

# CLASSICAL MYTHOLOGY: THE GREEKS COURSE GUIDE



Professor Peter W. Meineck NEW YORK UNIVERSITY

# Classical Mythology: The Greeks

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Classical Mythology: The Greeks Professor Peter W. Meineck



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# About Your Professor Peter W. Meineck

Peter W. Meineck is a clinical assistant professor of classics and artist in residence at the New York University Center for Ancient Studies and the producing artistic director and founder of the Aquila Theatre Company. Peter currently teaches in the Classics Department at New York University in ancient drama, Greek literature, and classical mythology. He has held teaching appointments at Princeton University, the University of South Carolina, and the Tisch School of the Arts. Fellowships include the Harvard Center for Hellenic Studies, Princeton, the University of California at San Diego, and the University of Texas at Austin. He has lectured and held workshops on ancient drama and Shakespeare at conferences, academic institutions, museums, festivals, and schools throughout the world.

Peter's publications include Aeschylus' *Oresteia* (Hackett Cambridge, 1998); *Aristophanes Vol. 1 - Clouds, Wasps, Birds* (Hackett Cambridge, 1998); Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus* with Paul Woodruff (Hackett Cambridge, 2000); Aristophanes' *Clouds* (Hackett Cambridge, 2000); and *The Theban Plays* with Paul Woodruff (Hackett Cambridge, 2002).

He has translated several Greek plays for the stage (*Clouds, Wasps, Birds,* Philoctetes' *Ajax, Agamemnon,* and *Oedipus the King*). He founded Aquila in 1991 after working extensively in West End theatre, including the Aldwych, the Almeida, the English National Opera, the Phoenix, the Royal National Theatre, the Royal Court Theatre, the Royal Opera House, and Sadler's Wells. Peter trained as a lighting designer and has lit and co-designed many Aquila shows.

His work as a director includes Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*; Sophocles' *Ajax*; a new play, *Villain*, which he also co-wrote; Shakespeare's *Coriolanus*; and Aristophanes' *Wasps*.



## Introduction

In *Classical Mythology: The Greeks*, widely published professor Peter Meineck examines in thrilling detail the far-reaching influence of Greek myths on Western thought and literature. The nature of myth and its importance to ancient Greece in terms of storytelling, music, poetry, religion, cults, rituals, theatre, and literature are viewed through works ranging from Homer's *lliad* and *Odyssey* to the writings of Sophocles and Aeschylus. Through the study of these time-honored myths, the Greek heroes and gods—including Heracles, Zeus, Achilles, Athena, Aphrodite, and others—leap from the page in all their glorious splendor. The following lectures are not only an entertaining guide to Greek mythology, but also a fascinating look into the culture and time that produced these eternal tales.

## Lecture 1: The Nature of Greek Myth

# The **Suggested Reading** for this lecture is G.S. Kirk's *Nature of Greek Myths*, section 1.

#### Introduction

The mythology of the Greeks has had a profound influence on Western thought and literature, yet myths themselves are very difficult to categorize. The Greeks were closely connected to their mythic tradition via storytelling, music, poetry, religious and cult practice, rituals and festivals, theatrical performances, and literature. This lecture will set out a basic framework for understanding the meaning of the term "myth," the different types of myth, and various approaches to the study of mythology. We will also create some context for our course with a brief description of the main periods of Greek history and an overview of the landscape and climate of Greece.

#### What Is Myth?

The mythology of the Greeks has had a profound influence on Western thought and literature.

The term "myth" is derived from the Greek *mythos*, which means "a spoken story," "speech," or simply "the plot." The fifth/fourth-century Athenian philosopher Plato contrasted *mythos* with the term *logos*, meaning "account." The teller of a *logos* takes personal responsibility for what they say, whereas the speaker of a *mythos* relates a traditional story, one that is "handed down"; hence the Latin term *trado*—to "hand over." Aristotle came to equate *mythos* with fiction and see it as acting like the plot of a Greek tragedy, capable of producing catharsis or "healing" through the shared experience of the audience. The Romans named their mythological stories *fabulae*, regarding many of them as mere fables.

Originally, Greek myths were handed down by word of mouth, via the songs of bards, at ritual gatherings, or simply via oral storytelling. By the eighth century BCE, these stories began to be written down and took on a textual form in works such as Homer's *lliad* and *Odyssey*. Myths became highly mutable as they developed through the course of their oral delivery. They changed to reflect local customs, social and political conditions, and contemporary tastes. As myths became recoded as written texts, different versions with varied plots emerged.

All cultures seem to have developed some sort of mythological narrative. There are numerous parallels and points of contact between the various traditions.

Examples include:

The Babylonian epics, such as the Enuma Elish

Sanskrit poetry, such as the *Mahabharata* The first books of the Old Testament The Viking sagas The Native American oral tradition The *Arabian Nights* The stories of King Arthur, the Knights of the Round Table, and the Holy Grail The rich tradition of African mythology The Inca creation stories

## Types of Myth

It is incredibly difficult to create a clear system for cataloguing mythology. The following three types of myth can establish only the broadest of outlines. Many myths contain elements of each.

## Etiological or Divine Myths

The term "etiological" is derived from the Greek word *aitia*, meaning "cause," and is used to describe a type of myth that articulates natural phenomena or the actions of divine forces. This includes creation myths, stories concerning the gods, and accounts of the time before humankind. Gods are often depicted as forces of nature (for example, Zeus is the sky god and his weapon is the lightning bolt), or they personify a powerful emotive force, such as Aphrodite, who encapsulates desire and sexual passion. Etiological myths can also be viewed as a type of primitive science in which myths are used to explain matters beyond the bounds of knowledge.

## Heroic Myths or Legends

These kinds of stories can best be described as mythological memories of the human past. Here the main characters are mortal, not divine, although many are related to the gods in some way and have larger-than-life attributes. They tend to reflect an aristocratic "hero" class, great leaders whose deeds have become enshrined in myth, such as Heracles, Achilles, Jason, and Theseus. Often these heroes are held up to reflect an extreme example of human behavior and the positive and negative effects this causes. These kinds of legends often contain elements of historical memory, such as the mythological accounts of the Trojan War. These may reflect a real conflict that occurred in the distant past, and portray elements of a much older culture.

## Traditional Folk Stories

Folk tales are used to articulate human commonalities, such as societal fears, important rites of passage, and moral guidance. Examples of folk tales in Greek mythology include the fables of Aesop, the central books of Homer's *Odyssey*, and stories of great trials or quests, such as the myths of Perseus and Jason. These tales contain recognizable motifs, such as the use of items imbued with magic power, an escape from danger using trickery, or sexual conquest after the passing of an initiation rite.

### Methods of Studying Myth

- Allegorical—Rationalizes myths as metaphors for human behavior and customs. This type of study can be traced back to the Hellenistic thinker Euhemerus (c. 300 BCE).
- Comparative—Examines the similarities and differences inherent in the mythologies of different cultures. The work of Joseph Campbell uses this method.
- Ritualism—The connection between religious rituals and mythology. A theory advocated by the Cambridge School in the early twentieth century. Frazer's the *Golden Bough*, Graves' the *White Goddess*, and the works of Jane Harrison and F.M. Cornford are notable examples of this school of thought.
- Psychological—Sigmund Freud used mythic stories to demonstrate his theories on human mental development and the effects of the personal unconscious. His famous terms "Oedipus complex" and "Electra complex" are drawn from the mythic accounts of Greek tragedy. Carl Jung advances a theory of a collective unconscious using the commonalities inherent in myth as evidence.
- Functionalism—Mainly advocated by anthropologists such as Bronislav Malinowski, who studies the Tobriand islanders of New Guinea. Here myths are seen as charters of social customs and beliefs, often dealing with cultural taboos.
- Structuralism—The analysis of myths as component parts. Claude Lévi-Strauss detailed a binary structure and observed a negotiation and resolution of opposing forces. Vladimir Propp documented thirty-one distinct motifs as units of recurring patterns. Walter Burkert blended structuralism and historical perspective to uncover essential meaning behind myths.

## The Geography of Greece

The Greek landscape and climate had a profound effect on ancient Greek culture and mythology. Greece has a temperate Mediterranean climate, with warm summers and mild winters. This led to the development of a culture that lived much of its civic and social life outside. In mythology, exterior space tends to be the realm of men, the state, and government, while interior space is attributed to women, the home, and privacy. Most communities in Greece were very close to the sea or situated on an island. A reliance on seafaring for trade and warfare led to the fluent exchange of cultural influences apparent in Greek mythology. Because the Greek mainland is broken up by low mountain ranges, communities developed in isolation. This led to the emergence of localized mythic traditions. The rugged landscape of Greece produced the olive, the vine, and hard cereals such as barley. These products were widely exported, allowing for the spread of mythology via devices such as iconography on painted vases and the export of sculpture. The cycle of the Greek agricultural year is also strongly reflected in Greek myth and ritual practice.

## **Historical Periods of Ancient Greece**

### Early to Middle Bronze Age

(3000 to 1600 BCE)

- Beginning of Minoan Palace culture on Crete/Thera
- Cycladic culture in the Aegean

### Late Bronze Age

(1600 to 1100 BCE)

- Mycenaean culture on Greek mainland
- Height of Minoan culture 1400 BCE
- Destruction of Troy in 1250 BCE

## Dark Age

(1100 to 800 BCE)

Collapse of palace culture

## Archaic Period

(800 to 480 BCE)

- Foundation of the polis city-state
- · Colonization by Greeks
- Development of Greek writing

## Classical Period

(480 to 323 BCE)

- Defeat of Persian forces led by Athens at Salamis in 480
- Development of democracy in Athens
- · Emergence of history, philosophy, rhetoric, drama

## Hellenistic Period

(323 to 31 BCE)

- Death of Alexander in 323 BCE
- Spread of Hellenic culture throughout Alexander's former empire
- · Conquest of Hellenic world by Rome-fall of Alexandria in 31 BCE

## FOR GREATER UNDERSTANDING

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## Questions

- 1. Choose one Greek myth you know well and apply several different scholarly approaches to analyze the meaning of the myth.
- 2. Find one example of each of the three broad categories of myth and explain how the myth functions and why it should be placed in a particular category.

### **Suggested Reading**

Kirk, G.S. The Nature of Greek Myths. New York: Viking Press, 1975.

### **Other Books of Interest**

- Frazer, James George. *Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion*. New York: Simon & Schuster 1996.
- Graves, Robert. *The White Goddess: A Historical Grammar of Poetic Myth.* New York: The Noonday Press, 1997.
- Lévi-Strauss, Claude. *Myth and Meaning: Cracking the Code of Culture*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1995.

## Lecture 2: Religion and Society

# The **Suggested Reading** for this lecture is Robert Garland's *Religion and the Greeks*.

#### **Religion and Society**

Much of Greek mythology deals with the actions of the gods, their involvement with mortals, and the deeds of humans with divine ancestors. How did the Greeks view their gods and in what way did religious practice, ritual, and sacrificial cult interact with mythology? In this lecture we will examine these questions and take a look at the changing face of Greek society as it developed through the ages and what effect this had on the telling of myths.

#### The Greeks and Their Gods

Originally, the Greeks seemed to have viewed their gods as elemental forces. Zeus is a sky god and Hera represents the earth. As Greek culture develops and human individuality becomes more important, the gods are seen as anthropomorphic and take on human form. The gods come to take on attributes of human traits and emotions, such as Athena, who stands for wisdom and moderation. Greek gods were not held to any moral standard, and ancient mythology is full of the sexual, duplicitous, mischievous, and downright malevolent antics of the gods. Mortals observed the gods more out of a fear of divine retribution. They believed they had to avoid displeasing them and to not incur their terrible wrath.

The Greek gods were worshipped via rituals and sacrificial cult. Their temples were built on hilltops and adorned externally in order that all members of the community could see them at all times and be mindful of that particular deity. Different gods were worshipped in a variety of temples and shrines—some cities placed more importance in certain "patron" gods. In Athens, for example, Athena and Poseidon were held in special reverence.

Communion via sacrifice was controlled by the clan chief, the king, or a state representative. This important ceremony distributed meat to the community, disposed of animal remains, and nourished the gods with the smoke of the burnt offering.

Mythology was a part of Greek religion and cult practice. Certain rituals "performed" mythological stories, and the performance of myth in lyric poetry, epic, and tragedy was dedicated to the gods.

#### Sacrifice

Sacrificial cult was of vital importance to the Greeks. The role of sacrifice is articulated in the myth of Prometheus, in which the wise Titan tricks Zeus into accepting offal by wrapping it back up in its skin. In this way the mortals received the meat. Sacrifice also articulates the role of the hunter/warrior. One famous example is the myth of the sacrifice of Iphigenia by Agamemnon

before the Greeks sailed on Troy. Human sacrifice abounds in Greek mythology. It is not definitively known if human sacrifice ever played a real role in Greek religious practice.

## A Brief Glossary of Greek Religion

Olympians—The divine dynasty that rules from "above," led by Zeus.

- Chthonic—The opposite of the Olympians. These are the spirits that are said to inhabit the earth or the nether regions. Hecate and the Furies are both chthonic forces.
- Libation—A liquid offering to the gods or the dead. This could be water, wine or honey, olive oil and milk, or a combination. A *sponde* was offered for heavenly protection, a *choe* to appease the dead or chthonic forces.
- Miasma—Pollution. A religious virus that could infect a whole community if not treated with ritual purification. Oedipus is a prime example of a man with Miasma.
- Oracles—A cult shrine where mortals could receive divine guidance on the future. Apollo's shrine at Delphi was one of the most important oracles.
- Divination—In addition to consulting oracles, Greeks read signs, usually of birds in the sky, such as the omen of the eagles in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon.* They also examined the entrails of birds to seek to understand divine will.
- Sanctuaries—Cult sites for worship and reverence, often sacred spaces clearly defined by strict rules of entry.
- Hades—The god of the underworld but also the place mortals went when they died, where they wandered as shades. There were different beliefs of the afterlife, including reincarnation, a blessed existence in Elysian, a transformation into a star, and diffusing into the ether.
- Mystery Cults—Cults of initiation that offered degrees of enlightenment. The most famous mystery cult was at Eleusis near Athens.
- Prayers—The invocation of a particular deity, usually a reciprocal offer in which the person praying would offer to perform a service or make an offering in return for a divine favor. Curses also operated in similar fashion.

## **Greek Society**

Greek mythology contains explanations of the divine and a collective memory of an earlier human existence. These stories were handed down through the dark ages and many of them seem to articulate moments from the Greek's own historic past. These stories include the myth of the Trojan War and myths of the city of Thebes.

As Greek society evolves, so does its mythology. As Greece emerges from the dark ages, there is a reorganization of Greek society into the city-state, the development of new forms of warfare, and the rise of novel systems of government. Athens is a good example. A small Mycenaean settlement hardly even mentioned in the *lliad* becomes one of the major cities in the ancient world in a period of less than 100 years. Athens develops its own mythology based on earlier myths, such as the myths of Theseus and Aeschylus' great trilogy the *Oresteia*. The Athenian writer Herodotus, known as the father of history, produces a written text explaining the Persian Wars. Here mythology, contemporary opinion, and a travelogue are blended to form the Western world's first history. One generation later the writer Thucydides completes a history of the Peloponnesian War that contains no mythological explanations.

## FOR GREATER UNDERSTANDING

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## Questions

- 1. How did Greek religion differ from the main religions of today?
- 2. How did the Greeks seek to learn the will of their gods?

#### Suggested Reading

Garland, Robert. *Religion and the Greeks*. London: Gerald Duckworth & Co. Ltd., 1994.

#### **Other Books of Interest**

- Burkert, Walter. *Greek Religion*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985.
- Easterling, P.E., and J.V. Muir. *Greek Religion and Society*. Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1985.
- Grant, M., and R. Kitzinger, eds. *Civilization of the Ancient Mediterranean*. New York: Charles Scribner and Sons, 1988.
- Graves, Robert. *Greek Gods and Heroes*. Reissue. New York: Laurel Leaf, 1965.

Martin, Thomas. Ancient Greece. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996.

Mikalson, J.D. *Athenian Popular Religion*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1983.

## Lecture 3: In the Beginning There Was Chaos

# The **Suggested Reading** for this lecture is Hesiod's *Theogony* and *Works and Days*.

#### Introduction

In the previous lecture we looked at the nature of Greek religion. Here we will examine our first primary sources: Hesiod's Works and Days and Theogony. In both texts, Hesiod details the origin of the universe, the lineage of the Olympian gods, the role of Prometheus in the ascent of humanity, Pandora and the creation of women, and the five ages of man.

#### **Creation Myths**

The Greeks had many different creation myths that explained the origins of the universe, the gods, and the earth. These ideas of creation were influenced by the cultures of the Near East, such as the Sumerian creation myth, the Babylonian Enuma Elish ("When Above"), the Hurrian-Hittite Kingship in Heaven and Songs of Ullikummi, and the Hebrew creation myth enshrined in the biblical Book of Genesis.

The earliest account of Greek creation lies in Book 14 of Homer's Iliad, composed around 750 BCE. The goddess Hera tells Aphrodite that the gods and humans were created by two Titans, the great river Oceanus and Tethys, the daughter of Earth and Sky. The most complete attempt to explain creation is told by Hesiod in two works that come down to us from around 700 BCE: the Theogony and Works and Days.

#### The Beginning

In the beginning there was only Chaos, the Abyss, But then Gaia, the Earth, came into being, Her broad bosom the ever-firm foundation of all, And Tartarus, dim in the underground Depths, And Eros, loveliest of all the Immortals, who Makes their bodies (and men's bodies) go limp, Mastering their minds and subduing their wills.

> ~Hesiod, *Theogony*, 116–122 trans. S. Lombardo



#### Eros

Eros is the original divine element, the power of desire. Hesiod is unclear as to whether Chaos produced Eros or Eros caused Chaos to "breed." The fifth-century comic dramatist Aristophanes, in the *Birds,* also placed Eros as a supreme originator. He argued that birds are more powerful than gods because the winged Eros caused creation. Here Aristophanes may be parodying the creation stories of the mystery cult that held the idea of the world as a great egg ("Orphism").

> In the beginning there was only Chaos and Night, black Darkness and vast Tartarus, there was no earth, no air, and no heaven, and in the infinite hollow of Darkness black winged Night laid the first wind borne egg, nurtured by the seasons it hatched Eros, soaring love high on the wind with his glimmering golden wings.

> > ~Aristophanes, *Birds,* 693, ff. trans. P.W. Meineck

## GAIA + URANUS (EARTH) (SKY)

## TITANS CYCLOPES HUNDRED HANDERS (INC. CRONUS)

#### Earth and Sky: The First Gods

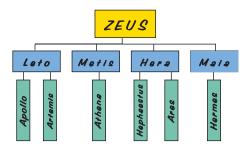
Uranus as the personification of the male sky reflects patriarchal custom in his marriage to Gaia, the earth. This image of the sky god dominating and fertilizing the earth continues down to Cronus and Rhea and Zeus and Hera, all forms of sky and earth. Some scholars have identified evidence of earthmother worship in early Greek religion. The domination and violent succession of the male sky god may reflect a cultural shift from a matrifocal society to a patriarchal order.

#### The Overthrow of Uranus: The Birth of Aphrodite

Uranus tried to hide his offspring back inside the earth from which they sprung. This put a great strain on Gaia, who begged her children to help her. Of the twelve Titans, Cronus was the youngest, and he took up his mother's challenge. As Uranus lay with Gaia, Cronus took a flint sickle and castrated his father. The blood of the genitals that fell on the earth produced the Furies—elemental forces that punished blood crimes. Cronus then cast the genitals into the sea, where sea foam produced Aphrodite (*aphros*—"foam"), the goddess of desire.

#### The Birth of Zeus

Cronus marries his sister Rhea (another form of Gaia—"earth"), and like his father devours his children: Hestia, Demeter, Hera, Hades, and Poseidon. Zeus is hidden in a cave in Crete by Rhea and substituted for a stone. Cronus belches up the stone and Zeus' siblings and is subsequently overthrown by Zeus, who seizes power and marries his sister, Hera. The Olympian pantheon is ZEUS' OFFSPRING



formed from this generation of gods and the offspring of Zeus.

#### Prometheus and the Creation of Man

Greek mythology is almost silent on the exact origins of humans. Hesiod is not specific, and some later myths credit Zeus. Traditionally, the Titan Prometheus was said to have created the first man, and in mythology he is depicted as the great benefactor of humanity. Prometheus tricks Zeus into receiving the sacrificial offal so the humans could eat the meat. As punishment, Zeus removed fire from man. Prometheus again outwits Zeus by stealing fire from Olympus and hiding it in a fennel stick (used for carrying embers in the ancient world).

Zeus punished Prometheus by having Kratos (strength) and Bia (force) chain him to a mountainside where an eagle would come each day and peck out his liver, which would grow back each night. Humans were punished with a life of endurance and hard work and, according to Hesiod, the invention of women.

## Pandora

He (Hephaestus) made this lovely evil to balance the good, Then led her off to the other gods and men Gorgeous in the finery of the owl-eyed daughter Sired in power (Athena). And they were stunned, Immortal gods and mortal men, when they saw The sheer deception, irresistible to men. From her is the race of female women, The deadly race and population of women, A great infestation among mortal men.

~Hesiod, *Theogony*, 588–596 trans. S. Lombardo

According to Hesiod, Pandora, the first woman, was created to inflict further misery on man. Hephaestus is commanded to fashion Pandora from water and clay and to make her resemble a goddess. Athena is to give her intelligence, Aphrodite, the power of desire, and Hermes, the morality of a thief.

Pandora means "all-gifted." Hesiod tells us she is dispatched to earth with a jar. When man lifts the lid all manner of worldly evils fly out, all except hope, which remains inside. The jar is a womb symbol, and in Greek culture women are often associated with such containers.

## The Five Ages of Man

Hesiod names five distinct ages of man in Works and Days:

- Gold—The men who lived during the reign of Cronus, a blessed godlike race who knew no troubles. Hesiod has it that they faded away like a dream.
- Silver—The gods made an inferior race who spent most of their lives in childhood. They refused to worship the gods and were very violent. Cronus buried them in the earth.
- Bronze—Zeus made this race of men, who were known for their warlike nature and their weapons of bronze. They killed one another and went down to Hades.
- Heroes—Hesiod believed this race to have inhabited the earth prior to the emergence of his people. They were also created by Zeus but were more godlike and noble than their forebearers. These were the men who fought the Trojan War.
- \* Iron—This is Hesiod's own generation, debased, miserable, and struggling.

#### Aristophanes and the Origins of Mankind

In Plato's *Symposium* the comic dramatist Aristophanes tells his own version of the origins of mankind. Originally there were three sexes: men, women, and a combination of both. Humans were round in shape and had two sets of limbs, two faces, and two sets of sexual organs. They were very strong, and Zeus, fearing an uprising, spilt them in half. From then on people were forced to search for their other half and would never be happy until they had found it.

## FOR GREATER UNDERSTANDING

· milling and sing ?

## Questions

- 1. Where can one find the earliest account of Greek creation?
- 2. How was Aphrodite born, according to Hesiod?

#### Suggested Reading

Hesiod. *Works and Days* and *Theogony*. Trans. Stanley Lombardo. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1993.

### **Other Books of Interest**

Lamberton, Robert. Hesiod. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988.

- Mulvey, Laura. "Pandora: Topographies of the Mask and Curiosity." Sexuality and Space. Ed. Beatriz Colomina. New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1992, pp. 53–71.
- Nagy, Gregory. "Hesiod." *Ancient Authors*. Ed. T.J. Luce. New York: Charles Scribner & Sons, 1982.
- Penglase, Charles. Greek Myths and Mesopotamia: Parallels and Influence in the Homeric Hymns and Hesiod. London: Routledge, 1994.

LECTURE THREE

## Lecture 4: The Olympians

# The **Suggested Readings** for this lecture are Walter Burkert's *Greek Religion*, chapter III and Homer's *Iliad*, Books 1 through 3.

#### Introduction

Reading Hesiod provided us with an excellent introduction to archaic Greek ideas about creation and the relationship of gods to humans. It is within the works of Homer that we find Greek mythology, religion, epic poetry, and narrative coming together to form some of the world's most enduring and influential works. Over the course of the next few lectures we will meet each of the Olympian gods set against a contextual background of their roles in particular myths. In Homer's *Iliad* (ca. 750 BCE), we first meet Zeus in literature. In this lecture, we will be looking at Zeus, Poseidon, Hades, Hera, and Aphrodite against the mythical narrative of Homer.

### A Glossary of the Main Greek Gods

There are thirteen main Greek Gods. Dionysus later replaced Hestia in the Pantheon of Twelve Olympians.

