Elżbieta Olechowska, "Entry on: Atlantis (Series) by Johnny Capps , Julian Murphy, Howard Overman", peer-reviewed by Elizabeth Hale and Daniel A. Nkemleke. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2020). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/933. Entry version as of November 06, 2026.

Johnny Capps , Julian Murphy , Howard Overman

Atlantis (Series)

United Kingdom (2013)

TAGS: Admetus Aeson Alcestis Anabasis Ariadne Atalanta Baucis Campe Cassandra Circe Daedalus Destiny Furies Hecate Heracles Hercules Icarus Jason Jocasta Katabasis Laius Medea Medusa Melas Minos Minotaur Oedipus Oracle of Poseidon Oracles Orpheus Pandora's Box Pasiphae Philemon Prophecy Pythagoras Telamon Thanatos Tiresias Underworld



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General information	
Title of the work	Atlantis (Series)
Studio/Production Company	Urban Myth Film Ltd co-produced with BBC America, for BBC Cymru Wales
Country of the First Edition	United Kingdom
Country/countries of popularity	worldwide
Original Language	English
First Edition Date	2013
First Edition Details	*Atantis*. Directors: Justin Molotnikov (8 episodes), Declan O'Dwyer (6), Alice Troughton (5), Lawrence Gough (3), Jeremy Webb (2), Julian Murphy (1). Broadcast on BBC from September 28, 2013 to May 16, 2015. Broadcast on BBC America from November 23, 2013 to August 8, 2015.
Running time	Two seasons, 25 episodes, 45 min each, 90 minute-long finale of season 02
Format	TV series and DVD
Date of the First DVD or VHS	May 25, 2015 (DVD)
Official Website	bbc.co.uk (accessed: January 14, 2020)

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Genre	Fairy tales, Fantasy fiction, Fantasy serial*, Mythological fiction, Retelling of fairy tales*, Retelling of myths*, Television series
Target Audience	Crossover (Children, young adults)
Author of the Entry	Elżbieta Olechowska, University of Warsaw, elzbieta.olechowska@gmail.com
Peer-reviewer of the Entry	Elizabeth Hale, University of New England, ehale@une.edu.au Daniel A. Nkemleke, University of Yaoundé 1, nkemlekedan@yahoo.com

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Creators



Johnny Capps (Producer)

Johnny Capps is a British television producer and writer. He graduated from the University of Manchester. After joining Shine Limited in 2002, he worked as Head of Development for Drama. He worked for the BBC as Development Executive, (*The Scarlet Pimpernel and Dangerfield*). With Julian Murphy, he created and executive produced a fantasy series for BBC One *Merlin*, then Capps, Murphy, and Howard Overman created and produced a mythological fantasy series *Atlantis*. The three creators are directors of their company Urban Myths Films, responsible for producing in 2019 a horror comedy television series for Channel 4 and Netflix – *Crazyhead*, for ITV (in co-prod. with ITV Studio) – *A Confession*, for Canal+ and Fox Europe and Africa – *War of the Worlds* based on H.G. Wells, and for Netflix *The One* based on John Mars SF novel.

Sources:

Profile at urbanmythfilms.com (accessed: January 14, 2020).

Interview: *Atlantis Executive Producers Johnny Capps & Julian Murphy*, TV Drama World Screen, published on Feb 28, 2014; 7'20", YouTube, youtube.com (accessed: January 14, 2020).

Interview with Jemima Rooper and Co-Creators Johnny Capps and Howard Overman Talk Atlantis, the Biggest Threats and Villains of This Season, and More by Christina Radish, collider.com, Nov. 30, 2013 (accessed: January 14, 2020).

