

Mythology1



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The origin of the universe can be explained by modern astronomers and astrophysicists, while archaeologists and historians try to clarify the origin of human

societies. In the distant past, however, before any sciences existed, the beginnings of the world and of society were explained by MYTHOLOGY.

The dictionary defines mythology as the myths dealing with the gods, demigods, and legendary heroes of a particular people.

The word myth is often mistakenly understood to mean fiction-something that

never happened, a made-up story or fanciful tale. Myth is really a way of thinking out the

past. Myths do not correctly explain what literally happen but suggest that behind the

explanation there is a reality that cannot be seen and examined.

One of the best-known mythological books is Homer's 'Iliad', which tells of the

Trojan War. No one reading the book today believes Homer's story as a historically

factual account. However it is believed that at some time, many centuries before Homer

lived-there really was a war between the Greek city-states and the residents of

Myths try to answer several questions. Where did the world come from?

What

are the gods like, and where did they come from? How did humanity originate? Why is

there evil in the world? What happens to people after they die? Myths also try to account

for a society's customs and rituals. Myths are used to justify the way a society lives.

Ruling families in several ancient civilizations found justification for their power in myths

that described their origin in the world of the gods or in heaven.

Myths did not originate in written form. They developed slowly as an oral tradition that was handed down from generation to generation among people who were

trying to make sense of the world around them. They tried to imagine how it could have

come into being in the first place. In the Greek city-states cults centering around the

worship of a particular god developed very early.

The legends of ancient Greece are more familiar because they have become so

permanently set in literary traditions of western civilization. Greek mythology followed

the pattern of other mythologies: the forces of nature were given personalities and were

worshipped. There was no worship of animals or of gods in animal form.

Greek gods and

goddesses were pictured as being much like men and women. The gods were conceived

as more heroic in stature, more outstanding in beauty and proportion, and more powerful

than humans. They did have many human weaknesses. They could be jealous, envious,

spiteful, and petty. Among them only Zeus was known as the Just.

The earliest record of Greek mythology comes from clay tablets dating back to the

Mycenaean civilization, which reached its peak between 1450 and 1200 B. C.. This

civilization consisted of several city -states in Greece, including Mycenae.

The basic

sources for classical Greek mythology are Hesiod's 'Theogony' and Homer's 'Iliad' and

'Odyssey', which date from about the 700's B. C.. Hesiod and Homer rank among the

greatest poets of ancient Greece. The books contain most of the basic characters and

Greek divinities can be divided into several groups. The earliest group was the

Titans, led by Cronus. The most powerful group were the Olympians. The Greeks believed

that the Olympians lived on Mount Olympus. They lived together in a

community of light

and pleasantness, and from this height they mingled with (and often interfered with) the

The Titans were the children of Earth(Gaea) and the heavens(Uranus).

Supposedly there were 12 Titans: the brothers Oceanus, Coeus, Crius, Huperion, Iapetus,

and Cronus and the sisters Thea, Rhea, Themis, Mnemosyne, Phoebe, and Tethys. At their

mother's prompting they rebelled against their father, who had shut them off in the

underworld of Tartarus. Under the leadership of Cronus they deposed Uranus and made

Zeus was the youngest son of the Titans Cronus and Rhea and the brother of

Poseidon, Hades, Hestia, Demeter, and Hera. According to myth at the birth of Zeus,

Cronus, fearing that he might be dethroned by one of his children, swallowed them as they

were born. Upon the birth of Zeus, Rhea his mother wrapped a stone in swaddling clothes

for Cronus to swallow and concealed Zeus in Crete. When Zeus grew up, he forced

Cronus to vomit up his brothers and sisters. The other children were adults now and eager

to get vengeance on their father. The Titans fought on the side of Cronus, but Zeus and

the other gods won, and the Titans were taken in chains to the underworld of Tartarus.

Zeus became ruler over the sky, and his brothers Poseidon and Hades were given power

over the sea and the underworld. The earth was to be ruled by all three brothers.

Zeus, according to Homer, was the father of the gods and of mortals. He was the

protector and ruler both of the Olympian family and of the human race. He was lord of

the sky, the rain god, and the cloud gatherer, who wielded the thunderbolt.