- **Zeus**—His name is derived from the Indo-European *Dyaus pitar*—"sky father." The same name is found in the Roman Jupiter, the Germanic Tiu (from which we get Tuesday), and the Latin word for god—*deus*. He is the sky god, the great father, and is depicted with a mighty frame, a manly beard, and either seated on his throne or clutching his dread thunderbolt.
- **Hera**—The origins of her name are unclear, but she is linked to Gaia and Rhea, who are earlier earth goddesses. She is the wife of Zeus and presides over marriage and women's fertility. Her epithet "cow-eyed" may refer to her association with fertility and agriculture. The cow sacrifice is often made in her honor. She is depicted veiled like a bride.
- Hades—His name means "the unseen one," as he rules over the realm of the dead in the underworld. He is Zeus' brother and is married to Persephone, whom he shares with her mother, Demeter, as Persephone dwells half the year in the underworld and half the year on earth, thus explaining the changing seasons. He is rarely depicted in art.
- **Poseidon**—His name means something like "husband" or "lord." He too is Zeus' brother and like Hades can be seen as another facet of Zeus himself. Poseidon is god of the sea and the earth-shaker—capable of causing earthquakes. The horse is sacred to the god, who is unpredictable, dangerous, and capable of sudden bouts of rage. He is shown Zeus-like, often holding a trident.
- **Demeter**—"The Mother," a goddess of crops and abundance. In the classical period, many of her cult attributes for the promotion of fertility begin to be assumed by Dionysus.

**Hestia**—The goddess of the hearth, the essential part of the Greek home. The sacred fire here was never supposed to be extinguished. She protected the home and family life.

**Apollo**—The son of Zeus and Leto, the young, petulant male god of prophecy, healing and sickness, music, and poetry. He is depicted as a beautiful, young, athletic man, holding the hunter's bow or the lyre. His most famous shrine was his great sanctuary at Delphi, where his oracle served the whole Greek world.

**Artemis**—The elder twin sister of Apollo, a goddess of the hunt, wild animals, and virgin girls. She was associated with female rites of passage and depicted as a huntress with a bow.

Athena—The virgin daughter of Zeus and the spirit of intelligence, Metis. Zeus swallowed Metis and the result was the birth of Athena, fully developed and armed for war, from Zeus' head. The goddess of wisdom, moderation, craft, and strategy, she was depicted fully armed with shield and spear and helmeted head.

**Hephaestus**—The god of the forge and the blacksmith of the gods. This lame god was said to inhabit the volcanic island of Lemnos, where he fashioned amazing metalwork for the gods, such as the arms of Achilles and a fine net that trapped his wife, Aphrodite, in bed with Ares.

**Ares**—The god of war and the lust for violence. A son of Zeus and Hera and a frequent consort of Aphrodite's, he is depicted as an impatient warrior.

**Hermes**—The name means "stone-heap" and is derived from the practice of placing a stone as a boundary marker. Hermes was the god of crossing boundaries in his guise as escort to the dead going to Hades, the protector of all messengers, the trickster, and the patron of both merchants and thieves. He is depicted with winged sandals carrying his messenger's staff.

**Dionysus**—His name may mean "son of god." He is the lord of wine and revelry and god of the theatre. He was born of Zeus and a mortal mother but was snatched from her womb as she died and was sewn up in Zeus's thigh, from which he emerged as a baby. He is depicted in Eastern costume wreathed in ivy and vine leaves and holding a wine cup. He is often shown accompanied by his followers, the bestial Satyrs and the wild Meanads.

### **Elements of Zeus**

Zeus is an Indo-European name meaning *di*—"sky," or in Latin, *dies*. His Roman name, Jupiter, is also a version of the Indic *Dyaus Pitar*, or "sky father." Our Tuesday is named for the European god Tiu, also a verson of the Indo-European "sky."

Zeus is a weather god, a cloud gatherer—he gives the symbol of the sky, his goatskin Aegis, to Athena. He also holds the power of the thunderbolt—the lightning streak.

Zeus is god of hospitality, law, and justice and the father of all gods and men. He is depicted either seated on his throne or hurling a thunderbolt. He is always shown bearded, with a powerful frame and usually wearing a wreath. Agamemnon and Menelaus believed they were upholding the laws of Zeus when they launched the Trojan War, to punish the Trojans for the abduction of Helen, an affront to the rules of hospitality.

Many of the myths of Zeus relate to his sexual potency as the great begetter of offspring. When seducing mortal women he must change his form:

- ✤ He appeared to Danae as a shower of gold, and she bore Perseus.
- \* He came to Europa as a bull, and she bore Minos.
- He tricked Alcmene by taking the form of her husband, and she bore Heracles.
- Semele tricked Zeus into appearing to her, and she was engulfed in flames as a result. The infant Dionysus was rescued before she died.
- Zeus also lay with the goddess Demeter and the Titan Leto, mother of Apollo and Artemis. He swallowed Metis, producing Athena fully armed from his head, and slept with Maia, an earth goddess, who bore Hermes.
- Zeus also seduced a Trojan prince named Ganymede, transforming him into an eagle and carrying him up to Olympus to serve as his cupbearer.

His bothers, Poseidon, god of the sea, and Hades, ruler of the underworld, could be said to be two versions of Zeus presiding over different realms.

Like the sea he ruled over Poseidon was prone to unpredictable behavior and a tempestuous spirit. It was he who caused Odysseus to spend ten years reaching his home of Ithaca after Odysseus blinded Poseidon's son the Cyclops. He was called the earth-shaker and a breaker of horses. There may be an etiological explanation to the myth of the Trojan horse connected with the cult of Poseidon, his association with the horse, his role as the "earthshaker," and the fact that Troy may have been leveled by an earthquake or other significant seismic event.

Hades is depicted as a judge of the dead and is famously portrayed abducting Persephone, the daughter of Demeter, the earth-mother goddess. This caused Demeter to plunge the world into a perpetual winter as she grieved for her lost daughter. Zeus intervened and brokered a compromise. Persephone (or "Kore") would spend half the year in Hades and half on earth, thus explaining the changing seasons.

Zeus' wife is Hera, another version of Gaia and Rhea. The meaning of her name is unknown, but it may be connected with the term *hora*—"season"— and be indicative of her role as the goddess of marriage. The marriage vows of Zeus and Hera are seen as the first *nomos*, or law, and the spiritual bond that all other *nomoi* spring from.

## Aphrodite

The goddess of sexual desire is often thought of as a child of Zeus, but as we learned from reading Hesiod, she is one of the oldest divinities. She is always depicted as a voluptuous, powerful, and self-assured woman, often naked or semi-naked. Her companion is Eros, known by the Romans as Cupid, who shoots his love arrows into the hearts of mortals, causing great mischief.

- She is associated with the island of Cyprus, and she may be a version of the Eastern fertility goddess Astarte.
- Aphrodite is credited with causing the Trojan War. It all went back to the exploits of Zeus. His archenemy, Prometheus, had warned him that if he lay with the divine sea nymph Thetis their son would overthrow him. Zeus arranged for Thetis to marry Peleus, a mortal man from the island of Aegina just off the coast of Athens. Hera planned a wedding for Peleus and Thetis and invited all the gods. Only Eris ("strife") was not invited. Infuriated, she threw a golden apple into the midst of the celebration carved with the words "to the most beautiful goddess." Hera, Athena (the goddess of wisdom), and Aphrodite each claimed the apple and asked Zeus to decide among them.

Zeus was a wise god and told them to seek out the lowliest of mortals to decide instead. They chose a lonely shepherd boy grazing his flocks on the slopes of Mt. Ida near Troy. Each goddess secretly offered the boy a great prize if he would choose her. Hera offered unlimited power, Athena, great victories in battle, but Aphrodite offered what every young man dreams of—the most beautiful woman in the world.

Of course, this young man turned out to be the long lost prince of Troy, Paris, who, citing Aphrodite's promise, would take Helen away from Menelaus in Sparta and return with her to Troy, causing one of the greatest of all mythological battles, the ten-year Trojan War.

## FOR GREATER UNDERSTANDING

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### Questions

- 1. What is the nature of the relationship between Zeus and Hera?
- 2. How are the gods depicted in Homer?

#### **Suggested Reading**

- Burkert, Walter. *Greek Religion*. Trans. John Raffan. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987.
- Homer. *The Iliad*. Trans. Stanley Lombardo. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2000.

## **Other Books of Interest**

Kerényi, Carl. The Gods of the Greeks. London: Thames & Hudson, 1980.

- Shay, Jonathan. Achilles in Vietnam: Combat Trauma and the Undoing of Character. New York: Athenaeum, 1994.
- Vernant, Jean-Pierre. *Mortals and Immortals*. Ed. Froma I. Zeitlin. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991.

## Lecture 5: The Trojan War

# The **Suggested Reading** for this lecture is Homer's *Iliad*, Books 4 through 12.

#### Introduction

In the last lecture we examined the role of some of the prominent Olympian gods against a backdrop of Greek mythology. Here we will look specifically at Homer's *Iliad* and the mythology of the Trojan War, paying special attention to Apollo and his role in the *Iliad*.

#### Myths of the Greeks: The Heroes

The Greeks used their mythology, particularly the stories of their heroes, to define their past. A mythological hero is any man who has lived larger than life and through the power of his deeds and actions has won a place in the memory of men. Heroes were worshipped as cult figures.

The Athenians had ten eponymous heroes who represented the ten tribes of Attica. Sometimes a man assumes hero status because of his actions as a warrior, such as Achilles. Oedipus becomes a powerful hero because he has walked a path no other man has ever trodden.

It was the desire of the aspiring hero to be remembered, to have tales told about him after his death. This is all Achilles ever wanted, and here we are, however many thousands of years later, still speaking his name.

#### The Trojan War

The stories of the Trojan War were told throughout the dark ages by Greek bards who traveled the Hellenic world telling their ancient stories of an epic clash between two great civilizations. These myths seem to contain memories of an ancient culture that we have come to know as the Myceneans.

#### Homer

There has been a long debate over whether Homer was one creative mind or a collective term for a wider bardic tradition. Most scholars agree that the *lliad* dates from around 750 BCE and the *Odyssey* 725 BCE. Little is known of Homer himself, if he did indeed exist. His use of language and other clues in his work point to origins in the lonic Greek communities of Asia Minor, and both Chios and Smyrna are claimed to be his birthplace. Homer's works are written in dactylic hexameter, a six-beat stressed line using formulaic devices of oral delivery such as repetition, similes, and the epithet. Many fine translations of Homer are available in English today, including the work of Richmond Lattimore, Robert Fitzgerald, Robert Fagles, and Stanley Lombardo. There were countless versions of the Trojan War myth in circulation throughout the Greek world. Our primary source is the *lliad* of Homer, a written record of an oral performance, probably an epic song from around 750 BCE. We cannot know if there ever was a "Homer"; scholars remain divided between those who see him as a metaphor for a wider oral tradition and others who still feel that this is the work of one great mind. In any event, the *lliad* is a truly great work of mythology.

Homer's *lliad* is really a story about the wrath of Achilles, set against the background of events during the ninth year of the Trojan War.

The story begins with a terrible plague sent by Apollo. He is angry with the Greeks because Agamemnon, their commander, has been awarded the captured daughter of Apollo's priest. When Chryses the old priest offers a handsome ransom to win her back, Agamemnon abuses him and sends him packing.

#### The Trojan War Sources

The stories of the Trojan War come to us mainly through Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, the later works of the Greek tragic dramatists, and two lost epics remaining only in scattered fragments. The *Cypria* was an exhaustive account of all the mythological events leading up to the Trojan War, and the *Little Iliad* told the stories of the Trojan War and its aftermath after the death of Hector, the point where the *Iliad* stops.

#### Apollo

Apollo is one of the more fascinating Olympians. He is the young male god of prophecy, healing, disease, and music. In the Hellenistic period, he becomes known as a sun god, probably because he is seen as a bringer of light. His famous shrine at Delphi was the greatest oracle in the Greek world, and every city-state would send ambassadors to ask the gods for advice. But Apollo's prophecies were often vague and designed to provoke action, rather than give definitive answers. In many myths, it is the oracle at Delphi that forms the catalyst that starts the mythological wheels in motion.

- \* Oedipus receives the news that he will kill his own father.
- Orestes is guided to Athens after he has murdered his mother, Clytemnestra.
- Herodotus (Book 1) tells us that the Lydian king Croesus consulted Delphi for military advice. He was told that if he attacked the Persians a great empire would surely fall. Of course, it was his empire that was destined to fall.
- Herodotus goes on to tell us (Book 7) that in 481 BCE the Athenians received an oracle from Delphi instructing them to put their faith in their wooden walls in the face of a Persian invasion. Some Athenians believed they should build wooden fortifications to defend their city, but the statesman Themistocles thought it meant that Athens should build ships and increase her navy. In 480 the Persians attacked Athens. Those who chose to remain behind the literal wooden walls were slaughtered. But

Themistocles had evacuated the majority of Athenians by ship and counterattacked the Persians, winning the great sea battle of Salamis and ensuring Athens' future domination of the waves.

Apollo was depicted as the eternal *ephebe*, a young man emerging from childhood. He is usually shown beardless and with a petulant, detached expression. He is a divine archer like his sister Artemis, and in Book 1 of the *Iliad*, we experience his wrath as he rains down arrows of sickness upon the Greeks.

### The Quarrel in the Greek Camp

Agamemnon is pressured to give the girl back, but this is Homeric warrior society, in which the power and status of a warrior is defined by the gifts he is awarded. Agamemnon feels he will lose face if he relents. Only one man steps forward to speak against him—Achilles, the greatest warrior of the Greeks, the very child of Thetis who might have overthrown Zeus had he not had a mortal father, Peleus. Achilles verbally spars with Agamemnon, and it is only the good judgment inspired by Athena that prevents him from killing his commander.

Agamemnon knows he must return his girl or watch his army be destroyed by Apollo's plague. So he agrees to hand her back, but only if he is given Achilles' prize, a young girl called Briseis, in return. The army agrees despite Achilles' objections. As the wise old warrior Nestor so aptly puts it, Achilles may be the best fighter, but Agamemnon commands more men.

Infuriated, Achilles has no choice but to withdraw from battle. He cannot desert and break the oath he swore at the wedding of Menelaus and Helen, and he cannot kill Agamemnon. Instead, in a moment of supreme mythological passive aggressiveness, he retires to his tent and refuses to fight. But that's not all: he begs his mother, Thetis, to plead with Zeus to turn the war against the Greeks, and so the events of the *lliad* with all its bloody consequences begin.

Apollo's links to the *lliad* are important. He was the god that represented the Greek male at the most important crossroads of his life, from boy to man. Many mythological stories are parables of initiation, and, like Apollo, Achilles also represents an *ephebic* type. Though he has been fighting at Troy for nearly ten years, he still seems an eternal eighteen-year-old, and, like Apollo, he is petulant, quick to anger, vain, and very, very dangerous.

## FOR GREATER UNDERSTANDING

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## Questions

- 1. What kind of heroic value system is operating in the world of the Iliad?
- 2. Is Achilles justified in withdrawing from battle?

### **Suggested Reading**

Homer. *The Iliad*. Trans. Stanley Lombardo. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2000.

### **Other Books of Interest**

- Griffin, Jasper. *Homer on Life and Death*. New York: Oxford University Press, USA, 1980.
- Nagy, Gregory. *The Best of the Acheans: Concepts of the Hero in Archaic Greek Poetry*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979.
- Powell, B.B., and Ian Morris, eds. A New Companion to Homer. Leiden: Brill Academic, 1996.
- Schein, Seth L. *The Mortal Hero: An Introduction to Homer's Iliad*. Berkeley: University of California, 1984.
- Slatkin, Laura M. *The Power of Thetis: Allusion and Interpretation in The Iliad.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991.

## Lecture 6: Myth as History

# The **Suggested Reading** for this lecture is Michael Wood's *In Search of the Trojan War* and Homer's *Iliad*, Books 13 through 18.

### Introduction

Now that we have read some of Homer's *Iliad*, this lecture will turn our attention to asking the question, Is the *Iliad* historical fiction or mythological fact? How much truth is there in the *Iliad*? Does the myth relate a historical perspective, or is it purely a work of poetic fiction? With this in mind, we will discuss the role of Heinrich Schliemann in the "discovery" of the Mycenaean world.

#### Heinrich Schliemann and Troy

Until the late nineteenth century it was believed that the *lliad* was a work of mythological fiction. Then German architect Heinrich Schliemann, who had read Homer as a young boy, decided to prove that the Trojan War must have taken place.

Schliemann made his fortune selling dyes to the Russians, trading gold during the California gold rush, where he became an American citizen, selling armaments to the Russians during the Crimean War, and going on to sell illegal cotton during the American Civil War. He was also the father of archaeology, though most archaeologists hate to admit it, and the man who uncovered Troy and the Mycenaeans.

An Englishman called Frank Calvert started digging on a hill on the northwest coast of Turkey called Hissarlick ("Hillfort"). He was so convinced this was Troy that he begged the British Museum to investigate, but officials refused his requests. Finally, he met Schliemann, who had been searching in vain for the city, and Schliemann agreed to finance an excavation in his own name.

Schliemann began to dig on the part of Hissarlick not owned by Calvert. He knew the Turkish landowners would eventually arrive, but he hoped he would make an amazing discovery and that he would be allowed to continue. After four days of frenetic and not-too-scientific digging, he had discovered the foundations of several buildings, and then the landowners arrived. They were not impressed with Schliemann's tales of the walls of Troy. Instead, they wanted to take the stones he had found and use them to build a bridge.

After many delays, Schliemann obtained official permission from the Turks to excavate at Hissarlick. Schliemann could never prove he had found Troy, until one day he suddenly ordered the workmen to take a break and told his wife to bring her shawl. Deep in a trench, he filled the shawl with gold artifacts and jewelry and arranged to have them immediately smuggled out of the country. A famous photograph of wife Sophia wearing "the jewels of Helen of Troy" caught the public's imagination and led to some believing that they were forgeries planted to justify Schliemann's quest. The bulk of Schliemann's treasure,

believed lost after World War II, is now divided between the Hermitage in St. Petersburg and the Pushkin in Moscow.

Schliemann is considered both a brilliant man and a liar and a thief. His excavation at Hissarlick cut a huge thirty-foot trench, destroying several layers of settlement. He assigned Homer's Troy to "Troy II," which scholars now believe dates to a much earlier period, around 2600 BCE. Of the many levels of settlement found at Hissarlick, Troy VI is the leading candidate for Homer's Troy. It was built by an Indo-European people around 1900 BCE, and by 1400 we have evidence of substantial trade with Mycenaean Greece.

#### The Face of Agamemnon

Because of his sensational discoveries, the Greek government allowed Schliemann to excavate at Mycenae, where he excavated a royal grave circle from the Middle Bronze Age and found the remains of twenty-one bodies adorned with gold. A myth has developed around this discovery that Schliemann lifted a fine mask and saw the perfectly preserved face of a Mycenean king. He was said to have sent a telegram to the king of Greece, saying, "I have gazed upon the face of Agamemnon." None of this appears to have been true, and yet the famous gold mask in question so prominently displayed at the national museum in Athens is still known as the gold mask of Agamemnon.

## FOR GREATER UNDERSTANDING

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## Questions

- 1. What are your feelings about how archaeologists and historians have viewed the antiquities of other countries? Should these artifacts now be returned?
- 2. What impact did the uncovering of the Mycenaean civilization have on attitudes toward Greek mythology?

#### Suggested Reading

- Homer. *The Iliad*. Trans. Stanley Lombardo. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2000.
- Wood, Michael. *In Search of the Trojan War*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988.

### **Other Books of Interest**

- Blegan, Carl W. *Troy and the Trojans*. New York: Barnes & Noble Books, 1995.
- Chadwick, John. *The Mycenaean World*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976.
- Snodgrass, A.M. *Archaic Greece: The Age of Experiment*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980.
- Vermeule, Emily. *Greece in the Bronze Age*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972.

## Lecture 7: Divine Myth

# The **Suggested Reading** for this lecture is Homer's *Iliad*, Books 19 through 24.

#### Introduction

In Homer's *lliad* we encountered a vast mythological story that portrayed the Greek gods as anthropomorphic figures. They are vain, jealous, quarrelsome, aggressive, petulant, and often divided in their loyalties. The Greeks used their myths to try to understand or at least rationalize the unpredictable world around them. The ancient Greek world was one of great social upheaval, wars, plague, political unrest, and rapid change. In this lecture, we will stay with the *lliad* and examine the relationship between gods and mortals, focusing on Hephaestus and Ares and looking at the myth of the fall of Troy.

Homer brings the gods closer via their various interactions with mortals and through the narrative device of allowing us to visit Olympus and meet the gods in person.

In Book 1 of the *lliad* we meet Hephaestus as he tries to cheer up his mother after she has been thoroughly chastised by an angry Zeus. Here we are shown the lame, slightly ludicrous god who acts out a famous story like a court jester. Yet Hephaestus makes an important mark on the world of Homeric warriors in his guise as god of the forge—the ancient god of technology.

As Achilles sits brooding in his tent, Zeus has allowed the war to go against the Greeks. The tables have turned, and now the Trojan forces, led by the mighty Hector, are bearing down on the Greek ships, threatening to burn them. The huge warrior Ajax is holding the line, but the Greeks are in serious trouble. Achilles' best friend Patroclus can stand it no longer and begs Achilles to rejoin the battle. He won't, and so Patroclus begs his friend to at least let him borrow his armor and lead his men into battle to save the ships. Ties of friendship among Homeric warriors were very powerful. Friends and family were *philoi* and all others *xenoi*, or "outsiders." Achilles relents, and Patroclus does indeed turn the tide of battle. He even kills a mortal son of Zeus, Sarpedon.

#### The Death of Sarpedon

Zeus is heartbroken at the death of his mortal son at the hand of Patroclus, but even he cannot change fate. Hera reminds him of his obligations in Book 16.

> "A mortal man, whose fate has long been fixed, And you want to save him from a rattling death?"

Reluctantly, knowing he cannot use his power to upset the delicate balance between gods and mortals, Zeus sends Sleep, Death, and Hermes to gently lift his son's corpse from the field of battle. Even the king of the gods is not immune from the grief of war. Achilles' rage was magnified at the news of the death of Patroclus and his wrath is redirected toward the man who killed him, Hector. Achilles' divine mother, Thetis, appeals to Hephaestus to make Achilles new armor, and Thetis delivers this wondrous work of craftsmanship to her son, who eagerly rejoins the battle after propitiating Patroclus' spirit with the sacrifice of several young Trojan boys upon his funeral pyre. Achilles ultimately slays Hector, but his wrath is not assuaged. He defies the laws of heaven by refusing to bury Hector and goes so far as to defile the corpse by dragging the body behind his chariot three times around the walls of Troy. It is only a heartbreaking personal appeal by Hector's father, King Priam, that causes Achilles to soften, as he is reminded of his own father and family.

### Bronze Age Technology

Metallurgy was of vital importance to Homeric warriors. They are described as "Bronze-clad" and many of them were known for specific weaponry— Ajax's great shield and Hector's helmet with its nodding plume, frightening his young son when Hector returns from battle. Even the popular myth of Achilles' invulnerability may have its roots in the importance of armor. This story, not found in the *lliad*, tells of Thetis dipping her newborn baby in the river Styx to make him invulnerable. The myth relates that only his ankle was exposed and an arrow to the ankle was the cause of his death—hence "Achilles tendon." Archaeologists have found complete suits of armor from the Mycenaean period that must have been enormously expensive. When the ancient warrior wore this armor, with metal grieves protecting his legs, the only exposed area would have been the lower back of his legs and ankles.

Hephaestus' role in myth is fascinating. He is both reviled and venerated. Working underground in his forge on the volcanic island of Lemnos, he toils away in a hot, sweaty, grimy existence. We know he is lame because of the story told to Hera in Book 1 of the *lliad*. Zeus flicked him off Olympus in disgust. But Hera too was said to have also thrown him from heaven. This time he was rescued by Thetis. While being nurtured back to health, he learned his craft and put it to good use, constructing a beautiful, golden throne for Hera. Hera gladly accepted what she took to be a peace offering, but as she sat down she was trapped in a fine gold mesh and could not escape. Hephaestus would release her only if he could return to heaven. Hera sent Ares to force him, but Hephaestus drove him back with flaming bolts. It took the god of wine, Dionysus, to lull him with alcohol and bring him back to Olympus on the back of a donkey.

In Book 8 of Homer's *Odyssey*, the bard Demodocus tells a story of how Hephaestus constructed a similar net to ensnare Ares, who was cavorting with Hephaestus' wife, Aphrodite. That the god of craftsmen could tangle up the very forces of war and desire is an apt mythological metaphor for the power of technology and planning over lust.

Ares, known to Romans as Mars, was the god of war and the lust for battle. In Book 5 of the *lliad*, Ares actually joins the battle to fight on behalf of Aphrodite. She had intervened on the side of her Trojan son Aeneas and was chased off the battlefield and even wounded by Diomedes, a Greek. Diomedes yells out: "Get out of the war, daughter of Zeus! Don't you have enough to do distracting Weak women? Keep meddling in war and You'll learn to shiver when it's even mentioned."