Bio prepared by Elżbieta Olechowska, University of Warsaw, elzbieta.olechowska@gmail.com

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Julian Murphy (Director, Producer)

Julian Murphy is a British television and film producer. He graduated from Cambridge University in 1987. In 1994 he co-founded a production company, Ikona Films, which produced for BBC *One The Vet*. He then joined the BBC to produce several shows, including *Dangerfield*, *Preston Front*, a new version of *Scarlet Pimpernel*, as well as several films. In 1998 , working for Carnival Films, he produced for Channel 4 two series of *As If*, and directed several episodes of the 2nd series. As creative director for Elizabeth Murdoch's Shine Limited, he produced several televisions shows for various broadcasters, including *Merlin* for BBC One. In 2013–2015, together with Capps and Howard Overman, he produced both seasons of *Atlantis* for BBC One (Urban Myths Films).

Sources:

Profile at urbanmythfilms.com (accessed: January 14, 2020)

Profile at unitedagents.co.uk (accessed: January 14, 2020)

Interview: A*tlantis Executive Producers Johnny Capps & Julian Murphy, TV Drama World Screen*, published on Feb 28, 2014; 7'20", YouTube, youtube.com (accessed: January 14, 2020)

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Howard Overman (Producer)

Howard Overman is a British television producer, creator, and writer. He wrote scripts for a number of BBC television shows and in 2008 began writing for the fantasy show *Merlin* produced by Shine Limited. He received a BAFTA award for the series *Misfits* in 2009. In 2010, he created a procedural comedy *Vexed* for BBC Two. With Johnny Capps and Julian Murphy he founded a television series production company Urban Myths Film which produced both seasons of the mythological fantasy *Atlantis* for BBC One and BBC America. He wrote 8 episodes for the first season of *Atlantis* and 8 episodes for the second season. He has been writing and executive producing also at Urban Myths Films, the 2019 series *War of the Worlds* for Canal+ and Fox, and The One for Netflix.

Sources:

Profile at urbanmythfilms.com (accessed: January 14, 2020)

Interview: *Jemima Rooper and Co-Creators Johnny Capps and Howard Overman Talk Atlantis, the Biggest Threats and Villains of This Season, and More* by Christina Radish, collider.com, Nov. 30, 2013,(accessed: January 14, 2020)

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Additional information

Casting

Jack Donnelly as Jason,

Mark Addy as Hercules,

Robert Emms as Pythagoras,

Aiysha Hart as Ariadne,

Jemima Roper as Medusa,

Sarah Parish as Pasiphae,

Alexander Siddig as Minos,

Amy Manson as Medea.

Summary

Jason, a twenty-first-century young man in search of his lost father, travels in a submarine through an under-ocean portal and ends up on the shores of the ancient city of Atlantis ruled by King Minos. He befriends a yet unrecognized mathematical genius/geek Pythagoras and a prizefighter past his prime, Hercules. In this version of the Minotaur myth, victims for the monster are picked from among the inhabitants of the city in a lottery. Pythagoras draws a black stone, but his friends try to save him. As a result, Jason kills the Minotaur who is revealed to have been a mortal punished by gods. This feat earns Jason the Atlanteans' gratitude. He becomes romantically entangled with Ariadne but meets opposition from Pasiphae, a sorceress from Colchis who is her step-mother and Minos' wife – and, as we learn later in a truly Hellenistic romance type reveal, also Jason's biological mother. Pasiphae plots to destroy Ariadne when the plan to marry her off to an easily controlled nephew, Heptarian, fails. She has been slowly feeding poison to Minos, and when he dies, she attempts to assume power depriving Ariadne of her inheritance. The conflict develops into a war, and Pasiphae's Colchian troops mount a siege to Atlantis.

During both seasons, Jason features in many well known Greek mythological stories inventively twisted to allow him and his new friends to play an essential role in each. Easily recognizable

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characters and themes figure in these various events, such as Medusa, Oedipus, Circe, the song of the Sirens, Pandora's box, Hekate, the Furies, the Grey Sisters, Daedalus and Icarus. All are not exactly as we may remember from mythological sources. Curiously, once in Atlantis, Jason displays a total lack of interest in his connection to the twenty-first century, or in time travel as such, but focuses on finding his father, Aeson. The Oracle in her usual cryptic manner warns Jason that Aeson "walks among the dead" which is a Sibylline way to describe a leper colony where Aeson lives. Jason eventually meets him but does not learn why and how they had traveled to the twenty-first century and back to Atlantis.

