

Greek and Roman Mythology

By Jessie M. Tatlock



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Preface

While familiarity with classical mythology is generally recognized as essential to the understanding of literature and art and to the preservation of a great and valuable part of our artistic and spiritual heritage, the method of assuring such a familiarity to the rising generation differs in different schools. In many the stories of the gods and heroes are read in the lower grades from one or another of the children's books based on the myths, and any further knowledge of the subject depends upon the study of Vergil and other Latin or Greek writers and on the use of reference books in connection with reading in English literature. In many schools, however, experience has proved that as even the most elementary knowledge of mythology gained in childhood cannot be presupposed, and as the knowledge gained from the occasional use of reference books is unsubstantial and unsatisfactory, a systematic course in mythology for students of high school age is necessary. It might seem that to such students this subject would be so simple as to present no difficulties, but the fact is that to those who come to its study, as surprisingly many do, with such entire unfamiliarity that the name of Apollo or Venus conveys nothing to them, the mass of new and strange names and the divergence of the conceptions from those to which they are accustomed make the study not a little difficult. After many years' experience with such students the writer has been led to believe that there is need for a text book in a style to appeal to those who have outgrown children's books, but of content so limited and treatment so simple as to make it possible for the average boy or girl to assimilate it in a course of about thirty lessons. To secure brevity and simplicity only the most famous and interesting of the stories have been incorporated in this book; certain others are briefly mentioned in the index. In reading a narrative it is difficult for an inexperienced student to distinguish between the important names and those that merely

form part of the setting of the story. The mention of any names beyond those that should be remembered has therefore been avoided, and the effort has been made by reiteration and cross-reference to impress these names upon the student.

In preparing an elementary book on mythology there are naturally two purposes to be kept in mind: (1) By a sympathetic and accurate treatment to give understanding and appreciation of the character and ideals of the people among whom the mythology developed. Any study that gives this understanding and appreciation of one of the peoples through whom our own spiritual life and civilization has come to be what it is is believed by the writer to be important to an intelligent valuation of our present life and ideals and to a sane building for the future. (2) By placing the familiar stories in their proper relation to enable the student better to understand references in literature and representations in art, ancient and modern. Because of the subjective element in the treatment of mythology in later ages the conceptions have become confused. It is the writer's belief that to avoid confusion and misunderstanding on the student's part the subject should not be treated through the medium of modern writers and artists, whose interpretation of Greek thought and religion has been affected by the thought and religion of their own times, but that by the use of ancient sources, careful study of the people's own understanding of their mythology, direct quotation and free reproduction of the works of Greek and Latin poets, illustrations drawn from Greek sculpture and painting, the effort should be made to leave an honest picture of the mind of the Greeks. Therefore reference has not been made in the text to English poems based upon the myths, but it has been left to the individual teacher carefully to introduce such illustrations and parallels; an appendix suggests a few of the more notable. Another misunderstanding that it is sought to avoid is the popular association of these anthropomorphic conceptions and imaginative tales with the Romans. The writer has wished to make it clear that what is known as classical mythology is a product of Greece, and that in general the Latin writers have merely retold stories that were not original with their people. The Greek names have therefore been employed

primarily, even though they are less familiar than the Latin. It may seem inconsistent that this has been done even when the version of a tale as it appears in the work of some Latin poet, e. g. , Ovid, has been followed, but it is not the nomenclature, which is Latin, but the subject matter and the conception of the tale, which is Greek, that has been followed. Where the story is mainly of Latin development Latin names have been used. Perhaps it may seem that too scant attention has been paid to Roman gods, but when one deals with Roman deities one quickly gets out of the realm of mythology into that of ritual and history, subjects which seem out of place in such a book as this.

In spelling Greek names the most familiar and the simplest English spellings have been used. In most cases $\epsilon\iota$ has been transliterated by English *i*. (Poseidon is a common exception, and *e* takes the place of $\epsilon\iota$ before the terminations *a*, *as*, *us*, as Medea, Augeas.) *K* has been rendered *c*, *a* by α , *os* by Latin *us*. In these inconsistencies the usual and permissible custom is followed. In the index and upon their first mention the accent on names of more than two syllables is indicated, and in an appendix a few simple rules of pronunciation are given.