But Aphrodite's mother, Dione, nursing her daughter's wounds and broken pride, comforts her with these words:

"This fool Diomedes doesn't understand That a man who fights with gods doesn't last long, His children don't sit on his lap calling him 'Pappa' To welcome him home from the horrors of war. So strong as he better watch out."

But Diomedes keeps on coming, determined to kill Aeneas, who is now being protected by none other than Apollo. Apollo flicks him back three times, but full of the lust of war, Diomedes keeps coming. On his fourth charge, he hears Apollo's voice:

> "Think it over, son of Tydeus, and get back. Don't set your sights on the gods. Gods are To humans what humans are to crawling bugs."

Apollo asks Ares to stop him before he ends up taking on Zeus. Ares stirs up the battlefield, turning the tide against Diomedes and the Greeks. Now Hera gets involved and implores Athena to help her beloved Greeks. Hera appeals to her husband, calling Ares "a mindless bully who knows no law." Athena is dispatched by Zeus and helps Diomedes drive off Ares, who thrusts his spear deep into the stomach of Ares, who is said to have yelled as if ten thousand warriors had shouted at once. He flies off back to Olympus and complains bitterly to Zeus. The king of the gods replies:

> "Shifty lout. Don't sit here by me and whine. You're the most loathsome god on Olympus. You actually like fighting and war."

#### Ajax

Sophocles' tragic play *Ajax* tells the story of the quarrel over the arms that are awarded to Odysseus. Ajax, mad with fury, goes to kill the Greek commanders in the night but is deluded by Athena and instead kills and tortures cattle and sheep. When he realizes what he has done, he commits suicide with the sword given to him by his archenemy, Hector (Ajax in turn gave Hector his belt—the very belt Achilles used to drag his corpse around the walls of Troy).

#### The Fall of Troy

The *Death of Achilles*—Paris, helped by Apollo, kills Achilles. A huge battle erupts over the body and arms of Achilles. Ajax wins the body and Achilles' armor is offered as a prize to the best warrior.

It is from the *Odyssey* that many of the myths of the fall of Troy are documented, although images of the famous wooden horse abound in early Greek art. Many Greek myths deal with the aftermath of the Trojan War, and this becomes a prevailing theme in Greek drama performed in the fifth century BCE. The *Odyssey* is perhaps the most supreme use of Greek mythology, in which divine myths, legends, folklore, and social commentary are all combined in an epic narrative. Like the *Iliad*, the *Odyssey* comes down to us from around 800 BCE, but many of its folkloric themes seem much older.

The story of the wooden horse is told by Helen and Menelaus in Book 4 of the *Odyssey*. The first five books of the *Odyssey* are often called the *Telemachia* because they primarily deal with the search of a son (Telemachus) for his father (Odysseus), who has been absent for twenty years. It seems Menelaus and Helen are only able to live together back in Sparta with the assistance of drugged wine. Within the telling of this story, we feel the stress that must underlie this most dysfunctional of marriages.

Helen tells Telemachus that Odysseus entered Troy disguised as a beggar, and there told her how he planned to take Troy. But Menelaus interrupts and reminds Helen that when the Greeks were hidden in the wooden horse she walked around it and called to each of the Greeks in the name of his wife. It was Odysseus who restrained the Greeks from reacting and foiling the plot.

## FOR GREATER UNDERSTANDING

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## Questions

- 1. How would you describe the relationship between gods and mortals as articulated by Homer?
- 2. Why has the myth of the wooden horse become one of the most famous of all Greek myths?

## **Suggested Reading**

Homer. *The Iliad*. Trans. Stanley Lombardo. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2000.

## **Other Books of Interest**

Kerényi, Carl. The Gods of the Greeks. London: Thames & Hudson, 1980.

- Otto, Walter Friedrich. *The Homeric Gods: The Spiritual Significance of Greek Religion*. Reprint. Trans. Moses Hadas. W.W. Norton & Co, 1979.
- Vernant, Jean-Pierre. *Mortals and Immortals*. Ed. Froma I. Zeitlin. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991.

## Lecture 8: Myths of Identity: *The Odyssey*

## The **Suggested Reading** for this lecture is Homer's *Odyssey*, Books 1 through 8 in Richmond Lattimore's *The Odyssey of Homer*.

## Introduction

In the last lecture, we discussed interaction between gods and humans and some of the myths and legends dealing with the fall of Troy. Here we will look at myths that deal with issues of identity, including the myth of Ajax as well as Homer's great work, the *Odyssey*.

## The Places Odysseus Visits in The Odyssey

*The Odyssey* is perhaps the greatest use of Greek mythology where divine myths, legends, folktale, and social commentary are all combined in an epic narrative. Like the *lliad*, the *Odyssey* comes down to us from around 800 BCE, but many of its folkloric themes seem much older.

Troy—Where Trojans and Greeks fought for ten years.

*Cicones*—Where they greet a new city with brutality and are beaten off, suffering heavy losses.

Lotusland—Where men are offered the chance to live in pure oblivion.

Cyclopes—A one-eyed, man-eating giant that rejects human hospitality.

King Aiolos—Offers safe passage home, thwarted by a lack of trust.

Laestrygonians-A race of giants who destroy Odysseus' fleet.

Circe—A sorceress who turns men into pigs and detains Odysseus for a year.

The Underworld—Where Odysseus receives a prophecy and meets the dead.

The Sirens—Their song promises fame and glory.

Scylla and Charybdis-A terrible choice, death or more death.

The Island of the Cattle of Helios—Where the cattle of the Sun are eaten.

The Island of Calypso—Where Odysseus hides away, unseen and lonely.

The Phaeacians—The people who hear Odysseus' remarkable story.

Ithaca-Odysseus' home, but in disguise and under threat.

## Folklore in The Odyssey

The narrative structure of the *Odyssey* contains much older folkloric elements that were skillfully blended into an epic story. The myth of the Cyclops is found on Greek vase paintings predating 725 BCE and seems to be a common folkloric motif. Here the inquisitive Odysseus finds himself trapped in a seemingly impossible situation. He is far from home, disorientated, and his rules of conduct have no effect. He must therefore rely on his wits and trickery (*dolos*) in order to escape. The myopic Cyclops is blinded, but not before the hero has befuddled him with the fruits of human viniculture—a bag of unmixed wine. Odysseus also tells him that his name is "nobody," suppressing his identity and allowing him to escape. But he is still the quintessential Homeric warrior and can't resist shouting his real name to the blinded Cyclops as he sails safely away, an act that results in the curse of Poseidon that keeps Odysseus from his home for ten long years.

## The Theme of Initiation

Many folkloric motifs deal with the articulation of certain important rites of passage. To the Greek male, the initiation of a boy into manhood was of prime importance. These young men undergoing their manly education were known as *ephebes* and were often trained in subterfuge, night fighting, hunting, and living in the wild. The *Odyssey* teems with initiation motifs as Odysseus learns more about himself, his society, the world around him, his relationship to the gods, and his family.

It is in the underworld that Odysseus learns the most startling information. On meeting the shade of Achilles, he asks:

> "While you were alive the army honored you Like a god, and now you are here You rule the dead with might. You should not Lament your death at all, Achilles."

I spoke, and he answered me at once:

"Don't try to sell me on death, Odysseus. I'd rather be a hired hand back up on earth, Slaving away for some poor dirt farmer, Than lord it over these withered dead."

> ~Homer, *Odyssey*, 11.505-513 trans. S. Lombardo

A startling discovery, and in one short exchange the whole honor code of the warriors of the *lliad* seems negated. Achilles, who lived only to die famous, rejects all he stood for while he was alive.

## FOR GREATER UNDERSTANDING

· milling and sing ?

## Questions

- 1. How does Homer manipulate the narrative structure of the *Odyssey* to create a cohesive meaning from the many myths this work contains?
- 2. To what extent is myth being used to create a paradigm for contemporary archaic Greek society?

## Suggested Reading

Lattimore, Richmond. The Odyssey of Homer. New York: Perennial, 1999.

## **Other Books of Interest**

- Clay, Jenny Strauss. *The Wrath of Athena: Gods and Men in The Odyssey*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983.
- Rubens, Beaty, and Oliver Taplin. *An Odyssey Round Odysseus: The Man and His Story Traced Through Time and Place*. London: BBC Consumer Publishing, 1989.
- Shay, Jonathan. *Odysseus in America: Combat Trauma and the Trials of Homecoming*. New York: Charles Scribner & Sons, 2003.

## Lecture 9: Myths of the Afterlife

## The **Suggested Reading** for this lecture is Homer's *Odyssey*, Books 9 through 13 in Richmond Lattimore's *The Odyssey of Homer*.

## Introduction

In this lecture we will examine myths of the afterlife, paying special attention to the myth of Odysseus in the underworld, Orpheus and Eurydice, and the myth of Perseus and the Gorgon. We will also look at Hermes, in his guise as the escort of the dead as well as his other attributes.

## The Greeks and the Afterlife

Most Greeks believed that when dead their spirit, or psyche, was escorted by Hermes down to the realm of Hades, where they crossed the river Styx and wandered as shades in dark eternity. The afterlife was seen as neither positive nor negative. Only divine sinners were punished, such as the miscreant Titans, who suffered eternal torments. The Greeks believed that all peoples must be buried or else wander as lost souls on the banks of the Styx. They practiced both cremation and inhumation. Burials were held in three parts: the laying out of the body (*prothesis*), the funeral cortege (*ekphora*), and the burial itself.

## **Odysseus in the Underworld**

- Circe tells Odysseus that he must descend into the underworld to consult the seer Tiresias.
- He crosses the river ocean to the end of the world. He digs a pit and makes a ritual sacrifice, offering milk and honey, sweet wine, and water with barley. He kills the sheep and lets the blood run into the pit.
- The dead come up from Hades and Odysseus has to keep them from drinking the blood until Tiresias arrives. He sees his comrade Elpenor, who has not yet been buried, as he died falling off the roof while drunk at Circe's. Elpenor begs to be buried.
- He sees his mother, Anticlea, and resists giving her wine until he sees Tiresias.
- Tiresias makes his strange prophecy and warns Odysseus of the dangers ahead.
- He finally gives his mother wine. They speak, but he cannot embrace her as she slips through his arms.
- \* He then meets Agamemnon, Achilles, and Ajax.
- \* He sees the judges of the dead: Minos, Rhadamanthys, and Aeacus.
- \* He sees the suffering of the Titans:

Tityus, who tried to rape Leto, has a vulture eating his innards.

**Tantalus** tried to test the gods by serving up his own son at a banquet. He stands in a swamp up to his chin but cannot drink the water. Nor can he ever reach the lush fruit on the trees.

**Sisyphus** tried to cheat death by imprisoning him. He has to forever roll a boulder to the top of a hill.

## Orphism

A popular mystery cult developed in the classical world based on the myth of Orpheus. Linked closely to the rites of Dionysus, Orphism seemingly promised an initiation into the very knowledge of Orpheus himself through his songs and poetry. He had transcended death and visited the underworld. Through an affinity with Orpheus, his followers felt they could come to understand the nature of their deaths.

Orphics also believed in a dual nature of man from a myth stating that Dionysus had been twice born, once from the wicked Titans and once from Zeus. They thought that man's wickedness came from the Titans and that mortal life was a kind of penance for the sins of the Titans. Orphics were strict vegetarians and did not consume wine. They may have believed that the afterlife contained a dualistic existence and that by maintaining ritual purity in life they could achieve a kind of grace in death.

## The Myth of Orpheus and Eurydice

- Some say Orpheus invented the lyre and was famous for his beguiling song. His music could charm animals, stop birds in flight, and alter the very landscape.
- His wedding to Eurydice is interrupted by a man called Aristaeus, who tries to rape Eurydice. She flees but is bitten by a snake (a symbol of death) and is sent down to Hades.
- Orpheus refuses to accept her death and enters Hades by charming the spirits there. Hades and Persephone agree to release Eurydice if Orpheus promises not to look back.
- Orpheus cannot help but look back and sees Eurydice following him—he loses her forever and cannot re-enter the underworld.
- He wanders the earth distraught and refuses the company of women. He is finally torn apart by the Bacchae. His head, thrown into the sea, continues singing.

## Hermes

- \* Hermes is the god who guides the dead to Hades.
- His name is derived from *herma* (pile of stones) and reflects his cult status as a god of boundaries.
- ✤ Greek homes had a *Herm* with a phallus to protect the hearth.
- \* Hermes is protector of heralds and is the messenger god.
- \* He protects merchants. His Roman name is Mercury.

- \* He is the trickster god and the protector of thieves.
- As an infant, he invents the lyre, steals Apollo's cattle, and tries to lie to Zeus. He gives Apollo the lyre after winning him over with song.

## The Legend of Perseus: The Hero Confronts Death

- Perseus is the son of Zeus and Danae. Acrisius is the king of Argos and the father of Danae. He wants a male heir, but the oracle tells him that his grandson from Danae will become his heir, and also kill him. Acrisius imprisons Danae in an underground bronze room. Zeus comes to her as a shower of gold and Perseus ("destroyer") is conceived.
- When Perseus is seven Acrisius hears a child crying and learns of him. He orders a wooden box to be built and casts it into the sea with Perseus and his mother inside. They are rescued by a fisherman and brought to the island of Seriphos. The king of the island wants Danae, but she refuses him, and the young Perseus defends her. The king then pretends to be marrying another and so sends Perseus to fetch an impossible wedding present, the head of a Gorgon, knowing that this means certain death.
- \* There were three Gorgons. If they looked at you, you turned to stone.
  - 1. Stheno-strength.
  - 2. Euyale—far leaping.
  - 3. Medusa—wide ranging.
- \* They lived at the edge of the world, and only Medusa was mortal.
- Athena helps Perseus and gives him guidance. He must first go to the Graeae, horrible chthonic creatures that had only one tooth and one eye between the three of them.
- He confronts the Graeae and forces information from them by grabbing the eye.
- \* He then goes to the Nymphs and receives magic items to help in his quest.
  - 1. The cap of Hades-invisibility.
  - 2. Winged sandals-flight.
  - 3. A leather bag—concealment.
  - 4. The curved sword of Hermes.
- Perseus flies to the river ocean. He finds the Gorgons asleep, surrounded by petrified men. He uses his burnished shield as a mirror and decapitates Medusa. She was pregnant by Poseidon and out flies the winged horse Pegasus and a giant called Chrysoar. Pegasus flies away from the other Gorgons.
- In one version of the myth, Perseus returns to save his mother and turns Polydectes to stone. He makes the fisherman king of the island and gives Medusa's head to Athena as an offering. Athena wears it in the center of her Aegis.
- Perseus fulfills the prophecy unwittingly. He throws the discus at the games and the wind takes it. The discus strikes Acrisius and he dies.
- Ashamed to take over Argos after killing the king, he founds Mycenae and rules there with wife Andromeda, whom he rescues from a sea monster.

- The myth of Perseus articulates the quest of the *ephebe* over the fear of death. The Graeae and Gorgons are chthonic underworld figures that must be dominated with cunning and bravery.
- Freud saw the Gorgon's head as representing female genitalia and the Perseus myth as a metaphor for the separation of the boy from the female world of childhood into the male world of the adult.

## Folkloric Elements in the Perseus Myth

Threat—The forced marriage of Danae. Quest—To retrieve the head of Medusa. Magic Items—His hat, sandals, and sword. Uncharted Land—Beyond the river ocean. Mortal Combat—Killing Medusa. Deadly Pursuit—The Gorgons' chase. Homecoming—Return to Seriphos. Recognition—Raising the head of Medusa. Villain Revenged—Turning Polydectes to stone. Sexual Reward—Andromeda. Reward of power—The Throne of Tiryns.

## FOR GREATER UNDERSTANDING

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## Questions

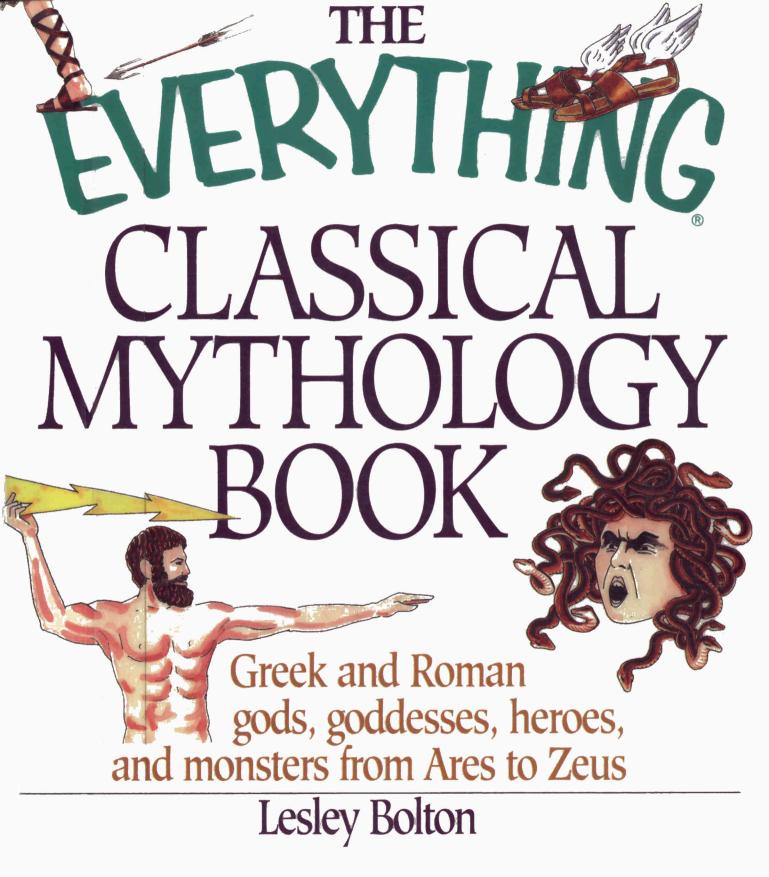
- 1. Compare the episode of Odysseus in the underworld to Virgil's Aeneid, Dante's Inferno, and Milton's Paradise Lost.
- 2. Apply the list of folkloric elements to the myths of Odysseus, Theseus, Heracles, and Jason. What are the similarities?

## Suggested Reading

Lattimore, Richmond. The Odyssey of Homer. New York: Perennial, 1999.

## **Other Books of Interest**

- Morris, Ivan M. *Death-Ritual and Social Structure in Classical Antiquity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992.
- Vermeule, Emily. *Aspects of Death in Early Greek Art and Poetry*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979.



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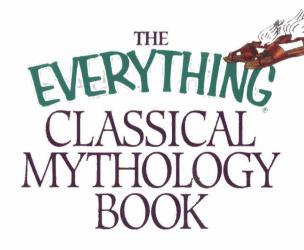
REFERENCE

- The gods defeated the Titans
- Hercules accomplished the twelve labors
- Odysseus tricked the Cyclops
- The Greeks defeated the Trojans in the Trojan War
- Perseus slew Medusa
- Bellerophon killed the Chimera a monster with a lion's head, a goat's body, and a serpent's tail

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Dear Reader,

Having a deep-rooted love of literature, it is only natural that classical mythology takes its place among my passions and interests. If you have any interest in literature or art whatsoever, it is advisable to have a solid foundation in classical mythology to fully appreciate and understand these mediums of expression. Indisputably, the myths of ancient Greece and Rome influence and inspire the literature and artists of the Western world. But this knowledge and groundwork is merely an added bonus; what matter most are the myths themselves.

While academia has its own numerous reasons for the study of classical mythology, I advise you to look at it from a nonacademic standpoint. I think that first and foremost, you should derive enjoyment from the myths. Once you are won over—and you undoubtedly will be—you can then take your time to explore the myths as you see fit. Classical mythology offers something for everyone—whether you are interested in romance, drama, tragedy, war, monsters, or vengeance. The myths are so very rich in excitement, intrigue, and imagination that it is hard to dispute their appeal.

Read on. You won't be disappointed.

Sincerely,

Ausley Bolton

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# Introduction

What do you know about classical mythology? You know it's important. *Everyone* knows it's important. But why? How can stories created more than 2,000 years ago possibly influence your life? Just wait, you'll see.

If you haven't yet been formally introduced to classical mythology, now is the perfect time! Allusions to Greek and Roman mythology are everywhere today. Look around you—billboards, museums, and libraries are just a few of the places that have welcomed the ancient myths.

Perhaps you think your only encounter with classical mythology so far was that stressful six-week crash course in high school followed by the traumatic final exam that held the power to make or break your GPA. But this isn't true. You have had a direct connection with mythology your entire life, regardless of whether or not you studied it in school. For instance, did you know that many names for plants and animals were taken directly from Greek and Roman mythology? These words we use every day help create that invisible link.

There's no doubt about it; classical mythology surrounds us. Yes, it may be thousands of years old, but it is alive and thriving today. Though it is no longer considered a religion, mythology is useful in other forms. All mediums of Western art have incorporated the characters and scenes of classical mythology. Allusions are made by public speakers all the time. Movies, cartoons, and theater have all tried to capture the passion and drama of ancient myths.

As you read through these captivating myths, consider their characters and scenes and then take a look around. Your eyes will be opened to the many colorful analogies and inside jokes present in today's world that pay tribute to the beliefs of an ancient world. This foundation will help to heighten your appreciation of all forms of Western art, including literature, sculpture, and even advertising. Of course, classical mythology also allows us a sneak peak into the everyday lives of the ancient Greeks and Romans. If you enjoy history, mythology is a fun and interesting way to learn about the culture, beliefs, and religious rituals of these peoples. Woven into the myths are clues as to how these people lived and what was important to them.

If you fancy science and origins, the myths are sure to intrigue you. You will find the meaning behind the names of planets, animals, constellations, and plants. Even today, we look to mythology to give names to our spacecraft such as Apollo, Mercury, and Zeus. The ancient Greeks and Romans used mythology to explain the mysteries of nature that weren't able to be explained using the technology of the day, providing an interesting look at how the ancients were able to answer those broad and fundamental questions that every society must answer.

Classical mythology can be a pretty intimidating subject. It *can* be, but it doesn't have to be. What you have to keep in mind is that regardless of all the intellectual hoopla associated with Greek and Roman mythology, what it all boils down to are just good old-fashioned stories. And who doesn't love a good story? Consider classical mythology to be one huge book with hundreds of chapters nestled between its covers. Each chapter can stand alone as its own intriguing story or be combined with others to create one of the most awe-inspiring, fantastic tales ever told.



# CHAPTER 1 The Myth and Its Function

Before diving into stories of passion, tragedy, war, and heroism, you must first build a foundation on which to procure the most meaning from these stories. Though you may find these stories simply entertaining, and that's all you're looking for, the question of how these stories were created will surely enter your mind at some point. This chapter will answer that question so you can continue with your pleasurable reading with greater understanding.

## What Is a Myth?

Myth, defined simply, is a fictitious story or half-truth, but it goes much deeper than that. Scholars of mythology have struggled to pinpoint an exact definition that encompasses all of the attributes contained within a myth. It's funny how such a small word holds the weight of defining and giving purpose to lofty ideas such as the meaning of life. It's no wonder an accurate definition has not been settled on!

Though this book concentrates on Greek and Roman mythology, these of course are not the only myths in existence. Many other cultures including Japanese, Native American, Indian, Chinese, Norse, African, Celtic, and Egyptian—have their own myths. While the stories themselves may be wildly different, the characteristics are similar. Using these attributes, the myth can be outlined if not completely defined.

## What Makes a Myth?

The myth has several characteristics that set it apart from the run-of-the-mill fictitious story. First, you have to keep in mind that these characteristics apply to the creation of the myth, and may not necessarily be viewed in the same way in today's world.

The origin of the myth is without one single author. The story evolves through the telling of it by many people. In other words, the mythology of a particular culture is created through the oral renderings of its people. Therefore, there is often more than one version of the same story.

# SSENTIALS

Much like modern religions, classical mythology tells of the relationship between mankind and a higher power. Myths often center around stories of direct interaction between man and the gods and goddesses. However, unlike most modern religions, the gods and goddesses are often driven by emotion more so than reason. Because of this, the interaction between man and deity isn't always pretty and is almost always dramatic. A myth is a religious story. A higher power or entity is always involved in the plot. The gods, goddesses, or other supernatural beings are often worshipped or revered by humankind. Believed to be true, the myth is considered sacred to those within the culture of the mythology.

The myth will offer explanation for the unknown, such as the creation of the universe and Earth. It also attempts to answer those broad and fundamental questions we all ask ourselves, such as the meaning and purpose of our existence.

The myth is part of a larger mythology, which incorporates several myths all tied together by a similarity or common theme. In so doing, the mythology then becomes a socially accepted truth.

While the above characteristics are the essential elements of a myth, there are also a few other elements that are not necessarily recognized to be essential, but are nonetheless evident in the mythology of several cultures. For instance, nearly every myth will highlight activities that break the laws of nature—people will change into inanimate objects, the dead rise and live again, and so forth. Also, myths often convey the different planes of existence and the interaction between them—heaven, hell, the future, and the past.

