

From the Indus to the Araxes: Place Names and Geography in Seneca's *Medea*

Seneca's *Medea*, like all his tragedies, is full of place names and geography. Previous scholarship has dismissed the deeper importance of this geography, but each geographical reference that Seneca makes is packed with information—links to larger cultural knowledge or references of which we, the modern reader, do not have casual knowledge. In this presentation, I will begin to unpack this geography, investigating how Seneca treats different locations and different areas of the world. I make a systematic analysis of the geographical references in Seneca's *Medea*, comparing and contrasting the references made throughout the play to specific locations: the larger areas of Greece, the East, and the West; Colchis and Thessaly; India; Corinth; Germany; and Sicily. In my presentation, I will include the comparative charts I have compiled of all the geographical references in the play, giving visual evidence (in the form of these charts and visual media) to how Seneca uses the references to highlight certain characters, areas of the world, and parts of the play.

Seneca makes five references to India in *Medea* (lines 373, 384, 484, 725, 865), three of which are to the rivers Indus (373), Ganges (865), and Hydaspes (725). By Seneca's time, India tended to be viewed by Romans as subject to Rome's imperial power, even though Rome did not actually have full control over the area (Pogorzelski 2011). The use of rivers to symbolize India in the play also problematize the nature of Roman power in the area itself, since the combination of river symbolism (Murphy 2004, Purcell 2012) and longer-standing symbolism of India (Romm 1992) represents not complete control, but rather the potential for conquest. However, imperial expansion is not always depicted positively in the play—during the second Choral Ode,

Seneca depicts the Argonautica in a Roman light, representing imperial expansion as the mixing of geography and violation of natural boundaries (Montiglio 2006).

Of the six references to Corinth made within the play (lines 35, 45, 299, 745, 783, 796), five are spoken by Medea, arguably the most foreign character (35, 45, 745, 783, 796). By writing the Corinthian references into Medea's lines and giving her words power over Corinth's own environment, Seneca reinforces Medea's threatening nature. Medea's references to Corinth also foreshadow her ultimate destruction of the city, as well as her manipulation of divine power to cause Corinth to destroy itself. By giving Medea more power over the city with her words, Seneca gives her more power in the plot than the other characters—even Creon, who makes only one reference to Corinth despite being its king, and Jason, who makes no explicit geographical references to the city at all despite desiring to marry into its ruling family.

This presentation offers a new contribution to Senecan scholarship by analysing the deeper meanings of geographical references in the *Medea*. Previous scholarship on geography in Senecan tragedy has focused on the erudite and possibly abstruse nature of the many geographical references (scholarship before Grant 2000). While this might hold true on the surface, there remains a deeper, more important meaning to the presence of so many geographical references in his work. Seneca does not just scatter geography at random throughout the play, with no skill beyond simply showing off that he is a *doctus vir*. Rather, Seneca uses these geographical references to allude to current attitudes about imperial expansion, to foreshadow elements of the plot, and to disrupt the surface readings of his characters.

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