



*MYTHS AND LEGENDS  
OF ANCIENT GREECE  
AND ROME*

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# MYTHS. INTRODUCTION

Before entering upon the many strange beliefs of the ancient Greeks, and the extraordinary number of gods they worshipped, we must first consider what kind of beings these divinities were.

In appearance, the gods were supposed to resemble mortals, whom, however, they far surpassed in beauty, grandeur, and strength; they were also more commanding in stature, height being considered by the Greeks an attribute of beauty in man or woman.

They resembled human beings in their feelings and habits, intermarrying and having children, and requiring daily diet to recruit their strength, and refreshing sleep to restore their energies.

Their blood, a bright ethereal fluid called Ichor, never induced disease, and, when poured, had the power of producing new life.



## MYTHS. INTRODUCTION

The Greeks believed that the mental qualifications of their gods were of a much higher order than those of men, but nevertheless, as we shall see, they were not considered to be exempt from human passions, and we frequently behold them actuated by revenge, fraud, and jealousy. They, however, always punish the evil-doer, and visit with terrible disasters any unholy mortal who dares to neglect their worship or despise their rites.

We often hear of them visiting mankind and sharing of their hospitality, and not unfrequently both gods and goddesses become attached to mortals, with whom they unite themselves, the children of these unions being called heroes or demi-gods, who were usually famous for their great strength and courage.

But although there were so many points of resemblance between gods and men, there remained the one great characteristic distinction, i.e., that the gods enjoyed immortality. Still, they were not invulnerable, and we often hear of them being wounded, and suffering in consequence such exquisite torture that they have earnestly prayed to be deprived of their privilege of immortality.

The gods knew no limitation of time or space, being able to transport themselves to incredible distances with the speed of thought. They possessed the power of rendering themselves invisible at will and could assume the forms of men or animals as it suited their convenience. They could also transform human beings into trees, stones, animals, &c., either as a punishment for their misdeeds, or as a means of protecting the individual, thus transformed, from impending danger. Their robes were like those worn by mortals but were perfect in form and much finer in texture. Their weapons also resembled those used by mankind; we hear of spears, shields, helmets, bows and arrows, &c., being employed by the gods.

Each deity possessed a beautiful chariot, which, drawn by horses or other animals of celestial breed, conveyed them rapidly over land and sea according to their pleasure. Most of these divinities lived on the top of Mount Olympus, each possessing his or her individual habitation, and all meeting together on festive occasions in the council-chamber of the gods, where their banquets were enlivened by the sweet strains of Apollo's lyre, whilst the beautiful voices of the Muses poured forth their rich melodies to his harmonious accompaniment. Magnificent temples were erected to their honor, where they were worshipped with the greatest solemnity; rich gifts were presented to them, and animals, and indeed sometimes human beings, were sacrificed on their altars.

In the study of Greek mythology, we meet with some curious, and what may at first sight appear unaccountable notions. Thus, we hear of terrible giants throwing rocks, lifting mountains, and raising earthquakes which crush whole armies; these ideas, however, may be accounted for by the awful convulsions of nature, which were in operation in pre-historic times.

Again, the daily recurring phenomena, which to us, who know them to be the result of certain well-established laws of nature, are so familiar as to excite no remark, were, to the early Greeks, matter of grave speculation, and not unfrequently of alarm. For instance, when they heard the awful roar of thunder, and saw vivid flashes of lightning, accompanied by black clouds and torrents of rain, they believed that the great god of heaven was angry, and they trembled with his anger.

# MYTHS. INTRODUCTION



Mount Olympus

## MYTHS. INTRODUCTION

If the calm and tranquil sea became suddenly alarmed, and the crested shafts rose mountains high, dashing furiously against the rocks, and threatening destruction to all within their reach, the sea-god was supposed to be in a furious anger. When they beheld the sky glowing with the hues of coming day, they thought that the goddess of the dawn, with rosy fingers, was drawing aside the dark veil of night, to allow her brother, the sun-god, to enter upon his brilliant career. Thus, personifying all the powers of nature, this very imaginative and highly poetical nation beheld a divinity in every tree that grew, in every stream that flowed, in the bright beams of the glorious sun, and the clear, cold rays of the silvery moon; for them the whole universe lived and breathed, peopled by a thousand forms of grace and beauty.