## **Legends and Folktales**

Quite often the words myth, legend, and folktale are used interchangeably. Granted, all three connote some type of story and do share similarities, but from there they branch out with their own purposes. In order for a myth to be a myth, it must have all the essential characteristics you just read about. If it doesn't have all these attributes, it can be called a legend or folktale. But even so, there are still differentiating elements.

A legend is a story handed down through the generations, which has no hard evidence backing it up. Its roots are founded regarding a specific person, place, or historical event. Legends are grounded in their association with one particular thing. They are different from myths in that they do not incorporate all the essential elements of a myth. A myth can be a legend, but a legend is not necessarily a myth.



## So then what is a fable?

A fable is a fictitious story that often has a supernatural element to it. The differentiating feature of a fable is that it is intended to teach practical lessons, or morals. Though myths do sometimes teach lessons, this is only an added bonus; they aren't constructed with this purpose in mind.

Folktales are also a bit different. They are pure fiction and are not founded on a particular person, place, or event. Folktales use symbolism to convey concepts and meaning, therefore anything is possible—animals take on the actions of humans, for example. Like legends, folktales do not have the essential elements of myths and a myth can be a folktale, but a folktale is not necessarily a myth.

## **The Sacred Myth**

The myth served several purposes for the ancient Greeks and Romans, one of the foremost being religion. As you know, one of the essential elements of a myth is a religious significance. In these cultures, the myth explained the religious beliefs as well as justifying religious rituals. This heavily influenced the behavior of the Greeks and Romans. Though the society of today no longer partakes in mythology as a religion, it is important and interesting to recognize that they once did.

## **Protect Yourself—Pray!**

The Greeks and Romans were very religious peoples. The gods and goddess, even the lesser deities, all held powers the people believed to be supreme. The myths defined which god or goddess the people should turn to in times of need. For instance, those wanting safe voyage on the seas would pray to the Greek god Poseidon or the Roman god Neptune; those in need of a successful hunting endeavor would pray to the Greek goddess Artemis or the Roman goddess Diana; or before a battle, it was common to pray to the Greek god Ares or the Roman god Mars. With so many deities to pay reverence to, one had to be careful to keep them all straight. You certainly wouldn't want a prayer meant for the god of justice to be directed toward the god of wine; the outcome could easily turn disastrous.



Appeasing the gods and goddesses isn't always as easy as a simple prayer. These deities often expected more than just prayer from mankind. In ancient times, if you wanted results, you often had to make a sacrifice or perform a religious rite along with your prayers.

The deities weren't always steady in their support of the human race and often were very moody and temperamental toward mankind. As part of a religion, the inconsistent behavior and temperament of the gods was accepted by the people, and they altered their own behavior accordingly. After all, these deities held the power of creation and destruction—it was best to be on their good side as often as possible.

## **Read Your Rites**

Like any religion, the ancients had particular religious rites beyond prayer. The myths gave these rituals meaning or sometimes even spawned new rites. One ritual in particular that is explored in several myths is that of sacrifice.

The ritual of sacrifice was devised by Prometheus, a Titan god who was considered to be the champion of mankind. Prometheus was called in to settle a dispute between the gods and man—which portion of the sacrifice would be given to the gods and which kept for man? Prometheus carved up a sacrificial bull and divided it into two parts. The first part was the flesh wrapped in skin, with the stomach placed on top; the second was the bones covered in the animal's fat. He then offered the parts to Zeus (ruler of the gods) and told him to choose which portion he wanted. Zeus chose the fat covering the bones. Of course, upon discovering the bones, Zeus became very angry, but alas the decision had been made. The ritual of sacrifice would require man to burn the bones of an animal and keep the flesh for himself.



The Olympic Games were founded in ancient Greece. However, unlike today, the games were then part of a huge religious festival that took place to honor Zeus. Athletes offered not only prayer, but also sacrifices to the gods and goddesses. A special sacrifice to Zeus of 100 oxen was an important part of the ritual.

Of course, there were rituals aside from sacrifice that are described by myths, some of which were even created because of myths. Furthermore, certain rituals were reserved for only one deity. For example, rites associated with the worship of Dionysus, the Greek god of wine, are unlike those of any other god. The rituals performed to honor Dionysus were kept secret so not much is recorded about them. However, from allusions made, a pretty clear picture can be carved. Let's just say there was a lot of drinking, dancing, and wild behavior taking place. Take heart, this party god will be discussed in greater detail later.

The religious rituals were an important part of not only the religion itself, but also of social order. Because the myths explained and justified these rituals and actions, the ancients relied heavily on myths to guide them along the correct path; they needed myths in order to appease the gods and to maintain an organized community.

## **Mystery Solved**

An important function of the myth is to explain the unknown. It is human nature to pose questions and not simply accept things for the way they are. We always want to know "why." Many of the world's mysteries have been explained to us through science. However, clearly the ancients did not have the technological advancements available today with which we can experiment and prove theories. Instead, they relied on myths to give them the answers they sought.

## **The Questions**

The ancients, just like us, hungered for knowledge. Most wanted explanations for what they considered to be phenomena they encountered in their daily lives. Others went beyond that and wanted reasons for the structure of the universe. Regardless of the importance or size of the question, a curiosity drove them to begin asking questions. And myths were formed to provide explanation for these otherwise unanswerable questions.

Some myths are solely dedicated to providing reason, such as the creation myth (which will be discussed in greater detail later). This myth answers big questions such as "How was the universe and earth created?" and "Where did man come from?" Another explanatory myth is that of the Underworld which answers the question, "What happens when we die?"



In ancient times, if you were a mighty hero or favored by the gods, you might end up in the Elysian Fields after death, a blessed place in the afterlife. A forever-happy land, the Elysian Fields were certainly where you wanted to end up.

Myths not only take on the challenge of tackling these colossal questions, but also venture to answer the more everyday wonderings. For instance, can you give a reason for the existence of the hyacinth? A Greek myth can. Apollo, god of archery, fell in love with a youth named Hyacinthus. Hyacinthus was accidentally killed when he and Apollo were practicing throwing a discus. Apollo was so heartbroken that he changed Hyacinthus' blood, which fell to the ground, into a new flower: the hyacinth. The flower returns every spring to honor the memory of the youth.

Some other subjects explored by the ancient myth include:

- The origin of certain constellations
- Why the sun disappears at night

- Why certain creatures behave the way they do (for instance, why the spider weaves a web)
- · How the evils-sickness, death, grief-were released upon the world
- How fire came to man
- The changing of the seasons

## The Answers

The Greeks and Romans answered these questions through myths. This explanatory element of the myth is quite important to its structure. Just like any other religion, classical mythology sought to provide definitive answers to these ever-looming questions. The stories tell their tale and that's that.

Because the ancients were not constrained by the truths of science and technology, they were free to develop stirring and sometimes outrageous tales to explain these phenomena. If you think about it, this was beneficial in many ways. The entertaining nature of the myths promoted their transmission and retention. In other words, the oral tradition of the ancients was able to thrive in part because of the interest these stories aroused. This helps to secure the longevity of the myth.

## **Establishing Order**

Another important role of the myth, though not as direct as providing explanation or religious structure, is that of creating both natural and social order. As you will soon see, creation begins with Chaos, but from there the myth works to give a specific order to the universe. After order is created within the cosmos, the myth can then bring order down unto the lesser beings—humankind and its society. There's even order in the order of bringing order!

## Natural Order

Most myths confirm that Zeus, ruler of the gods, was held responsible for creating order in the natural world. However, by the time he came to power, some sense of order already existed. The earth, heaven, seas, sky, and space were already set in their respective places. So, we shouldn't give Zeus *all* the credit.



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You will often see the ruler of the gods and men referred to as Zeus. This was the name used by the ancient Greeks. However, the Romans gave a different name to the same character—Jupiter. For a comparison of Greek and Roman names given to the gods, check out Chapter 21.

However, the affairs of the universe were in Zeus's domain; he presided over the natural world. He was believed to have placed the stars and planets in their individual places. But he didn't stop at the celestial beings. Zeus was also sometimes referred to as the weather god for he gave rain, snow, thunder, and lightning to the earth.

Zeus, though he held highest command, wasn't the only one involved with maintaining order in the natural world. The universe was divided up amongst the gods (the goddesses were left out of this bit), each having jurisdiction over a particular domain. For instance, Poseidon became god of the seas and Hades became god of the Underworld.

And there were more players in the ultimate order of things. For instance, Zeus conceived children who helped to establish this natural order. The three Horae were the goddesses of nature: Eunomia (Discipline), Dike (Justice), and Eirene (Peace). Zeus also sired the Moirai, who represented destiny. There were three Moirai: Atropos, Clotho, and Lachesis. These three sisters determined the length of an individual's life by first spinning a thread, then winding it, and finally cutting it.

All these key players, who held power over the maintenance of the natural world, were often helped by various lesser deities. Although not much credit is given to them, it is worth mentioning that there were river gods, nymphs, satyrs, sirens, and the various gods and goddesses of light, moon, darkness, dawn—all of whom played a role. But don't worry! They will be given their due, as an entire chapter is devoted to these lesser gods later in the book.

## **Social Order**

Now that order has been created in the universe and the big picture is under control, it's necessary to make sure the lesser beings understand their roles and rules so as not to upset the order of the natural world. Just as we have laws today, the ancients had their own set of rules established through the myths—that worked to maintain order in society by showing what was and what was not acceptable behavior.

Once again, the burden of creating order was laid upon the shoulders of Zeus. To reign over immortals and mortals alike was a huge responsibility. But Zeus took his duty very seriously and also came to be known as a god of justice. He created laws that were fair and sensible, and recognized and respected his responsibility of maintaining order and justice. Having a strain of diplomacy, he often used compromise to settle disputes and watched very closely that his laws were not broken. Specifically, he made sure oaths were not broken and the laws of hospitality were observed—by both the host and the guest alike. Because Zeus never really warmed to mankind, it was easy to lose his favor. Therefore, it was best to abide by his laws—the wrath of Zeus was the last thing you wanted.

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If you are going to swear by the gods, it is best to know what you are doing. Oaths were often sworn to Helios, the sun god, because he was able to see everything that happened on earth (and he had no qualms about telling on you!). However, for the very serious oaths, swear to Styx. It was proclaimed that no one could ever break an oath to Styx, not even the gods. If you did so, you would essentially be placed in a coma for nine years.

Though Zeus set the laws and quite often carried out the harsh punishments for those who broke them, he wasn't the only deity concerned with maintaining order. All the gods and goddesses placed their own demands upon humankind, most of which were concerned with sacrificial rites and due respect. Crimes never went unpunished. The thought of dodging or escaping a deity was almost laughable. To put it simply, the ancients had a lot of rules to follow, but did so willingly so as to avoid the wrath of not just their fellow countrymen (as is common today), but that of the gods!

## **Emotion Overload**

Now that we've covered the respected and obligatory function of myths, let's get to the heart of the matter. One thing that makes us human and makes us *feel* human is our range of emotions. Even the most stoic person feels emotion. We can't escape it. It is a natural, and sometimes disruptive, part of our lives. It just makes sense that the myths, designed to help the ancients understand themselves and their place in the world, would cover the wide range of emotions we experience.

The gods and goddesses were superior beings, wielding powers beyond our ability and sometimes comprehension. But even they, in all their glory, could not escape emotion. They suffered from emotion just as mankind did—at times on even more extreme levels, it seems.

Perhaps the deities were granted the privilege of feeling to help make the myths more accessible to the people—to help them relate on a personal level. Or maybe the myths' creators understood that to really make an impact, it's best to appeal to the emotions of people, therefore making the myth memorable and lasting. Regardless of the reasoning behind forcing the deities to bow to emotion at times, the myths certainly do not hold back when it comes to exploring the complications and power of emotion.

If you have ever felt an emotion so powerfully that it overwhelmed you, then you will relate to several experiences the myths describe. Immortals and mortals alike share the weakness of allowing an emotion to take control. The outcome isn't always pretty; at other times, it works out for the best. What's more, unlike some modern tales, you really can't guess the ending to most myths. So if your emotional stability is easily influenced by drama, be prepared to have your mood altered as you explore the stories of classical mythology.



Look out for the moodiness of the gods and goddesses! Combine emotional instability with the power of the heavens, and the outcome can be quite disastrous. You will see the effects emotions have on the deities as you read further into the ancient myths.

If you are expecting to learn a lesson about the destructive power of jealousy or the brighter side to sadness, think again. Though myths give accounts of emotion as part of human (and deity) nature, rarely do they offer lessons or teach morals. This isn't to say that you won't learn anything from reading these myths. On the contrary. Though lessons aren't spelled out for you as they are in fables, due to the epic nature of myths you will no doubt discover things on your own and on a personal level.

## The Ideal

Because myths were created by a collective people, they evolved and changed in small ways, depending on whom was recounting the tale and whom the audience was. Therefore, the myth reflected not only the cultural views and ideas, but also those of individual people.

On that note, the myth served to paint the portrait of the ideal human behavior and being. This shows us what the people of a particular culture viewed as admirable, upright, and worthy of recognition and explains why some within that culture maintained a higher social standing than others.

## **Man's Shining Moment**

Most often, the ideal human attributes shine brightly through the character of a hero. The hero plays an important role in classical mythology. Amidst all the grandiose stories of gods, goddesses, and lesser deities, a few humans find praise and admiration for their own feats. In a sense, man is elevated to the level worthy of the same esteem as the deities—perhaps even more so considering that man does not have the same power as the immortals. These chosen human heroes became models for good and appropriate behavior.

We will explore the individual heroes later in this book, but for right now, let's focus on their behavior. What made these men heroes while still in the shadows of the gods? What actions were worthy enough to repeat over and over again? Why were they singled out as exemplary?

## **Good Behavior Rewarded**

Characteristics deemed ideal by the ancients weren't so different from those of today. Read through the following characteristics and see if you can identify any attributes evident in the heroes of today.

Obviously, when conjuring up the image of a hero, adventure comes to mind. Yes, in ancient times, the adventure story was one of the most popular. But a hero must display certain behaviors during his adventure to warrant admiration. For instance, the hero must be brave and not just brave as in "I killed that spider without a second thought!" but rather by displaying a fearlessness that can only be derived from confidence. The hero's ambition drives him to succeed when faced with a challenge.



The definition of today's hero isn't quite as concrete as in ancient times. Even dictionaries vary on the definition. A hero can be anything from a distinguished warrior to the central figure in an event to a submarine sandwich.

Amidst all this confidence (sometimes amounting to outrageous egomania), the hero must have a loyalty to something that keeps him grounded. Even when faced with the most tempting of treacheries, the hero must stay true and loyal to his allies and/or creed.

Outside of the adventures and battles, the hero must be devoted to his family. With adultery running rampant in classical mythology, cheating on one's spouse is often overlooked as simply a force outside the control of the hero. However, for those few who did remain faithful to his or her spouse, the admiration granted them was astounding. Let's not bypass the means by which the hero is successful in his quest. The hero will also often exhibit a mastery of a particular skill, sometimes several. Now, whether that skill is mastery of archery or the art of seduction doesn't matter. The point is: the hero exercises an undeniable skill.

Oh, but let's not forget about the admirable qualities of women revealed in the myths. Though not always as celebrated as the male heroes, several women throughout classical mythology are esteemed for their attributes. The most important is the virtue of loyalty to family—even to the point of staying faithful to a husband she thinks is dead. Other common characteristics of a good woman are her cleverness, wisdom, and hospitality.

All of the above traits, in both women and men, were deemed respectable and worthy of the highest esteem by the ancients. We are led to believe that these traits are what shaped social standing and manner of these people. The myth not only allows us to get a clearer picture of the times, but it helped to create a uniform ideal throughout the entire culture in ancient times.

## The Right to Rule

Speaking of social standing, did you know that myths also beget kings and rulers? Roman mythology, in particular, accounted for the succession of several kings and emperors. Myths validated rulers' claims to have been descended from gods. What people wouldn't want a ruler with the power of the gods running through his veins? Or on the flip side of that, what people would dare challenge a ruler who held family ties with a deity?

If you ever doubted the power of the myth, withdraw that doubt now. Granted, it would seem ludicrous to the society of today if our president's campaign centered around his claim to be a descendant of Zeus. However, in the time of classical mythology, the myth was the authoritative standard and taken seriously to provide the functions we have discussed in this chapter.

## **Entertaining the Masses**

Amidst all these serious and important functions of the myth lies the one function that has withstood the test of time, technology, and progression: entertainment. Yes, classical mythology is important and quite a serious study, but that doesn't mean it can't be fun as well! Had these stories been any less lively, do you really think they would have made it to the point of being recorded?

#### Then and Now

The ancients enjoyed entertainment just as much as we do—and the oral tradition was one of the foremost sources of entertainment. And their society—just like ours of today—was full of individualists, all with slightly differing views. Therefore, it is likely that not everyone accepted all myths to be literal truths, and therefore took them a little less seriously. Although there were varying degrees of doubt, the myths have endured and are now a part of our lives. The entertaining quality of myths no doubt helped to carry them into the present day.



The ancient myths were often told to the people by bards, storytellers who were well versed in heroic tales. Bards often relayed these stories through song and poetry. Because they were under pressure to please the audience, stories were sometimes altered according to the audience's wishes, yet another reason why the same story will vary a bit from myth to myth.

It is obvious that for our purposes, mythology is a source of great entertainment and academic study. We do not accept the myths as literal truths and therefore do not study them to gather answers. Even so, that doesn't mean that we can't find our own truths within the tales, though less literally.

#### **Better Than Any Soap Opera**

Remember that these myths are, above all else, stories. And what stories they are! Much like Shakespearean plays, mythology presents all the faces of human experience, from love to tragedy to comedy. Let's take a look.

The adventure stories are probably the most favored. Here we have tales of heroic deeds, mortals going up against gods, rescues, and long journeys and quests. Several myths come to mind in this category: Heracles (*Heracles* is the Greek version, while *Hercules* is the Roman), Odysseus, and Perseus are just a few of the more popular heroes to get you started.

Tragedies, though sometimes upsetting, always have an addictive quality. The Greeks and Romans certainly weren't shy about throwing tragedy about. There are numerous myths for which you are best prepared with a box of tissue. For example, it is likely you will cry along with Demeter as she searches relentlessly for her kidnapped daughter.

Perhaps you prefer the shoot-'em-up-kill-'em-all form of entertainment. If this is the case, check out the battle scenes of classical mythology. If you are impressed by the wars of recent history, you will be amazed by what the ancients could do. And don't worry, there's plenty of blood-gutsand-gore to keep you occupied. The story of the Trojan War alone has more than enough violence to keep your attention.

Do you like monsters? Classical mythology can offer you a variety of monsters that you never dreamed might be lurking beneath your bed. But beware, once you know them, there's no forgetting them! From Typhon with its hundred serpentine heads to Minotaur who regularly fed on children, the monsters of classical mythology might very well keep you up at night.

Also included are tales of witchcraft and revenge, murder and mystery, crime and punishment, and don't forget the all-encompassing passionate love stories. As you will soon learn, love plays a major role in mythology, so if this is your interest, you're in luck! You have a litter of love stories to linger over, including both scandalous affairs such as that of Aphrodite and Ares, and true love stories such as the myth of Perseus and Andromeda.

With such a wide variety of tales to choose from, classical mythology is guaranteed to have a little bit of something for everyone!



## CHAPTER 2 Sources of Classical Mythology

f classical mythology descended the generations through oral tradition, how on earth did it reach us? Fortunately, people had the foresight to copy these myths down in written form. This chapter will introduce you to those we have to thank for our knowledge of classical mythology.

## Homer

You will never study classical mythology without hearing the name of Homer. Homer is regarded as not only the greatest poet of the ancient world, but also one of the greatest—and certainly one of the most influential—artists of the literary world. But did Homer truly exist? This question has been debated among scholars, historians, and the common man alike for centuries. What is not argued though is the prominence of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, literary tombs attributed to Homer.

#### Homer as a Man

For the moment, let's just assume that the popular theory of Homer's existence is correct, and that he was in fact a man and the author of these two great epic poems. After all, the ancient Greeks and Romans believed in his existence.

Although the information regarding Homer's birth date and place aren't secure, historians believe he was born somewhere around 750 B.C. Homer was a bard, which means he traveled around telling stories and performing poetry for audiences. The Greeks believed him to be a blind man, presumably concluded from one of his poems in which he speaks of a blind bard.



Seven cities claim to be the birthplace of Homer: Argos, Athens, Chios, Colophon, Rhodes, Salamis, and Smyrna. However, historians have not yet settled on an exact location.

Homer's epic poems are not the typical poems of today. The *lliad* and the *Odyssey*, both approximately 12,000 lines each, might require several evenings to perform in their entirety. But if you think the ancients tired of such long encounters with poetry, think again. These two poems speak of the Trojan War (discussed in greater detail in Chapter 20), a defining moment in the lives of the Greeks and the catalyst for the foundation of Rome. Because the poems center on such a pivotal historic event, and because Homer is such a gifted storyteller,

they became an integral part of the Greek culture. In fact, the Greeks were said to have introduced the study of these works into their schools around 400 B.C.

#### Homer as a Myth

With the extensive study of Homer's works, several theories are afloat regarding the idea that Homer wasn't the single author of all his works some even question whether or not he really existed. Debates on the subject run rampant among scholars and historians, each of whom holds his or her own ideas as to the creator of these famous works.

One theory is that several people were involved in the composition of these poems and that the collection was later attributed to Homer. From here it branches out into different ideas. Some believe Homer composed the first part of the *Odyssey* and that someone else or several others concluded it. Others believe that there wasn't a man named Homer at all and that the word Homer referred to bards in general, thus encompassing all the different authors. Yet another theory is that Homer was the name of the scribe who took on the task of writing down all these works. By signing his name to them, he wound up with credit of authorship.

Why all the skepticism? Most likely because the works of Homer have come under such scrutiny. By comparing the poems to each other, especially the *lliad* and the *Odyssey* (though the lesser poems were also taken into account), differences are obvious. Granted, they are two separate poems, but if the author were the same for both, wouldn't there be quite a few similarities?

The differences stand out between them. For instance, the use of vocabulary suffers from an extensive range. Dialects change within the same work. Adding to the mystery, an extreme difference in social settings and conditions is present, implying that the two works were composed during different time periods. However, nothing has yet been proven. But you can bet that scholars will not rest until the mystery is solved.

Though these differences lay a foundation for doubt and skepticism, we still attribute our knowledge of classical mythology to Homer—whether we are honoring a single man or a group of several different authors.

## Hesiod

You can't talk about Homer without talking about Hesiod. Though it is suspected that Hesiod lived after Homer, around 700 B.C., the two figures go hand in hand when learning about classical mythology. Hesiod is often referred to as the Father of Greek Didactic Poetry. Whereas Homer is famous for his epic poetry, Hesiod holds the reins when it comes to ancient didactic poetry. The difference is that epic poetry is typically a narrative poem that recounts the tale of a hero or event, whereas a didactic poem is one that is meant to teach a moral lesson and to serve as entertainment at the same time. Before you learn about the works of Hesiod, it's good to have a little background information.

#### **Bio Breakdown**

While Hesiod is shrouded in mystery as well, we do know a bit more about his life than that of Homer. Most of what we know of him was taken directly from his works. The best guess is that he lived sometime around 700 B.C. in the village of Ascra in central Greece. According to his poems, he was a shepherd in his youth and grew to become a poor farmer when his father died. However, Hesiod wasn't your average, everyday peasant.

While tending his flock one day, Hesiod was visited by the Muses. They appeared to him in a mist and gave him a poet's staff and a poet's voice. They told him to use these gifts to spread the word about the immortal gods. Hesiod did as he was told. Honoring the Muses, he even went so far as to compete in contests using this skill! What came of his mystical visitation are the famous works *Theogony* and *Works and Days*, as well as some lesser-known poems.



#### What are the Muses?

The Muses were the nine daughters of Zeus (ruler of the gods) and Mnemosyne (Memory). As the goddesses of music, poetry, literature, and art, the Muses were said to provide inspiration and enlightenment to artists. There aren't any cold, hard facts relating to Hesiod's death. But, according to legend, Hesiod was murdered by the sons of a family he stayed with during his travels. However, no motive or blow-by-blow account is given about the murder. His bones were then taken to Orchomenus and a statue was built to honor him in the middle of the marketplace.

#### The Works

Like Homer, Hesiod had two famous poems—poems that descended the years and are still studied and enjoyed today. Also like Homer, debate surrounds Hesiod as the sole author of his works. Unlike Homer, most scholars agree that Hesiod was indeed a living, breathing individual, and that he authored *most* of *Theogony* and *Works and Days*. Only bits and pieces of these works are under question and are believed to have been added later by other poets.

#### Theogony

*Theogony* is the first of the two famous poems and was composed following the Muses' command. The poem centers around the history of the gods, beginning with creation, and provides us with a foundation on which to build the stories of the gods and goddesses. Without this account of creation and the succession of the deities, we might not have ever known the ancients' basis for mythology as a religion. A story can't be a story without a beginning, after all.