Eventually, in her attempt to seize and consolidate the Atlantean throne for herself, Pasiphae gives orders to kill Jason. Medea, her niece, who has fallen in love with Jason, betrays her aunt and gives Jason a magic flower depriving the witch of her powers. Jason captures Pasiphae in Hekate's temple; her execution is performed in the nearby woods by Hercules who prompted by Pythagoras, lets her pray to Hecate for resurrection. Convinced of Pasiphae's demise, Jason and Ariadne gain the support of the army and return to Atlantis intending to seek the gods' blessing and restore peace in the city. Unfortunately, a harpy, presumably sent by Hekate, transports Pasiphae's body to the temple and throws it through the opening in the roof on the altar where the dead queen is resurrected and regains her magic. She terrorizes the soldiers and reclaims the city but Jason and Ariadne escape. Cassandra who flees with the couple, prophesizes first that Pasiphae can only be vanquished when Jason destroys the Golden Fleece, the source of her power and second, that the only person who can help Jason achieve that is Medea. Season 2 ends with Medea, magically commanding Jason from the far away shores of Colchis to come and find her. It is unknown, what would have happened in season 3, because at that point, BBC cancelled the series surprising the creators and providing a twenty-first-century reality check to the young viewers' adventure with mythology.

Analysis

In an interview, Johnny Capps explained the creators' idea behind exploring mythological themes:

> "Atlantis is a word that everybody recognizes and it brings emotional reactions because most people know what Atlantis is. We just thought we could set Greek myths in a world called Atlantis. That was our

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> starting point, really. And then, it was all about creating characters and finding out what characters worked in that world. We wanted to reinterpret Greek mythology in a fresh way, for the 21st century audience, and just play around with it and make it an interesting springboard into discussions for other people. We play fast and loose with Greek mythology, so I'm sure Greek scholars will be horrified. But at the same time, I think they'll love the fact that we're making people question it and talk about it."
>
> (Interview with Rooper, Capps, and Overman by Christina Radish, 2013, accessed: January 14, 2020).

While the story moves forward from episode to episode, the creators wanted the viewers to watch a "mini action-adventure movie" every week (Capps in Radish Interview, 2013). Playing "fast and loose with Greek mythology" is an accurate way to describe how the show's creators swirled various myths together. They imagined "a world called Atlantis," populated it with Cretans and the Minoan dynasty, and transformed Theseus into a 21st century Jason. For good measure, they also inserted among the mythical characters a version of a young and still unknown Pythagoras, a historical figure.

The show presents a different "truth" about myths, their revisited aetiological receptions. Two episodes of Season 1, the 9th and 10th (*Pandora's Box* and *The Price of Hope*) may serve as examples of this kind of treatment of myths in the series. Jason and Hercules travel to the Underworld to steal a box for a local villain who kidnapped Hercules' girlfriend, Medusa, to secure the two friends' co-operation; the box lies hidden in Tartarus, a deep and scary place where souls of the dead suck out life from the living who are foolish or brave enough to venture there.* Hercules – who is here a middle-aged bon-vivant, the first such departure from the familiar image of the beloved hero – and Jason are successful, and the kidnappers release Medusa from captivity. Unfortunately, before they have time to warn her, she sees the box brought from Tartarus and cannot stop herself from opening it. It is, as the viewers know, not just any old box but the Pandora's box. As punishment for her curiosity, Medusa becomes a Gorgon, complete with snakes growing out of her head. The new narrative combines a continuation of Pandora's story, an explanation of Medusa's myth and a version of how the Underworld works.