While in many instances in a foot-note the version of a story followed has been indicated, and in case of direct quotation the reference has been given, in an elementary book such as this the use of many notes has been avoided as undesirable. In many stories one author has not been followed exclusively, but various features have been borrowed from various sources. Those chiefly followed are: Homer, the *Homeric Hymns*, Hesiod, Pindar, Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, Apollodorus, Apollonius Rhodius, Hyginus, Pausanias, Vergil, and Ovid. In quoting from the *Iliad* the translation of Lang, Leaf, and Myers has been used; from the *Odyssey*, that of Butcher and Lang; and from the *Homeric Hymns*, that of Lang. Of modern authorities consulted the most important are: Preller's *Griechische Mythologie* revised by Robert (unfortunately incomplete); Wissowa's *Religion und Kultus der Römer*; separate articles in Roscher's *Lexikon der griechischen und römischen Mythologie*; the *Pauly-Wissowa Real-Encyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft*. Frazer's *Golden Bough*, Jane Harrison's *Prolegomena to the Study of Greek Religion*, Lawson's *Modern Greek Folklore*

and Ancient Greek Religion, Warde Fowler's *Roman Festivals*, and many other books and articles have been helpful and suggestive. The comprehensive works of Collignon, Baumeister, Overbeck, Furtwangler, and others have, of course, been taken as authorities in dealing with representations in art.

J. M. Tatlock.

December, 1916.

Introduction

Myths and Mythology

*P*rimitive people, as they have looked out on the world about them, on the sea and the trees, on the sky and the clouds, and as they have felt the power of natural forces, the heat of the sun, the violence of the wind, have recognized in these things the expression and action of some being more powerful than themselves. Able to understand only those motives and sensations that are like their own, they have conceived these beings more or less after their own nature. The Hebrews, indeed, at an early time recognized one supreme God, who had created and who directed all the world according to his will, but most other early people have seen living, willing beings in the forms and powers of nature, and have worshiped these beings as gods or feared them as devils. Physical events, such as the rising and setting of the sun, or the springing and ripening of the grain, are to them actions of the beings identified with sun or grain. In accounting for these acts, whether regularly recurring, as the rising of the sun, or occasionally disturbing the ordinary course of nature, as earthquakes, eclipses, or violent storms, stories more or less complete grow, are repeated, and believed. These stories told of superhuman beings and believed by a whole people are myths, and all these myths together form a mythology.

The Interest of Greek Mythology

The mythology of any people is interesting because it reflects their individual nature and developing life; that of the Greeks is more interesting to us than any other, first, because it expresses the nature of a people gifted with a peculiarly fine and artistic soul; secondly, because our own thought and art are, in great part, a heritage from the civilization of Greece. Much of this heritage comes to us quite directly

from the Greek writers and artists whose works have been preserved. The dramas of Sophocles and Euripides hold an audience in America as they held those in Athens, because their art is true and great; the noble youth of the Hermes of Praxiteles, or the gallant action of the horsemen in the frieze of the Parthenon satisfy us in the twentieth century as they did the Greeks in the fifth and fourth centuries B. C. But more of this heritage comes down to us through the Romans, whose genius taught them to conquer and govern without destroying, and who learned from the nations that they conquered, Egypt, Asia, and Greece, all that centuries of rich civilization had to give. The civilization of the modern world, America as well as Europe, is rooted deeply in the civilization of Rome, and through Rome in that of Greece. Greek thought and Greek principles run through our law, our government, our standards of taste, our art, and our literature. The very personages of Greek mythology are familiarly known today in the United States, divorced from religious meaning but set up before our eyes as symbols of truths that are in the very nature of things. The winged Mercury (the god of travelers, whose Greek name was Hermes) waves his magic wand above the main entrance to the Grand Central Station in New York; the noble head of Minerva (the Greek Athena, the goddess of wisdom) is set above the doors of our libraries and colleges, and the adventures of Ulysses (or Odysseus) and of many other Greek heroes are painted on the walls of our Congressional Library. Even in our daily language there is still a hint of mythology: our troops still march to martial music, the music of the war-god Mars, and we eat at breakfast cereals, the gift of the corn-goddess Ceres; the Muses of Pieria are not too far away to inspire the music of our western world.