#### Works and Days

*Works and Days* is a bit different from *Theogony*. This poem reflects the didactic nature of Hesiod's work in that it teaches lessons and morals—it was for this particular quality that it was so highly valued by the people of ancient times. *Works and Days* is essentially a disagreement between Hesiod and his brother concerning the inheritance of their father's estate, but is filled with fables and myths as the two brothers debate the issue. Rich with description, this work also gives us an account of the rituals and superstitions of the Greeks.

## Aeschylus

We are now going to skip ahead a few hundred years to cover some other important sources of classical mythology. Please keep in mind, however, that even though we are leaping ahead, there were several lyric poets who maintained the mythological subject matter during this time. However, these poets simply didn't have the impact that Hesiod and Homer did.

During the fifth century B.C., Greece experienced an inclination toward tragedy and theater. Three famed Greek tragedians rose to fame during this time period, the first of which was Aeschylus.

#### Life

Aeschylus was born into an aristocratic family near Athens, presumably in either 525 or 524 B.C. Unlike the two former authors we've discussed, we know several facts concerning the life of Aeschylus. Aeschylus was quite the busy man—fighting in battles, creating timeless plays, participating in the Great Dionysia. The Great Dionysia was part of a festival honoring Dionysus, the Greek god of wine. During the Great Dionysia, three dramatists would create and perform three tragedies and a satyr play. Aeschylus took part in this competition several times. His first competition was thought to have taken place around 499 B.C. with his first victory in 484 B.C. From then on, he was nearly untouchable (though he was bested once by his own protégé, Sophocles. Ouch!)

Aeschylus died in either 456 or 455 B.C. in Gela, Sicily. His cause of death is unknown, although a rumor thought to have been started by a comic writer claims that Aeschylus was killed when an eagle dropped a tortoise on his bald head. Regardless of how he died, Aeschylus was honored with a public funeral in which sacrifices and performances were carried out.



If you are or wish to be a writer, you should become familiar with not only the works of Aeschylus, but also with his gravesite. Located in the town of Gela in Sicily, his grave has been known as a pilgrimage destination for both budding and experienced writers alike.

#### Works

So why all the fuss about Aeschylus? If you read his works, you'll know. Aeschylus is estimated to have written ninety plays during his lifetime, approximately eighty of which are known from the bits and pieces that managed to survive. However, only seven of these plays remain intact today, all of which are tragedies: *Persians, Seven Against Thebes, Suppliants, Agamemnon, Libation Bearers, Eumenides* (these three make up the famous trilogy *Oresteia*), and *Prometheus Bound*.

These tragedies all focus on the theme of justice. Aeschylus believed that the gods and goddesses often resented the rise of mankind to standards considered "great." Therefore, they often tricked man into devising his own downfall through the means of haughtiness or pride, which would then be considered a form of divine justice. Zeus, being the god of justice is quite often a central figure in helping to weave the theme.

Justice does not only prevail through the physical and emotional downfall of man, though. Aeschylus also relates a form of justice that does not directly affect the culprit himself. Rather, the innocent descendants of the unjust are punished, creating a guilt complex that stands out in many of his plays.

There is no doubt that the works of Aeschylus are important to our knowledge of classical mythology today. Although Aeschylus believed in the gods as a religious order, his works are not full of the bias and glorification often awarded to the deities. Instead, his plays work out themes with clarity and neutrality. And it is because of this that we are able to better reach an understanding.

## Sophocles

The second great Greek tragedian is Sophocles. But don't let his order in succession fool you. He is considered to be the most successful of the three. Like Aeschylus, Sophocles lived during a time in which there were many wars being fought. The Persian Wars (546–479 B.C.) followed by the Peloponnesian War (431–404 B.C.) made wartime a constant in the life of this man. And the effects of these wars evidently influenced his work as an artist.

#### Life

Sophocles was born around 496 B.C. in a village outside the city of Athens. Born into a wealthy family (his father manufactured armor), Sophocles was sent to Athens to receive a good education. He studied military techniques, science, mathematics, philosophy, government, law, astronomy, and, of course, the arts. It is widely believed that as part of Sophocles' excellent education, he studied under Aeschylus. Small world, huh?

Sophocles was one of those people you wish you could hate. He excelled in nearly everything he did, was known to be quite handsome, and earned the respect of all who knew him. He held many public offices during his life and was also a patron of the arts. To say the least, he was a very popular man.

Sophocles also took part in the Great Dionysia, winning his first victory in 468 B.C. at the age of twenty-nine. He went on to win this competition eighteen (some say twenty-four) times throughout the course of his life, even beating out his tutor Aeschylus one year.

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The seven plays of Sophocles survived because someone had the foresight to group these together and publish them as a set along with seven plays by Aeschylus and ten by Euripides. Since Sophocles' other plays weren't published in such a manner, they eventually faded from existence.

Sophocles' lifespan covered the Athenian Golden Age—a good time to be alive indeed. He certainly made the most of his life. He lived to the ripe old age of ninety, which simply didn't happen often during those times. There isn't much recorded concerning his death except an approximate year of 409 B.C., but we are probably safe in assuming that time finally got the best of him.

#### Works

Yes, Sophocles excelled in nearly everything, but what he is best known for is his artistic and philosophic skill. Sophocles produced an estimated 123 plays during his lifetime—no small feat. However, like the works of Aeschylus, sadly only seven survived intact: *Oedipus the King, Oedipus at Colonus, Antigone, Ajax, Trachinian Women, Philoctetes,* and *Electra.* Each one of these used mythology as its foundation.

Sophocles, as stated before, was greatly influenced by war and wartime deeds. This backdrop is directly reflected in the thematic schemes of his plays, as well as by some of the identities of his main characters. In the works of Sophocles, war goes hand in hand with negativity, pain, and suffering. But it is through this pain and suffering that humans are able to become more human. We learn to accept the natural order of things and strive to recognize reality.

Let's not forget the mythology part! It is because of Sophocles that Oedipus is now a widely known character of Greek mythology. He took this myth and expanded on it, creating three of his most famous tragedies. The gods are also used quite extensively in his works. The gods were the higher beings, and mankind was subject to their decisions. For instance, if the gods felt a man should be punished, he was indeed brought to justice. If the gods felt a man should be rewarded for his pain and suffering, then he was aptly rewarded. The gods also had a hand in making things even and fights fair.

Tragedy is the means by which Sophocles gets his message across. And because tragedy always seems to strike close to the heart, it normally makes a bigger and more memorable impact. Perhaps this is one of the reasons Sophocles' works are still so popular today.

## Euripides

The third of the great Greek tragedians is Euripides. Though held in company with Aeschylus and Sophocles as far as playwright talent and notoriety go, Euripides was in a class of his own. He did not partake in famous battles, nor did he ever hold public office. He didn't even wholly and blindly believe in the religious beliefs of his fellow Greeks. No, Euripides was a philosopher and constantly questioned all that the Greeks held sacred. It was because of this that Euripides was not a very popular man and became quite controversial in his day. In fact, he was openly disliked and criticized during his lifetime.

#### Life

Euripides was born around 480 B.C. on the island Salamis. No one really knows for sure from what type of background he came, though it can be assumed that his family was pretty well-off, for Euripides was obviously well educated. It is likely that he studied the same topics as did Sophocles, but Euripides found a particular passion for philosophy. Being a philosopher, Euripides began asking questions and was outwardly skeptical of all that the Greeks held to be true.

He began writing plays around the age of eighteen. He had a talent that far surpassed the criticism and alienation he received from his fellow countrymen. He, too, competed in the Great Dionysia, beginning in 455 B.C. He is said to have competed twenty-two times, but won only four times, once posthumously. He attributed his "failures" to the bias of the judges.

Euripides eventually separated himself from the Athenians and their city. He died in Macedonia around 406 B.C. at the age of seventy-seven.

#### Works

It is estimated that Euripides wrote ninety-two plays in all, but unfortunately only seventeen tragedies survived—still, more than what remains of Aeschylus and Sophocles combined. These plays also use mythology as a foundation. The seventeen include: *Andromache, Hecuba, Iphigenia at Aulis, Bacchants, Alcestis, Medea, Children of Heracles, Hippolytus, Suppliants, Electra, Madness of Heracles, Ion, Trojan Women, Iphigenia Among the Taurians, Phoenician Women, Helen,* and Orestes.

Being a philosopher, Euripides was a big fan of realism and his plays reflect this. The works introduce characters—main characters—who are common, everyday people. Even the deities are more on the common level and often equal man in their level of importance. He also brings women to the forefront, making them the main characters and worthy of as much recognition as the traditional war hero. Euripides blatantly uses his works to portray his own thoughts and ideas with very little regard for the traditional acceptability of dramatic content.



Even though the main characters in Euripides' plays are common people, his views of these people in general were rather pessimistic. He felt that the people blindly accepted the answers religion offered without seeking answers for themselves and through science.

We know that tragedy is meant to use emotion as a tool. Euripides recognizes this, but takes it a step further. Yes, we can feel sympathy, sorrow, and compassion toward the characters in these plays, but Euripides often uses innocent children as the suffering victims in his plays to augment these feelings. Can you think of a better way to gain an audience's empathy?

## Virgil

The Greeks weren't the only ones to have great poets of mythology within their culture. We are now going to skip ahead to the Augustan Age of Rome to take a look at two poets who are often compared to Homer and Hesiod—Virgil and Ovid. These two Roman poets are held in the highest esteem for bringing immortality to Roman mythology. As before, there is a succession we must follow. Therefore, we will start off with Rome's greatest poet, Virgil.

## Life

Virgil was born on October 15, 70 B.C., as Publius Vergilius Maro in the village of Andes. He was born to a farmer who sent his son to Cremona, Milan, and Rome for an education. Virgil studied both Greek and Roman literature and poetry, as well as the other natural studies of the day. Completely devoted to his studies, Virgil had no interest in taking part in a military or political lifestyle. World affairs didn't concern him, and he was all but a recluse during the first half of his life, and a sickly one at that.

Though he wasn't much interested in the world outside his studies, eventually his rising fame as a poet sucked him into the glories of Rome, and he formed some very significant friendships with influential people. However, even with all the splendor of Rome, he never abandoned his love of the countryside and this love is evident in all his poetry.

Virgil died of a fever on September 21, 19 B.C., on his way to Greece before his final revision of the *Aeneid* was completed. He is buried in Naples and, like Gela, this too became a destination for religious pilgrimages.

#### Works

Virgil is best recognized for his epic poem the *Aeneid*. If you have ever studied Latin, you are most likely familiar with this work. This poem follows the course and actions of the hero Aeneas after the fall of Troy, his settling in a new land, and the founding of a new race. It introduces all the great characters of ancient Roman mythology, mortal and immortal alike, including Dido, Romulus, Jupiter, and Venus, just to name a few. The Aeneid is a timeless classic that has served as inspiration for many past and present authors over the course of hundreds of years.



The Aeneid is a must-read for anyone even remotely interested in the classics or mythology. Due to great demand, annual printings of at least one version of the Aeneid has been conducted for the past 500 years. Surely the masses can't be wrong!

Although the *Aeneid* is Virgil's most famous work, we mustn't let his other works fall by the wayside. His earliest work is a collection of ten pastoral poems entitled *Eclogues*. Some of these poems speak of the ideal but unrealistic life, others move forward to bring these ideas into the real world, and some even mourn the eviction of farmers from their farms.

Yet another poem, *Georgics,* reflects Virgil's love of the Italian countryside (and may have served as political propaganda). In this work,

Virgil begs for the farmers to come back to their land and restore the agricultural lifestyle.

Virgil was essentially Rome's national poet. Needless to say, he and his works are very important to the study of Roman culture. It is because his work has so successfully transgressed the times that we know so much about Roman mythology today.

## Ovid

Rome's other great poet, Ovid, is renowned for his fantastic storytelling abilities. Ovid was a hit with not only the ancients, but also with readers of today. It is said that Ovid is read more than any other ancient poet, even his predecessor Virgil. His works have influenced and inspired famous writers of both Roman and English literature. And most importantly, he provided us with several of the very best sources of classical mythology.

#### Life

Ovid was born on March 20, 43 B.C., as Publius Ovidius Naso. He was born in the small, country town of Sulmo, which is about 90 miles east of Rome. He came from a fairly affluent and respectable family and his father sent him and his older brother to Rome for their education.

## SSENTIALS

To take a closer look at the life of Ovid, read his poem *Tristia*. This autobiographical work describes the main events that took place in Ovid's life in his own words. Hint: *Tristia* means sorrow.

Ovid became a member of the Roman knightly class and used this position to travel around before officially taking on any duties. However, once he did settle down and take up some of the duties necessary for his career in public life, he found he didn't have the stomach for it. Instead he abandoned his post, settled in Rome, and took up with a society of poets. Obviously, he made the right decision, for once he began producing, he immediately became a great success. Just like that. Don't we all wish it were that easy!

Ovid enjoyed immense popularity during his lifetime and his popularity is still going strong today. However, his life wasn't entirely full of glory. In A.D. 8 he was exiled to Tomis on the Black Sea. The reasons behind his banishment are still a mystery, but rumor states that it involved an adulterous affair with the emperor's granddaughter. He died in A.D. 17, still begging to be allowed to return to Rome.

#### Works

Ovid wrote several works, though by far the most popular is the narrative poem *Metamorphoses*, which is often called "the major treasury of classical mythology." Consisting of approximately 12,000 lines, this poem is a collection of Roman mythological stories. It covers everything from the creation theory to the death of Julius Caesar. Needless to say, this work is an amazing masterpiece, chock full of pretty much all you want to know about Roman mythology.

Now, you'd think that a project that size would take one an entire lifetime to complete, but no, Ovid had time for several other compositions as well. The *Amores*, a series of poems describing a love affair, were his first published poems. Keeping with these passionate lines is *Heroides*, which is a series of imaginary love letters written by mythological characters to their lovers. And of course we can't forget *Fasti*, which describes the various religious festivals upheld by the Romans on a month-to-month basis. Unfortunately, only the first six books—the first six months—have survived.

## Last but Certainly Not Least

There is no question that all of the aforementioned writers greatly contributed to our knowledge of classical mythology. Though these names often take the spotlight in mythology, several others have also played a role in bringing mythology to the modern world. These people should not be forgotten and deserve honorable recognition.



Don't forget the artists! Though the most noted contributors are those who wrote and recorded works of literature about classical mythology, there are also the numerous sculptures, painters, and other artists who certainly made their mark in ancient Greece and Rome by depicting characters and scenes taken directly from classical mythology.

### **Greek Contributors**

The following people are often shadowed by comparison with the great Greek poets and dramatists. But nonetheless, had it not been for these people, we might not have the extensive knowledge of Greek mythology that we have today.

- **Apollodorus:** A Greek mythologist and historian. His work *The Library* serves as a guide to classical mythology covering everything you would want to know about the history of the gods.
- **Apollonius Rhodius:** A Greek epic poet who lived in the second century B.C. He is best known for his poem *Argonautica*, which tells the story of Jason and his quest for the Golden Fleece.
- **Herodotus:** Better known as the "Father of History," Herodotus was a Greek historian living during the fifth century B.C. His work *History* is comprised of nine books named after the Muses and is a narration of the Persian Wars.
- **Musaeus:** A Greek poet who lived during the fifth century A.D. He is best known for his poem about the myth of Hero and Leander.
- **Pausanias:** A Greek writer and traveler who lived in the second century A.D. His work *Description of Greece* is exactly that—a description of Greece including mythology, religious rites, art, and history.
- **Pindar:** A Greek poet who lived in the fifth century A.D. He is often called "the greatest of the Greek lyric poets." His collection of lyric odes celebrates the winners of the Olympic, Pythian, Nemean, and Isthmian Games.

- **Plutarch:** A Greek biographer and essayist who lived during the first and second century A.D. He wrote biographies of both mythological and historical Greeks and Romans.
- **Stesichorus:** A Greek lyric poet who lived during the sixth century B.C. His works consist of the story of Thebes and Troy.

#### **Roman Contributors**

Though much of Roman mythology was taken from the Greeks—just a few names changed here and there—they did have their own mythology as well. The following people helped to make that mythology known to us today.

- **Horace:** A Roman lyric poet whose works *Odes* and *Epodes* offer information about both Greek and Roman mythology.
- Livy: A Roman historian whose work *History of Rome* tells of not only the history of Rome, but also of the legends of Rome as well.
- **Propertius:** A Roman poet whose works consist of elegies and mythological poetry.
- **Seneca:** A Roman tragedian whose plays focus on Greek mythological characters.
- **Statius:** A Roman epic poet who is best known for his work *Thebaid*, which relays the story of Oedipus trying to gain control of Thebes.



## CHAPTER 3 Creation: A Chaotic Theory

I t's time to move forward and get straight to the heart of the matter—the myths themselves. No doubt about it, this is the fun part. And what better place to start than at the beginning? This chapter will tell you the story of how it all started, relaying the similarities and differences in the various myths.

## In the Beginning There Was Chaos

Today, we have several theories about the creation of the universe, religiously based theories as well as scientifically based ones. You can study these theories and pick and choose which you feel most comfortable with, but the ancients didn't have such an option. No, they were steadfast in their belief that the universe and all that was known to them sprang from one source—chaos.

You may think that nothing pretty could come from chaos, but if you think about it, it makes sense. In order to recognize order, you have to have disorder to counteract it. And creation is simply a process of bringing order and placement to the objects of the universe.



To explore the creation theories of classical mythology thoroughly, you must familiarize yourself with Hesiod's *Theogony* and Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. These two works serve as our main sources of creation as viewed by the ancients.

#### **Chaos as a Being**

Before there was the earth or sky or seas, all the elements of the universe were one, and this oneness was called Chaos. Chaos was a shapeless void of confusion, but held the seeds of the universe, so to speak. Contained within Chaos were the elements—earth, sky, sea all jumbled together, yet no one element had its own identity. The earth didn't have its shape, the sky didn't have air, and the sea was not watery.

The elements constantly fought with each other until an unknown force put an end to the disorder. This force is not truly identified in the myths—some consider it to be nature, others speak of it as a divine being or a god. Some myths even leave out this force entirely, simply stating that the elements sprang from Chaos on their own. Regardless, the elements were separated—heaven from earth, sea from sky, heat from cold, and so on. This separation brought the order needed to create a universe. Thus we have creation.

#### **Outlining the Elements**

These elements still needed shape and definition. According to one popular myth, an unnamed force (we'll call it the Creator) first laid shape to the earth. The Creator designated water to its appropriate places: marshes, rivers, oceans, brooks, lakes, and seas were settled. He then raised the mountains, smoothed out the plains, and shoveled out the valleys, distributing forests, rocky terrain, and fertile fields.

Next came the sky. The Creator spread out air like a blank canvas on which to paint his masterpiece. He added clouds, thunder, lightning, and winds. The stars, however, he did not place. He simply drew them out from the confines of darkness.

Having the sky and earth initially set up, the Creator went back to add a few more things. This is when the fish came to the seas, the birds to the air, and beasts to land. Ah, but not all beasts. Man was not yet created. But we will get to that in a moment. First, we need to give names and personalities to all of the above elements.

## **Giving Personality to Nature**

Because the ancients believed that anything moving and changing must be alive, the elements of the universe were thought to be living and therefore must have names and personalities. The previous explanation of creation is one of the more popular and basic myths, but another version exists in which the elements not only sprang from Chaos but were born into existence.

#### **Back to the Beginning**

Again, we have Chaos. But from there, things change a bit. This myth does not name a Creator; instead the first elements simply sprang into being. No explanation is given, and obviously none is needed, for this myth was quite popular with the ancients. It is also one of the foremost historical theories on creation, having been taken from Hesiod's *Theogony*.

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From Chaos came the five elements: Gaia (Earth), Tartarus (the Underworld), Nyx (Night), Erebus (Darkness), and Eros (Love). Gaia gave birth to three children without the traditional mating with another being. These were Uranus (Sky), Pontus (Sea), and the Mountains. Now we have the earth and sky set up as a stage, but there is still more to come. From here on out, nearly all else is born as a result of good ol'-fashioned lovemaking.



Don't forget to pay homage to Eros, the god of love, for his role in creation! Though Gaia is often the one most credited with giving life to the universe (which she did by giving birth to the elements), Eros served as the catalyst in that he urged the movement forward by prompting the elements to mate.

#### The Unions

Uranus, said to have been born to Gaia in her sleep, mates with his mother (yes, incest seems to run rampant throughout classical mythology) to create the rest of the earth's elements such as the waters, forestry, and the beasts. Uranus and Gaia also produced other children, including the Titans and Titanesses, the Cyclops, and the Hundred-Armed giants, but we will discuss these characters in greater detail in the next chapter.



The Moirai, or Fates, were three sisters responsible for the lives of mortals. One sister would spin the thread of life, the next would measure its length, and the third would cut the thread to bring about death. Some myths say that even Zeus, the ruler of the gods, was subject to the Moirai.

Nyx mated with Erebus to produce Hemera (Day) and Aether (Air). Nyx also bore several other children, though the paternity test results still haven't come in. These are Thanatos (Death), Hypnos (Sleep), Moros (Doom), Nemesis (Retribution), Oizys (Pain), Momus (Sarcasm), Eris (Strife), the Keres (the female spirits of death), Geras (Old Age), Oneiroi (Dreams), and the Moirai (Fates). Obviously, she was quite busy. Of course, the unions did not end there. Many more are yet to come. However, this helps to define the elements of the universe a little bit further. Think of it as adding a little more detail with each birth.

#### And Then There Was Man

With all the hard work put into it, you'd think the universe was complete. But no, a more magnificent animal was needed, one that would be superior to the other mortals—man. The ancient myths vary on exactly how man was created. Let's take a look at two of the most popular theories.

A myth that is popular, not only with the Greeks and Romans but also with other cultures, is that man simply sprang up from the earth. Remember the seeds of the universe buried in Chaos? Well, think of it that way. The seeds of man were buried in the earth. Without any further explanation, these seeds simply produced man, and they were considered the children of Gaia.

Another theory is that Prometheus was the creator of man. Prometheus was a Titan (the Titans will be discussed in the next chapter) and one of Gaia's many grandchildren. Prometheus and his brother Epimetheus were given the task of not only creating man, but also of giving the other beasts of earth protection. Epimetheus took it upon himself to present the beasts with gifts of preservation and Prometheus was to supervise his work. Therefore, Epimetheus is credited with giving the turtles their shells, the leopards their spots, and the bears their claws.

When it came time to create man, Prometheus performed this task himself, using earth and clay as his materials. He kneaded this with water and fashioned the form of man, which was molded in the likeness of the gods. But the first man was not what we know as the man of today. The mortal man went through several stages before reaching the final desired effect.

## The Gift of Fire

Epimetheus did such a good job of distributing gifts that by the time he was finished with his task, all the gifts of protection were accounted for. But wait, man was left out of the loop.



Prometheus was considered the champion of mankind not only because he gave fire to man, but also because he contributed to the survival of mankind in several ways. For instance, he taught man how to plant seeds and harvest crops, how to domesticate animals such as the horse, and how to use herbs and other plant life for poultices and medicinal uses.

Prometheus decided that man also needed a gift of protection, one that went beyond all the others—and that gift was fire. But Zeus, ruler of the gods, was quite angry with mankind and refused to give them this fire. Prometheus was adamant though and resolved to steal fire from the heavens. According to one account, he stole fire from the forge of Hephaestus, the smith of the gods. Another account states that he stole the fire from the wheels of Helios's (the sun) chariot and concealed it in the stalk of a fennel plant. Regardless of how it happened, the quest was successful. Prometheus bestowed the gift of fire unto mankind.

When Zeus looked down upon the earth at night and saw it shining with firelight, his anger shook the heavens. He sent for his servants and ordered them to arrest Prometheus. The punishment of Prometheus was rather severe. Zeus ordered that Prometheus be bound by steel chains to a rock far from mankind. Zeus then sent an eagle to feed on his liver every day. The liver would regenerate every night. Vowing to never release Prometheus, Zeus left him to endure this torturous punishment.

## Welcoming the Woman

To counteract the strength that mankind gained from the gift of fire, Zeus devised a scheme to give them a weakness just as powerful as this strength. Enter the woman. Until this time, mortal women did not exist.

Zeus ordered Hephaestus to create a woman of clay and water. What resulted was the greatest sculpture ever fashioned. Just as man was molded in the image of the gods, woman was molded in the image of the goddesses. As if this weren't enough, every deity contributed to this creation. She was given beauty along with lust, splendid clothes, lustrous jewelry, the gift of music, grace, dexterity, and charm. All these make for one hell of a woman, but that wasn't all she was given. She was also given the art of lies, seduction, deceit, and guile. These contributions simply made her a dangerous temptation that man was sure to fall for. Her name was Pandora.

## **Pandora's Box**

As his gift to mankind, Zeus ordered Hermes, the messenger of the gods, to deliver Pandora to Epimetheus. Awestruck by her beauty and charm, Epimetheus accepted Pandora as his bride, though his brother Prometheus had warned him to not accept gifts from Zeus.

