

PLURABELLE

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Women Becoming or Turned Into Stone / Rock / Salt



Niobe

Niobe is the prototype of the bereaved mother, weeping for the loss of her children. According to Homer's *Iliad*, Niobe had seven daughters and seven sons. In punishment for her boasting about the large number of her offspring, Artemis killed her daughters and Apollo killed her sons. Niobe was turned into a rock on Mount Sipylus, which continues to weep to this day when the snows above it melt.

Weeping Rock, Mount Sipylis, Turkey

Hermes Changes Aglauros to Black Marble

In the *Bibliotheca*, when Hephaestus unsuccessfully attempted to rape Athena, she wiped his semen off her leg with wool and threw it on the ground, impregnating Gaia / Earth. Athena wished to make the resulting infant Erichthonius immortal: she gave it to three sisters, Herse, Aglauros, and Pandrosos, in a willow basket and warned them to never open it. Aglauros and Herse disobeyed her and opened the basket which contained the infant (and future king), who was intertwined with a snake. The sight caused Herse and Aglauros to go insane and they jumped to their deaths off the Acropolis. Ovid in *Metamorphoses* says that Aglauros saw the child lying next to a great snake. Later, Hermes, the herald of the gods, falls in love with Herse and goes to her house to ask for her hand. Aglauros agrees to give Herse his message for a payment of gold. Athena orders Envy to poison Aglauros, who begins to waste away with jealousy. Hermes, angry at Aglauros for breaking her promise, changes her into a black marble statue.

Hermes, Herse and Aglauros, Paolo Veronese



Medusa

In Greek mythology, Medusa ("guardian," "protectress"), was one of the three Gorgons. Sisters Euryale and Stheno were immortal, but Medusa was mortal. Raped by Neptune, she was beheaded by Perseus, who used her head as a weapon. In some accounts, the blood of a Gorgon was said to have both the power to heal and harm. Medusa's streaming blood produced Pegasus and Chrysaor. Medusa is generally described as a woman with living snakes in place of hair—her appearance so monstrous that anyone who looked upon her was turned to stone. Perseus later gave Medusa's head to the goddess Athena, to place on her shield. From the fifth century BCE on she began to be envisaged as beautiful as well as terrifying, including by Pindar and Ovid. Joseph Campbell references the latent content of a neurosis that is manifest as a dream: registered in the unconscious, yet unknown or misconstrued by the conscious mind.

Perseus beheading Medusa, sixth century BCE



A Magic Cow and a Witch

A local legend about a Bronze Age stone circle in Shropshire, England, tells that during a time of famine, a giant (or a fairy) gave a cow magic powers to produce unlimited amounts of milk—until a malicious witch milked the cow (using a sieve) until it was drained dry. When the cow realized the trick, it fled to Warwickshire where it became the Dun cow. As a punishment, the witch was turned into stone, and a circle of stones was erected around her to ensure that she could not escape.

Mitchel's Fold stone circle

Lot's Wife, Genesis, King James Bible

“15 And when the morning arose, then the angels hastened Lot, saying, Arise, take thy wife, and thy two daughters, which are here; lest thou be consumed in the iniquity of the city.

16 And while he lingered, the men laid hold upon his hand, and upon the hand of his wife, and upon the hand of his two daughters; the LORD being merciful unto him: and they brought him forth, and set him without the city.

17 And it came to pass, when they had brought them forth abroad, that he said, Escape for thy life; look not behind thee, neither stay thou in all the plain; escape to the mountain, lest thou be consumed.

18 And Lot said unto them, Oh, not so, my Lord:

19 Behold now, thy servant hath found grace in thy sight, and thou hast magnified thy mercy, which thou hast shewed unto me in saving my life; and I cannot escape to the mountain, lest some evil take me, and I die ...

24 Then the LORD rained upon Sodom and upon Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the LORD out of heaven;

25 And he overthrew those cities, and all the plain, and all the inhabitants of the cities, and that which grew upon the ground

26 But his wife looked back from behind him, and she became a pillar of salt.”



Lot's wife turned into a pillar of salt during Sodom's destruction, Nuremberg Chronicle, 1493

The Merry Maidens

The Merry Maidens is a late neolithic stone circle in Cornwall, England. Local myths say the nineteen maidens were turned into stone as punishment for dancing on a Sunday. The Pipers, two megaliths some distance away, are the petrified remains of the musicians who played for the dancers. The pipers, hearing the local church clock strike midnight, realised they were breaking the Sabbath, and started to run up the hill away from the maidens, who carried on dancing without accompaniment.



The Merry Maidens, engraving by W. & G. Cooke, 1814

Cailleach

In Gaelic myth, the Cailleach is a divine hag, associated with the creation of the landscape and with the weather, especially storms and winter. In Irish folklore studies, she is sometimes known as The Hag of Beara. In Ireland, the Cailleach is associated with craggy, prominent mountains and outcroppings, including

- ~ Hag's Head (the southernmost tip of the Cliffs of Moher, County Clare)
- ~ Labbacallee wedge tomb or bed (Glanworth, County Cork) – where she lived with her husband, Mogh Ruith, until she threw a boulder at him, pinning him to the floor of the River Funshion.
- ~ The megalithic tombs at Loughcrew in County Meath, situated atop The Hag's Mountain which includes a kerbstone known as The Hag's Chair. Nearby is a classic passage tomb—the rays of the equinox sunrise shine down the passageway, illuminating an inner chamber filled with megalithic stone carvings.



Labbacallee wedge tomb or "The Hag's Bed," near Glanworth, County Cork