The most important of these divinities may have been something more than the mere creations of an active and poetical imagination. They were possibly human beings who had so distinguished themselves in life by their supremacy over their fellow-mortals that after death they were deified by the people among whom they lived, and the poets touched with their magic wand the details of lives, which, in more prosaic times, would simply have been recorded as illustrious.

It is highly probable that the reputed actions of these deified beings were commemorated by bards, who, travelling from one state to another, celebrated their praise in song; it therefore becomes exceedingly difficult, nay almost impossible, to separate bare facts from the hyperboles which never fail to accompany oral traditions.

To exemplify this, let us suppose that Orpheus, the son of Apollo, so famous for his extraordinary musical powers, had existed at the present day. We should no doubt have ranked him among the greatest of our musicians, and honored him as such; but the Greeks, with their vivid imagination and poetic license, enlarged his remarkable gifts, and attributed to his music supernatural influence over animate and inanimate nature. Thus, we hear of wild beasts domesticated, of mighty rivers arrested in their course, and of mountains being moved by the sweet tones of his voice.

The theory here advanced may possibly prove useful in the future, in suggesting to the reader the probable basis of many of the extraordinary accounts we meet with in the study of classical mythology.

And now a few words will be necessary concerning the religious beliefs of the Romans. When the Greeks first settled in Italy, they found in the country they colonized a mythology belonging to the Celtic inhabitants, which, according to the Greek custom of paying respect to all gods, known or unknown, they readily adopted, selecting and appropriating those divinities which had the greatest resemblance to their own, and thus they formed a religious belief which naturally bore the impress of its ancient Greek source.

As the primitive Celts, however, were a less civilized people than the Greeks, their mythology was of a more barbarous character, and this circumstance, combined with the fact that the Romans were not gifted with the vivid imagination of their Greek neighbors, leaves its mark on the Roman mythology, which is far less fertile in fanciful conceits, and deficient in all those fairy-like stories and wonderfully poetic ideas which so strongly characterize that of the Greeks.

## MYTHS. INTRODUCTION



**Epona, The Celtic Goddess of Horses Who Conquered Rome**

**ORIGIN OF THE  
WORLD. FIRST  
DYNASTY.  
URANUS AND GAIA  
(Caelus and Terra)**



The ancient Greeks had several different theories about the origin of the world, but the generally accepted notion was that before this world came into existence, there was in its place a confused mass of shapeless elements called Chaos.

These elements becoming at length consolidated (by what means does not appear), resolved themselves into two widely different substances, the lighter portion of which, soaring on high, formed the sky, and constituted itself into a huge, overarching vault, which protected the firm and solid mass beneath.

Thus, came into being the two first great primeval deities of the Greeks, Uranus and Ge or Gaia.

# ORIGIN OF THE WORLD. FIRST DYNASTY. URANUS AND GAIA

Uranus, the more refined deity, represented the light and air of heaven, possessing the distinguishing qualities of light, heat, purity, and omnipresence, whilst Gaia, the firm, flat, life-sustaining earth, was worshipped as the great all-nourishing mother. Her many titles refer to her more or less in this character, and she appears to have been universally revered among the Greeks, there being hardly a city in Greece which did not contain a temple erected in her honor; indeed, Gaia was held in such veneration that her name was always invoked whenever the gods took a solemn oath, made an emphatic declaration, or implored assistance.

Uranus, the heaven, was believed to have united himself in marriage with Gaia, the earth; and a moment's reflection will show what a truly poetical, and what a logical idea this was; for, taken in a figurative sense, this union actually does exist. The smiles of heaven produce the flowers of earth, whereas his long-continued frowns exercise so depressing an influence upon his loving partner, that she no longer dresses up in bright and festive robes but responds with ready sympathy to his melancholy mood.

The first-born child of Uranus and Gaia was Oceanus, the ocean stream, that vast expanse of ever-flowing water which encircled the earth. Here we meet with another logical though fanciful conclusion, which a very slight knowledge of the workings of nature proves to have been just and true. The ocean is formed from the rains which descend from heaven and the streams which flow from earth.

