

Press release

Medea's Love and the Quest for the Golden Fleece

5 October 2018 to 10 February 2019

Press preview: Thursday, 4 October, 11 am

Liebieghaus Skulpturensammlung

(Frankfurt am Main, 11 September 2018) On view from 5 October 2018 to 10 February 2019 at the Liebieghaus Skulpturensammlung, the major special exhibition “Medea's Love and the Quest for the Golden Fleece” will recount an important tale of Greek mythology. It is the story of a fabulous adventure and a great love that ends in disaster. Original Greek and Roman sculptures, vases, paintings and wall paintings from the Vesuvian cities of Pompeii and Stabiae will illustrate the voyage of the Argonauts and the love of Jason and Medea. Important loans from such institutions as the British Museum in London, the Museo Archeologico Nazionale in Naples, the Paris Louvre and the Vatican Museums in Rome will bring the events to life – the perilous maritime expedition of the Greek prince Jason and the Argonauts, the capture of the Golden Fleece and the murderous deeds of the two lovers.

On the occasion of this year's Frankfurt Book Fair with Georgia as its guest of honour, outstanding bronze and gold objects from the Georgian National Museum will also be presented within the framework of the show. The splendid jewellery and other millennia-old treasures will underscore the ancient description of Medea's native Colchis as a “land of gold riches”. With their exceptional beauty, the designs of the Bronze Age weapons, vessels and gold jewellery objects testify to especially skilled craftsmanship. “Medea's Love and the Quest for the Golden Fleece” moreover draws on very recent research on imagery illustrating the Greek myths, in particular the saga of the Argonauts. Since their rediscovery in 1885, the interpretation of the famous Quirinal bronzes, the so-called *Terme Boxer* and *Terme Ruler* has been a matter of controversy. Investigations carried out in the context of the Liebieghaus's polychromy research have yielded new findings on the formal and narrative designs of the two bronzes and confirmed their interpretation as figures from one of the key adventures of the Argonaut saga. The statues have thus come to be a main focus of the exhibition project, for which elaborate reconstructions of them have been realized.

The exhibition “Medea's Love and the Quest for the Golden Fleece” is being carried out with support from the Hessische Kulturstiftung, the City of Frankfurt am Main and the Georgian Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sports. The show is receiving additional support from the Georg and Franziska Speyer'sche Hochschulstiftung.

“The figure of Medea has been fascinating people for thousands of years – a circumstance no less true in the present than it was in ancient times. It was the classical tragedian Euripides who cast her in the form still valid today. Yet hardly anyone knows that her story is closely linked, geographically speaking, to present-day Georgia. It is a source of great pleasure to us to have the opportunity, in cooperation with the Republic of Georgia, to recount the entire course of events from happy adventure to hapless love with the aid of prominent artworks of antiquity and the famous golden treasures of Georgia”, comments Philipp Demandt, the Director of the Liebieghaus Skulpturensammlung.

“The Greek myths tell us all about divine workings and heroic adventures. These stories are receptacles of memory, but also of philosophical interpretations of life. The saga of the Argonauts, and above all the tragic events of the love between Medea and Jason, convey especially striking images whose currency is astonishing. We are delighted to be able to send the visitor on a journey through the myth with the help of important works of ancient art”, adds Vinzenz Brinkmann, the curator of the exhibition and head of the Liebieghaus Collection of Antiquities.

The exhibition

The Frankfurt exhibition “Medea’s Love and the Quest for the Golden Fleece” adheres to the dramaturgy of the myth: an adventurous expedition and a disastrous love affair in eight chapters. To begin with, vases, reliefs and wall paintings inform us of the events leading up to the ancient saga. They show Phrixus and Helle fleeing from their stepmother on the back of Chrysomallos, a flying ram with a golden hide. Yet only Phrixus and the ram reach faraway Colchis safely – Helle has lost her hold in flight, plunged into the sea and drowned. Upon their arrival, Chrysomallos orders Phrixus to sacrifice him to Zeus. From that day forward, the ram’s golden fleece adorns the holy grove of Ares, the god of war.

Next the visitor encounters the main protagonist of the adventure: Jason. A wall painting from Pompeii (ca. AD 10) – a key masterwork of classical art – depicts the moment in which Jason meets his step-uncle Pelias, who has driven his father from the throne, for the first time in Iolcus. To rid himself of Jason, Pelias promises him the crown if he brings him the Golden Fleece from Colchis – a mission impossible. With the aid of the goddesses Hera, Athena and Aphrodite, Jason sets out on the adventurous voyage to Colchis. Athena, for her part, oversees the construction of the *Argo*, a ship with supernatural powers. A campana relief (ca. AD 100) from the British Museum shows the goddess fastening the sail. Jason is accompanied by heroes with special talents – among them Herakles, the singer Orpheus, the seer Mopsus, the winged brothers Zetes and Calais, and the sons of Zeus Castor and Polydeuces. The Argonauts meet with countless adventures on their journey, illustrated in our exhibition in Greek vase paintings and bronze artworks. Polydeuces, for example, is compelled to face the mighty king of the Bebryces in a boxing match. This incident is played out by the famous and extremely lifelike bronze statues of Polydeuces and Amykos, reconstructions of which are on view to the public in the exhibition for the first time, as well as in an Etruscan bronze mirror (ca. 300 BC) evidently illustrating the statuary group. In the central room of the exhibition, the Liebieghaus visitor finds himself surrounded by highly expressive works of art, precious vessels and enchanting jewellery. When the Argonauts arrive in the faraway fairy-tale land of Colchis, they encounter the proverbial golden riches to which these objects bear unambiguous witness. The myth is now approaching its climax. Antique vases from Athens and Greek Southern Italy tell of the love of Jason and Medea, daughter of the Colchisian king, and how she uses her magical powers to put the dragon guarding the Golden Fleece to sleep so that her beloved Jason can capture the precious

object.