The ancient myths vary a bit concerning the story of Pandora's box. One myth says that Pandora was given a sealed jar by the gods to give as a gift to man. She had not been told what it carried, and she wasn't on earth very long before her curiosity got the better of her. She opened the jar and out flew the plagues of mankind. These included such afflictions as disease, pain, sorrow, insanity, envy, and death. Hastily replacing the lid, Pandora trapped the one member left behind—hope.

Another myth states that the box containing all the evils of the world was kept in a jar or box in the house of Epimetheus. Whether it belonged to Epimetheus or Prometheus is not known. Pandora, overcome by her feminine curiosity, stole to the room and removed the lid. Again, out poured all the ills of mankind, leaving behind hope, which did not escape.



The myth of Pandora's box is well known to even those who haven't the faintest idea who Pandora was. Pandora's box is often used today as an expression to describe danger, confusion, or trouble. If you ever come across something described as Pandora's box, it is best to suppress your curiosity and simply leave it be. You certainly don't want to be responsible for bringing pain to the world as Pandora did! Yet other myths say the box or jar did not contain evils at all. Instead it contained only goodness and blessings, and was meant to be a wedding present from Zeus. Again, Pandora's curiosity overcame her and she opened the box carelessly. All the blessings escaped and returned to the heavens, save one—hope. Therefore, mankind was sentenced to endure all the hardships and evils of the world with only hope as a consolation.

Regardless of which myth you choose to favor, Pandora ultimately becomes the cause of weakness among men. In the end, Zeus's plan worked and he got his revenge.

## **Other Deities Affecting the Universe**

You may have noticed that certain elements of the universe aren't accounted for. For example, we have the day, but no sun; we have the night, but no moon. These deities do in fact exist although they weren't part of the original offspring during creation; they came a bit later and were born of the Titans. Though we will discuss the Titans in the next chapter, it's best to take a look at the deities now as they certainly affect the way the universe was made whole.

#### The Sun

The god of the sun was Helios. He wasn't considered to be one of the great gods, but rather one of the "lesser" ones. Regardless, he was held in great esteem by the other deities and his purpose was no small matter.

Helios was responsible for giving light to the earth during the day. He accomplished this by driving his chariot of fire, pulled by four flaming steeds, east to west across the sky during the day. Nightfall comes as Helios crosses over the western horizon and lasts as long as it takes him to return to the east. It is said in later myths that Helios made his way back to the east in a huge golden cup that floated along the river Oceanus, which encircled the world.

Helios, though admired, was also feared. No one, mortal or immortal, could escape his eye during the day. He looked down upon the world and saw everything as he passed over. And to make matters worse, he was a bit of a gossip. So all that he saw, he rarely kept to himself. If you were raised with an overprotective father, just be glad you weren't born of Helios!

#### The Dawn

The dawn was the sun's sister and she was called Eos. It was her duty to rise every morning from her golden throne to open the gates of heaven and to announce the coming of the sun. But her day didn't end there. She accompanied Helios in his journey across the sky during the day. Some myths say she rode alongside him in his chariot of fire; others state she rode in her own chariot in front of Helios, announcing his arrival all day long.

Eos was also well known for her amour addiction. It would take hours to reveal the tales of all her lovers, but do know that of these lovers, she bore some rather well-known children. Eos was the mother of the Winds: Boreas (North), Notus (South), and Zephyrus (West). She also bore Eosphorus (the Morning Star), as well as all the other stars in the heavens.



There are certainly many others who represent the elements of the universe, though they aren't as prominent in the myths. For instance, there were 3,000 river gods and 3,000 ocean goddesses, not to mention the various demi-deities of the forests and mountains, which will be explored further in Chapter 17.

#### The Moon

And of course, we can't forget the other sister of Helios–Selene, the moon. She also drove a chariot across the sky, though hers was made of silver and driven by two horses. She was responsible for providing the light of the moon to shine through the night.

Not much is known about Selene. The myths state that she was quite a beautiful girl and was rather well known for her own love affairs, though she may not have been quite as *eager*, shall we say, as her sister. It was said that Pan, god of shepherds and flocks, tried to seduce her with either a beautiful fleece or a herd of white oxen—the myths vary. She was also involved with Zeus at one point and bore him a daughter named Pandia.

However, her most famous love affair took place with Endymion, king of Elis. Legend has it she looked down upon his sleeping body and fell instantly in love with him. She came down from the heavens and made love to him in his dreams. Some even say she bore him fifty daughters. At Selene's request, Zeus offered to grant Endymion one wish. He wished for eternal youth—and some say eternal sleep so as to keep reliving his amorous dreams—and was granted immortal sleep.

## **Giving Definition to Life**

A fundamental question that nearly everyone has asked him or herself at least once is that of "Where did we come from?" The answer to this question would help us to understand why we are what we are and why we are where we are. It is because of this need to understand that creation stories are so important. Not only do they provide a simple—though not always straightforward—explanation, but they also provide us with definition of life.

Every religion has a creation story. Because we don't practice classical mythology as a religion today, the chaos theory is mainly just for fun. But you should recognize that this myth does have some similarities to the creation stories of other religions. For instance, as you were reading the story of Pandora, did the Biblical Eve ever cross your mind?



## CHAPTER 4 The Children of Mother Earth

s you learned in the last chapter, Gaia (Mother Earth) was part of the original offspring during creation. She had a huge responsibility to the universe, being the earth and all, but above all else, she was a mother. This chapter is dedicated to the children of Mother Earth and their respective roles in classical mythology.

## **Children by Pontus**

As you recall, Gaia gave birth to three children without the aid of a man. One of these was Pontus, the Sea. Gaia, although quite busy creating elements for the universe, took time out to then mate with Pontus. This union produced five children: Ceto, Eurybia, Nereus, Phorcys, and Thaumas.



Pontus was recorded in mythology as the personification of the sea. Although you would think this character would show up time and time again throughout the myths, he doesn't. It seems as though his shining moment was the union with Gaia, after which he fades into the background.

#### Ceto

Ceto was considered to be the deity of large marine beasts. The Greeks use her name informally to refer to sea monsters. Ceto married her brother, Phorcys. Together they produced several children.

- **The Graeae:** These three daughters were born as old women, never able to enjoy the freshness of youth. Their names were Dino, Enyo, and Phephredo. The sisters were always portrayed together in the myths, and they weren't the prettiest of sights. Between them they had only one eye and one tooth, which they shared in turns. They lived in darkness away from the sunlight (some myths say they lived in a deep cave).
- **The Gorgons:** These three daughters were even less to look at than their sisters. They were monsters with snakes for hair, tusks, bronze claws, wings, and a stare that could turn men to stone. Both mortals and immortals feared these creatures. Only two of the Gorgons were immortal—Euryale and Stheno. The third and most recognizable to us, Medusa, was mortal. (Medusa will be featured in the myth of Perseus in Chapter 19.)
- **The Hesperides:** These daughters were nymphs. Their number varies from myth to myth (as do their parents), but most often they were

known as three: Aegle, Erythia, and Hesperarethusa. The Hesperides were quite a bit better looking than their sisters and they each had the gift of song. They lived in the Garden of the Hesperides and protected a tree with golden apples that grew there.

- **Ladon:** This son was a hundred-headed dragon. He lived with his sisters in the Garden of the Hesperides and was the prime guardian of the golden apples. After he is killed, he is turned into a great constellation of stars.
- Echidna: Yet another monster of a daughter, Echidna had the body of a beautiful woman and instead of legs, a serpent's tail. She is best known in classical mythology for giving birth to several monstrous offspring. She also is said to have laid in wait for people passing through her territory. She would then attack and devour them.

### Eurybia

Eurybia isn't quite as popular as her sister Ceto. Most myths involving Eurybia simply mention her as the wife of Crius (a Titan) and mother of three Titan sons: Astraeus, Pallas, and Perses. Astraeus would later father the winds and the stars; Pallas would become the father of Victory, Valor, and Strength; Perses would later father Hecate, a triple goddess you will get to know better in Chapter 17.

#### Nereus

Nereus was a marine deity and was sometimes known as the "Old Man of the Sea." Though Poseidon is most often thought of first as the god of the sea, Nereus had this title well before Poseidon was even born. He had the ability to shapeshift—to take on various forms in different places—and also had the gift of prophecy. He is best known for fathering the Nereids (sea goddesses).

#### Phorcys

Like his brother, Phorcys was also a sea deity. However, he isn't often regarded for this attribute, but rather is best known for his offspring. As you know, Phorcys fathered several children by Ceto. However, some myths also claim that he was the father of the Sirens, which were sea deities: half woman, half bird. He is also rumored to be the father of Scylla, the famous sea monster.



The Sirens were great musicians with very beautiful voices. But beware—their songs were quite dangerous. They used their intoxicating songs to lure sailors close to the rocky coast, causing their ships to wreck. The Sirens would then attack and devour the poor, unsuspecting sailors.

#### Thaumas

Thaumas, also a sea deity, does not have a myth all to himself. He simply stood on the sidelines and was known only for his siring ability. He married Electra (an ocean deity) and fathered Iris and the Harpies. Iris was the personification of the rainbow as well as a messenger of the Olympian gods and goddesses. The Harpies were birdlike women who carried off the souls of the dead. They were also said to be responsible for anything that had gone missing, including children.

## Need a Hand?

The most famous of Gaia's unions was with her other son, Uranus (Sky). The first children born of Gaia and Uranus were the Hecatoncheires. Hecatoncheires means "hundred handed" and that they were. These creatures are referred to as giants, though they differ from the giants we will encounter in later myths. There were three Hecatoncheires, each having one hundred arms and fifty heads. Perhaps "giant" isn't such a bad name for them.

These three were named Cottus, Briareus (or Aegaeon), and Gyges (or Gyes). The myths don't really distinguish between these three, except one myth that claims that Briareus later becomes Zeus's bodyguard.

Needless to say, the Hecatoncheires had incredible strength. They were able to throw boulders at such a speed and so many at a time as to make mountains crumble. Because of their outrageous strength, most feared these creatures upon sight—even their very own father, Uranus, ruler of the universe. And because Uranus was so intimidated by his sons, he had them imprisoned in Tartarus (the Underworld), where we will visit them later on. First, let's move on to the next set of children.

## **One-Eyed Wonders**

Gaia then gave birth to three Cyclopes, sired by Uranus. The Cyclopes were not small creatures themselves. Giant in build, they possessed great strength and dexterity. However, each had only one eye, centered in the forehead. Even with their limited vision, they were still quite intimidating.

Traditionally, Cyclopes were feared as shepherd monsters said to eat men, and that is true in later myths. But these first Cyclopes were not like that. Instead they were known as the first smiths.



Historians and mythographers have categorized the Cyclopes into three separate groups: the Uranian Cyclopes, the Sicilian Cyclopes, and the Gasterocheires Cyclopes. The Cyclopes discussed in this chapter belong to the first race, the Uranian Cyclopes. They are not to be confused with the savage Sicilian Cyclopes who were known to eat men and each other.

Unlike the Hecatoncheires, the three Cyclopes were distinguished from one another. Brontes became known as Thunder or Thunderer. Arges became known as the Shiner or Thunderbolt. And Steropes (or sometimes Asteropes) became known as Lightning or the Maker of Lightning. You get the idea. Just consider them storm deities.

Recognizing—and sometimes flaunting—their power and strength, the Cyclopes had a bit of a problem with authority. But Uranus took matters into his own hands and threw them into Tartarus to join their brothers. What it comes down to is, it seems that Uranus was afraid of his own offspring. Kind of cowardly for the supposed ruler of the universe, don't you think? We'll leave them there for a while to cool off and move on to the next group of children.

## **The Imperials**

The most famous of Gaia's children were born next—the Titans and Titanesses. Twelve in total, Gaia gave birth to six sons and six daughters. These children, being the youngest, naturally were spoiled and given their own individual identities in myths, much more so than their brothers in Tartarus.



Although we have encountered several deities so far, they weren't actually considered to be "gods" and "goddesses." They all held power but as the personification of an element or division of the universe. It is the Titans and Titanesses that would become known as the first line of gods and goddesses.

Let's first introduce the Titans:

- **Coeus:** Not much is known about Coeus except that he becomes the father of Leto, who becomes the mother of Apollo and Artemis.
- **Crius:** Again, he seems to be left out of most myths, but he does become the father of Astraeus, Pallas, and Perses.
- **Cronus:** The youngest of the Titans, Cronus has his very own action-packed myth. We'll get to him in just a moment.
- **Hyperion:** He is the first god of the sun, but later sires Helios, who is more commonly known to be the Sun.
- **Iapetus:** This Titan is best known for fathering the champion of mankind, Prometheus, as well as Epimetheus, Menoetius, and Atlas.
- Oceanus: The eldest of the Titans, Oceanus is the god of the rivers.

Now the Titanesses:

- **Mnemosyne:** Also referred to as Memory, she later gives birth to the Muses.
- **Phoebe:** She is considered the first goddess of the moon, and also the mother of Leto.
- **Rhea:** A mother-deity or earth goddess, Rhea will later give birth to the Olympians.
- **Tethys:** Tethys is known as the first goddess of the sea. She later gives birth to numerous children, including 3,000 (!) daughters—the Oceanids.
- **Theia:** This Titaness is best known for giving birth to Helios, Selene, and Eos.
- **Themis:** Also considered a mother-deity or earth goddess, Themis is the mother of Prometheus, the Hours, and the Fates.

## **Uranus Loses a Limb**

We've established that Uranus was afraid of the Hecatoncheires and the Cyclopes and imprisoned them in Tartarus because of this fear. Well, he certainly didn't favor the Titans either. In fact, he downright hated them. And the feeling was mutual.

Uranus loved his position as ruler of the universe and was not willing to give up that ultimate power—and he viewed his children as threats to that power. Therefore, he also decided to get the Titans out of the way. However, instead of imprisoning them with their other siblings, Uranus got a bit more creative with the punishment of the Titans. This time, with each birth, he shoved the child back into the womb of Gaia. All twelve were returned to the womb just after being born. Uranus was pleased with himself and was able to relax knowing that his power was no longer threatened.

As you can imagine (well, probably not!), Gaia wasn't all too pleased with her situation. Being forced to endure physical discomfort, if not utter pain, is horrible in itself, but don't forget that she was also a mother. As a mother, it pained her even more to see the punishments inflicted upon her children. She eventually got fed up with Uranus's treatment of his family and decided to take action.

Gaia made a sharp sickle out of either iron or flint (the myths vary, but you can be sure it was sharp!). She then voiced her complaints to her children. She suggested they rise up and punish Uranus for his mistreatment of the whole family. The Titans and Titanesses were afraid of their father and refused their mother's request. Gaia, however, did not give up. She continued with her complaints and mutinous pep talk until one boldly came forward and offered to help take revenge upon Uranus. Cronus was the youngest of the Titans. Gaia smiled down upon this favored child and told him her plan.

Cronus lie in waiting that night, armed with the sickle. Uranus finally came and embraced Gaia in love. Cronus, wasting no time, grabbed his father's genitals and sliced them off with the sickle. The severed organ was thrown from the heavens into the sea.



Some myths state that the attack on Uranus actually caused the birth of Aphrodite, the goddess of love. Legend has it that the discarded organ hit the sea, causing a great white foam. Aphrodite was born of this foam and emerged from the sea fully grown.

After this incident, Uranus seems to drop out of the picture as far as the myths are concerned. He was no longer worshipped or honored with sacrifice, and held no power.

## **Cronus Crowned as Ruler**

With the success of Cronus, the Titans, Titanesses, Cyclopes, and Hecatoncheires were all freed. Cronus took his place as ruler of the universe and married Rhea, his sister. You'd think that after all of this, Cronus would be a fair and benevolent ruler. But power got the best of him, just as it had done his father.

No sooner had the Hecatoncheires and the Cyclopes been freed, they were once again imprisoned in Tartarus, this time by Cronus. He felt the same fear of these giants as did his father. Apparently, he did not seem to fear the Titans, and they were allowed to keep their freedom. At this point, these Titans and Titanesses paired off in marriages:

- Themis married lapetus
- Phoebe married Coeus
- Theia married Hyperion
- Tethys married Oceanus
- and, of course, Rhea married Cronus

# Like Father, Like Son

Cronus was just as power hungry, if not more so, as his father. Because of this, he did not make for a very good ruler. But the similarities between he and his father don't stop there. Cronus was also a horrible father. Apparently, Cronus was aware of a prophecy stating that one of his children would overthrow his power. Just like dear old dad, Cronus wouldn't hear of the possibility of his power being threatened. So he devised a scheme to put his own children out of commission.

He remembered that it was actually his mother's doing that ultimately brought about the ruin of his father. But he also realized that that probably wouldn't have come to pass had not Gaia been so burdened by the children in her womb. Therefore, he decided to place the burden on himself rather than risk placing it on the mother.

Once a year for five years, Rhea gave birth to a child. As soon as it was out of her womb, it was in the mouth of Cronus. You see, his grand scheme consisted of his swallowing each newborn child, therefore literally taking the burden upon himself. Don't worry, he didn't chew them up, but rather swallowed them whole.

Naturally, as a mother, Rhea was overcome with grief and rage. She simply couldn't stand to have her children permanently taken away from her so soon after birth. This is where Cronus's plan backfired. He underestimated a mother's love and natural instincts toward her children, which became the driving force behind Rhea's own scheme of revenge.

When she conceived her sixth child, she asked her parents for help. They sent her to the island of Crete. There she gave birth to her youngest, Zeus. Rhea returned to Cronus following the birth, but left Zeus behind. She substituted a large stone wrapped in swaddling clothes for the baby Zeus and offered it to Cronus. Wasting no time, Cronus immediately swallowed what he thought was his sixth child.

# **Zeus's Childhood**

Zeus had been left in the ultimate care of Gaia, but for practical purposes, left in the care of the Curetes (minor gods) and the Nymphs (nature goddesses). The Curetes would mimic the rituals of the Cretan youths by performing dances and clashing their weapons together. These loud dances and the sounds from the clashing weapons hid the cries of the baby Zeus so his father would not discover him.

His safety being taken care of, he still needed nourishment like any other baby. One nymph in particular was responsible for feeding Zeus, and so Amalthea suckled Zeus through his younger years. Some myths say that Amalthea was a she-goat and talk of the extreme gratitude Zeus felt toward her. To show his appreciation, when Amalthea died, Zeus used her skin to create a shield that he carried with him into battle. As his last gift, Zeus turns Amalthea into a constellation otherwise known as Capricorn.

Zeus was well cared for and grew into adulthood with no obstacles. A strong and healthy young man, Zeus felt he was ready to fulfill his prophecy and overthrow his father. He left the island of Crete and went to visit his cousin, Metis, who was an Oceanid, the daughter of Tethys and Oceanus. She was well known for her wisdom and offered to help Zeus in his quest. She advised him to become a servant of Cronus and then to place an elixir in his drink. Zeus did as he was told. The elixir caused Cronus to vomit and out came Zeus's brothers and sisters, all still whole and unharmed.

# War with the Titans

Now that Zeus had rescued his siblings, he had the beginnings of an army with which to challenge the power of Cronus. There was no question that Zeus would be the leader of this army.

#### **CHAPTER 4: THE CHILDREN OF MOTHER EARTH**

Cronus wasn't so lucky in family loyalty though. Not all the Titans decided to join in the war. None of the Titanesses participated, and Oceanus, Cronus's brother, also refused to fight. Helios, son of Hyperion, also refused to take part in the war. And Prometheus and Epimetheus, sons of lapetus, blatantly refused to pledge loyalty to Cronus, and in fact eventually sided with Zeus's army. The remaining Titans decided that Atlas, son of lapetus, would be the one to lead them into battle.



Prometheus pledged loyalty to Zeus, not because he was necessarily in favor of the Olympians, but because he possessed the gift of prophecy. He knew what was coming and used this knowledge to offer advice to the Titans. When the Titans disregarded him, Prometheus joined the Olympians; he wanted to be on the right side of things when all was said and done.

The Titans under Atlas set up command at Mount Othrys, and the children of Cronus, under Zeus, set up command at Mount Olympus. With sides having been chosen and central command areas in place, thus began the war with the Titans.

This war was far from some petty skirmish. As you know, the Titans were awesome creatures and possessed considerable strength. And the children of Cronus were just as strong and cunning. The two sides met on the battlefield every day for ten years, going back and forth with victories and losses. Even after ten years, the war was still no closer to being decidedly won. However, Gaia interceded and offered advice to Zeus.

According to Gaia, if Zeus would free the Cyclopes and Hecatoncheires from Tartarus, he would find in them very powerful allies. Zeus wasted no time and immediately went down into the depths of the Underworld and faced Campe, a monster appointed by Cronus to guard the giants. Zeus had little difficulty in slaying Campe and successfully freed his uncles. Just as Gaia had predicted, the Hecatoncheires and the Cyclopes were so angry with Cronus that they didn't hesitate to join forces with Zeus. This addition to Zeus's army was the turning point of the war. The Cyclopes not only offered their strength, but also built grand weapons for the sons of Cronus. Among these were lightning, thunder, earthquake, a trident, and a helmet of invisibility. The Hecatoncheires were no small addition either. They continuously threw great boulders at the Titans' fort causing it to weaken.

With such extreme power backing him, Zeus decided to lay siege on Mount Othrys. But mere strength would not win him the war, so Zeus took his time and devised a plan that would leave the army of Cronus no choice but to surrender. Using the Helmet of Invisibility, Zeus's brother walked into the camp unnoticed and stole all of Cronus's weapons. Next, the other brother of Zeus distracted Cronus with the trident while Zeus fired off shots of lightning bolts. Meanwhile, the Cyclopes and Hecatoncheires were occupying the rest of the Titans with rains of boulders. The plan was successful and the end of the war that almost destroyed the universe was finally over.

# **First Acts as Supreme Ruler**

First and foremost, Zeus had to dispose of his enemies. The army of Cronus was sent down to Tartarus to be imprisoned for eternity where the Hecatoncheires stood guard to ensure no chance of escape.

One enemy did escape imprisonment in Tartarus, but only to find himself on the receiving end of an even greater punishment—Atlas. Because Atlas was the commander of the opposing army, Zeus felt a special punishment was needed. Atlas was sentenced to hold the weight of the sky and heavens upon his shoulders for eternity.

Just as Zeus was harsh with his punishments of his enemies, he was very giving in his rewards of his allies. Because the Titanesses did not participate in the war, Zeus allowed them to retain their power and positions in the heavens. He also restored the powers of any immortal who supported him and had been shunned by Cronus. And of course, his brothers and sisters would be granted their own rights and powers, but we'll get to that in the next chapter when we introduce the Olympians.



# CHAPTER 5 Introducing the Olympians

You've made it through the chaotic creation of the universe, the various schemes for revenge and power, and a ten-year-long war. Whew! But your journey has not been in vain. You have now reached the gates of the famed Mount Olympus. You've certainly earned this backstage pass. Are you courageous enough to step inside and meet the gods and goddesses face to face?

# The Original Six

As you know, Cronus lost his power after being overthrown by his very own children. However, this struggle for power did not continue. Instead the children of Cronus united, dividing reign among them. A supreme ruler was needed, however, and all agreed Zeus would best rule over them. The decision was unanimous and final.

These original six Olympian gods and goddesses included:

Zeus

• Hera

- Poseidon
- Hades

HestiaDemeter

# **The Brothers**

After the fall of Cronus, the three brothers divided the dominions between them. The three divisions were made fairly—each god drew lots. The realms up for grabs were the heavens, the seas, and the land of the dead. It was agreed upon that earth and Mount Olympus would remain as joint domain without one god in particular having control.

As luck would have it, Zeus drew the heavens. This made him the ruler of the gods as well as of the heavens. Zeus, often helmeted, is normally depicted as wielding one of his thunderbolts and wearing the aegis. He is also often accompanied by an eagle, which symbolically serves as his attendant.



Some myths say that Poseidon created the horse or at the very least tamed them. Regardless, he was known to many as the god of horses, and was said to give away horses as gifts to those he favored. And his great chariot was always drawn by horses or monstrous variations of the horse.

Poseidon drew the realm of the seas. Myths often describe Poseidon as a rather violent god, associating him with savage sea storms and earthquakes. He is depicted as being tall with a long flowing beard, normally wielding his trident (which is, if you remember, one of the weapons made by the Cyclopes during the ten-year war). Although the best guess might be fish, horses and bulls are most often associated with Poseidon. Good luck figuring that one out. What do horses and bulls have to do with the sea?

Last, but certainly not least, is Hades, who drew the land of the dead—otherwise known as the Underworld. The Underworld is not representative of Hell, nor is Hades considered in any way evil or satanic. The myths describe Hades as a loner, rather uninterested in the world of the living. He is often depicted holding a key, signifying his "jailer" status. He, like his brother, is also associated with horses, and in some myths is even said to have created the horse.

#### **The Sisters**

Though the sisters of Zeus were left out of drawing lots, they certainly held their own when it came to wielding power. And it is recognized that the order of the universe would not be complete without the domains of these three goddesses.

