

## **THE OLYMPUS AND THE SEA**

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### Introduction

People have always tried to understand why certain things happen. They have wanted to know why the sun rises and sets, and what causes lightning. They also wanted to know how the earth was created and how and where humankind first appeared.

Today, people have scientific answers and theories to explain many of those questions about our world.

But in the early times, people lacked the knowledge to provide scientific answers. They therefore explained natural events in terms of stories about gods, goddesses and heroes.

*For instance, the Greeks invented a very famous story to explain the existence of evil and trouble. They believed that at one time the world evils and troubles were trapped in a box. They escaped when the box was opened by the first woman PANDORA.*

The stories combine realistic accounts of life in ancient Greek and elements of historical events with fairy tales about imaginary lands.

Such stories are known as *myths*, and the study of myths is called *Mythology*. In some parts of the world **myths are still used to explain scientific facts about our world.**

The Greek word to designate the myths, ‘mitos’ is opposed to ‘logos’, in the same fashion as fantasy is opposed to reason. Logos and mitos are the two halves of the language, two equally fundamental halves of the language, as Grimal remarked in his Introduction to the Greek Mythology.

‘Logos’, being reasoning itself, serves to convince; it brings about in the listener the need to utter a judgement. We have to bear in mind that ‘logos’ will only be true if it adequates to Logic, if it conceals any secret artifice (a “sophism”), it will be considered to be false. But myths find their ultimate purpose, and their validation, from within. One may believe in it or may not, for not further reason, as an act of faith, depending on whether one regards it as beautiful or credible, or just for its own desire to believe in it.

The myth thus attracts all the irrational part of human thinking; it is, by its very nature, closely related to Art...” Myths easily integrate into all kind of activities that the Spirit may engage with: Fine Arts, Literature, etc; it is a constant resource for us, and their force is suggested everywhere.

Thanks to the myth, the sacred is no longer a terrible matter; the soul has opened itself to reflection. An infinite number of meditations and inspirations emerge with great strength, concerning issues that are by no means outdated nowadays.

The myth itself is not an independent reality, but rather evolves together with historic and ethnic conditions, and, sometimes, “preserves unforeseeable samples of situations that would have otherwise fallen into oblivion”.

Myths are a very valuable tool for research. Legends, on the other hand, are distorted versions of the history; through them we try to interpret events and situations occurred across different periods of

time, but yet they face considerable problems in terms of coherence, regarding both time and space.

On the other hand, not all myths have the same scope of influence. Some of them are tales concerning the emergence of the world and the birth of the gods. It is believed that, we should reserve the term “myth” for these two matters: “cosmogonic myths” and “theogonic myths”, respectively.

In early times, every society developed its own myths, which played an important part of the society’s religious life. This religious significance has always separated myths from folk tales and legends. The people of a society may tell folk tales and legends for amusement, without believing them. But they usually considered their myths sacred and completely true.

Most myths concerned divinities. These divinities have supernatural powers, powers far greater than any human being has.

Man looked for a god who could dominate those huge forces of nature that he couldn’t dominate and then personified and admired them as gods and goddesses.

But, in spite of their supernatural powers, many gods, goddesses, and heroes of mythology have human characteristics. They have emotions as love and jealousy, they experience birth and death, and it is through these human qualities of the divinities that a society reflects its own ideals.

By studying myths, we can learn how different societies have answered basic questions about the world and the individual place in it. It is a constant blend between the human and the superhuman.

*We study myths to learn how a people developed a particular social system with its many customs and ways of life; we can better understand the feelings and values that bind members of society into one group. We can compare the myths of various cultures to*

*discover how these cultures differ and how they resemble one another. We can also try to understand why people behave as they do.*

*For many years, mythology has provided material for much of the world's great art. Myths and mythological characters have inspired masterpieces of architecture, literature, music, painting, and sculpture.*

## **How myths began**

For at least 2000 years, scholars have speculated about the emergence of myths, and what gave rise to them.

Some believe myths began as historical events that became distorted with the passage of time. Others think myths resulted from an attempt to explain natural events that people could not understand. Other scholars have also developed other theories of how myths began.

None of these theories answer all the questions about myths, but each contributes to an understanding of the subject.

Euhemerus' theory—Greek scholar – late 330's and early 200's B.C. He suggested that all myths were based on historical facts.

Müller's theory - German born British language scholar - late 1800's. He suggested that all gods and mythical heroes were really representations of nature, specially the sun.

Malinowski's theory - Polish born British anthropologist – early 1900's. He emphasized the psychological conditions that lead people to create myths.

