

Introduction to Greek Mythology

The origins of Greek Mythology date back to 1200 b.c.e. when the inhabitants of Greece and Asia Minor believed in a group of deities that later came to be known as The Olympians. Myths about these deities formed the foundation of the Greek religion established by the people. The actual myths date back to the classical period of Greece circa 500 b.c.e., but they were not actually recorded in the written form for several hundreds of years later. Some of the oldest myths found were written by three main sources: Homer, Hesiod, and the Homeric Hymns. These documents date back to 800 b.c.e., which means they survived nearly 400 years of changes before they were actually recorded as literature. The myths of course lived in the hearts of the natives of Greece and so it was not seen as important in the past to keep written records while the oral tradition of sharing these myths was so widely used (Origins of Greek).

Greek Mythology is simply a collection of individual stories or myths created to help explain the beliefs and history of the residents during that time. Myths were told to describe the daily life of deities, which often led to greater lessons of moral values and ethics. Of course, to make the stories interesting they contained exciting elements of life such as love affairs, ambitions, schemes, quarrels, and battles. There were also myths told to explain multiple aspects of the culture including origins of humanity and its traditions as well as the natural world and human's interaction with it. One of the most important myths to serve as the foundation of Greek mythology is the story of the Creation of the World (Intro to Mythology).

The story of Creation begins during a time when there was only chaos that ruled the world. Soon out of this void Erebus, the place where death dwells, appeared along with the Night. The world was a cold, dark place, until Love was born and from that came Light and Day and then finally Gaea, the mother earth.

The first offspring to be born was Ether, the heavenly light and the earthly light to Day, whose parents were Erebus and Night. Unfortunately, Night alone produced Doom, Fate, Death, Sleep, Dreams, and Nemesis, which all come out of the darkness. But then Gaea gave birth to Uranus, the sky God, whom she also mated with to produce the three Cyclopes, the three Hecatoncheires, and the twelve Titans.

The Cyclopes were one-eyed monsters with each of the three of them representing lightning, thunder, and the lightning bolt. The Hecatoncheires were gigantic monsters with fifty heads and a hundred arms, which all hated their father Uranus. The Titans were the first rulers of the earth before the Olympians were born.

Uranus was the father and ruler, but he was much hated due to how bad he treated his children as well as his wife. He was so evil that he forced the Hecatoncheires back into Gaea's womb imprisoning them for years upon years simply because he did not like them. In turn, Gaea grew to hate Uranus and plotted against him with her other children. Cronus, the youngest Titan was the only one to stand up to Uranus. One night as Uranus lay with Gaea; Cronus fought and castrated him, throwing his genitals into the ocean. Uranus disappeared and promised revenge, but from his spilt blood created the Giants, the Ash Tree nymphs and the Erinnyes and from the sea where his genitals had been tossed came Aphrodite, goddess of love, desire and beauty.

After the disappearance of Uranus, Cronus came to be ruler and married his sister Rhea, whom has many children. Cronus imprisoned the Cyclopes and Hecatoncheires in Tartarus, but continued to rule over the Titans. However, it had been prophesied by both Gaea and Uranus that he would be overthrown by one of his children so he tried to avoid this at all costs by swallowing each of his children as they were born. Rhea was upset at losing all of her children and so she

decided that she would have the sixth child in solitude and give it to the nymphs and trick Cronus by giving him a stone wrapped in swaddling cloth to pass it off as the baby for him to swallow.

The plan worked and the surviving child was Zeus, who would grow up to defeat Cronus by giving him a potion to make him vomit up the other children. The five children were of course unharmed since they were Gods and they were so thankful to Zeus that they made him their leader. But Cronus and the Titans were not willing to be overpowered by the young Gods and so they appointed Atlas as their leader in battle against Zeus and the other children. Cronus was winning until Zeus went to Tartarus to free the Cyclopes and Hecatoncheires to join him in the battle. The Cyclopes provided Zeus with lightning bolts for weapons and he armed the Hecatonchieres with boulders. With the combination Zeus had established, they were able to defeat the Titans and drive them away from Mount Olympus.

Zeus sent the Titans who had fought him to be exiled to Tartarus, except for Atlas who was given the special punishment of holding the world upon his shoulders. Unfortunately, the battle was not over for Zeus because Gaea produced one last offspring to take revenge for those who were being imprisoned at Tartarus. His name was Typhoeus and he was such a fearsome and evil creature that all of the other Gods except Zeus fled from his presence. In a fierce battle the two faced each other and Zeus was able to defeat it with his lightning bolts. Typhoeus was then buried under Mount Etna in Sicily.

Zeus' rule was later challenged by the Giants who made an outrageous attempt to invade Mount Olympus by piling boulders one on top of the other in an effort to reach the top. Fortunately, the Gods had grown in power and with the help of Hercules, were able to kill the Giants. And from then on Zeus ruled over the Gods of Mount Olympus and they came to be known as the Olympians.
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There were twelve important gods and goddesses to be named the divine family of Olympians. They were: Zeus, Hera, Apollo, Artemis, Ares, Hermes, Aphrodite, Athena, Hephaestus, Poseidon, Dionysus, and Demeter. Among other important gods and goddesses of Greek Mythology are Hercules, Hades, Persephone, Helios, and Eros (The Olympians).

Greek Mythology may have started with the Story of Creation, but it lived on through each one of these deities and their personal struggles and accomplishments in life. Through the lives of these gods and goddesses the residents of Greece established their ethical and moral values. Greek Mythology may be nothing more than a compilation of myths and stories that never really were, but they will always be because they live in the hearts of the culture that founded them (The Olympians).

<http://www.desy.de/gna/interpedia/greek_myth/creation.html> (Nov. 1, 2002).

Xavr. Origins of Greek Mythology. 2002.

<<http://www.messagenet.com/myths/neomyth.html>> (Nov. 4, 2002).

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