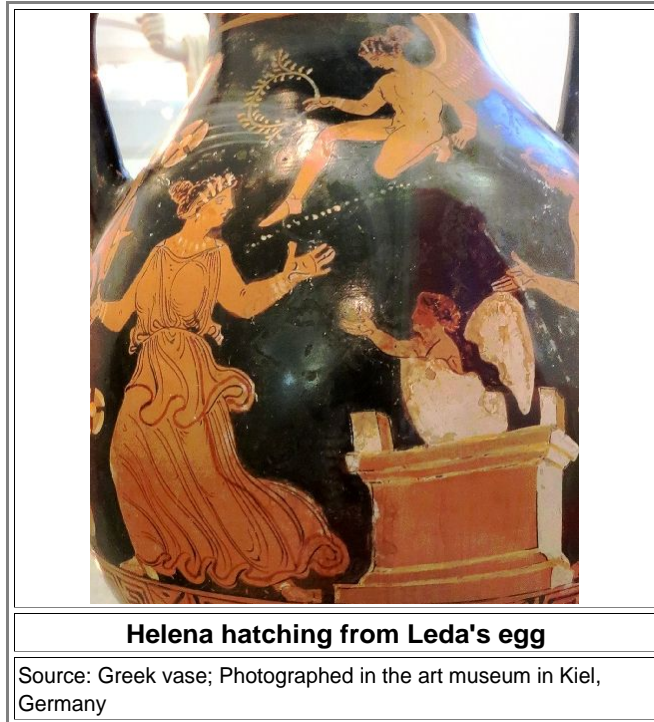


## Leda and the Swan

Hidden

Renderings of Leda and the swan are good items to "collect" when wandering through museums and towns. The topic goes back to Greek mythology, relating how Zeus, the CEO of the Gods, raped Leda while being a swan. Leda was the daughter of the Aetolian king Thestius and the wife of the Spartan king Tynhareus. She was thus a simple human and probably just too pretty or sexy to be left alone by some deity that happened to fly by in the form of a swan.

- Zeus, disguised as swan for some reason of his own, was pursued by an eagle, dived and fell into Leda's arms for protection, and did what he intended all along. While one can't help wondering about certain technical aspects of the performance, Leda conceived and gave birth to two healthy eggs, from which hatched beautiful "**Helen of Troy**" plus assorted other Greek celebrities like the Dioskouri Castor and Pollux (or Polydeuces) and Clytemnestra. One of the eggs seems to have been of the many-yolk variety. Here is the hatching of Helen:



- That's a painting on a Greek vase (a "pelike", to be exact) from around 360/50 BC. The guy hovering above the scene is Eros. Leda doesn't seem to be overjoyed. Now you see why studying the "classics" is considered to be so much more fun compared to studying fracture mechanics, for example.



**Helena hatching from Leda's egg**

Source: Greek vase; Photographed in a museum in Bari, Italy

● Here is another hatching of Helena. It's an "Apulian red-figure bell krater, 4th B.C." and I found it in the Bari Provincial Archaeological Museum". I have no idea what the guy is trying to do (or what's that thing hanging out of his underpants). Probably a kind of antique midwife.

▲ Ancient artists had plenty of ways to express nudity and human interactions of all kinds in their works; they didn't need the Leda myth to get them going. Artists therefore did not get obsessed with the Leda topic before the renaissance around 1500. But then about everybody who was somebody in the art establishment, from Leonardo da Vinci to modern artists, did one or more Leda's.

● The sixteenth-century popularity was due to the little perversity that depicting a woman in the act of copulation with a swan was more acceptable than showing the same procedure with a man. Considering that today it is far more acceptable in certain societies to depict the killing of humans in great detail than to show a breast, I'll go with renaissance perversity and take the Leda's.

● The Leda-and-the-swan topic may have been used for producing a save "ersatz" porno, but that alone cannot explain the fascination of artists (and their customers) with the subject for centuries to come. I'm not sure if the male or female mind is more tickled by this, or if a swan's neck plus head should be seen as a [phallic symbol](#).

▲ Anyway, here are a few. Most I have collected myself; a few are from other sources.



**Rubens version in Dresden; Germany**



**Rubens version in London, Great Britain**

It saves a lot of time and effort if you copy from yourself.



**Correggio's version from 1532; found in Berlin.  
His real name is actually Antonia Allegri.**



**Modern version done with fluorescent tubes;  
Berlin, Germany**



**Bronze sculpture in a store in Copenhagen, Denmark, 2012**



**Porcelain Leda in silk stockings and the swan**

This is a modern porcelain (china) version from Kati Zorn, taken from her exhibition "Mythos und Erotik - Porzellankunst aus Thüringen" shown in Eisenach, Germany, in 2012.