Frazer's theory – Scottish anthropologist – late 1800's and early 1900's. He believed that myths began in the great cycle of nature – birth, growth, decay, death and rebirth.

The ritualist theory – closely related to Frazer's theory. The ritualists believed that myths derive from rituals or ceremonies. Today, few mythologists consider this theory.

Jensen's theory – German anthropologist – early and middle 1900's. He was influenced by the ideas of Frazer and the ritualists.

Levi-Strauss's theory – modern French anthropologist – he is the best-known supporter of structuralism. A myth's basic purpose is to resolve an otherwise unresolvable contradiction. (The Oedipus myth)

Some of these theories stress the role of myths in understanding society as a whole. Other theories emphasized the place of mythology in understanding why an individual acts in a certain way.

*Most myths* can be divided into two groups: *creation myths* and *explanatory myths*.

Creation myths try to explain the origin of the world, the earth, the sky, the sun, the moon, the sea, the oceans, the creation of the human beings, and the birth of gods and goddesses. All early societies developed creation myths.

Explanatory myths try to explain natural processes or events.

A great number of myths deal with water, the sea, the ocean, the rivers, spring waters, etc.

Some explanatory myths deal with illness and death.

**We have chosen Greek Mythology, and will focus on the aspects of mythology related to the Sea and Medicine, specially, to Thalassotherapy.**

Let us now present the Greek gods and goddesses that we are going to comment today.

## **Genealogical Tree of Sea Greek Gods**

**(See the joint poster)**

Greeks as many others, looked for a principle to create the essence of life and they believed to find it in love, in EROS.

At the beginning was the night, NIX, and near her, EREBO her brother, the two faces of the darkness of the World. It was the Chaos, the Vacuum. Not an empty vacuum but a Vacuum with eternal force and “matrix” of the world. From Chaos emerged the bright light, ETHER, and the light of the Day, HEMERA.

From Chaos emerged GAEA, the Earth, and gave birth to URANUS, the sky. Likewise, from Chaos emerged Thalassa.

**Thalassa**, the old sea goddess, daughter of Hemera and Ether, personifies the Mediterranean Sea, and had a former worship in Corinto. She linked Ponto.

Nowadays, we have not enough knowledge of her.

**Ponto**, the old sea god, the Wave, was the male personification of the sea. He was son of Gaea and Ether, he married Gaea and born other sea gods, Nereus and Forcis, etc.

**GAEA** married **URANUS** and had many offspring, the **TITANS**, early gigantic gods, the offspring of Heaven and Earth.

The youngest and most important was **CRONUS**, who married **RHEA**, his sister. Cronus deposed Uranus and became the king of the gods.

Rhea born Cronus many children, the Olympic generation of **TITANS**, but he swallowed them as soon as they were born, to prevent one of them from overthrowing him. Rhea was determined to save Zeus, her youngest son. She tricked Cronus into swallowing

a stone wrapped in baby clothes instead. Then she hid Zeus in the island of Crete.

Once Zeus grew up, he tricked his father into vomiting up all the offspring. Zeus then led his brothers and sisters in a war against Cronus and finally overthrew him.

Zeus banished Cronus and the Titans who had supported him to Tartarus, an underground region. The defeat of Cronus established Zeus as the supreme ruler of the universe and thus played an important role in the religion of ancient Greeks.

**RHEA**, daughter of Uranus and Gaea, wife and sister of Cronus, and mother of the Titans: Zeus, Hera, Poseidon, Hades, Hestia and Demeter, the first race of mythological beings.

She was called the “Mother of the Gods” The Titans.

## **ZEUS – The god of the gods**

King of the gods and the supreme ruler of people. He originally was the god of the sky. In time, the Greeks regarded him as the only god who was concerned with the entire universe.

He was son of Cronus and Rhea. He overthrew his father Cronus and ruled from Mount Olympus.

He headed a family of 12 mayor gods and goddesses called the OLIMPIANS. Zeus’s brothers were the gods Hades and Poseidon. Hades ruled the underworld, and **Poseidon controlled the seas.**

The goddesses Demeter, Hera, and Hestia were Zeus’s sisters. Zeus married his sister Hera, who became the queen of both the gods and humans.

Zeus had many love affairs with goddesses and with mortal women too. Zeus and the goddess Mnemosyne were the parents of the Muses, the nine goddesses of the arts and sciences.

Among his many children was Apollo, son of the titanide Leto.

