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# GODS AND MONSTERS

## *Classical Allusion and the Jacobites*

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The myths and legends of the classical world provided a wealth of material that Scottish Jacobites exploited to signal support for, and spread messages about, the exiled Stuarts. Dr Calum Cunningham and Dr Alan Montgomery delve into these clandestine allusions in architecture, text and material culture

**F**rom 1719 onwards, the exiled Stuart court was based in Rome. For many British visitors on the grand tour, it became something of a tourist attraction, not unlike the Colosseum, the Forum and the other remains of the ancient world that they travelled to the Eternal City to admire. At a time when the culture and imperial success of ancient Rome was held in high regard, it was perhaps inevitable that the leaders and supporters of the Jacobite cause would regularly turn to the classical world when creating images and texts celebrating and promoting the Jacobite succession and the Stuarts' claim to the thrones of the three kingdoms.

This article reveals that classical allusions are commonly found in Jacobite material and literary culture, often creating complex comparisons between the Stuarts and heroes and gods from ancient history and myth. It proposes that the Stuarts themselves largely shied away from classical comparisons, preferring imagery which linked them with their religious affiliations, royal status and British connections. At the same time, however, their Jacobite followers appeared more comfortable with classical allusions, featuring them in propagandist and *in situ* art, alongside circulating medals, literature and song. These references to ancient Rome included quotations from

Above: Targe with a screaming Gorgon (Medusa) head at its centre, long thought to have belonged to Charles Edward Stuart, c.1739

Latin poetry and images of historical and legendary heroes, mythical gods and monsters. Using allegory and metaphor allowed adherents in Scotland to create a classically influenced visual and literary cipher, codifying their treasonous political beliefs and hiding them in plain sight.

### ***In situ***

Perhaps the most notable Scottish example of *in situ* allegorical and clandestine Jacobite symbolism is at the House of Dun, near Montrose. Completed in 1743, it became the country home of the judge and parliamentary commissioner David Erskine, Lord Dun, a cousin of John Erskine, earl and Jacobite duke of Mar. The magnificent saloon plasterwork created over four years by the Dutchman Joseph Enzer remains a mysterious and allusive conundrum. Alongside some family emblems, conceivable Jacobite symbols, including white roses, a thistle adorned with a crown, and a fleur-de-lys (likely signifying the Stuarts' French allies), it depicts several classical tableaux. Two allegorical representations adorn each side of the room above opposite mantelpieces. One shows the sea god Neptune welcomed by a sea nymph, possibly announcing,



Saloon plasterwork at the House of Dun, Angus. This side of the room depicts the sea god Neptune/Poseidon, trident in hand, riding his seahorses towards an unknown destination, 1743

heralding or personifying the arrival of James Stuart or his elder son Charles Edward Stuart from across the water. The other even more ambiguous relief displays Mars, the god of war – said to be the earl of Mar – bestriding a union flag, suppressing the crown and lion of Scotland on the one hand and the same of England on the other.

Classical influences in Jacobite propaganda also sporadically materialised much closer to the exiled court on the continent. One example comes from the monastery of Saint Scholastica in Subiaco, near Rome. Alongside numerous portraits of popes who visited the abbey and had frescoed portraits painted in their honour, one of James was completed following his visit there in 1733. It can still be found in the Renaissance cloister. The Jacobite claimant is shown standing atop a plinth, adorned in the garb of a Roman *imperator* (general or emperor), complete with a *lorica musculata* (muscle cuirass), *cingulum militare* (military belt) and a red cape. Red was the traditional colour associated with leadership and the Roman king of the gods, Jupiter or Jove. James also holds a sceptre, and a crown rests at his feet, symbolising his claims to *de jure* sovereignty. He

is referred to (erroneously) as ‘*JACOBO. III. MAGNÆ. BRITANNIÆ. &c. FIDEI. DEFENSOR*’ (‘James III, King of Great Britain Et Cetera, Defender of the Faith’). The remainder of the dedication – now mostly illegible – was severely damaged during World War II and is still riddled with bullet holes.