**A somewhat rougher version cut out of a tree trunk and not yet finished**

Wood sculpture found in an artists yard in Sesslach near Coburg, Germany

Here comes a joke:



**Leda (disguised as swan) and the swan in front of the City Hall in Oslo, Norway**

- That is a joke, of course, but also a possible starting point to look at the symbolism behind swans. Lohengrin (by Wagner) features a noble youth turned into a swan, and [Wayland the smith](#) started his career by raping some valkyries who came flying by in the shape of swans but changed into beautiful maidens after being caught as shown here:



**Alrund, Svankit and Alvit, valkyries or swan maidens, according to need; I guess**

Woodcutting adoring City Hall in Oslo, Norway. Wayland (called Volund there) "marries" Alvit after taking her by force.

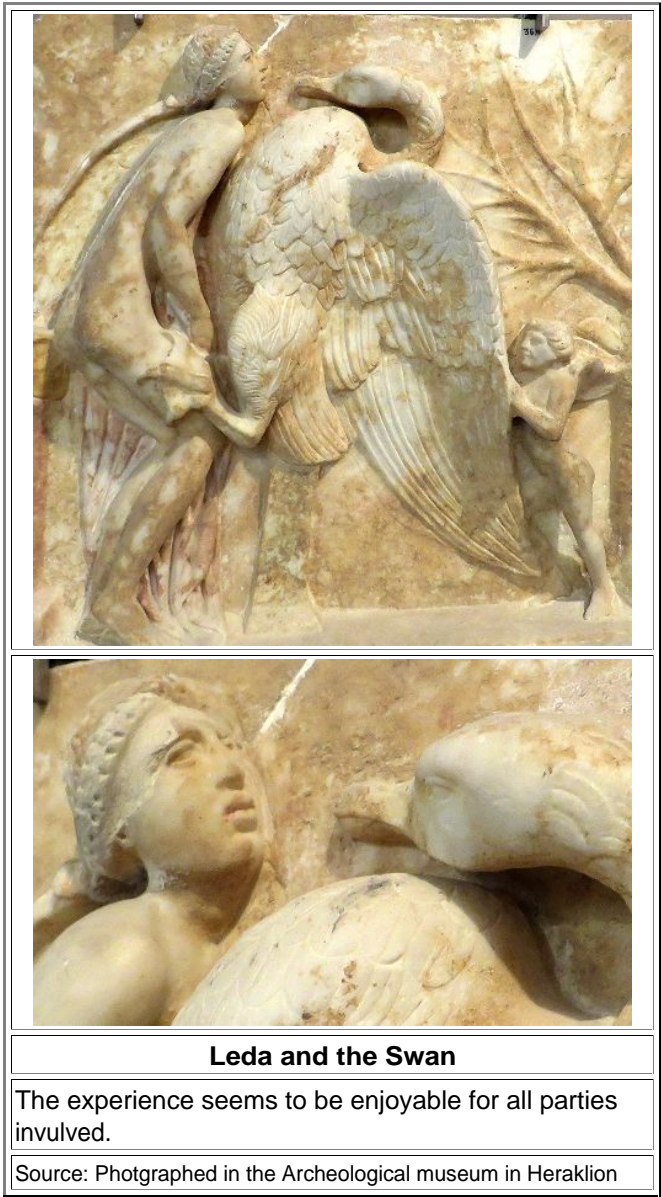
Here is modern one that I didn't collect myself but found in the Net. It's just too good to pass.