In keeping with the "realistic" character of the show, the descent to the Underworld is an elaborate scientific procedure with drugs

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inducing a death-like trance of the body and freeing the soul to travel apparently in corporeal form – if not, it would have been difficult to see or film them – to the world of the dead. Parallel farcical adventures happening in the land of the living involve their inert bodies, a fire, an actual burial, and Pythagoras racing from one end of the city to another trying to recover the bodies in time for re-animation. This provides a comic relief for the infernal horrors witnessed by Jason and Hercules, and of course, by the viewers.

Unfortunately, in the following episode, *The Price of Hope*, the pace and dramatic tension go down and still another well-known mythological hero appears – Daedalus who is here, like his mythological persona, an inventor and architect. Daedalus' wisdom here goes well beyond engineering; he knows how to lift the curse which transformed the girl Medusa into the familiar monster of the same name. His solution is harsh: the only way to return Medusa to normal is to sacrifice a life for her. Hercules, as her boyfriend, is ready to sacrifice his own.

The story of Daedalus continues in the last episodes of season 2 when he is severely beaten for helping the three friends; Pasiphae's soldiers arrest him and blackmail Icarus offering him his father's life in exchange for betraying his friends. He agrees, even if it means endangering Pythagoras with whom Icarus is romantically involved. Daedalus released from prison convinces his son that nothing justifies betraying one's friends and values. Icarus decides to thwart Pasiphae's plans using the artificial wings his father invented. Icarus attacks the soldiers who are trying to ambush Jason, flying above them and shooting them with fire-missiles. The plan succeeds, but Icarus falls to his death. It is an honourable and valiant death suffered for a doubly noble cause, a sacrifice to save dear friends and the redemption for past misdeeds — not just a moralizing story about a disobedient teenager who meets a sad end and has only himself to blame. Recent reception of mythology in television series for young adults and indeed for all ages frequently offers a different perspective on villains and other less admired figures who unexpectedly display redeeming qualities and even become noble heroes and models to imitate.**

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* This version of the darkest region of Hades makes the young viewers think of Azkaban and the Dementors.

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	** E.g., the 2011–2018 ABC fairy tale / mythology series *Once Upon a Time* features several such reformed villains.
Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	Admetus Aeson Alcestis Anabasis Ariadne Atalanta Baucis Campe Cassandra Circe Daedalus Destiny Furies Hecate Heracles Hercules Icarus Jason Jocasta Katabasis Laius Medea Medusa Melas Minos Minotaur Oedipus Oracle of Poseidon Oracles Orpheus Pandora's Box Pasiphae Philemon Prophecy Pythagoras Telamon Thanatos Tiresias Underworld
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Character traits Friendship Love Parents (and children) Prediction/prophecy Relationships Romance Sacrifice Values Violence
Further Reading	Conroy, Tom, "'Atlantis,' fractured myths for tweens. BBC America series plays fast and loose with Greek legends", Media Life Magazine, November 21, 2013, medialifemagazine.com (accessed: March 10, 2017.) Keene, Allison, "Atlantis: TV Review", *The Hollywood Reporter*, November 18, 2013, hollywoodreporter.com (accessed: January 14, 2020). Lowry, Brian, "TV Review: BBC America's 'Atlantis'. Brits' latest mythological tea-time show doesn't do much more than tread water", *Variety*, November 21, 2013, variety.com (accessed: January 14, 2020). Novalk, Brandon, *'Atlantis' rewrites Greek mythology as a fun fantasy adventure*, Nov 21, 2013, avclub.com (accessed: January 14, 2020). Olechowska, Elżbieta, "Between Hope and Destiny in Young Adults Television Series Once Upon a Time, Season 5, Episodes 12–21 (2016)" in Katarzyna Marciniak, ed., *Our Mythical Hope: The Ancient Myths as Medicine for the Hardships of Life in Children's and Young Adults' Culture*, Warsaw: Warsaw University Press, 2021, 593–612. Wiegand, David, "'Atlantis' review: Fun mix of history, mythology", *SF*

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Addenda

Company Website (accessed: January 14, 2020)

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