### The written word

In Scotland, Jacobites awaiting their exiled royal family’s return sometimes invoked the ancient pagan gods in song, calling on them to speed the Stuarts back to their homeland. Using symbolism not dissimilar to that seen in the House of Dun, one Gaelic song entitled ‘A Song Upon the Birth of Prince Charles’ (c. 1721) and attributed to John MacLachlan of Argyll, proposes that the sea god Neptune and Aeolus, keeper of the four winds, will work together to make the young prince’s journey quick and easy:

*Neptune does promise for him  
A sea as smooth as the land,  
And Aeolus is ready always,*





James Francis Edward Stuart, by Francesco Trevisani, oil on canvas 1720. Note the crown he so coveted, on the table beside him



James Francis Edward Stuart in the guise of a Roman general. Fresco by an unknown artist in the monastery of Saint Scholastica, Subiaco, near Rome, 1733

*For him keeping his favoured winds.*

The celebrated Gaelic poet Alexander MacDonald, who was born in Ardnamurchan (c.1698) and probably played an active role in the 1745-46 uprising, uses similar symbolism in at least two of his works, 'The Song of the Clans' and in this extract from 'A Song Composed in the Year 1746':

*A jewel there is, by wind and sea  
To be in Aeolus' and Neptune's keeping,  
And after him shall come all joy.*

British Jacobites also developed a taste for linking the Stuarts with legendary heroes and kings of the ancient past. For instance, Murray Pittock's analyses suggest that the translation of Virgil's *Aeneid* by John Dryden, published in 1697, transforms his epic into a Jacobitical Trojan horse. After all, Virgil's poem describes Aeneas's epic journey across the sea to found a new kingdom and implicitly celebrates the glorious reign of the first Roman emperor Augustus, themes with obvious appeal to Jacobite supporters. A 'Jacobite Aeneas' represented the notion of

legitimacy and the weight of descent by tracing the Stuart senior line right back to Brutus, the legendary founder of the British people, similar to that of Augustus, Julius Caesar and their 'ancestor', Aeneas, founder of the Roman people. Indeed, Brutus was also a supposed descendant of Aeneas.

Dryden's conceivable Jacobitical intentions are evidenced in the first eight lines of the *Aeneid*. Instead of appearing from the coasts of Troy, Aeneas is 'forc'd' to the Lavinian shores 'by fate', through 'expulsion' and 'exile':

*Arms, and the man I sing, who, forc'd by fate,  
And haughty Juno's unrelenting hate,  
Expell'd and exil'd, left the Trojan shore.*

Divine or indefeasible hereditary right and the 'rightful' line of succession from legitimate ancestors of old are also alluded to in Virgil's (and Dryden's) opening verse:

*His banish'd gods restor'd to rites divine,  
And settled sure succession in his line,  
From whence the race of Alban fathers come,  
And the glories of majestic Rome.*

Neil Guthrie notes that Dryden's translation refers to 'a perfect Prince', either King James VII and II or his son, the prince of Wales, and 'the restoration of an earlier golden age and messianic return from exile'.

Even if Dryden's intent is somewhat ambiguous, Stuart supporters in Scotland clearly viewed his translation as a Jacobite text, as demonstrated by a copy belonging to the Gordons of Letterbury (now in Aberdeen University Library), which contains numerous politically-inspired annotations, particularly around the opening lines. In fact, James Stuart was often likened to Aeneas (and Augustus) in Jacobite material culture, especially on glassware. Charles was also occasionally linked with Aeneas but more commonly with Ascanius, the legendary king of Alba Longa and son of Aeneas. It was a codename that describes the young Stuart prince in the contemporaneous Jacobite account of Charles's travails during the '45 and subsequent escape after Culloden, *Ascanius; Or, the Young Adventurer* (1746).

### The medallic shorthand

Designers of Jacobite medals drew on the classicising tradition of European numismatics that had its roots in the Renaissance. Far from being added or occasional, classical elements are ubiquitous. Every medallist in the late 17th and early 18th centuries would have had King Louis XIV's grand series of propaganda medals in mind. These medals do not rely so much on classical myths but are heavy on allegorical figures and classical motifs generally. Due to the seditious and treasonous nature of the Jacobite movement, medals, as Guthrie has shown, often including Latin mottoes, regularly utilised classical allusions as clandestine shorthand or code.

For instance, *'Unica Salus'* (1721), where James Stuart is depicted in the armour of a Roman general but not identified by name, describes him as 'the only safeguard'. A good example that borrows from ancient Roman mythology is a 1719 medal produced by the Italian medallist Ottone Hamerani. It celebrates the escape of Maria Clementina Sobieska from her detention at Innsbruck on her journey to safety in Rome, linking her with the legendary heroine Cloelia, who supposedly escaped the clutches of the Etruscans in the 6th century BCE. Another 1719 medal shows the conjoined busts of James and Clementina with the legend *'IACOB. III. R. CLEMENTINA. R.'* ('King James III, Queen Clementina'), the reverse depicts Hercules and Venus with linked hands and Cupid beside them, foreshadowing a Stuart heir's arrival. Medals like these would have been aimed at intellectual elites who could read Latin and understand the allusions.