By making Oceanus therefore the child of Uranus and Gaia, the ancients, if we take this notion in its literal sense, merely assert that the ocean is produced by the combined influence of heaven and earth, whilst at the same time their vivid and poetical imagination led them to see in this, as in all manifestations of the powers of nature, an actual, perceptible divinity.

But Uranus, the heaven, the embodiment of light, heat, and the breath of life, produced offspring who were of a much less material nature than his son Oceanus. These other children of his were supposed to occupy the intermediate space which divided him from Gaia.

Nearest to Uranus, and just beneath him, came Aether (Ether), a bright creation representing that highly rarified atmosphere which immortals alone could breathe. Then followed Aër (Air), which was near Gaia, and represented, as its name implies, the grosser atmosphere surrounding the earth which mortals could freely breathe, and without which they would die out.

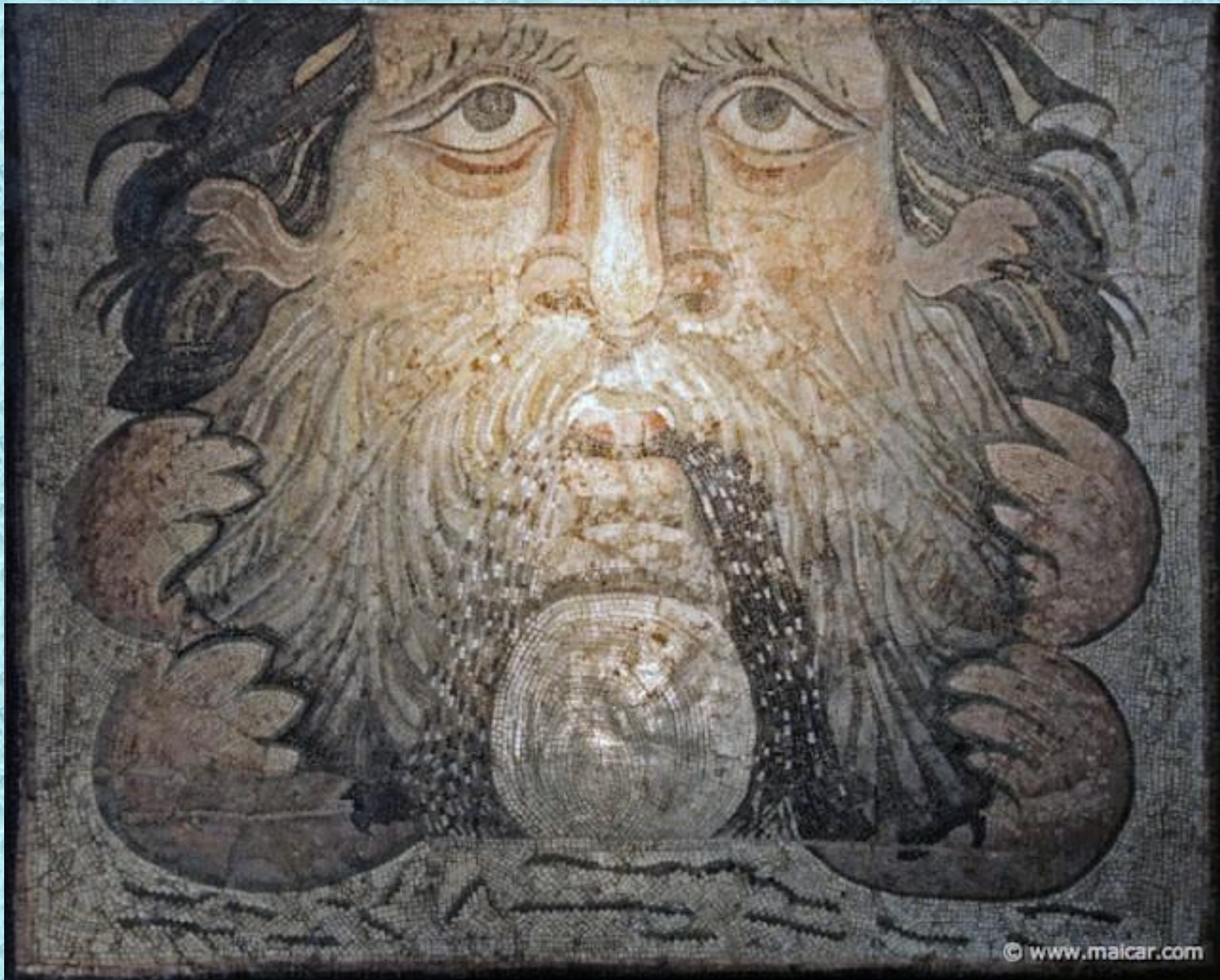
Aether and Aër were separated from each other by divinities called Nephelae. These were their restless and wandering sisters, who existed in the form of clouds, ever floating between Aether and Aër. Gaia also produced the mountains, and Pontus (the sea). She united herself with the latter, and their children were the sea-deities Nereus, Thaumas, Phorcys, Ceto, and Eurybia.