Hera is often considered the greatest of all Greek goddesses. She is, after all, not only the sister but also the wife of Zeus (but we'll get into that in the next chapter), which makes her the queen of the Heavens. She is described as very jealous and vindictive, with a quick temper and fearsome passion. As the first lawful wife, she is the protector of wives. She is also considered to be the goddess of marriage and childbirth. She is depicted as a queen often is: tall, stately, and wielding a scepter. Her bird is the peacock.

Hestia isn't very well known in mythology. Little is recorded of her, though she is considered to be the goddess of the hearth and the home. She is thought to have been worshipped in every household of the ancients and was held as quite sacred. Though no description is given of her, she is closely associated with the countenance of virginity and is not associated with any animal.

Demeter, whose name means "Mother Earth," is an (surprise!) earth goddess, though not to be confused with Gaia, the actual Earth. Demeter holds the power of fertility and agriculture. Whereas her sister Hestia never left Mount Olympus, Demeter rarely stayed there. She preferred to spend her time on earth, close to the soil. She is depicted as sitting down with either a serpent or torches. Her bird is the crane and her emblems are the poppy, narcissus, and an ear of corn.

# **A Dozen Distinguished Deities**

Now that you have been introduced to the original six Olympians, it only makes sense to get the rest of the introductions out of the way. There are twelve great Olympians in all, each playing a respected role in the order of the universe. Now, without further ado, the remaining great Olympians:

#### Ares

The least favored of all the Olympians was Ares, god of war. And no wonder. He lived for battle and bloodshed, deriving great pleasure from destruction. But still, he was one of the "Greats" and therefore, held high rank.

Ares is described as always wearing a helmet and armor, and carrying a spear, sword, and shield. Though he was the war god, he was not always victorious. In fact, he was defeated in battle several times throughout the myths. He is associated with the dog and the vulture.

#### Athena

As the goddess of wisdom, Athena was held in high regard by all, mortal and immortal alike. She was also the goddess of war, crafts, and skills. Unlike Ares, however, Athena was not bloodthirsty. She would rather have peace than war. Even so, during those times that she was in battle, she proved herself to be an invincible strategist, dominating the field.

Athena is depicted as wearing a full suit of armor, a helmet, and an aegis. She wields a spear and a shield that has a picture of the Gorgon's head painted on it. She is associated with the owl (which symbolizes wisdom), and an owl is often seen perched on her shoulder.

#### Artemis

Being goddess of the hunt, Artemis was little interested in anything else. She roamed the mountainsides with a band of nymphs, hunting animals and, at times, even men. But don't think her bad. She was also the protector of children, wild animals, and the weak. Legend has it that her arrows could cause sudden death without pain, but if one were to get on her bad side, Artemis was said to have been quite vindictive and vengeful.



Artemis and Apollo would not have been born if Hera had her way. But their mother, Leto, was able to escape Hera and give birth, first to Artemis. Though an infant, Artemis was said to have helped her mother through nine days of intensive labor to give birth to Apollo. Because their mother had suffered so much for them, Artemis and Apollo would continuously protect and indulge her throughout the myths.

Artemis is most often depicted carrying her weapon of choice—a bow and arrows. Some myths even describe her as a girl-child—a virgin with eternal youth—as tame as the wild animals she hunted and protected. As all wild animals are within her domain, she is not associated with one in particular.

# **Apollo**

Apollo was the twin of Artemis. He was considered the god of archery, as well as of music and poetry. While his sister lived only for the hunt, Apollo was a versatile god and enjoyed a great many things. He was at times a shepherd or cowherd, at other times a great musician not to be seen without his lyre or cithara. He was also involved in prophecy and medicine.

With his hand in so many arts, there isn't a "usual" depiction of him. However, he is invariably described as an ideal beauty—truly tall, dark, and handsome. Apollo is associated with several different creatures, including the wolf, deer, dolphin, crow, vulture, and swan, and is also associated with the laurel plant.

#### Hermes

Hermes was the god of commerce and flight (formally). Informally, he was best known as the messenger of the gods. He brought luck to people, guided travelers and merchants, and became the patron deity of rogues and thieves. Hermes was quite the active god, known for his agility and athleticism.

In keeping with his messenger status, Hermes is normally described as wearing a winged hat and winged sandals—speedy delivery indeed! He is also sometimes seen carrying either a golden herald's wand or a staff with two serpents' heads. To get a good picture of Hermes in your head, imagine that one little boy you've encountered at least once in your life who is terribly mischievous, but so cute and with such a kind heart (although it may seem deeply hidden at times) that you simply have to adore him—this is Hermes.

#### Aphrodite

Nearly everyone has heard of Aphrodite—the goddess of love. (Or perhaps you know her as Venus, which is the Roman name.) Some myths view her as a flaky and ridiculous character, while others describe her as a generous and benevolent goddess, due just as much reverence as the other Olympians. Regardless of her character, Aphrodite is always viewed as passionate. That was her duty after all—to make love.

Needless to say, Aphrodite is depicted as being a great beauty, with a sweet and seductive smile. The myths revolving around her almost always involve a love affair, either with Aphrodite as one of the participants or with the goddess intervening in the lives of others. She is associated with the dove, and her plants are the rose and myrtle.

#### Hephaestus

Believe it or not, the goddess of love had a husband—Hephaestus. Now, you probably think that this god must have been the most beautiful and passionate god around if he was lucky enough to capture the one and only goddess of love. Unfortunately, no, he wasn't. In fact, he was thrown out of heaven at his birth because of his ugliness and deformities. (If your curiosity is piqued, see Chapter 15 for complete details on the marriage of Aphrodite and Hephaestus.)

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Some myths state that Hephaestus was born healthy and without any deformities at all. He was tossed from the heavens by Zeus when he took Hera's side in an argument against Zeus. He fell for an entire day and then landed on an island. This myth attributes Hephaestus's lameness to this fall and the not-so-gentle landing.

Hephaestus was the god of fire, smithing, craftsmanship, and metalworking. He built the great homes of the gods and goddesses, made armor for those he favored, and could pretty much build anything that was asked of him. He was most often depicted as being lame and not so handsome. Instead of being associated with animals, Hephaestus is associated with volcanoes, which were thought to be his workshops.

#### Dionysus

Better known as the party god, Dionysus was the god of the vine, wine, and revelry. Whereas most of the Olympians kept their distance and snubbed the mortals, Dionysus mingled with his mortal followers. His religious festivals turned into rites of ecstasy—everyone had a good time.

Dionysus is depicted as being a lover of peace. He felt his greatest gift to bestow upon his loyal followers was that of wine: to be able to relieve a person of the burdens of the day—if only for a while. This isn't to say that he was never cruel—he was after all still a god. And those who opposed him were often met by the wrath of a god. Dionysus isn't associated with an animal or a plant (except of course the vine); he is most often associated with dance, music, wine, madness, and sex.



You may have noticed that there are supposed to be twelve great Olympians, but that you have been introduced to fourteen in this chapter. No, you didn't count wrong. Dionysus is said to have taken the place of Hestia, who eventually fades out of mythology. Hades is the other deity often not counted. His world was the Underworld, and he rarely visited Mount Olympus. Therefore, most do not consider him one of the great Olympian gods.

# **Mount Olympus**

The home of the Olympian gods and goddesses deserves a little recognition, wouldn't you say? However, the descriptions of this place are rather vague in ancient mythology. Some myths state that it was indeed a mountain higher than any other mountain on earth. It had several peaks, each the residence of a different deity with Zeus residing on its topmost peak. Other myths refer to Mount Olympus as part of the heavens and not on earth at all.

Regardless of its exact location, Mount Olympus was a magnificent dwelling, clearly fit for the gods. Beyond the entranceway of clouds were several luxurious palaces and halls, supposedly built by Hephaestus, where the gods and goddesses lived and held parties.

For the most part, life on Mount Olympus was an easy and peaceful one. The gods and goddesses would lounge around feasting on ambrosia and drinking nectar while listening to music and watching dances being performed for their enjoyment. Mount Olympus was untouched by the various natural disasters and inconveniences we have on earth. There were no thundershowers, snow, rough winds, earthquakes, hailstorms, or tornadoes. The atmosphere was at peace, making the inhabitants peaceful (most of the time anyway).

Mount Olympus wasn't only the residence of the gods and goddesses, but also their command center, so to speak. This is where trials were held, laws were created, and important decisions were made.

# Law and Order Under the Olympians

As ruler of gods and men, it was Zeus's duty to bring ultimate order to the universe. An order of sorts had already been established, but it was only basic in its form. Zeus felt this should be taken further and detailed more precisely.

Taking matters into his own hands, he made love to his aunt, Thetis, who was the goddess of eternal order. Their union produced six daughters who became the personifications of those very principles needed to complete the ultimate order he desired. The daughters included:

- **Eirene:** The personification of peace
- Eunomia: The personification of law and order
- Dike: The personification of justice
- Atropos: One of the Fates and responsible for cutting the thread of life
- **Clotho:** One of the Fates and responsible for spinning the thread of life
- **Lachesis:** One of the Fates and responsible for determining the length of the thread of life

With order now established in the universe, it was now Zeus's job to maintain it and he was fully capable of this duty. Zeus was known to be a fair but strict leader. He firmly believed in the idea of justice and carried out punishments to uphold that idea.

As supreme ruler, Zeus did not allow his emotions or biases to get in the way of a ruling. If he felt he could not make a judgment impartially, he would either bring the matter before a council of other deities to help him determine the ruling, or find another way (such as a contest) to determine the final decision. For instance, Zeus's brother Poseidon had a tendency to fight for land and often started battles with other gods and goddesses. Zeus sometimes felt as though he could not make an impartial ruling in the favor of either his own brother or, say, his daughter. Who would want to make that choice? So he would instead either bring the matter before the council or create a contest in which the winner would rightfully claim the land. However, in some cases, Zeus thought it best that not one party was favored over the other. To handle these situations, he used compromise to settle the matter.



If you are a mortal woman (or even a goddess for that matter), look out for Zeus! Though he most often thought through things quite extensively before performing any action, women were his weakness and he would allow his lust to control his actions.

Some myths say that even though Zeus was the supreme ruler, he did not have complete control. Remember the Fates he fathered? These three women are often considered to be superior to even the greatest of the gods. Therefore, Zeus himself was subject to them.

# **Mutiny on Mount Olympus**

One would think that the beauty, peacefulness, and splendor of Mount Olympus would be enough to keep the peace. You've seen that in mythological times law and order have been set, justice most often prevails, and the universe is ruled with intelligence instead of with sheer force. But with all these grand notions of utopia, there was still a rebellious attitude working within the society of deities that would become a threat to the power of Zeus.

#### A Mob Is Assembled

A rebellion of some sort is almost always expected in any society, and the great gods and goddesses of Mount Olympus were no exception. The rebellion began with three key figures: Athena, Hera, and Poseidon. (However, several myths ultimately credit Hera as the mastermind behind the scheme.) These three each felt he or she could rule better than Zeus, and perhaps begrudged having to answer to him. Regardless of their personal reasons, they banded together to rally the other gods and goddesses against Zeus–all except for Hestia.

The group worked together to quickly chain Zeus to his bed while he lay sleeping. Setting his weapons out of reach, they congratulated each other on a successful and easy rebellion. However, the celebration soon took a turn for the worse. Now that Zeus had no power, who would take his place?

The gods and goddesses began to argue, each convinced that he or she would be best placed as supreme ruler. None of the powerful deities were willing to back down. The argument continued for a long while, and did not taper off. If anything, it only grew more heated as the frustration level rose.

While the deities were preoccupied with their claims to power, a sea deity named Thetis came to Zeus's rescue. She ventured down to Tartarus and appealed to Briareus (one of the Hecatoncheires) for help, who consented and unchained Zeus. The deities dared not challenge an angry Zeus face to face and quickly backed down. Reclaiming his position as supreme ruler, Zeus forced all Olympians to vow that they would never again challenge his power.

#### **Hera's Punishment**

Zeus, as lord of justice (and also probably as an act of revenge), was moved to punish Hera for her insubordination. And such disloyalty called for no small punishment. Therefore, Zeus decided to suspend Hera from the heavens. He attached chains to her wrists, which held her over the edges of the heavens, and anvils to her feet to weigh her down. She was eventually released and never again incited another rebellion.



This punishment of Hera is certainly recorded in mythology, however some myths argue a different reason behind the need for her punishment, asserting that Zeus actually punished her in this manner because of her relentless and overzealous persecution of his son, Heracles.

# War with the Giants

As the rulers of the universe, it's no surprise that the power of the Olympians was challenged. However, it wasn't only for power that they were threatened. Gaia (Mother Earth) was terribly upset at having her children, the Titans, imprisoned in Tartarus. She therefore rallied the Giants to avenge her children.

The Giants were a very powerful race. They had a basic human form, but their legs were the bodies of serpents. Depicted as having wild, thick hair and beards, and of great stature, they certainly weren't the prettiest creatures around; rather, they instilled fear in everything that crossed their paths.

If the Olympians were ever to have an enemy who could match their power and strength, it was the Giants. The Giants could not be killed by an immortal alone. Instead, an immortal and a mortal had to slay a Giant simultaneously in order to kill it. Some myths say a plant existed that made the Giants immune to the attacks of mortals. Luckily, Zeus caught wind of this and had the plant removed from the earth before the Giants could get hold of it.

#### Let the Battle Begin!

The Giants initiated battle by bombarding the heavens with boulders and flaming trees, which certainly caught the Olympians attention. They quickly buckled down for war, making a valiant effort to fight the Giants. But since the Giants could not be killed, the Olympians were struggling to simply keep their hold.

# **Bringing Down the Big Boys**

An oracle had warned the Olympians that they would never be able to win the war without the help of a mortal. Zeus, therefore, sent Athena down to earth to recruit Heracles, the son of Zeus, born of a mortal woman. With Heracles' entrance to the war, things started looking up for the Olympians. Athena and Heracles joined forces to bring down the first victim of the war, one of the Giants' leaders, Alcyoneus. Athena attacked and Heracles shot him with a poisoned arrow. Alcyoneus was a special case, however, and he didn't die right away. He was granted immortality for as long as he stood on his native soil. Therefore, Athena—with all her great wisdom—advised Heracles to drag the Giant outside of the bounds of his land. Heracles did as he was told and Alcyoneus died on the spot.

The next to fall was Alcyoneus's co-leader, Porphyrion. Porphyrion attacked Hera, meaning to kill her, but instead Zeus filled him with lust for her, turning his desire to kill into a need for love. With Hera as the decoy, Zeus and Heracles positioned themselves. Zeus hurled a thunderbolt at him, while Heracles simultaneously shot him with an arrow, at which point Porphyrion dropped dead. Hera remained unharmed.

SSENTIALS

Some myths state that Zeus had an ulterior motive when filling Porphyrion with lust for Hera. (As you will see in the next chapter, deceit and revenge play a big role in the marriage of Zeus and Hera.) It is said that Zeus used the Giant to test the virtue of Hera. When Hera withdrew from the Giant's advances, Zeus then killed him.

The war was pretty much a sure shot for the Olympians after the fall of the two leaders. But the Giants did not give up easily. It was only through the combined efforts of all the Olympians that the war was ended.

# **The Scariest Monster of All**

Gaia was rather upset at hearing the news of the Giants' defeat. Her sons were still locked up in Tartarus and it was beginning to look like they would forever remain there. But Gaia had one last item up her sleeve. She gave birth to a monster—half man, half animal, *all* horrifying.

Typhon had a hundred serpentine heads, each equipped with a flickering tongue and eyes that shot flames. Each of the heads also spoke in a different voice, sometimes that of a human, sometimes that of a god, sometimes that of a beast, and sometimes that of something sent straight from Hell. He had wings and his body was encircled with snakes. And just to make matters worse, this guy was huge! Spreading his arms, one arm reached all the way to the west, and the other reached all the way to the east.

#### **Run Away! Run Away!**

At the sight of Typhon's advance toward Olympus, the gods and goddesses fled. Not only did they flee, but they also transformed into various animals to disguise themselves. Aphrodite and Ares turned into fish, Apollo transformed into a bird, Hephaestus became an ox, Dionysus turned into a goat, and Hermes changed into an ibis. Only Zeus stood his ground against the fearsome enemy (although some myths claim Athena stayed as well).

Zeus's first reaction to Typhon was to use his almighty weapon—the thunderbolt. Hurling thunderbolts in constant succession so that the entire earth began to quake, Zeus was able to push Typhon back a little. Thinking the monster was wounded, Zeus grabbed his sickle and left his fort, descending upon Typhon. However, Typhon wasn't quite as weak as Zeus thought, and the fight that ensued was quite fierce. Eventually, Typhon wrestled the sickle away and used it to cut the tendons in Zeus's arms and legs, leaving Zeus on the ground, helpless. Typhon placed the tendons under the protection of Delphyne, a dragon. He then carried Zeus off to a cave.

But not all was lost. Hermes and Pan joined forces to trick Delphyne. While the dragon was preoccupied, they stole the tendons and restored them to Zeus. Regaining his strength, Zeus wasted no time in returning to Olympus and arming himself with thunderbolts. He then went in search of Typhon.

#### No Rest for the Weary

Eventually, Zeus caught up with Typhon and showed him no mercy. Though Typhon did his best to withstand the rain of thunderbolts upon him, he simply was no match for them. So he fled in hopes of finding harbor and renewing his strength. He came upon the Fates who advised him to eat the food of the mortals in order to be healed. Typhon trusted their advice and did as he was told. But the food of mortal men only served to weaken him more.

Zeus once again caught up to Typhon and relentlessly showered him with more thunderbolts. Typhon tried hurling mountain peaks back at Zeus, but he used the thunderbolts to deflect them. The battle continued on, becoming quite bloody, until finally Typhon fled once more. But this time he didn't get away. According to one myth, Zeus picked up an island from the sea and flung it at Typhon. The island crushed the monster, trapping him. The myth states that because Typhon was immortal, he still resides beneath the island and the volcanic eruptions are merely the fire breath of the monster.

Another myth says that Zeus set Typhon on fire with the thunderbolts, seized the monster, and flung him down into Tartarus. There he is imprisoned with the Titans. Many say that Typhon is the cause of all dangerous winds, and that is where the word "typhoon" came from.

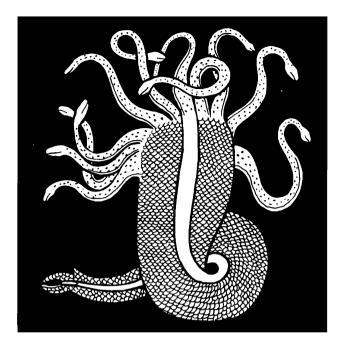


The horror does not die with Typhon's defeat! Before he was overcome by Zeus, Typhon fathered several monstrous children: the Chimaera (a fire-breathing monster with the head of a lion, the body of a goat, and the tail of a snake), the Lernaean Hydra (a large snake with several heads), the Nemean Lion (a monstrous lion with an impenetrable skin), Orthros (a two-headed dog), and the Sphinx (a monster with a woman's head and a lion's body).

Zeus was once again victorious in battle. Following this, no one would deny him the right as ruler of gods and men. Thus the Olympians came to rule the universe until the end of time.

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FIGURE 5-2: Hydra, as depicted on a vase



# This Is Just the Beginning

You have now been introduced to the great Olympian gods and goddesses. But if anything, this brief introduction should only serve to raise your curiosity about these magnificent and powerful deities. The great Olympians have managed to ward off all threats to their power, and will rule the universe for the rest of time.

The Olympian gods and goddesses reoccur throughout the ancient Greek myths, making them the dominant cast of characters in Greek mythology. They each have their own stories in which they star, but quite often their stories intermingle, creating interaction not only among the deities but also with mortals and the happenings of the world as well.

If you are to become familiar with the spectacular stories of classical mythology, it is imperative that you get to know these "Greats." The brief introductions offered here only serve to get you started. In the following chapters, you will get to know these gods and goddesses better by viewing their characters through the stories in which they participate.

# APPENDIX A Cast of Characters

- Achilles Greatest Greek warrior of the Trojan War; killed Hector, among others.
- Acrisius Grandfather of Perseus; accidentally killed by Perseus, fulfilling a prophecy.
- Actaeon Grandson of Apollo; great hunter; killed when he came across Artemis bathing naked.
- Admetus King of Pheres; neglected to sacrifice to Artemis and found his bedchamber filled with snakes on his wedding night.
- Adonis A beautiful young boy loved by Aphrodite and killed by Ares out of jealousy.
- Aeacus Son of Aegina and Zeus; fair ruler of the island Aegina; became a Judge of the Dead.
- Aeetes Father of Medea.
- Aegeus King of Athens; foster father of Theseus.
- Aegina Daughter of the river god Asopus; mother of Aeacus by Zeus; namesake of the island Aegina.
- Aeneas Trojan warrior; founder of the Roman race.
- Aerope A lover of Ares; died giving birth to Ares' son.
- Aether Air; born to Nyx and Erebus.
- Aethra Daughter of the king of Troezen; wife of Aegeus.
- **Agamemnon** Commander in chief of the Greeks during the Trojan War; killed by his wife upon his return from the war.
- **Aglaia** A Charite; the personification of beauty and radiance or splendor.
- Aglaurus Daughter of Cecrops; mother of Alcippe by Ares.

- **Agrius** A Giant; killed by the Fates and Heracles during the war with the Olympians.
- Alcmene Mother of Heracles by Zeus.
- Alcyoneus A Giant; one of the leaders of the Giants during the war with the Olympians; killed by Athena and Heracles.
- Amalthea A goat-nymph who suckled Zeus; is turned into the constellation Capricorn.
- Amata Wife of Latinus.
- Amazons A race of warrior women; said to be descendants of Ares.
- Amphitrite Daughter of Nereus; wife of Poseidon; mother of Benthesicyme, Rhode, and Triton.
- Amphitryon Heracles' foster father.
- **Amymone** One of the fifty daughters of King Danaus; mother of Nauplius by Poseidon.
- **Anchises** King of Dardania; father of Aeneas by Aphrodite.
- Ancus Marcius Fourth king of Rome.
- Andromeda Daughter of the king of Joppa; wife of Perseus.
- **Anteros** God of passion; son of Aphrodite and Ares.
- **Antiope** Daughter of the king of Thebes; mother of Amphion and Zethus by Zeus.
- **Apemosyne** A daughter of the king of Crete; loved and impregnated by Hermes; killed by her brother when he found out about her pregnancy.
- Aphrodite Goddess of love; one of the twelve great Olympians.

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- Apollo God of archery, music, and poetry; brother of Artemis; son of Leto and Zeus; one of the twelve great Olympians.
- Apsyrtus Brother of Medea; killed when Medea fled with Jason.
- Arachne A young woman who challenged Athena to a weaving contest; was turned into a spider.
- Ares God of war; son of Zeus and Hera; one of the twelve great Olympians.
- Arges One of the three Cyclopes; known as the Shiner or Thunderbolt.
- Argus A giant monster with a hundred eyes; placed as guardian of Io by Hera; killed by Hermes to rescue Io.
- Ariadne Daughter of King Minos; helped Theseus to escape the labyrinth; wife of Dionysus.
- Artemis Virgin goddess of the hunt; sister of Apollo; daughter of Leto and Zeus; one of the twelve great Olympians.
- Asctepius Son of Apollo; god of healing.
- Asteria Sister of Leto; provided Leto refuge from Hera.
- Atalanta A famous hunter; would only marry if a man could beat her in a foot race; wife of Milanion.
- Atharnas King of Orchomenus; husband of Ino; driven mad by Hera for having sheltered Dionysus, causing him to kill his own children.
- Athena Goddess of wisdom, war, crafts, and skill; born out of the head of Zeus; one of the twelve great Olympians.
- Atlas A Titan; condemned to hold the heavens up on his shoulders.
- Atropos One of the Fates; responsible for cutting the thread of life; daughter of Zeus and Thetis.
- Aurora Roman goddess of the dawn; counterpart of Eos.

- Autolycus Son of Hermes and Chione; one of the most famous thieves of ancient Greece.
- Bacchus Roman god of wine; counterpart of Dionysus.
- Battus A shepherd who witnessed Hermes stealing Apollo's cattle; was turned to stone when he betrayed Hermes.
- Bellerophon Mortal man who tamed Pegasus.
- Boreas The North wind.
- **Brontes** One of the three Cyclopes; known as Thunder or Thunderer.
- Butes An Argonaut; a priest of one of Athena's temples; fell victim to the Sirens and saved by Aphrodite.
- Cacus Son of Hephaestus and Medusa; a firebreathing, three-headed monster.
- Cadmus Founder of the city of Thebes; was made Ares' slave for eight years; husband of Harmonia.
- Calliope The Muse of epic poetry.
- Callisto An attendant of Artemis; raped by Zeus and bore him a son, Arcas.
- Camenae Roman counterpart of the Muses.
- Campe A monster appointed by Cronus to guard the Hecatoncheires and the Cyclopes in Tartarus.
- Cassandra Daughter of King Priam and Hecuba; tricked Apollo into granting her the gift of prophecy.
- **Cecrops** Half man, half serpent; son of Gaia; first king of Attica.
- **Centaurs** A savage race of beings with the head and torso of a man and the body and legs of a horse.
- **Cerberus** The dog of Hades; guarded the Underworld, not allowing the living to enter, nor the dead to exit.
- Cercyon A monster killed by Theseus.