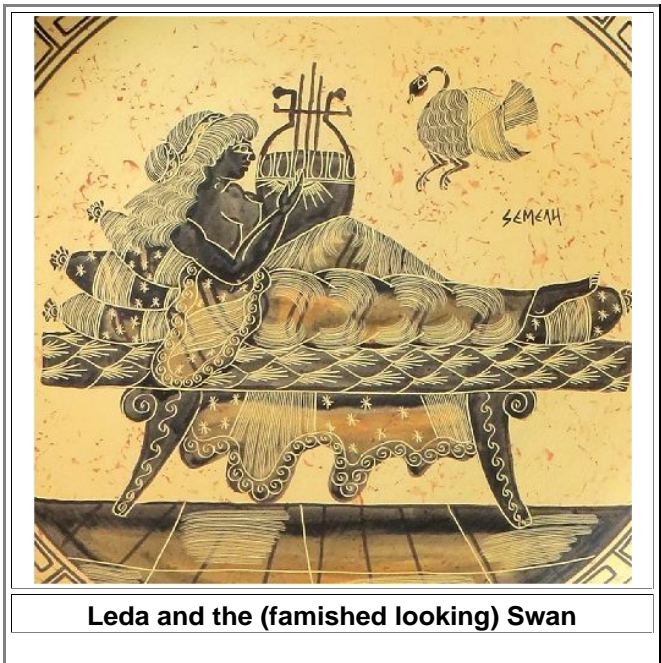
**Leda and the Swan**

Bronze Sculpture by Sculptor Igor Zeinalov (<http://www.zeinalov.com>)

Back to the roots. Here is a Leda from Crete, 1st - 2nd century AD. The guy at the left is Eros. From basic geometry we might conclude that Zeus is carrying a rather long sword.



Here is a Leda I found in Rhodos on some market. A modern Greek interpretation of the old topic. Note that the swan seems to be less enthusiastic than Leda about what is to commence.



Here is a Leda I found in the Catherine Palace (town of Tsarskoye Selo (Pushkin), 25 km south-east of St. Petersburg).



**Leda and the Swan (discussing terms?)**

Source: Photographed 2015 in the Catherine Palace.

Frederick the Great, King of Prussia from 1740 until 1786 had a nice weekend retreat in Potsdam, the summer palace *Sanssouci*. In there you find this Leda:



**Leda and swan (plus understudy?)**

Source: Photographed 2016 at Sanssouci

Rome has many museums and you'll find a Leda or two in most of them. Or right at some roadside:



**Who is forcing attention on whom here?**

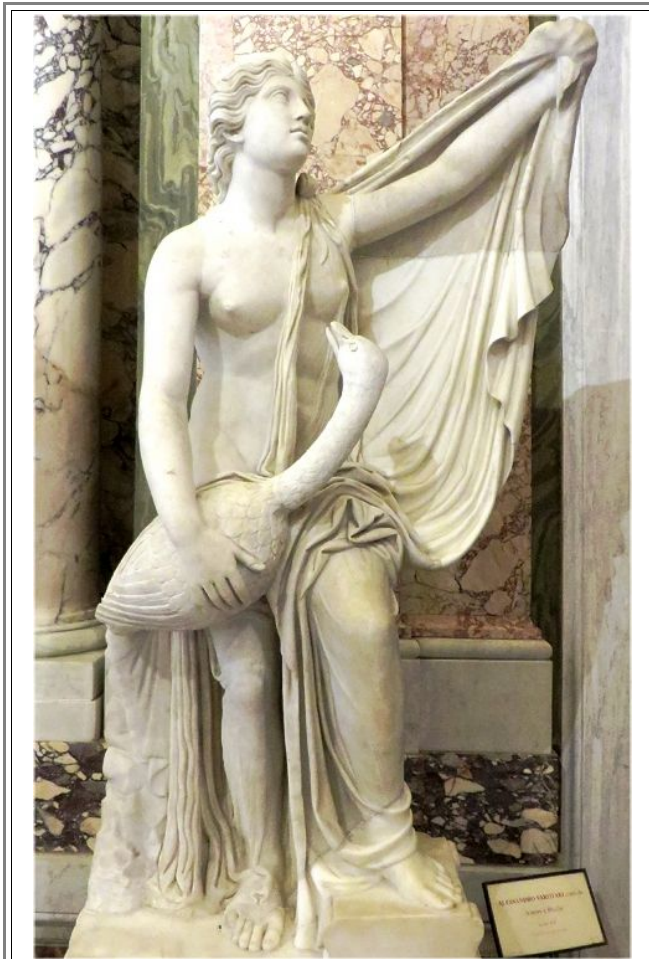
Source: Photographed 2016 at a road crossing in Rome

▀ The next few one can be found in the Villa Borghese:



**Leda and swan, engaged in discussing elementary particle physics or something, with an Eros on the side reminding them on the business on hand. Full marble sculpture.**  
***Gruppo di Leda sedente e Amorini con testa ritratto di Antonia Minore: testa ca. 35 d.C.; whatever that means***