Co-existent with Uranus and Gaia were two mighty powers who were also the offspring of Chaos. These were Erebus (Darkness) and Nyx (Night), who formed a striking contrast to the cheerful light of heaven and the bright smiles of earth. Erebus reigned in that mysterious world below where no ray of sunshine, no gleam of daylight, nor vestige of health-giving terrestrial life ever appeared. Nyx, the sister of Erebus, represented Night, and was worshipped by the ancients with the greatest solemnity.

Uranus was also supposed to have been united to Nyx, but only in his capacity as god of light, he being considered the source and fountain of all light, and their children were Eos (Aurora), the Dawn, and Hemera, the Daylight. Nyx again, on her side was also doubly united, having been married at some indefinite period to Erebus.



## ORIGIN OF THE WORLD. FIRST DYNASTY. URANUS AND GAIA



**Oceanus, first-born child of Uranus and Gaia**



In addition to those children of heaven and earth already enumerated, Uranus and Gaia produced two distinctly different races of beings called Giants and Titans. The Giants personified brute strength alone, but the Titans united to their great physical power intellectual qualifications variously developed. There were three Giants, Briareus, Cottus, and Gyges, who each possessed a hundred hands and fifty heads, and were known collectively by the name of the Hecatoncheires, which signified hundred-handed. These mighty Giants could shake the universe and produce earthquakes; it is therefore evident that they represented those active subterranean forces to which allusion has been made in the opening chapter. The Titans were twelve in number; their names were: Oceanus, Ceos, Crios, Hyperion, Iapetus, Cronus, Theia, Rhea, Themis, Mnemosyne, Phœbe, and Tethys.

Now Uranus, the chaste light of heaven, the essence of all that is bright and pleasing, hated his crude, rough, and turbulent descendants, the Giants, and moreover feared that their great power might eventually prove hurtful to himself. He therefore threw them into Tartarus, that portion of the lower world which served as the subterranean dungeon of the gods. To avenge the oppression of her children, the Giants, Gaia instigated a conspiracy on the part of the Titans against Uranus, which was carried to a successful issue by her son Cronus. He wounded his father, and from the blood of the wound which fell upon the earth sprang a race of monstrous beings also called Giants. Assisted by his brother-Titans, Cronus succeeded in dethroning his father, who, enraged at his defeat, cursed his rebellious son, and foretold to him a similar fate. Cronus now became invested with supreme power, and assigned to his brother's offices of distinction, subordinate only to himself. Subsequently, however, when, secure of his position, he no longer needed their assistance, he basely repaid their former services with treachery, made war upon his brothers and faithful allies, and, assisted by the Giants, completely defeated them, sending such as resisted his all-conquering arm down into the lowest depths of Tartarus.

## ORIGIN OF THE WORLD. FIRST DYNASTY. URANUS AND GAIA



## DIVISION OF THE WORLD

We will now return to Zeus and his brothers, who, having gained a complete victory over their enemies, began to consider how the world, which they had conquered, should be divided between them.

At last, it was settled by lot that Zeus should reign supreme in Heaven, whilst Aïdes governed the Lower World, and Poseidon had full command over the Sea, but the supremacy of Zeus was recognized in all three kingdoms, in heaven, on earth (in which of course the sea was included), and under the earth.

