

Deceit in the Gardens of Versailles: The Reception of Hesiod's Pandora

Louis XIV, famously known as *Le Roi Soleil*, undertook an artistic and political program at Versailles heavily influenced by Roman Imperial iconography and propaganda (Maral 2012). Nevertheless, French humanists had an enduring connection to Greek literature and philosophy, and Greek influence cannot be overlooked in Louis XIV's neoclassical art program. For example, Hesiod's *Works and Days*, with its famous narrative about Pandora, was translated into French in 1574 (Panofsky 2012). By closely examining the herm statue of Pandora in the gardens of Versailles, this paper demonstrates Hesiodic influence over French political thought at the time both as an erudite engagement with Hesiodic poetry, and as a political commentary on the deceit and trickery brought on by court affairs in Louis XIV's reign. I propose that the statue of Pandora at Versailles is best understood in connection to the Affair of the Poisons (1677-1682), which was a crisis which involved allegations of witchcraft against some of the women of Louis XIV's court (Somerset 2003). The figure of Pandora in Hesiod's *Works and Days* illustrates the threat posed by female deception.

The imagery associated with this statue - especially the *pithos* - along with its placement next to the herm statue of Mercury, leave little doubt that this statue depicts the Pandora from *Works and Days*, not any other female divinity or figure. Erected only two years after Louis XIV crushed the Affair of the Poisons, I argue that the statue of Pandora was commissioned as a warning, considering she unleashed evils upon mankind from her pithos: "But the woman took off the great lid from the jar with her hands, and scattered it, and she brought about baneful sorrows for mankind" (ἀλλὰ γυνὴ χεῖρεςσι πίθου μέγα πῶμ' ἀφελοῦσα / ἐσκέδασ'· ἀνθρώποισι δ' ἐμήσατο κήδεα λυγρά, *Op.* 94-95). Panofsky (1962) suggests that French kings before Louis

XIV used Pandora as a symbol of good, but Pandora's presence in the gardens, especially when paired with Mercury, relate a more ominous message to viewers. Mercury furthers this message of deceit, as he is the one who brings Pandora to Epimetheus in *Works and Days*, and gifts her deceptive character: "Then into her chest the messenger, slayer of Argus, crafted lies and wily words and a thievish character through the plans of deep thundering Zeus" (ἐν δ' ἄρα οἱ στήθεσσι διάκτορος Ἀργειφόντης / ψεύδεά θ' αἰμυλίους τε λόγους καὶ ἐπίκλοπον ἦθος / τεῦξε Διὸς βουλῆσι βαρυκτύπου, *Op.* 77-79). Another statue group of Pandora and Mercury located in the Gardens of Marly, an adjacent, private garden off Versailles (Rosasco 2008), is also significant because this statue group served as a private reminder to the royal family of recent affairs. Pandora is recorded in multiple catalogues and descriptions of Versailles (Piganiol de la Force 1701, Maral 2012, Rosasco 2015), yet her importance is never mentioned, and no interpretation of her presence seems to have been presented in scholarship.

Louis XIV was caught in the middle of the Quarrel of the Ancients and Moderns, an argument over the importance of ancient Greek and Roman works in his contemporary society. Pandora's placement as a warning in the gardens of Versailles not only evoked Greco-Roman antiquity, but was in fact a topic which resonated with 17th century French affairs. Her deceptive character and the release of evils from her pithos described in *Works and Days* function ideally as a reminder of the Affair of the Poisons.

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