His

breastplate was the aegis, his bird the eagle, his tree the oak. Zeus's shrines were at

Dodona, in Epirus, the land of the oak trees and the most ancient shrine, famous for its

oracle, and at Olympia, where the Olympic Games were celebrated in his honor every

four years. The Nemean games, held at Nemean, northwest of Argos, were also dedicated

From the Greek poet Homer's writings, Zeus is pictured in two very different ways. He is represented as the god of justice and mercy, the protector of the weak, the

punisher of the wicked and rewarded of the good. The goddess Hera became Zeus's wife,

and queen of the gods. They had two children, the gods Ares and Hephaestus. Zeus had many love affairs and goddesses and mortal women. His children by them included the gods Apollo, Dionysus, and Hermes; and the heroes Heracles (Hercules in Latin) and Perseus. Also Zeus gave birth to the goddess Athena, who sprang full-grown from his head. Zeus and Mnemosyne were the parents of the Muses, and nine goddesses of the arts and sciences. Some of the myths say that Zeus and the goddess Themis were the parents of the Fates, three goddesses who controlled men's destiny.

Poseidon, in Greek mythology is the god of the sea. He was also the god of horses, earthquakes, and storms at sea. Poseidon was the son of Cronus and Rhea, and the younger brother of Zeus, the king of the gods. His wife was Amphitrite, a sea goddess. Poseidon had many children famed for their wildness and cruelty, among them the giant Orion and the Cyclops Polyphemus. Poseidon and the Gorgon Medusa were the parents of Pegasus, the famous winged horse.

Poseidon fought unsuccessfully with Athena, goddess of wisdom, for the control of Athens. When he and Apollo, god of the sun, were cheated of their

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promised wages

after having helped Laomendon, king of Troy, build the walls of that city,

Poseidon's

revenge against Troy was terrible. He sent a sea monster to ravage the land, and during

the Trojan War he helped the Greeks.

In art, Poseidon is represented as a bearded and majestic figure, holding a trident, a

three pronged spear, riding in a chariot drawn by horses and often seen with a dolphin.

Every two years the Isthmian Games, featuring horse and chariot racers, were held in his

Hades, was the god of the dead in Greek mythology. He ruled the kingdom of the

dead. He was the son of the Titans Cronus and Rhea and the older brother of Zeus and

Poseidon. Hades from the underworld abducted his queen, Persephone, whom he had

abducted from the world above, ruled the kingdom of the dead. He was a grim and

pitiless god, unappeased by either prayer or sacrifice, but he was not evil. He was known

also as the lord of riches, because both food crops and precious metal were believed to

come from his kingdom below ground.

The underworld itself was often called Hades. It was divided into two regions:

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Erebus, where the dead pass as soon as they die, and Tartarus, the deeper region, where

the Titans had been imprisoned. Tartarus was a dim and unhappy place, inhabited by

vague forms and shadows and guarded by Cerberus, the three-headed, dragon-tailed dog.

Sinister rivers separated the underworld from the world above, and the aged boatman

Charon ferried the souls of the dead across these waters. Somewhere in the darkness of

the underworld Hades' palace was located. It was represented as a many-gated, dark and

gloomy place, thronged with guests, and set in the midst of shadowy fields and an

apparition-haunted landscape. In later legends of the underworld is described as the place

where the good are rewarded and the wicked punished.

Hera, in Greek mythology, queen of the gods, the daughter of the Titans Cronus

and Rhea, and the sister and wife of Zeus. Hera was the goddess of marriage and the

protector of married women. She was the mother of Ares, god of war;

Hephaestus, god

of fire; Hebe, goddess of youth; and Eileithyia, goddess of childbirth. Hera was a jealous

wife, who often persecuted Zeus's mistresses and children. She apparently never forgot an injury and was known for her vindictive nature. Angry with the Trojan Prince Paris for preferring Aphrodite, goddess of love, to herself, Hera aided the Greeks in the Trojan War and was not happy until Troy was finally destroyed. Zeus changed one of his mistresses, the beautiful princess Io, into a cow to hide her from Hera. But Hera found Io and sent the monster Argus, who had 100 eyes, to guard her. On Zeus's orders, the god Hermes beheaded Argus. Hera honored Argus by putting his eyes on the tail of the peacock, her favorite bird. Hera also tormented Io by sending a gadfly to sting her. The Greek artists portrayed Hera as beautiful, dignified, and matronly.