**Apollo married the nymph Coronide, parents of the god of Medicine Asclepius.**

Artists have shown Zeus as a bearded and majestic man. His symbols were the eagle, the oak tree, the royal scepter, and the thunderbolt.

## ZEUS



- The god of the gods
- Son of Cronus and Rhea
- Brother of Poseidon and Hades
- Ruled from Mount Olympus
- Father of Apollo
- Grand-father of Asclepius

## **POSEIDON (one of the Titans)(The Great Sea god)**

He was son of Cronus and Rhea, brother of Zeus, the king of the gods.

**He was the god of the water, specially the god of the sea, but also of the rivers, streams, lakes, springs and fountains. He was also the god of horses, earthquakes and storms at sea.**

Artists portrayed Poseidon as bearded and majestic, with a stern expression. He drove a chariot drawn by horses and carried a trident.

His wife was **Amphitrite, a sea goddess**, and their son was TRITON. Poseidon had many offspring, including Antaeus, a giant; Arlon, a wondrous horse; Polyphemus, a Cyclop (one-eyed giant), and TRITON, a half-man and half-fish creature called merman.

(Poseidon's anger towards the Greek hero Odysseus for blinding Polyphemus is a major theme of the epic poem the Odyssey).

Poseidon's attendants included sea goddesses called Nereids. Medusa, the beautiful and the only mortal from the three Gorgons, daughters of the sea god Phorcys, and Poseidon were the parents of Pegasus, the immortal winged horse.

# POSEIDON



- The god of the water
- Son of Cronus and Rhea
- Brother of Zeus
- His wife was a sea goddess Amphitrite
- His son was Triton

**TRITON lived with his parents, the sea god Poseidon and his wife, Amphitrite, in their golden palace at the bottom of the sea. Triton often blew his couch shell horn to stir up or calm the seas and rivers.**

According to early myths, Triton often befriended passing sailors. He guided the Argonauts, companions of the Greek hero Jason, and gave one of them a clod of earth that later became the island of Thera in the Aegean Sea.

In later myths, Triton appeared as a menacing sea monster.

In some Greek myths, members of a group of minor sea gods who served Poseidon were called Tritons.

# OCEANUS

- Oceanus was a Titan
- Son of Gaea and Uranus
- Husband of Thetis, also a Titan
- Father of Oceanids, Nereids, Naiads and Rivers



## OCEANUS

The god Oceanus was a Titan, one of the family beings born of Uranus (the sky god) and Gaea (the earth goddess) soon after the creation of the world.

Oceanus was the river that was believed to encircle the world.

**Oceanus was the husband of THETIS, who was also a Titan and a goddess of the sea.**

The kindly old Oceanus and Thetis were the parents of Oceanids, 3000 sea nymphs, and of another 3000 stream spirits, the rivers.

## **RIVERS**

Some rivers had special interest, for example PENELO, the god river of Thessalis, and AQUELOO, the god river of Etolia. Aqueloo linked with the muse of tragedy, Melpomene, and they had the mermaids.

## **NYMPHS**



They were lovely maiden of mythology who guarded the different realms of nature.

*OREADS* watched over the hills and mountains

*NEREIDS* were 50 beautiful sea nymphs who watched over the Mediterranean Sea and attended the sea divinities Poseidon and Amphitrite. They were the daughters of the sea goddess DORIS and NEREUS, called the All Man of the Sea (Old Sea god).

One of them, Coronide, married Apollo, son of Zeus, and gave birth to Asclepius, the God of Medicine.

The Nereids lived under the sea and surfaced to dance in the waves. Their leader was Thetis, mother of the hero Achilles.

The *NAIADS* were the nymphs of the rivers, brooks, and streams and they inspired those who drank their waters.

The *OCEANIDS* protected the ocean.

The *DRYADS* and *HAMADRYADS* took care of the trees and forests.

Nymphs were friendly and kind to mortals. Only Oreads and Naiads were immortal.

## **ASCLEPIUS**

He was the god and hero of Medicine. He was son of APOLLO, god of music and poetry and the nymph CORONIDE.

The former worship to the god was settled in Thessalis. The name of asclepiads is given to the associations of people who prescribed natural treatments (diet, plants, sun, clima, water, etc.)

# ASCLEPIUS



- God of Medicine
- Son of Apollo and the nymph Coronide
- Grand son of Zeus
- The name of asclepiads is given to the associations for natural treatment

We have tried to give a retrospective look to the mythology sources and induce to reflection over the great influence of the sea, and gods and goddesses from the sea, not only in early times of Greek Mythology, but nowadays too.

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