However, as Pittock points out, smaller brass and copper medals were secretly shipped in bulk to Britain to infiltrate the currency and reach a broader audience. Though these also frequently incorporated Latin mottoes and emblems, which would have been lost on many viewers, objects made by commercial makers and some Jacobites – not produced or sanctioned by Stuart court propagandists – appear more interested in conveying native British iconography (such as flowers, specifically roses, birds and regal symbolism), especially on medals of the 1740s and accompanying glassware. While crude and commercial, they were perhaps more immediate and effective in promoting Jacobite ideology than pallid allegorical figures. Surprisingly, the Stuarts preferred this iconography in their personally commissioned official portraiture.

### The painted image

During their extended stay in Rome, the Stuarts were surrounded by relics of the city's classical past – their home, the Palazzo del Re, was close to Trajan's Column and the Forum, with the Pantheon less than ten minutes' walk away. The interior of the palace, too, was decorated with classical imagery. Almost a century before the Stuarts arrived, the Muti family had commissioned French artist Charles Mellin to paint frescoes in several rooms on the palace's first floor. The ancient world heavily inspired the chosen iconography: putti, classical architecture, images of marble statues and reliefs and a portrait of the Roman mythological hero Marcus Curtius, whom the Muti family claimed as an illustrious ancestor.

Some redecoration occurred before the Stuarts moved into the palace to turn it into a home fit for a king. The new frescoes created at this time contain only insignificant references to ancient Rome, focusing instead on celebrating the Catholic Church and the royal status of the new arrivals. Giovanni Angelo Soccorsi painted the ceiling of the room that would become the king's gallery, with putti holding aloft the crown and sceptre of England. At either end of the gallery were images of women dressed in white, representing the Catholic religion and faith. The Catholic Church was not opposed to classical imagery per se – Pope Clement XII (r.1730–40) purchased the vast Albani Collection of ancient marbles to add to the Vatican's already sizeable collection of Roman antiquities – but in this case, it was felt that the links between the Stuarts and their generous papal benefactor were a more appropriate subject matter.

Similarly, the Stuarts largely rejected classical imagery when commissioning portraits of themselves during their time in Rome. It is important to remember that these

images were used as propaganda to be reproduced and distributed among their supporters. As far as James and his courtiers were concerned, this stay in Rome was only a temporary measure, a chance to plan their next move towards reclaiming their lost kingdoms. They thus preferred to be painted with symbols of their British royalty. When British visitors such as Thomas Coke, earl of Leicester, or Sir Edward Gascoigne hired Francesco Trevisani to paint their portraits, he made sure to include some classical ruins or marble sculptures in the background, creating a tasteful souvenir of the sitters' encounters with the ancient world while in Rome. Yet no such classical allusions appeared when Trevisani painted the Stuarts. His portrait of Maria shows her in an elegant and colourful dress, her hair adorned with jewels, while he painted James wearing the collar and badge of the order of the garter, the crown he so coveted resting on a table beside him.

Likewise, when English tourist William Perry commissioned artist Antonio David to paint his portrait in Rome, he, like many other British visitors, chose to be shown in front of the ruins of the mighty Colosseum. When the same artist painted Stuart courtier Marjory Hay, Jacobite duchess of Inverness, she was depicted in the guise of the Roman goddess Diana, complete with a bow and arrow. However, David's portrait of James in 1722 shows him in armour, his left hand placed on a crown, with the Tower of London in the background. This portrait was hung in the Palazzo del Re and later copied for Jacobite supporters in Britain and elsewhere. James would never see the Tower of London in person despite his best efforts. Rather than representing the reality of their life in Rome, the artists who worked for the Stuarts were encouraged to create a fantasy, the dream of the banished dynasty finally realised.

The only portrait James commissioned which contains a significant reference to the classical world is Martin van Meytens the Younger's painting of 1725. Although the original is now lost, various artists who worked for the Stuart court made copies in the following years. James is shown half-length in armour, wearing the order of the garter. In the centre of his chest is a glaring Gorgoneion, the head of a Gorgon, her face twisted into a horrifying expression.

### Perseus and the Gorgon

The Gorgon's head was frequently used as an apotropaic symbol in the ancient world. It was regularly featured on the chest of Athena and Zeus – Athena's aegis decorated with the head of a Gorgon is mentioned in the *Iliad*. In addition, the monumental statue of the goddess created by



The silver hilt of the so-called 'Kandler sword' featuring an image of Athena, 1740-41

Phidias for the Parthenon featured Gorgoneia on her aegis and shield. It also appears on images of Roman emperors, including the 1st-century Blacas Cameo, which shows Augustus in a cloak bearing a tiny Gorgon head.

