euripides to move the blame for the children's death from the Corinthians to Medea. Johnston (1997: 45-50) links Medea and the death of her children with the Corinthian cult of Hera Akraia (Pausanias 2.3.6-7) and suggests Medea developed from the folkloric paradigm of the reproductive demon.

<sup>53</sup> Corti 1998: 12 states that, although there is no link between ancient themes of child murder and exile, 'clinical discussions of child abuse suggest that... geographical mobility, flight and isolation from the larger community have been noted as characteristic of abusive parents'. Hopman 2008: 158- 62 suggests that Medea's revenge is a new version of the Argo journey, as killing her children with Jason destroys their shared past, and that their passage through the Symplegades symbolises the sea journey of the Argo and the marriage of Medea.

<sup>54</sup> Easterling 1977: 187 comments, 'It seems that very often the parents who kill their children convince themselves that the children would in their own interests be better dead'. Rehm 1994: 102-4 highlights the conflation of wedding and funeral imagery in Medea's farewell to her sons.

<sup>55</sup> These are some of the consequences for other kin-killers in Greek mythology, including Agamemnon, Clytaemnestra, Orestes, Electra, Herakles, Agave, Ino, and Procne. Due to the restraints of space in this paper, I am unable to elaborate on these examples further, although they warrant further consideration elsewhere.

<sup>56</sup> Knox 1977: 280-3 argues that Medea's exit on the chariot is the place for the gods in tragedy, and that the situation, action and language in the scene make Medea become more than mortal. Mastronarde 1990: 274 also states that (after Aeschylus) the gods and mortals

## Conclusion

A pattern that emerges from the variant stories about Medea is that her geographical movement is linked to, and a consequence of, her transgressive actions. For every murder and betrayal she commits, she not only crosses a social or moral boundary, but this then results in her crossing a geographical boundary and moving to a new city. She betrays her father and kills her brother, so she sails away from Colchis and on to Iolchus; she kills Pelias in Iolchus, so she moves to Corinth; she kills Creon, the princess, and her children in Corinth, so she moves to Athens. Even her later mythology, where she lives with Aegeus in Athens, continues this cycle as she attempts to kill his son Theseus on his return, but is thwarted in her attempts, and so she leaves Athens.<sup>57</sup>

The more transgression and movement Medea achieves, the more independent she becomes. Medea initially leaves Colchis and travels with Jason due to the influence of Hera and Aphrodite, and her divinely inspired love for him. After Iolchus she travels with Jason but no longer seeks purification for her murders, as she did from Circe after Apsyrtus' death. By the time Medea leaves Corinth she can fly off on her own in a vehicle of the gods, and with the promise of refuge in Athens with Aegeus, but without any divine presence to influence her or any man to follow. Although Aegeus and her grandfather Helios are male supporters, they do not need to be present to help her escape.

Her movement and marriage with the hero is unique for a maiden that has helped in his tasks, rather than being left behind like Nausicaä or Ariadne.

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are separated in tragedy, and gods are distinguished from mortals in the divine epilogue by being on a different level.

<sup>57</sup> See Apollodorus *Library* 1.9.28 and Epitome 1.5-6. Gantz 1993: 255-6 notes the likelihood that Medea's episode in Athens was included in the *Aegeus* plays of Sophocles and Euripides.

Although Jason does eventually abandon her in Corinth, it is not until after he has made marriage oaths and had children with her. Rather than physically abandoning Medea and travelling to a new city, Jason crosses boundaries within the *polis* by moving to a new *oikos* and joining the princess and Creon, and instead Medea is threatened with forced movement out of the city in exile. Therefore Jason also crosses both physical boundaries of land and sea and the social boundaries of the *oikos*, however by the time he reaches Corinth his independence has diminished,<sup>58</sup> as he moves into the palace of his new bride, rather than bringing the maiden into his household. This contrasts with Medea's increased independence from her actions, and places him in the dependant position of the bride entering a new *oikos*. Eventually Jason is left behind in Corinth, mourning for his sons, and cannot reach or follow Medea.

A parallel between Medea and Helen is the influence of Aphrodite in their decision to cross geographical boundaries, which represents love as an important factor in mythology for women taking the risk to travel into the unknown.<sup>59</sup> Medea and Helen's movements to new lands result in the death of others, although they themselves survive, whereas the consequences for Cassandra and Andromache are their own death or attempted murder. Therefore when the involvement and manipulation of the gods motivates women to travel, it affects the consequences for the women and allows their survival. By contrast, when the male hero decides to take the woman she often suffers in her new home, as a consequence of the hero's transgressions rather than her own, and her life is threatened by the wife when they disrupt an existing marriage.

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<sup>58</sup> In Euripides' *Medea*, Jason implies that Medea's actions have affected his social status (551-4) and he therefore made his new marriage to protect himself and his family (593-7) in Corinth.

<sup>59</sup> Hunter 1993: 67 notes the similarities between Helen's reasons for departure from Sparta with Medea's reasons in the *Argonautica*, as Aphrodite is blamed for their flight. There is a comparison between Helen's beauty being as dangerous as Medea's magic, and Helen's arrival in Troy resulting in a disastrous outcome as does Medea's arrival in Greece.

Medea and Helen can therefore stand as mythical representations of the fears in society regarding women choosing to move around the Greek and non-Greek worlds, due to the disruption this can cause. Their ability to break through geographical boundaries and leave the boundaries of their *oikos* without the approval of their husband or father can damage the stability of society, undermine the security of marriage, and challenge the relationship of exchange between men. These actions also define their characters as disruptive women. However, despite Helen's actions causing larger scale losses, these are as a consequence of her physical departure from the Greek to the Trojan world and from one *oikos* to another, and are perpetrated by others in pursuit or defence of her. In contrast, Medea can be seen as far more dangerous, because the deaths that occur as a consequence of her breaking through boundaries are perpetrated by herself. As her cycle of transgression and movement develops, it reveals her growing malevolence and highlights her powerful and threatening characteristics.

In comparison to Helen and Medea, who can be interpreted as choosing to cross physical and metaphorical boundaries, Cassandra and Andromache are forced through them. As victims of war, they represent some inherent fears regarding losing a conflict or battle; that the community is broken up and the surviving children and wives are vulnerable and will suffer with no-one to protect them. In all of these examples, there is no going back once boundaries are broken. Helen may be able to return to Menelaus, but the cost of her departure and the lives lost in the Trojan War cannot be undone. Medea cannot return to her homeland, seek support from her family or return to Iolchus or Corinth after the murders and betrayals she commits. Cassandra and Andromache cannot rebuild their community or bring back the protection of their *oikos* after all the Trojan men are killed, and they cannot reverse their journeys or escape their new masters without a male protector. Throughout the interpretations of all of these journeys there are subverted forms of bridal and funereal imagery, and the theme of the wedding ritual is often compared to death for the bride. For women as captives of war their journey can therefore result in their own literal marriage to death, whereas for Medea and

Helen their journey and the disruption of their own marriage result in the death of others. Therefore the importance of established boundaries, whether physical, social or moral, is outlined through mythic representations of the consequences of those boundaries being broken.

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