Source: Photographed 2016 at in the Villa Borghese in Rome



**Leda and swan, once more engaged in serious discussions  
Imperial Rome, 2nd century AD**

Source: Photographed 2016 at in the Villa Borghese in Rome



**Leda and swan; copy from Leonardo, ca. 1620**

Source: Photographed 2016 at in the Villa Borghese in Rome

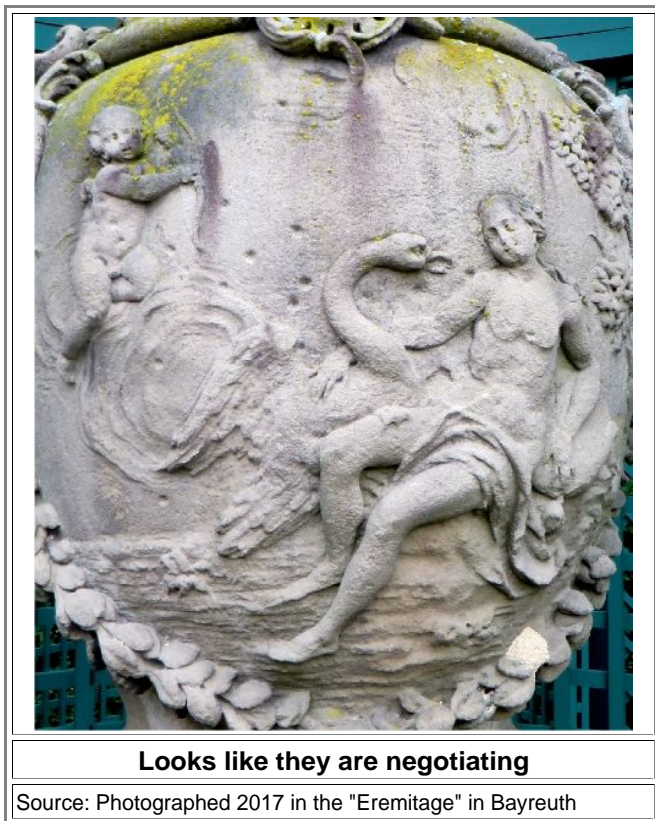
■ In Genua, Italy, you find a great sculpture of the swan (sans Leda) being all excited about the Dioskouri Castor and Pollux (or Polydeuces) just hatching from the (obviously double-yolk) egg that Leda produced



■ Here is a modern Leda from the artist Saad Alei Iraq / Spain. The picture was shown in the big art exhibition "Nordart 2015" in Būdelsdorf, Germany. Saad Ali addresses certain technical questions; his work is entitled "And What Now?"



▀ In Aug. 2017, while mentally preparing for the upcoming "Götterdämmerung", I found this somewhat weather-beaten Leda in Bayreuth:



● You have to walk around in the "Eremitage", a huge park plus assorted castles, waterworks, palais' and what not, going back to 1715 and - judging from the kind of art expressed in innumerable sculptures and other things - wholly dedicated to playing Leda and the swan.

▀ The next Leda was a totally unexpected find in the Berlin "Tierpark" - the Berlin zoo, right in the center of the city, in other words.



- Mummies with their little innocent kiddies go there. I wonder what kind of stooey the invent to go with the sculpture.

▣ The Ufficis in Florence, world famous [art museum](#), have an interesting Leda or better Ledo:



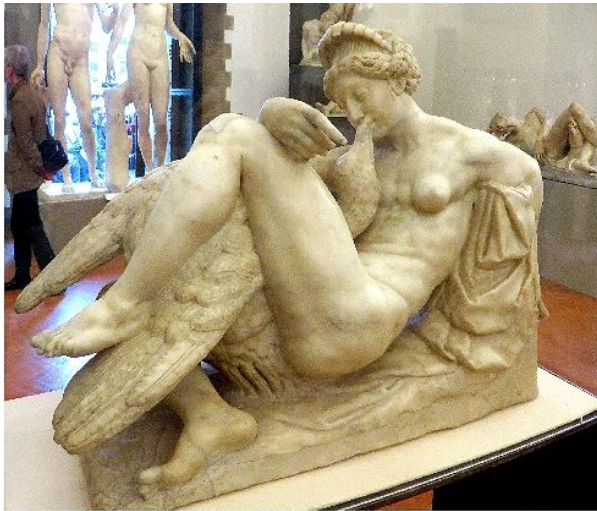
- It's a Roman copy of the Greel original showing Ganymed; the most beautiful young man of his time: So Zeuss, this time as an eagle, abducts him for sinister purposes.

▣ Of course Florence does have real Leda's, too. Here is one that is on display in a shop specializing on bronze copies of original sculptures.