Apollo was a major god in Greek mythology. He was the son of Zeus and the goddess Leto. The goddess Artemis was his twin. Apollo was the god of light, purity, and the sun. Apollo played the lyre and wrote poetry, and he became a patron of musicians and poets. He also had healing powers.

According to myth, Apollo killed a dragon named Python at Delphi. The town became the major center of Apollo's worship in Greece. As the god of prophecy, Apollo

foretold the future through his oracle at Delphi. The Greeks regarded Apollo as the ideal

young man—handsome, honest, intelligent, and strong. But Apollo could also be cruel. He

killed the children of Niobe, queen of Thebes, who had boasted that she was superior to

Leto. He accidentally killed a young boy with a discus. But he was still a much beloved

Athena was the goddess of warfare and wisdom in Greek mythology. At birth,

according to myth, she sprang, full grown and dressed in armor, from the forehead of

Zeus. Athena represented the intellectual aspect of war. The Greeks also worshipped her

as the patroness of arts and crafts. Athena was particularly skilled at spinning and

weaving. One myth states that a mortal woman challenged Athena to a weaving contest

and afterward Athena changed her into a spider so that she could spend the rest of her life

spinning. Athena never married. Athena's most famous temple, on the Acropolis in

Athens, is called the Parthenon. The Greeks in the territory of Attica wanted to name

their principal city for either Poseidon, the sea god, or Athena, whoever gave them the

more useful gift. One myth says Poseidon created the horse. Another myth says he

created a spring. Athena created the olive tree. The gods judged Athena's gift more

useful, and so the city was named Athens, with Athena its patroness.

Ancient artists usually showed Athena wearing a helmet and a magic shield called

the aegis. Athena's chief symbol was the owl.

Hercules was one of the most famous heroes of Greek legend. His father was

Zeus, and his mother was a princess, Alcmene. Hera, wife of Zeus, was jealous of

Alcmene and hated Hercules. When Hercules married Megara, a Theban princess, Hera

made him become insane and he burned his house, killing his wife and children. Hercules

recovered his sanity and sought help from the oracle at Delphi. The oracle told him he

must serve his cousin Eurystheus, King of Argos, for twelve years.

Hercules performed twelve great labors for Eurystheus. First, he killed the Nemean Lion. Second was to kill the Hydra, a serpent with many venomous heads. The

third and fourth labors, Hercules captured a wild boar and a stag in the Arcadian

mountains and showed them to Eurystheus. The fifth labor, Hercules drove

away a great

flock of destructive birds. The sixth labor was to clean the stables of King Augeas of Elis

in one day. For the seventh labor, Hercules went to Crete and caught the savage bull of

Minos, the Cretan King. the eighth labor was to capture the man-eating mares of King

Diomedes of Thrace. The ninth labor was to obtain the girdle of the Amazon queen

Hippolyta. The tenth labor took Hercules far to the west, past the Pillars of Hercules (Strait

of Gibraltar) to get the cattle of the monster Geryon. The eleventh labor was to carry the

Apples of the Hesperides to Eurystheus. For his twelfth labor, Hercules had to show

Cerberus, the watchdog of the Lower World, to Eurystheus. The last three labors were

ways of winning immortality, because Geryon and Cerberus represent Death, and the

At the end of his life, Hercules won immortality. When Hercules died his friends

placed him on a funeral pyre and lit it. After his body had been burned up, he was taken

up into Olympus and welcomed as one of the gods.

There are many more gods, goddesses, legends and heroes in Greek Mythology,

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they are too numerous to go into detail on. When we read stories today about the Greek gods and goddesses we all remember them and can tell someone else the stories we have read. We all have enjoyed many of the Greek myths and will continue far into the future.

Bibliography:

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