Later, it became a popular motif on decorated Italian Renaissance armour, such as the breastplate of a magnificent set of armour made for Guidobaldo II della Rovere in 1546 by Bartolomeo Campi of Pesaro. Styled on ancient Roman models, it bears a Gorgon head of gilt brass at its centre, with a gaping mouth not dissimilar to that on James's armour. An elaborate late-16th-century breastplate from Milan reputedly made for Alfonso II d'Este, duke of Ferrara, features a Gorgoneion in a similar position to that worn by James, although its face is more beautiful than horrific, its intertwined snakes flanked by delicate wings.

In Scotland, the regularity of Gorgoneia appearing on arms owned and used by Jacobites suggests a concerted attempt to link Charles Edward Stuart with the mythical hero Perseus. The comparison between the young prince and Perseus would have made perfect sense to the Jacobites; both men were the grandsons of kings (Acrisius, king of Argos, in the case of Perseus, King James VII and II, in the case of Charles); both were sent



into exile in foreign lands and had to battle their way back to their homeland and their rightful position.

One of the most famous tales of Perseus's adventures is his decapitation of the fearsome Gorgon, Medusa, whose gaze turned living beings to stone. In the aftermath of his defeat of Medusa, Perseus used her severed head in battle to such an extent that it could be described as an ancient 'weapon of mass destruction'. Those who were turned to stone by the head-wielding hero included Atlas (who became the mountain range of the same name), Phineus (a spurned suitor of Andromeda) and the terrifying sea monster to which Andromeda was to be sacrificed.

Gorgon heads appear on several items of arms and armour associated with the Jacobites that could be wielded in battle, just as Perseus brandished the decapitated head of Medusa. Perhaps best known is the targe in the collection of the National Museum of Scotland (NMS). According to tradition, it was rescued by Ewen (Cluny) Macpherson, chief of Clan Macpherson, after Culloden. The construction of the targe is typical of a highland shield, with wooden boards covered in tooled pigskin. More unusual is the use of jaguar skin rather than deerskin to line the reverse. The most striking feature is the silver mounts on the front of the targe, which include military equipment, fasces (a bundle of rods associated with political authority in ancient Rome) and a screaming Gorgon at its centre, the horrific face surrounded by a tangled mass of serpents. Although long thought to have been gifted to Charles by his committed supporter James Drummond, Jacobite duke of Perth, in 1739, it has recently been proposed by Edward Corp and Graeme Rimer that the duke himself more probably used this shield.

The use of a Gorgon as a shield motif has ancient precedents. The *Iliad* (11.36-7) states that it appeared on a shield carried by Agamemnon, king of Mycenae. Early Gorgoneia from the archaic period are notably monstrous, with fangs, staring eyes and a lolling tongue. Later in the ancient world, more beautiful images represent Medusa as a calm-faced beauty with elegant wings. Yet the Gorgons featured in Jacobite imagery are terrifying, with monstrous features and twisted expressions. The Stuarts and their followers may well have known the story of Perseus and Medusa from Ovid, whose *Metamorphoses* describes the quest of Perseus and his encounter with the Gorgon in some detail. By the 18th century, images of the Gorgon, fearsome and alluring, had become commonplace in art and literature as well as on arms and armour.

She appears, for example, in Dante's *Inferno*, in which Virgil protects Dante from her petrifying gaze; she is said to have been painted by Leonardo da Vinci and was depicted

by Caravaggio in a famous circular panel, painted around 1597, that mimics the shape of Perseus's reflective shield. A beautiful but furious Medusa is shown on an elaborate shield fashioned by 16th-century Milanese armourer Filippo Negroli for Emperor Charles V, on a mid-16th-century shield acquired by Archduke Ferdinand II, and a silver-plated shield made for Francesco de Medici and attributed to Benvenuto Cellini. The Medusa head that appears at the centre of the NMS targe would have been more than just terrifying; it also had the potential to wound – her mouth is threaded so that a metal spike could be inserted.

Also in the collection of the NMS is a backsword bearing the mark of silversmith Charles Frederick Kandler, which is often referred to today as the 'Kandler sword'. Although once thought to have belonged to Charles Edward Stuart, its worn date mark for 1740-41 has inspired a theory that it may have been given to his brother Henry Benedict. Its hilt features the goddess Athena/Minerva, a deity associated with 'just war' wearing a Gorgon head on her chest. The sword's pommel is fashioned as an owl, Minerva's regular companion.