Classical Mythology Is Truly Greek

These beliefs and stories have been handed down through so many ages and modified in so many ways that confusion as to their real origin has naturally arisen. It is Greek, not Roman. The Romans did not develop an original mythology but took over stories from the

Greeks and others and told them of their own gods. It was the Greek Zeus, not the Roman Jupiter, who had so many love adventures; it was the Greek Aphrodite, not the Roman Venus, who received the golden apple from Trojan Paris. Classical mythology is the expression of the nature and thought of the Greeks, not that of the Romans. For the Greeks were by nature artistic; they instinctively expressed their ideals, the truth as they saw it, in poetry, story, and sculpture, and because imagination, insight, and love of beauty were united in them, their stories and their art have an appeal that is universal.

The Development of Greek Mythology

The religion and mythology of the Greeks was not a fixed and unchanging thing; it varied with different localities and changed with changing conditions. For when we speak of Greece we do not speak of a nation in the strict sense—that is, a people under one central government—but of the Greek race: “Wherever the Greeks are, there is Greece.” So the mythological stories grew and changed as they passed from Asia Minor to Greece, or from Greece to the islands of the Aegean Sea, to Italy and Sicily. Moreover, the independence of the individual in the Greek states, where men thought for themselves, and no autocratic government or powerful priesthood exerted undue restraint, fostered variety and permitted artists and poets so to modify tradition as to express something of their individual ideas. This added infinitely to the richness of mythology and art. Local conditions, too, and local pride, in a country broken both geographically and politically into small divisions, added variety to religious customs. In mountain districts the god of the sky and storms was most feared and worshiped, in the fertile plains, the gods of earth and harvest, while on the coast men needed the favor of the gods who were powerful over the sea and protected commerce. Local heroes gathered stories about themselves, and local pride led people to place important events, such as the birth of a god or some important manifestation of his power, in their own localities. Many different places claimed to be the birthplace of Apollo, and the fires of Hephaestus burned within many

a volcano (called after his Latin name, Vulcan). Furthermore, as they came in contact with other peoples and became familiar with their religious stories and ceremonial, they incorporated much that was of foreign origin into their own religion. The stories connected with Dionysus, or Bacchus, and the extravagant rites celebrated in his honor were imported from the East, and the Aphrodite of Asia Minor was far more Asiatic and sensual in character than the Aphrodite of Greece. Finally, since mythology is not based on authority but grows from the soul of the people, it necessarily follows that as Greek life and thought grew and developed, as social conditions changed, as art was perfected and poetry and philosophy grew less simple, the telling of the myths and their interpretation changed and developed. Mythology was a living, growing thing, impossible to seize and fix in a consistent system. It must be regarded as a mass of legend, handed down through the people and poets of generation after generation, continually reflecting the developing life and soul of a great and vital race. When different versions of a story are found, one is not necessarily more authentic than another; in the present book that version is given which has become most famous in art and literature.

The Character of the Greek Religion

Before proceeding to the mythological stories that spring from the Greek religion, it is well to notice some of the more marked characteristics of that religion.

(1) It was polytheistic, it was the worship of many gods. The supremacy of Zeus, "father of gods and king of men," over the other gods did not make the religion a monotheism any more than the hegemony or leadership of one Greek state over others made Greece one united nation.

(2) The religion was, in origin, a worship of the powers of nature. This is natural to primitive men everywhere, because these are the first powers outside of themselves of which men are conscious. The intensity of the Greek sun, the nearness of the sea and its importance in the daily life of the people, the mountain barriers about them, all

tended to emphasize men's dependence upon nature. But as the Greeks developed in intelligence and civilization, as their thoughts and their lives became less simple, and abstract ideas entered into the government of their actions, these nature gods assumed ethical or moral meanings. So the thunder of Zeus, originally his weapon as sky-god, became the symbol of his world power as god of law and order. The clear, illuminating brightness of the sun made of the god of light, Apollo, the all-seeing prophet, who in his worshipers required purity. Athena, who, owing to the story of her birth from her father Zeus's head when Hephaestus had cleft it, is generally supposed to have represented the descent of the storm when the thunderbolt has opened the heavens, almost lost this original meaning, and became the goddess of practical wisdom and of skill in war.

