

To what extent did the romans take their mythology from the greeks? essay



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Myths turn out to be a significant part of human lives: they provide people with a chance to learn more captivating stories about past, people's ideas as for their place in this world, cooperation between people and gods, and, of course, heroism.

Each nation has its own ideas to describe in myths; this is why mythology of each country has its own characteristics and grounds; from time to time, it is quite possible to find out certain similarities and not less important differences between the mythologies of different countries and cultures. Greek and Roman mythologies are ones of the most frequently discussed mythologies; their peculiarities and connection are thoroughly studied by lots of students and adults.

The names and the roles of Gods and Goddesses, nature of human world, origins of cultures – all this captivates many readers and evokes lots of discussions. To what extent did the Roman representatives take their mythology from the Greeks?

What are the similarities and differences, which make these two mythologies so unique and interesting? What is the essence of each myth? All these questions burn unbelievable desire to open the book with Roman or Greek myths and re-read some of them in order to present more or less clear answers.

In this paper, the ideas to what extent Roman mythology is similar to Greek one, the differences and similarities of myths from different cultures, and the impact of these two mythologies will be introduced; a thorough analysis of

Roman and Greek literature and attention to the details in myths of the both cultures will be helpful in order to present a comprehensible piece of work.

The influence of Greek mythology to the Roman mythology is obvious: numerous borrowings and the same development of the events could not be hidden even after changing the names of the characters both human and gods' and deep attention to rituals and every day life from Roman side; but still, certain differences between these two mythologies made each of them unique and interesting to investigate them more and more.

The purpose of any myth is considered to be a significant issue for many historians and writers. Janet Parker admits that " myths are significant stories for their culture, and their significance sometimes resonates over millennia and far beyond their original culture." [1] This is why so much attention is paid to myths' essence, characters, and consequences.

First meeting with a new culture should start with reading a couple of myths in order to feel and comprehend the spirit of the chosen nation, its preferences, and its interests. For example, Roman mythology touched lots of aspects concerning the daily life of Romans [2]; and Greek mythology is interesting due to its long history and the stories, which pass from generation to generation. [3]

These two mythologies are frequently discussed together, as the later myths and stories were created with the help of numerous borrowings, which came from Greek mythology, which helped to present all information in a clear literary form.

Roman mythology had lots of similarities to Greek mythology as well as lots of difficulties. In comparison to many other mythologies, the Roman ones had not sequential narratives: the greater part of Roman myths was all about rituals and the development of cities and rising of professions. The Romans liked to describe their lives and all those actions, which made their lives complete.

For example, in his *Cyrus, Future King of Persia*, Herodotus wrote more about the relations between relatives, their problems, and desires: “when the woman saw how fine and fair the child was, she began to cry and laid hold of the man’s knees and begged him by no means to expose him” (Herodotus & Godley 1920, para. CXIII). If the Romans wanted to take each detail from Greek mythology, the author would choose to concentrate on Gods and their permission not to expose the child.

However, it is necessary to admit that the Romans took lots of ideas from Greek mythology and believed that some changes with names and other trifles would make their mythology interesting and significant as well. This is why the names of Roman mythology were taken from the Greeks, and changes of names took place. *Iliad* and *Odyssey* are the two most known Greek epic poems, the brightest examples of Greek mythology; the best presents, given by Homer to people.

The events of Trojan War, Achilles’ power and weakness, relations between gods (Poseidon) and people (Odysseus) – all this was inherent to Greek mythology and made it really precious to people. If Greek mythology is a great part of Greek literature, than Roman mythology is a great part of

Roman history. It was hard to call the examples of Roman myths as literary pieces of work. Myths were more about Roman rituals and beliefs, styles of life and observations, the roles of Gods and traditions.

However, the preferences in mythology were also caused by the relations between the Romans and the Greeks. After the Romans conquered Greece, they stopped believing that gods had some powers over people and were not humans and started thinking that all gods should have human forms and be equal to people. It was one of the first borrowing, the Romans took from the Greeks in mythology.

Roman mythology has no concrete way of creation: lots of myths appeared around its creation, and the reader cannot still decide what myth is more convincing. However, there are two major myths, which present more or less clear picture of how Roman mythology has been developing. One of the myths was about Aeneas and his travel to Italy, when he found Rome.

This person was characterized by close connection to gods, this was why he decided to create mythology telling about gods, their power, and relation to people. Another myth was about two brothers, Romulus and Remus, who were the sons of mortal Rhea and the God Mars. When their parents died, their uncle decided to kill both of them in order to rule the world. However, only Remus was killed, and Romulus escaped, created a new city, Rome, and became the first king.[4]

However, some historians admitted that it was Romulus, who killed Remus, because he had no desire to share the throne with his brother. “ The more

common report is that Remus contemptuously jumped over the newly raised
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walls and was forthwith killed by the enraged Romulus, who exclaimed, ' So shall it be henceforth with every one who leaps over my walls'" (Livy & Roberts 1912, para. 1. 7).

One of the oldest writers, who wanted to present in details the history of his country, was Marcus Terentius Varro. He had " an overwhelming interest in the nature of language in general and the development of their vernacular, recording Roman achievements as a parent would boast to his friends or address praise and encouragements to his son" (Fantharn 1999, 48). This very writer created works, in which the characters of Roman mythology were introduced in regard to the existed for that period of time government.