More decoration was added to the sword's blade in the form of an engraved and gilt figure holding his sword and wearing an extravagantly plumed helmet, labelled '*hannibal*'. Pittock describes the Carthaginian general Hannibal in the context of Jacobite iconography as 'a rare symbol of Scottish patriot historiography and resistance to overweening claims of empire'. Hannibal was certainly much admired as a skilled tactician, and a man brave enough to take on the might of Rome. His use as a symbol of the heroic attempts by the Stuarts to overthrow the Hanoverian regime is perhaps more appropriate with hindsight since Hannibal, like Charles, would end up suffering a defeat and spending his later years in peripatetic exile.

Another sword long associated with the gifts given to Charles by the duke of Perth is the so-called 'Brodie sword', said (like the Kandler sword) to have been recovered from the Jacobite baggage train after Culloden, later property of many generations of the Brodie family, now on display at the Culloden Visitor Centre. Although its solid silver hilt is unmarked, its shared iconography, bold modelling and its similarities to the decoration on the NMS targe have led Helen Wyld and George Dagleish to speculate that the same silversmith may have produced it.

While the Gorgoneion on the hilt of the Kandler sword is somewhat vague and ill-defined, in the case of the Brodie sword, a Gorgon's head is front and centre of the entire design. With looping snake hair that twists around the base

of the blade, the screaming face is also surrounded by other classical symbols, including fasces and the club of Hercules/Heraclēs. Its pommel is a classically inspired plumed helmet, while the scabbard has silver mounts featuring another Gorgoneion, fasces and a cornucopia.

A Medusa shield also appears in an engraved portrait of the prince that was likely produced during his stay in Edinburgh in 1745. While the image of Charles seems to have been based on a painting now attributed to Allan Ramsay, Robert Strange, the Jacobite engraver, added an oval architectural frame hung with drapery. Below it, a Latin inscription reads *‘Everso Missus Succurrere Seclo’* (‘sent to restore a ruined age’), a paraphrase of a famous passage in the *Georgics* of Virgil. Previously quoted on the coronation medal of King Charles II, these words imply that the young Stuart prince had returned to restore an enfeebled Britain to its former glory. The prince possibly commissioned Strange’s print as a cheap and effective way to disseminate Jacobite propaganda to supporters in Scotland and beyond. This image of him with a Gorgon shield suggests that, like Perseus facing the sea monster, Charles was battling a terrible force, in his case, the Hanoverian regime.

The exiled Stuarts were considered worthy of divine intervention to aid their cause. As hitherto discussed, they were sometimes shown as either classical gods or god-like figures of equal stature to them. Another example is the folding fans, by tradition also attributed to Strange, said to have been distributed to Jacobite ladies in attendance at the ball Charles threw at Holyroodhouse in 1745 to celebrate his victory at Prestonpans. One such fan shows him surrounded by other gods and flanked by Mars, and Bellona, the Roman goddess of war. The figures on the right are reputed to be the mortal and weak family of King George II, demonstrably fleeing from a god-like Stuart saviour who had come to rescue the British people from its

malignant grip.

## Conclusion

Despite setting up home in Rome, a place crammed with remnants of a glorious ancient past, the exiled Stuarts were apparently reluctant to associate themselves too closely with the city or its classical heritage. Their supporters in Scotland, however, made good use of classical allusion in their literature, song, interior decoration and other material culture. As we have seen, these associations with the much-admired classical world allowed them to express their hopes of a Stuart restoration in subtle and sophisticated ways. Erudite Latin phrases and elegant images that could be overlooked by the uninitiated as harmless references to ancient history or mythical gods and monsters would be recognised by fellow Jacobites as political propaganda, covert calls for the return of their own exiled heroes over the water.

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## FURTHER READING

*The Material Culture of the Jacobites* (Cambridge, 2013), N. Guthrie

*Material Culture and Sedition, 1688–1760: Treacherous Objects, Secret Places* (Basingstoke, 2013), M.G.H. Pittock

‘The *Aeneid* in the Age of Burlington: A Jacobite Document?’, in T. Barnard and J. Clark (eds.), *Lord Burlington: Art, Architecture and Life*, (London, 1995), 231-50. M.G.H. Pittock

*The Medalllic Record of the Jacobite Movement* (London, 1988), N. Woolf

‘The Weapons of Bonnie Prince Charlie – a New Examination’, *Arms & Armour*, 17:1 (2020), 27-79, E. Corp and G. Rimer



Paper and ivory folding fan from the collection of the West Highland Museum, showing Charles Edward Stuart with Mars and Bellona, 1745