#### APPENDIX A: CAST OF CHARACTERS

- **Ceres** Roman goddess of agriculture; counterpart of Demeter.
- **Cerynitian Hind** Deer with golden antlers sacred to Artemis; captured by Heracles.
- **Ceto** A deity of large marine beasts; daughter of Gaia and Pontus.
- **Charites** Known as the Graces; minor goddesses of beauty, grace, and friendship; three daughters of Zeus and Eurynome.
- **Charon** The ferryman of the dead across the River Styx.
- **Charybdis** A monster that swallows ships by creating a whirlpool.
- **Chimaera** Daughter of Typhon and Echidna; firebreathing monster with the head of a lion, the body of a goat, and the tail of a snake.
- **Chione** Lover of Hermes and Apollo; mother of Philammon by Apollo; mother of Autolycus by Hermes.
- Chiron A wise Centaur; tutor of several heroes.
- Chryse Mother of Phlegyas by Ares.
- **Circe** Daughter of Helios; powerful witch who used her powers for evil.
- Clio The Muse of history.
- **Clito** An orphan girl who became a lover of Poseidon; bore five pairs of twin sons to Poseidon, including Atlas.
- **Clotho** One of the Fates; responsible for spinning the thread of life; daughter of Zeus and Thetis.
- Clytemnestra Wife of Agamemnon; killed her husband.
- **Clytius** A Giant; killed by Hecate and Heracles during the war with the Olympians.
- **Coeus** A Titan; husband of Phoebe; father of Leto.
- **Coronis** A mortal lover of Apollo; was unfaithful to Apollo and shot and killed by Artemis.

- **Cretan Bull** Sacrificial bull given to King Minos by Poseidon; father of the Minotaur.
- **Crius** A Titan; husband of Eurybia; father of Astraeus, Pallas, and Perses.
- **Cronus** A Titan; ruler of the universe following Uranus; husband of Rhea; father of the original Olympians.
- Cupid Roman god of love; counterpart of Eros.
- **Cybele** An earth goddess; taught Dionysus religious rites and practices.
- **Cyclopes** Three sons of Gaia and Uranus (Brontes, Arges, Steropes), giants with only one eye centered in the forehead.
- **Cyparissus** Grandson of Heracles; loved by Apollo; changed into the cypress tree when his best friend was killed.
- Cyrene A nymph; mother of Diomedes by Ares.
- **Daedalus** A great architect; built the labyrinth underground that held the Minotaur prisoner.
- **Danae** Daughter of the king of Argos; mother of Perseus by Zeus.
- Danaides The fifty daughters of Danaus; fortynine killed their husbands on their wedding night.
- **Daphne** A mountain nymph who turned into the laurel tree to escape Apollo's advances.
- **Deimos** Personification of fear; son of Aphrodite and Ares.
- **Demeter** Goddess of fertility and agriculture; one of the twelve great Olympians; daughter of Cronus and Rhea.
- **Diana** Roman moon goddess; counterpart of Artemis.
- **Dido** Queen of Carthage; fell in love with Aeneas and when he left, committed suicide.
- **Dike** Personification of justice; daughter of Zeus and Thetis.

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- **Diomedes** Greek warrior during the Trojan War; king of Aetolia.
- **Dionysus** God of the vine, wine, and revelry; one of the twelve great Olympians.
- Discordia Roman goddess of discord; counterpart of Eris.
- Dryads Tree nymphs.
- Echidna Monster with the body of a woman and a serpent's tail instead of legs; mother of several monstrous offspring.
- Echion Son of Hermes; the herald for the Argo.
- Egeria A nymph who was a lover of and counseled Numa Pompilius.
- **Eileithyia** A goddess of childbirth; daughter of Zeus and Hera.
- **Eirene** Personification of peace; daughter of Zeus and Thetis.
- Elais Daughter of King Anius; could turn anything into oil with just a touch.
- Electra Daughter of Atlas; mother of Dardanus by Zeus.
- **Enceladus** A Giant; killed by Athena and Heracles during the war with the Olympians.
- **Endymion** King of Elis; lover of Selene; wished for eternal youth and was granted immortal sleep.
- **Enyo** Goddess of the battle; often seen in the company of Ares.
- Eos The Dawn; sister of Helios and Selene; mother of the Winds.
- Eosphorus The Morning Star.
- **Ephialtes** A Giant; killed by Apollo and Heracles during the war with the Olympians.
- **Epimetheus** A Titan; the brother of Prometheus; the husband of Pandora.
- Erato The Muse of love poetry, lyric poetry, and marriage songs.

- **Erebus** Darkness; one of the first five elements born of Chaos.
- Ericthonius Son of Gaia and Hephaestus; half man, half serpent; raised by Athena as her own son.
- Erigone Daughter of Icarius; loved by Dionysus; committed suicide when she discovered her father's dead body.
- Eris Goddess of discord; born to Nyx.
- Eris Strife.
- **Eros** Love; one of the first five elements born of Chaos.
- **Erymanthian Boar** Vicious boar captured by Heracles during his labors.
- **Erysichthon** Son of the king of Dotion; disrespected Demeter's sacred trees and died a horrible death.
- **Eunomia** Personification of law and order; daughter of Zeus and Thetis.
- **Euphrosyne** A Charite; the personification of joy or mirth.
- Europa Daughter of the king of Phoenicia; lover of Zeus.
- Eurus The East wind.
- **Eurybia** Daughter of Gaia and Pontus; wife of Crius; mother of three Titan sons: Astraeus, Pallas, and Perses.
- **Eurydice** The wife of Orpheus; died from a snakebite and was almost retrieved from the Underworld by her husband.
- **Eurynome** Daughter of Oceanus; wife of Ophion; lover of Zeus; mother of the Graces.
- **Eurystheus** The king of Tiryns; commanded the twelve labors of Heracles.
- **Eurytus** A Giant; killed by Dionysus and Heracles during the war with the Olympians.
- Euterpe The Muse of music and lyric poetry.

#### APPENDIX A: CAST OF CHARACTERS

- Fates Three goddesses in charge of determining one's fate.
- Faunus Roman counterpart of Pan.
- Faustulus King Amulius's chief shepherd; raised Romulus and Remus.
- Gaia Mother Earth; one of the first five elements born of Chaos.
- Ganymede Son of the royal Trojan family; kidnapped by Zeus; a cupbearer to the gods.
- Geras Old Age; born to Nyx.
- **Geryon** A three-headed monster killed by Heracles during his labors.
- Giants A race of monsters; battled the Olympians for control of the universe and lost.
- **Glaucus** A sea deity; loved Scylla and inadvertently caused her transformation into a monster.
- **Gorgons** Three monstrous sisters who had serpents for hair, eyes that could turn any being to stone, and sharp claws and teeth.
- **Gration** A Giant; killed by Artemis and Heracles during the war with the Olympians.
- **Griffins** Monsters with the head of an eagle, the body of a lion, and the wings of a predatory bird; guardians of treasure.
- Hades Ruler of the Underworld; son of Cronus and Rhea.
- Halirrhothius Son of Poseidon and Euryte; was killed by Ares for raping his daughter.
- Hamadryads Nymphs who lived in only one specific tree and died when it died.
- Harmonia Daughter of Aphrodite and Ares; wife of Cadmus, king of Thebes.
- Harpies Monstrous birds with the faces of women; sent by deities to punish criminals.
- Harpinna Daughter of the river-god Asopus; mother of Oenomaus by Ares.
- Hebe Personification of youth; cupbearer to the gods; daughter of Zeus and Hera.

- Hecate A Titaness; a triple goddess presiding over magic and spells; an attendant of Persephone.
- Hecatoncheires The three, hundred-handed, fifty-headed sons of Gaia and Uranus (Cottus, Briareus, and Gyges).
- **Hector** Greatest Trojan warrior of the Trojan War; killed Protesilaus.
- Hecuba Wife of King Priam; mother of Troilus by Apollo.
- Helen Daughter of Zeus and Leda; most beautiful woman in the world; was kidnapped by Paris.
- Helenus Son of Priam; chief prophet of Troy.
- Helios The Sun; brother of Eos and Selene.
- Hemera Day; born to Nyx and Erebus.
- Hephaestus God of fire, smithing, craftsmanship, and metalworking; one of the twelve great Olympians.
- Hera Queen of the heavens and the gods; goddess of marriage and childbirth; sister and wife of Zeus; one of the twelve great Olympians.
- Heracles Son of Zeus and Alcmene; one of the greatest heroes of Greek mythology; underwent the Twelve Labors.

Hercules Roman counterpart of Heracles.

- Hermes Messenger of the gods; the god of commerce and flight; son of Zeus and Maia; one of the twelve great Olympians.
- Herse A daughter of Cecrops; mother of Cephalus by Hermes.
- Hesperides Nymphs who lived in the Garden of Hesperides and protected the golden apples; three in number: Aegle, Erythia, and Hesperarethusa.
- Hestia Goddess of the hearth and home; one of the three virgin goddesses; daughter of Cronus and Rhea.

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- **Hippolytus** A Giant; killed by Hermes and Heracles during the war with the Olympians.
- **Hyacinthus** A beautiful young man loved by Apollo; was killed during a game of discusthrowing.
- Hydra of Lerna A giant serpent with numerous heads; had a giant crab as its sidekick.
- Hymen God of marriage.
- **Hyperion** A Titan; husband of Theia; father of Helios, Selene, and Eos.
- Hypnos Sleep; born to Nyx.
- **lacchus** Son of Demeter and Zeus; a minor deity associated with the Eleusinian Mysteries.
- lambe Daughter of Pan; servant in the house of Celeus along with Demeter.
- lapetus A Titan; husband of Themis; father of Prometheus, Epimetheus, Menoetius, and Atlas.
- lasion Son of Zeus and Electra; lover of Demeter; killed by a thunderbolt thrown by Zeus.
- **Icarius** Taught cultivation of the vine and how to make wine by Dionysus; was killed when his neighbors thought he was trying to poison them.
- Idas Son of Poseidon; chosen by Marpessa over Apollo.
- Idomeneus A Greek warrior during the Trojan War.
- **Ino** Semele's sister; driven mad by Hera for having sheltered Dionysus, causing her to kill her own children.
- **Io** Virgin priestess of Hera's; lover of Zeus; turned into a white heifer; persecuted by Hera.
- **Iphigenia** Daughter of Agamemnon; sacrificed by her father to Artemis.
- **Iphimedia** Wife of Aloeus; seduced Poseidon and bore him two Giant sons, Ephialtes and Otus.
- Iris Goddess of the rainbow.
- **lulus** Son of Aeneas; founder of the city Alba Longa.

- **Ixion** A king of Thessaly; condemned to Tartarus for trying to seduce Zeus's wife.
- Jason A great hero; led the Argonauts on the quest for the Golden Fleece; husband of Medea.
- Juno Roman goddess of marriage and childbirth; counterpart of Hera.
- Jupiter Roman god of the heavens; counterpart of Zeus.
- Keres Female spirits of death, sometimes said to be the same as the Furies; born to Nyx.
- Lachesis One of the Fates; responsible for measuring the thread of life; daughter of Zeus and Thetis.
- Ladon A hundred-headed dragon; the prime guardian of the golden apples in the Garden of Hesperides.
- Laocoon A prophet; warned the Trojans about the wooden horse; was devoured by a sea monster.
- Laomedon King of Troy; father of Priam and Hesione.
- Latinus King of Latium; son of Faunus.
- Lavinia Daughter of Latinus; wife of Aeneas.
- Leda Daughter of the king of Aetolia; mother of Polydeuces and Helen by Zeus.
- Leto Daughter of Coeus and Phoebe; mother of Apollo and Artemis by Zeus.
- **Leucothoe** Loved by Helios; buried alive by her father when he found out about the affair.
- Lucius Tarquinius Priscus Fifth king of Rome.
- Lucius Tarquinius Superbus Seventh and final king of Rome; father of Sextus.
- **Lycurgus** King of Thrace; punished by Dionysus for refusing his religious teachings; put to death by his own people.
- Macris The nymph who nursed the baby Dionysus.

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#### APPENDIX A: CAST OF CHARACTERS

Maenads Wild women followers of Dionysus.

- Maia The eldest daughter of Atlas; mother of Hermes by Zeus.
- Marpessa Daughter of the river-god Evenus; chose a mortal man over Apollo.
- Mars Roman god of war; counterpart of Ares.
- Marsyas A satyr; challenged Apollo to a musical contest and lost his life.
- Medea A powerful witch; aided Jason on his quest for the Golden Fleece.
- Medusa A Gorgon; monster with snakes for hair and a stare that could turn any being into stone; a lover of Poseidon.
- Megara Daughter of the King of Thebes; first wife of Heracles.
- Melampus A great seer; cured the women of Argos from madness inflicted upon them by Dionysus.
- Meliae Nymphs of the ash trees.
- Melpomene The Muse of tragedy.
- Menelaus King of Sparta; husband of Helen.
- Mercury Roman counterpart of Hermes.
- Metis An Oceanid known for her wisdom; the first wife and cousin of Zeus.
- Midas King of Phrygia; granted by Dionysus a touch that could turn anything to gold.
- **Milanion** Young man who beat Atalanta in a foot race, winning her hand in marriage.
- Mimas A Giant; killed by Hephaestus and Heracles during the war with the Olympians.
- Minerva Roman goddess of wisdom and warfare; counterpart of Athena.
- Minos Son of Zeus and Europa; King of Crete; became a Judge of the Dead.
- Minotaur A monster with the body of a man and the head of a bull; trapped in the labyrinth and fed sacrifices of young children.

- Mnemosyne A Titaness; known as Memory; mother of the Muses.
- Momus Sarcasm; born to Nyx.
- Morae Roman counterpart of the Fates.
- Moros Doom; born to Nyx.
- Muses The daughters of Zeus and Mnemosyne; goddesses of music, art, poetry, dance, and the arts in general.
- Myrtilus Son of Hermes; a famous charioteer, known for his swiftness.

Naiads Water nymphs.

- Narcissus A beautiful young man who fell in love with his own reflection and was turned into the narcissus flower.
- Nauplius An Argonaut; founder of the town of Nauplia; famous for his knowledge of the seas and astronomy.
- Nemean Lion Monstrous lion strangled by Heracles during his labors.
- Nemesis Goddess of vengeance; born to Nyx.
- Nemisis Retribution.
- **Neptune** Roman god of the sea; counterpart of Poseidon.
- Nereids Sea nymphs.
- Nereus A marine deity known as the "Old Man of the Sea"; father of the Nereids; son of Gaia and Pontus.

Nike Goddess of victory.

Niobe The first of Zeus' mortal lovers; daughter of Phoroneus (the first mortal man); mother of Argus by Zeus. Also the wife of Amphion; her children were killed by Artemis and Apollo because she bragged that her children were greater than Leto's.

Notus The South wind.

Numa Pompilius Second king of Rome.

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- **Nymphs** Nature goddesses; the personification of the fertility and gracefulness of nature; often daughters of Zeus.
- Nyx Night; one of the first five elements born of Chaos.
- **Oceanus** A Titan; husband of Tethys; god of the rivers.
- Odysseus A great hero; warrior during the Trojan War; famous for his ten-year journey home following the war.
- **Oedipus** King of Thebes; unknowingly fulfilled a prophecy by killing his father and marrying his mother.
- **Oino** Daughter of King Anius; could turn anything into wine with just a touch.

Oizys Pain; born to Nyx.

- Oneiroi Dreams; born to Nyx.
- Ops Roman counterpart of Rhea.
- Oreads Mountain nymphs.
- Orestes Son of Agamemnon and Clytemnestra; killed his mother to avenge the murder of his father.
- **Orion** A great hunter; placed in the sky as a constellation after his death.
- **Orpheus** Son of Apollo; talented musician; visited the Underworld to retrieve his dead wife.
- Otrere A queen of the Amazons; mother of Penthesilea by Ares.
- Otus A Giant; son of Poseidon and Iphimedia.
- **Pallas** Daughter of Triton; a childhood friend of Athena; was accidentally killed by Athena.
- **Pallas** A Giant; killed by Athena and Heracles during the war with the Olympians.
- Pan Son of Hermes; a minor god of shepherds and flocks.
- Pandia Daughter of Selene and Zeus.
- Pandora The first mortal woman; wife of Epimetheus; her curiosity drove her to open a

box that released all the plagues and ills on the world.

- Paris Prince of Troy; judged the beauty contest between Hera, Athena, and Aphrodite; kidnapped Helen.
- **Pasiphae** Wife of King Minos; fell in love with a sacrificial bull and gave birth to the Minotaur.
- Patroclus Achilles' best friend; killed during the Trojan War.
- **Pegasus** A winged horse, born from the blood of Medusa's severed head.
- Peina Personification of hunger.
- **Pelias** King of lolcus; killed by Medea to place Jason on the throne.
- **Pentheus** King of Thebes; punished by Dionysus for refusing his religious teachings; killed by women taking part in a Dionysiac festival.
- Periphetes Son of Hephaestus; killed by Theseus.
- **Persephone** Queen of the Underworld; daughter of Demeter and Zeus; abducted by Hades.
- **Perseus** Great Greek hero; son of Zeus and Danae; killed Medusa.
- **Phlegyas** Son of Ares and Chryse; shot and killed by Apollo; condemned to spend eternity in Tartarus.
- **Phobos** Personification of terror; son of Aphrodite and Ares.
- **Phoebe** A Titaness; wife of Coeus; mother of Leto; first goddess of the moon.
- **Phorcys** A sea deity; father of the Sirens; son of Gaia and Pontus.
- **Pierides** The daughters of Pierus, a Macedonian king; challenged the Muses to a contest, lost, and were turned into jackdaws.

Pluto Roman god of hell; counterpart of Hades.

- **Polybotes** A Giant; killed by Poseidon and Heracles during the war with the Olympians.
- **Polydectes** King of Seriphus; loved and persecuted Danae; turned to stone by Perseus.

#### APPENDIX A: CAST OF CHARACTERS

Polyhmnia The Muse of mime and songs.

- **Polyphemus** A man-eating Cyclops; son of Poseidon; blinded by Odysseus.
- Pontus Sea; born to Gaia during creation.
- **Porphyrion** A Giant; one of the leaders of the Giants during the war with the Olympians; killed by Zeus and Heracles.
- **Poseidon** God of the sea; one of the twelve great Olympians; son of Cronus and Rhea.
- Priam King of Troy; father of Paris.
- **Priapus** God of fertility; son of Aphrodite and Dionysus.
- **Procrustes** A murdering innkeeper killed by Theseus.
- **Prometheus** A Titan; the champion of mankind; thought to be the creator of man; stole fire from the heavens to give to man.
- Proserpine Roman counterpart of Persephone.
- **Protesilaus** The first Greek to step ashore in Troy; the first Greek to fall during the Trojan War.
- **Python** A great serpent sent by Hera to persecute Leto; strangled to death by Apollo.
- **Remus** Son of Rhea Silvia and Mars; brother of Romulus; killed during the fight with his brother over Rome.
- Rhadamanthys Son of Zeus and brother of Minos; became a Judge of the Dead.
- Rhea A Titaness; a mother-deity and earth goddess; wife of Cronus; mother of the original Olympians.
- Rhea Silvia Mother of Romulus and Remus by Mars.
- Rhode Daughter of Poseidon and Amphitrite; wife of Helios.
- **Romulus** Son of Rhea Silvia and Mars; brother of Remus; founder of Rome.
- Saturn Roman counterpart of Cronus.

**Satyrs** Nature spirits; the personification of fertility and sexual desire; half man, half goat.

- Sciron A highwayman killed by Theseus.
- Scylla A sea nymph who was transformed into a monster.
- Selene The Moon; sister of Helios and Eos.
- Semele Mortal lover of Zeus; mother of Dionysus by Zeus; was killed when she asked to see Zeus in his true form.
- Servius Tullius Sixth king of Rome.
- **Sextus** Son of Superbus; raped Lucretia and brought about the downfall of the Roman monarchy.
- **Sibyl** An aged prophetess who aided Aeneas in his journey to the Underworld.
- **Silenus** A satyr; tutor and companion of Dionysus; possessed the gift of prophecy.
- **Silvius** Son of Aeneas and Lavinia; first to be born into the Roman race.
- Sinis A highwayman killed by Theseus.
- **Sinon** A Greek soldier during the Trojan War; convinced the Trojans to take in the wooden horse.
- **Sinope** A nymph; pursued by both Zeus and Apollo; tricked the gods into granting her eternal virginity.
- **Sisyphus** Considered the cleverest of mortal men; outwits Death; commits several crimes against the gods; sent to Tartarus.
- **Smyrna** Daughter of the king of Cyprus; fell in love with her father because of Aphrodite and was changed into a myrrh tree to escape his wrath.
- Sol Roman Sun god; counterpart of Apollo.
- **Spermo** Daughter of King Anius; could turn anything into corn with just a touch.
- **Sphinx** Daughter of Typhon and Echidna; monster with the head and breast of a woman, the body of a lion, and the wings of a bird of prey.

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- Steropes One of the three Cyclopes; known as Lightning or the Maker of Lightning.
- Stymphalian Birds Monstrous birds with long legs, steel-tipped feathers, and razor-sharp claws; preyed on men.
- Syrinx A nymph loved by Pan; transformed into a bed of reeds to escape Pan's amorous advances.
- Taygete A daughter of Atlas; mother of Lacedaemon by Zeus.
- Terpsichore The Muse of dance.
- Tethys A Titaness; first goddess of the sea; wife of Oceanus; mother of the Oceanids and all the rivers.
- Teucer A Greek warrior during the Trojan War.
- Thalia The Muse of comedy.
- Thalia A Charite; the personification of blooming or good cheer.
- Thamyris Son of Philammon; the first homosexual.
- Thanatos Death; born to Nyx.
- Thaumas A sea deity; father of the Harpies; son of Gaia and Pontus.
- Theia A Titaness; wife of Hyperion; mother of Helios, Selene, and Eos.
- Themis A Titaness; a mother-deity or earth goddess; wife of lapetus; mother of Prometheus, the Hours, and the Fates.
- Theopane Mother of the ram with the Golden Fleece by Poseidon.
- Theseus The greatest Athenian hero; son of Poseidon and Aethra.
- Thoas A Giant; killed by the Fates and Heracles during the war with the Olympians.
- Thoosa Daughter of Phorcys; lover of Poseidon; mother of the Cyclops Polyphemus.
- Tiresias A mortal who had lived as both a man and a woman; one of the greatest prophets of classical mythology; blinded by Hera for taking the side of Zeus during an argument.

- Titus Tatius King of Sabine; ruled jointly with Romulus.
- **Tityus** A Giant who tried to rape Leto; was killed by Artemis and Apollo.
- Triton Poseidon's herald and son; half man, half fish; a sea deity.
- Tullus Hostilius Third king of Rome.
- **Turnus** King of the Rutulians; battled Aeneas for the hand of Lavinia.
- Tyche Goddess of fortune and the personification of luck.
- Typhon A monster with a hundred serpentine heads, wings, and a body encircled with snakes.
- Ulysses Roman counterpart of Odysseus.
- Urania The Muse of astronomy.
- Uranus Sky; born to Gaia during creation.
- Venus Roman goddess of love; counterpart of Aphrodite.
- Vesta Roman goddess of the hearth; counterpart of Hestia.
- Vestal Virgins The priestesses of the Temple of Vesta.
- Vulcan Roman god of fire; counterpart of Hephaestus.
- Zagreus The first name of the infant Dionysus; a child with a crown of snakes and horns.
- Zephyrus The West wind.
- Zeus Ruler of the heavens, gods, and men; one of the twelve great Olympians; son of Cronus and Rhea.

# APPENDIX B **Resources**

#### **CLASSIC SOURCES**

Aeschylus Oresteia Persians Prometheus Bound Seven Against Thebes Suppliants Apollodorus The Library **Apollonius Rhodis** Argonautica **Euripides** Andromache Hecuba Iphigenia at Aulis **Bacchants** Alcestis Medea Children of Heracles Hippolytus Suppliants Electra Madness of Heracles lon Trojan Women

Iphigenia Among the Taurians Phoenician Women Helen Orestes Herodotus History Hesiod Theogony Works and Days Homer Iliad Odyssey Horace Odes Epodes Livy History of Rome Ovid Metamorphoses Amores Heroides Fasti Tristia Epistulae ex Ponto

Ibis Pausanias Description of Greece Sophocles Oedipus the King **Oedipus at Colonus** Antigone Ajax Trachinian Women **Philoctetes** Electra Statius Thebaid Virgil Aeneid Ecloques Georgics

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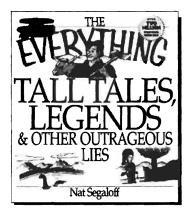
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