**Leda and the swan assuming the missionary position**

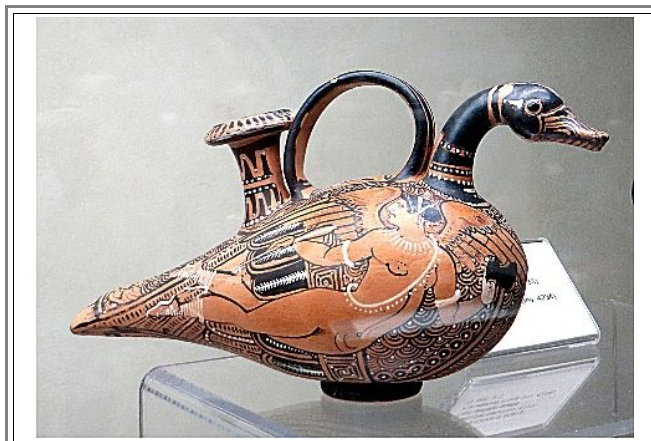
Source: Photographed 2018 in the ufficis, Florence



**Leda and the swan assuming the missionary position**

Source: Photographed 2018 in the ufficis, Florence

- Finally, a somewhat unusual Etruscan Leda:



**Leda, are you in there?**  
Etruscan (4th century BC). Possibly imported from Greece. Archeological Museum

Source: Photographed 2018 in the ufficis, Florence

▀ The "Altes Museum" in Berlin is full of exquisite stuff from the old Greeks - but the best Leda I could find is this rather poor example:



**1st century BC; Roman marble**

Source: Photographed 2018 in the "Altes Museum", Berlin

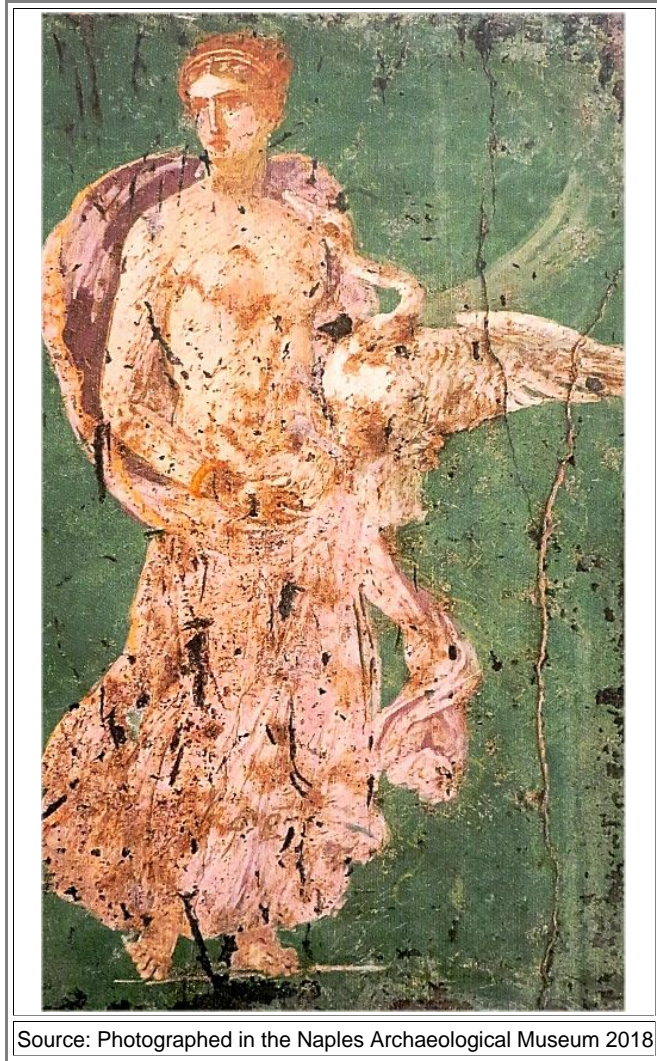
▀ In 2018 I found a somewhat unexpected Leda in the big Leipzig art museum. The "Leipzig School" of modern painters was (and is) very famous. Arno Rink, who did the Leda here, has quite a presence in the huge museum



**Arno Rink, 1994, "Leda und der Schwan"**

Source: Photographed in the Leipzig art museum 2018

Here is a Roman Leda, found in the "Villa de Ariana" in Pompeii. We have a beautiful Leda and a somewhat piddly swan, leaving questions as to technical details wide open. Maybe it's the thought that counts here



Here is a second one, probably also from Pompeii, found in the archaeological museum in Naples



Source: Photographed in the Naples Archaeological Museum 2023