As we can observe, the history of Rome is not that clear, this is why even one of the greatest writer, Plutarch, wrote " from whom, and for what reason, the city of Rome, a name so great in glory, and famous in the mouths of all men, was so first called, authors do not agree" (Plutarch 1864, para. 1). This is why it is hard to judge when Roman mythology was started and who was its creator, but still, its influence remains considerable for Rome and any other country.

After the war with Greece, it had become a habit for the Romans to copy lots of things from the conquered country, and Greek mythology wasn't an exception. This is why lots of Roman myths are seen through the eyes of Greeks (Wiseman 1995, p. 43). Greece was a great empire with its rules and traditions.

For lots of countries, Greece was the necessary standard to follow. Greece

literature and mythology was a good example of how to write grammatically
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correct. This is why it was not surprisingly that the Romans wanted to learn in order to be smarter, more respected, and more developed in any sphere of life. They learnt, copied, borrowed, and created also unforgettable pieces of art in history. So, the already existed civilization, Greece, served just a perfect example for the Romans to their victories.

The nature of Greek myths deserves much attention: they created masterpieces in order to underline the power of their gods and people's dependence. Also, Greeks preferred to represent gods in forms of animals. For example, Io could turn into a cow, Hades' guards were the dogs, and Zeus, himself, was a bull (Kirk 1974, p. 50). This is why Roman mythology took much from Greek mythology, however, made good attempt to add something personal in order to present some distinctions.

For example, according to Greek mythology, all gods and goddesses lived on Olympus that was placed high in the sky (Sissa and Detienne 2000, p. 4). Roman mythology did not present a clear explanation where all gods lived. It only pointed out that each god had own powers and could affect on human being in different ways: Jupiter was the supreme god and Lares was the protector of a piece of land (Bonney and Doniger 1992, p. 132).

As we can see, Roman mythology took the functions of Greek gods, gave them other names, and made them homeless. In Roman mythology there was a strong triad of gods, Jupiter, Quirinus, and Mars, who, in comparison to Greek gods, did not have much power over people and did not have many activities. They also did not have close relation to other gods and goddesses and lacked marriages.

As it was mentioned above, Roman mythology differed from Greek mythology with the names of gods and goddesses, but still, the functions remained to be almost the same. For example, the Roman Neptune was the god of the sea, who participated in the Trojan War (Bolton 2002, p. 247). In Greek mythology, it was Poseidon, who could control the sea and earthquakes. Greek Eros, the god of love and desire was a prototype of Roman Cupid.

However, the Greeks and Romans analyzed love from different perspectives: in Greece love was compared to lust and intercourse, and, in Rome, love was all about passion and desire. Of course, all these concepts are closely connected to each other, but still, such trifles could say a lot about the nature of the nation. Even being great conquerors, the Romans did not forget about love and attention to beloved people, and Cupid was the one, who showed the right way to success in love.

In Greek mythology, there was one god with “brutal muscular strength” (Deacy 2008, p. 54) named Ares. This cruel and prudent god of war was the son of great Zeus and Hera. He had unbelievable power to start wars and put nations against nations. The Romans called the god of war Mars, because “he fights using men, as if Mars were ‘male’ (mas, gen, maris).”[5]

In fact, there were lots of god, who had different names in Roman and Greek mythologies, but still performed the same functions: Rhea in Greece and Ops in Rome – the mother Goddess, Greek Hypnos and Roman Somnus – the god of sleep, Hephaestus in Greece and Vulcan in Rome – the god of fire (Topping 2000, p. 217).

In spite of unbelievable desire to win and conquer more and more nations, the Romans turned out to be much more disciplined in comparison to the Greeks. Unfortunately, this discipline reflected considerably on their creativity and imagination – they were good at wars and engineering but not at verbal images and literature.

They could easily built a magnificent building according to personal standards, but they could not present a worthwhile myth without consulting Greek myths, this is why the Romans became known as the greatest borrowers from the Greeks.

During the times, when the Roman Empire began its establishment and demonstration of its power, Greek traditions had already amazed the world. This is why it was not too much surprisingly that certain traditions and ideas, presented by the Greeks, were borrowed by other nations, and the Romans as well.

Greek influence was noticed in many spheres of Roman life. Roman and Greek religion, Roman and Greek mythology – this is why is always interesting to analyze and find out as many differences and similarities as possible. The Romans created their mythology grounding on the already Greek characters, just changed their names, and limited their functions. With the help of the works by Herodotus and Livy, the reader gets a wonderful opportunity to learn more about the Roman history and Rome's development.

The point is that the Romans preferred to concentrate on rituals and daily routines more than Greeks, this is why Roman mythology helped to get a <https://assignbuster.com/to-what-extent-did-the-romans-take-their-mythology-from-the-greeks-essay/>

clear idea of Ancient Romans' style of life. If we talk about the extent to which the Romans took the ideas for their mythology from the Greeks, it turns out to be difficult to present concrete numbers, but still, it is possible to say that numerous borrowings were noticed.

God's abilities, functions and relations to people, duties and destinies, cooperation and loving affairs – all this is almost common for the Romans and for the Greeks. However, it should not mean that Romans were too illiterate to create own mythology; maybe, it should underline once again how creative and inventive the Greeks were that their pieces of art became the standard for many nations.

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