
7-15-2013

Poseidon and Queen Cassiopea

Joe R. Christopher

Follow this and additional works at: <https://dc.swosu.edu/mcircle>



Part of the [Children's and Young Adult Literature Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Christopher, Joe R. (2013) "*Poseidon and Queen Cassiopea*," *The Mythic Circle*: Vol. 2013: Iss. 35, Article 6.

Available at: <https://dc.swosu.edu/mcircle/vol2013/iss35/6>

This Fiction is brought to you for free and open access by the Mythopoeic Society at SWOSU Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Mythic Circle by an authorized editor of SWOSU Digital Commons. An ADA compliant document is available upon request. For more information, please contact phillip.fitzsimmons@swosu.edu.

To join the Mythopoeic Society go to:
<http://www.mythsoc.org/join.htm>



Online Summer Seminar 2023

August 5-6, 2023: Fantasy Goes to Hell: Depictions of Hell in Modern Fantasy Texts

<https://mythsoc.org/oms/oms-2023.htm>



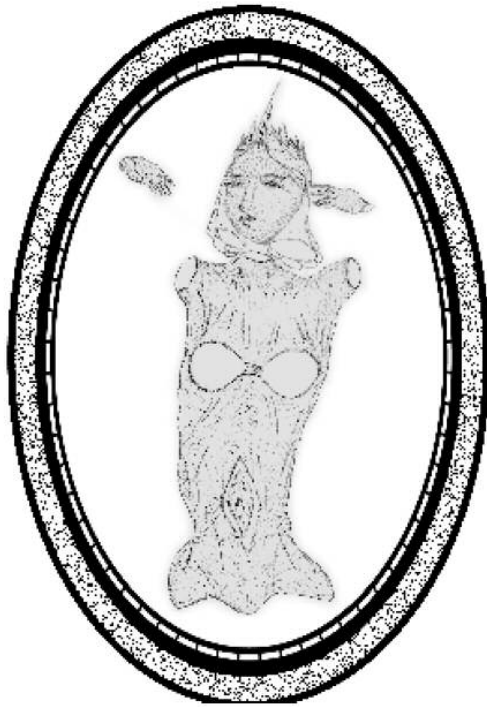
Poseidon and Queen Cassiopea

Poseidon and Queen Cassiopea

by

Joe. R. Christopher

Once upon a time, back before the later Greeks from the steppes of Russia had conquered Greece and the island Crete and distorted the true myths, a beautiful queen lived in a kingdom on the shore line of the Mediterranean Sea. The kingdom was that of Phoenicia, engaged in trade along the coast with the Minoans of Crete and the Egyptians. The king's name was Cepheus and the queen's, Cassiopea.



Cepheus had been a prince in the city-state of Joppa (then under Egyptian control); his family originally came from Nubia. Phoenicia was matrilineal in royal descent—through the

eldest daughter—but the function of rule went to her husband as long as his wife lived. Thus Cepheus was very protective of Cassiopea.

She was famed for her beauty, but she had once visited Egypt and she knew that standards of beauty varied in different places; she also knew that she could afford cosmetics and a comfortable life, which meant that she did not age as quickly as many women did.



She also, secretly, wore a girdle under her robe, for she had given birth to four children. Although she had many things, including attractive children, and lived (for all her rank in society) a relatively conservative lifestyle, still one thing bothered her.



She had never been granted a vision of the gods and goddesses. Many people saw the gods and goddesses even daily; sailors told tales of Poseidon arising and quelling the waves; young women said their pregnancies were due to their being commanded by one male god or another; soldiers claimed that Ares had led their troops into battle. Of course, *Ares* (for example) is just a short way to indicate whatever war god the local soldiers believed in—*Resef* or another. For the sophisticated believed Ares and Resef were different names of the same god.

*

One day when Queen Cassiopeia was in the temple of Poseidon and his consort Amphitrite (then still called Poseidea, and known as Poseidon's sister); when the queen was making the prescribed offerings for a sea-going nation, she sighed and looked at the statue of Amphitrite and said, "I wish I could see the goddess in person."

"What did she say?" asked one of the female hangers-on of the court, a gossip and tale-teller, whose welcome depended on her news of the latest scandal.

"Something about herself—she said 'I'—

and about the sea-queen's person," replied another. "I couldn't quite hear the words."

"Do you suppose she was comparing herself—that famous beauty—to the goddess's?" asked the first.

"Oh surely not," said the second. "Surely not."

"Surely not," echoed the first, in an ironic tone.

And so the story spread.

