

# The Domestication of Fear

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The Asahi Shimbun  
displays Room 3  
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# The famous Gorgon myth: Medusa & Perseus



The Gorgons were three sisters named Sthenno, Euryale and Medusa. They had a dreadful appearance, with protruding tongues, serpents in their hair and the power to petrify (to turn to stone) all who caught their direct gaze. Medusa was the only mortal Gorgon, but could only be killed by decapitation.

Perseus was the son of Danae of Argos. To protect his mother from the king Polydectes he offered to exchange Medusa's head for his mother's freedom. He approached Medusa, avoiding her deadly gaze by using a mirror shield, and removed her head.

B. Cellini (1545-1554).

The Loggia dei Lanzi Florence

# THE DOMESTICATION OF FEAR

Throughout history humankind have resisted fear..

Fear of darkness, fear of hunger, fear of death, fear of vanishing..

People cope with these frightening thoughts by domesticating them.

The domestication of fear was displayed in the past in many different ways, by burying dead loved-ones in the home, by painting wild animals on the walls, or by wearing protective amulets.



1st century BCE

Gorgons appeared as symbols of fear around the 8th century BC.

The Gorgon image was displayed on armour, coffins and grave goods, appropriating and channelling her fearsome power to protect the living and the dead.



6th century BCE

Over time, the grotesque and wild Gorgon becomes more beautiful, the snake heads are tied and tamed. The fearsome monster is not only resisted, but domesticated.

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**Pair of bronze greaves**  
Made in Southern Italy  
about 550–500 BC

The protective Gorgon image  
hammered on each greave  
displays the typical  
characteristics of its time. The  
fearsome facial expression  
displays a (bone inlaid) fanged  
mouth, broad nose, prominent  
ears and protruding tongue.

Found in Ruvo, probably from a grave.  
GR 1856,1226.615 (Bronze 249)

**Terracotta scent bottle with  
Gorgon's head**  
Made in East Greece  
about 610–550 BC

This small scent bottle highlights the dichotomy between the elegance of the form (and its aromatic contents) and the wildness of Gorgon image (and the fear it represents).

Found in Vulci, probably from a grave.  
GR 1836,0224.368 (Terracotta 1619)