After the couple's return to Iolcus, Medea again uses magic and guile, now to eliminate Jason's adversary Pelias. It is his daughters who kill him after Medea convinces them that they can turn their father into a young man by cutting him to pieces and cooking him. A copy of a famous relief of the fifth century BC shows Pelias's daughters as ideal beauties.

In the last room of the show, the myth comes to its gory conclusion. Medea and Jason flee to Corinth, where their marriage will bring forth two sons. However, Jason abandons Medea when Creon, the Corinthian king, offers him his daughter, and with it the succession to the throne. Medea's initial grief turns to rage and she takes terrible revenge on Jason and his new bride Creousa. Wall paintings and two vases from the Staatliche Antikensammlungen in Munich and the Paris Louvre depict Medea's horrible deeds: she sends Creousa a bridal gown that goes up in flames when it is donned and burns its wearer alive. And finally, Medea commits the ultimate inconceivable crime: she kills her own children with a sword.

Georgia's gold treasure

It is little wonder that Georgia is associated with the mythical kingdom of Colchis and its legendary gold riches, because it is there that one of the oldest gold mines and sites of gold-working were discovered. Recent research proves the outstanding importance of gold mining for the culture of early Georgia and provides evidence of its vast gold deposits, which are mirrored in the tale of the Golden Fleece. The saga of the Argonauts, for instance, describes the splendid golden objects the heroes encounter stacked high in front of them as they enter the palace of Medea's father, King Aietes. The Greek myth thus reflects the historical and cultural reality of the highly developed Colchisian society and its riches.

Research in the context of the exhibition

Since their excavation in Rome in 1885, the interpretation of the so-called *Terme Boxer* and *Terme Ruler* – two of the few large-scale Greek bronzes to have survived in the original – has been a subject of dispute. Initially the two bronze figures were thought to have once belonged to a larger statuary group. Later, however, it was determined that they differed in style, and thus, it was assumed, in date, and doubts arose as to whether they were even companion pieces at all.

When it was still assumed that the two bronzes had common origins, it was suggested that the figures might well represent a scene from the Greek Argonaut saga: the Greek hero Polydeuces, the brother of Castor, defeating Amykos, the king of the Thracian Bebryces and an avid boxer, in a fistfight. In the 1940s, archaeologists in the U.S. picked up the thread of this interpretation and offered convincing arguments in support of it.

The investigations in the context of the Liebieghaus Polychromy Project have yielded new findings on the formal and narrative design of the two bronzes. In the exhibition, the so-called *Terme Ruler* can now be shown to display welts on his face and ears. These details suggest that this statue likewise shows a person who has just fought a challenging boxing match. New insights have also been gained with regard to the *Boxer*. His breast exhibits incisions intended to represent 'barbarian' body hair. This 'unkempt' hair unequivocally identifies the figure as a depiction of a non-Greek.

The findings thus confirm the interpretation of the Quirinal bronzes as an illustration of one of the main adventures of the Argonaut saga, and the two statues are accordingly a chief focus of the exhibition. Their

spectacular reconstructions, only very recently completed, display important narrative elements that bring the story around the figures of Polydeuces and Amykos to life in especially vivid manner.

An exhibition of the Liebieghaus Skulpturensammlung in cooperation with the Georgian National Museum on the occasion of the 2018 Frankfurt Book Fair with Georgia as guest of honour

Medea's Love and the Quest for the Golden Fleece

Exhibition dates: 5 October 2018 to 10 February 2019

Press conference: Thursday, 4 October 2018, 11am

Curator: Prof Dr Vinzenz Brinkmann (Head of the Collection of Antiquities, Liebieghaus Skulpturensammlung)

Information: www.liebieghaus.de

Visitor services and guided tours: info@liebieghaus.de, phone: +49(0)69-605098-200, fax: +49(0)69-605098-112

Location: Liebieghaus Skulpturensammlung, Schaumainkai 71, 60596 Frankfurt am Main

Opening hours: Tue, Wed, Fri–Sun 10 am – 6 pm, Thu 10 am – 9 pm, closed Mondays

Special opening hours: closed Mon, 24 Dec 2018; open Tue, 25 Dec 2018 and Wed, 26 Dec 2018 10 am – 6 pm on both days; closed Mon, 31 Dec 2018; open Tue, 1 Jan 2019 11 am – 6 pm

Admission: 10 EUR, reduced 8 EUR, family ticket 18 EUR, free admission for children to the age of twelve

Advance ticket sales online at: tickets.liebieghaus.de

Catalogue: The exhibition will be accompanied by an extensive catalogue published by the Hirmer Verlag, edited by Prof Dr Vinzenz Brinkmann, with contributions by Vinzenz Brinkmann, Nino Lordkipanidze, Maria Michela Sassi, Ulrike Koch-Brinkmann and the team around Olimpia Colacicchi Alessandri and Marco Ferretti. In German, approx. 208 pages, museum edition 34.90 EUR

Public guided tours of the exhibition: Thursdays at 7 pm and Sundays at 4 pm, also Tue., 25. Dec. 2018 and Tue., 1 Jan. 2019 at 4 pm on both days

Digitorial®: The Digitorial will be online at medea.liebieghaus.de from 14 September 2018.

Social Media: The Liebieghaus Skulpturensammlung is communicating the exhibition in the social media with the hashtags #MedeasLiebe and #Liebieghaus

With support from: Hessische Kulturstiftung, the City of Frankfurt am Main and the Georgian Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sports

With additional support from: Georg and Franziska Speyer'sche Hochschulstiftung

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