(3) It was an anthropomorphic religion—that is, the gods were conceived in the forms of men, greater and more beautiful and of a finer substance, yet such as men could understand and represent. While a more spiritual conception leads to a loftier ideal, this Greek conception of the gods as of like nature with men exalts and ennobles human life and the human body and offers subjects for poets and sculptors. A purely spiritual god can never be so represented as even in part to satisfy his worshipers, but the noble dignity of Zeus, the king of gods, was so realized by the sculptor Phidias that his great gold and ivory statue quite worthily expressed to the people their ideal. What gulf there was between gods and men was bridged by the existence of heroes or demigods, sons of gods by mortals, and of nature and powers half human, half divine.

(4) To worship and propitiate these gods, in nature so close to men, so easily understood, men needed the help of no powerful priesthood gifted with peculiar sanctity and mysterious knowledge and powers. At the great shrines, it is true, there were priests and priestesses devoted to the gods' service, and there were men and women peculiarly inspired by the god to interpret his will and give warning and promise for the future; but these prophets only occasionally or indirectly controlled people's actions and had little authority in determining

religious belief and practice. Each father was his family's priest; each man could offer his own prayers and his own sacrifice and be understood and accepted by the god he addressed. When the family ate and drank, part of the meat and drink was offered to the gods. When they danced and sang, the gods, called on to be present, enjoyed a pleasure like their own. Even games and athletics were shared by the gods. Apollo threw the discus with his friends, and Hermes was famous for his swiftness of foot. So athletic contests became a form of worship. Business as well as pleasure was a repetition of divine actions and therefore joined with religion. Hermes was a shepherd and understood the needs of other shepherds; Hephaestus was a smith, and no human smith needed an interpreter to call upon him for aid in his craft. The gods experienced and understood, too, the different relations of life. The maiden Artemis readily lent an ear to girls who were in trouble, and the offering of their childish playthings was acceptable to her. Hera, as wife and mother, was always ready to champion mortals in those relations, while the rights of kings were very dear to Zeus, the king of gods. So all the acts of daily life, all the simple things that men used, finding their counterpart among the Olympians were ennobled and filled with religious meaning.

The Character of the Roman Religion

The gods of the Romans were just as closely connected with daily life as were those of the Greeks, but the number of deities to be recognized was vastly multiplied, and they did not appear to their worshipers as distinct personalities. No act of life, from the cooking of the family meal to the declaration of war, but was under the special care of some divinity. No material thing, from the oven in which the bread was baked to the city of Rome, but had its own indwelling deity. Even to know the names of all these innumerable divinities, much more to give them all distinct characters and to determine the best way to approach each one, was quite impossible for the busy practical citizen. Hence, a purely conventional system of religious ceremonial and invocation ran through Roman life, just as

unquestioningly observed as the other conventions and regulations to which the citizens were subject. Each family under its father as head worshiped its own gods of the home and family about its own hearth, and no one could hold his place in the family without performing his duty to the family gods. So the state, as the greater family, had its own deities, its own hearth in the shrine of Vesta in the Forum, its own religious head, first the king, later under the Republic the Pontifex Maximus. State and religion were one and indivisible; failure in religious duty was failure in national duty, and a wrong committed against the civil law was a sin against the gods. This was a strong civilizing side of religion that made for good morals and good citizenship, but it lacked the inspiration of a more personal faith. Nor had the Roman gods sufficient individuality to bring into existence any body of mythology, such as that of the Greeks. The stories we are accustomed to associate with the Roman gods are either borrowed from the Greeks or were late creations of imagination inspired by and modeled on the traditions of Greek mythology.

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PART I
THE GODS