*

Queen Cassiopeia was horrified when a maid told her the rumor that she had said she was more beautiful than Queen Amphitrite. Cassiopeia went to the temple, made sacrifices to the Queen, and stretched herself down on the floor before the idol and prayed that the goddess would not seek revenge against her for something she had not said.

But as these stories spread, the word came to Poseidon, then at the eastern end of the Mediterranean, that the earthly queen had insulted his wife's beauty. As the sea can sometimes be peaceful and mild for days at a time, but other times can storm and rage, so Poseidon this time did not pause to question the report. He raised his massive trident and plunged it into the sea floor not far from the coast of Phoenicia. The tectonic plate at a depth beneath the place where he struck, shattered. The earth shook. The water drew back from the shore and then, in a tsunami, rushed at the coast, wiping out fishing villages and summer palaces alike. Not far from the coast, it washed through temple of Poseidon, killing the people but leaving some of the stone pillars standing—although the earthquake had brought down the roof and the friezes.



After the aftershocks had quieted and the people began to come back to the coast to rebuild their lives, the body of Cassiepea was

found not far from what remained of the temple, and the body was laid on a bier in preparation for her cremation in a pyre. The

appropriate wood had to be located far inland and brought to the temple.

Cassiepea's eldest daughter, Andromeda, came to the throne; she banished her father to Joppa, accepted presents from many suitors, and (some say) eventually ran off with a wandering Greek. But that seems unlikely.

Soon after the earthquake and the flood, invisibly, "in a mist" as it was described at the time, Poseidon and Amphitrite walked down the coast and considered his handiwork. They were mainly naked, for they were sea creatures, but they did not worry about being seen by those with second sight—humans knew the dangers of *lèse majesté*. They came, in their wanderings, to their temple, roofless, idolless, with most of the beams and tiles and the shattered friezes now carried outside.

Cassiepea's body was swollen and decaying. Poseidon, who had taken the form most familiar to his worshippers of a green-skinned, gilled, and bare-headed humanoid, carrying his trident, paused by the queen's body. "She *was* beautiful, when alive, it seems."

Amphitrite, also a green humanoid, but wearing a crown set with many pearls, replied, "And her mind—what is left of it—suggests she was, for a human, virtuous."

Poseidon, his mood no longer one of anger, said, "I will repay her sufferings."

He held his trident in his left hand, tines upright, and pulled his index finger of his right across a tine. The ichor swelled to the surface. Putting his right thumb next to the cut, he pressed, holding his hand above the dead woman's gaping mouth. Three drops fell into her mouth, and the decay was slowly arrested and reversed.

Poseidon waited for the reversal to take effect—but what is time to an immortal?—and then grasped Cassiepea by her left hand, his wounded finger against her wrist. He said, "Come now, arise," as he pulled her slowly to her feet. The sheet which had partially covered her fell away.

"My dear," he said in politeness, "your apotheosis is nearly complete. Come, and I'll give you a place to honor in my brother's realm of the sky. You shall dance forever around the northern star."

And Cassiepea inclined her head and bowed before him. She knew her body was now firm as in youth, no longer with the stretched muscles of a woman who had given birth, no longer needing a girdle. And when she raised her head and looked at him and at her, seeing them clearly, she smiled—smiled radiantly, as was most appropriate.

II.

Cassiepea, male chauvinists they were
Who told your tale in later days, who swore
You'd bragged about your beauty, and your daughter's,
And so deserved the monster come for slaughters,
And too the storm—not one, but twinned disaster:
As if that hype would make the excitement vaster!
And then they claimed Poseidon's gift of glory—
Was false! His aim, instead, denunciatory.
They claimed, in circling 'round the northern star,
Your actions there were strange and most bizarre,
Balancing on your head half of the day—
A clown! at whom all men were meant to bray.
In short, they thought their view from earth all truth
About the starry realm, and thus their oath.
But seen within the stars, earth's up and down,
Is most absurd—for earth has small renown.
The gods don't raise the foolish to the skies—
Your merits gained your dance above earth's eyes.
Your daily dance brings joy, brings lasting joy;
The spirits float upon emotion's buoy.
You take your part in that far greater Dance
That spreads across the sky's extravagance.
The same Great Dance that's seen by a trillion eyes,
The dance that swirls across galactic skies.
No planet finds the patterns much the same,
But each will greet its star-spread with acclaim.
And when high gods, outside of world and time,
Will view a galaxy in pantomime;
When they, in conclave met, with glance prehending,
They'll see it swirls and spirals to its ending.
Until the heat death comes, and great in-folding,
Till then you'll dance, to joyfulest beholding.