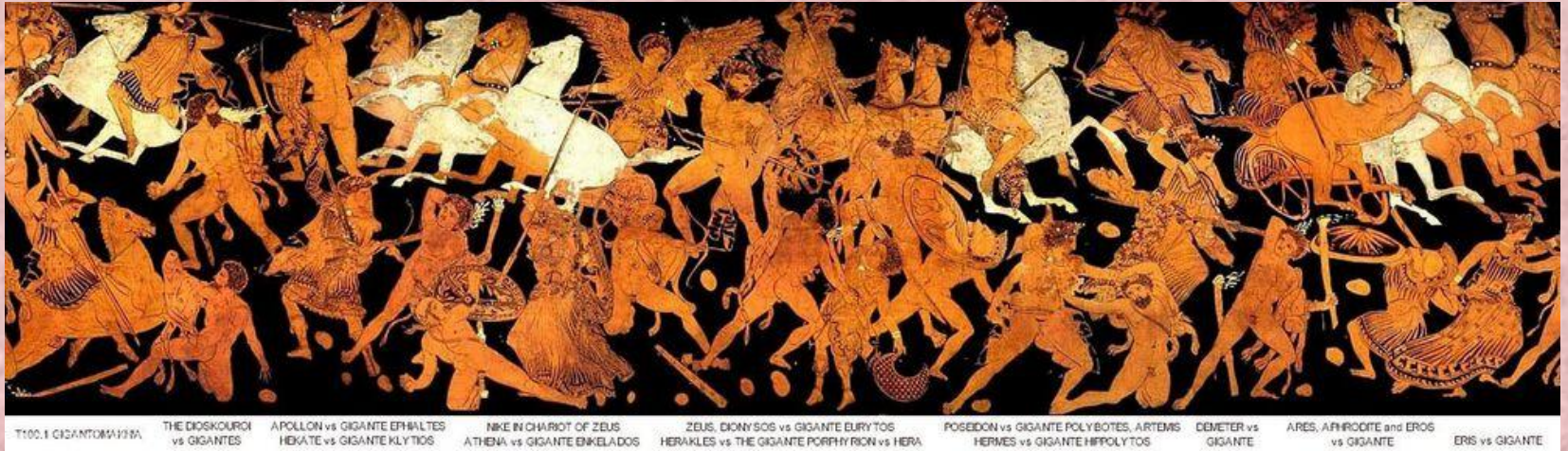
Zeus held his court on the top of Mount Olympus, whose peak was beyond the clouds; the dominions of Aïdes were the gloomy unknown regions below the earth; and Poseidon reigned over the sea.

It will be seen that the realm of each of these gods was enveloped in mystery. Olympus was shrouded in fog, Hades was wrapped in gloomy darkness, and the sea was, and indeed still is, a source of wonder and deep interest.

Hence, we see that what to other nations were merely strange phenomena, served this poetical and imaginative people as a foundation upon which to build the wonderful stories of their mythology.

## DIVISION OF THE WORLD

The division of the world being now satisfactorily arranged, all things should have gone on smoothly, but such was not the case. Trouble arose in an unlooked-for quarter. The Giants, those hideous monsters (some with legs formed of serpents) who had sprung from the earth and the blood of Uranus, declared war against the triumphant deities of Olympus, and a struggle began, which, in consequence of Gaia having made these children of hers invincible as long as they kept their feet on the ground, was tiring and sustained. Their mother's precaution, however, was proved useless by pieces of rock being hurled upon them, which threw them down, and their feet being no longer placed firmly on their mother-earth, they were overcome, and this exhausting war (which was called the Gigantomachia) at last came to an end.



Among the most daring of these earth-born giants were Enceladus, Rhœtus, and the brave Mimas, who, with youthful fire and energy, hurled against heaven great masses of rock and burning oak-trees, and defied the lightnings of Zeus. One of the most powerful monsters who opposed Zeus in this war was called Typhon or Typhœus. He was the youngest son of Tartarus and Gaia, and had a hundred heads, with eyes which struck terror to the beholders, and awe-inspiring voices terrifying to hear. This terrible monster resolved to conquer both gods and men, but his plans were at length defeated by Zeus, who, after a violent battle, succeeded in destroying him with a thunderbolt, but not before he had so terrified the gods that they had fled for refuge to Egypt, where they metamorphosed themselves into different animals and thus escaped.

# THEORIES AS TO THE ORIGIN OF MAN

Just as there were several theories concerning the origin of the world, so there were various accounts of the creation of man.

The first natural belief of the Greek people was that man had originated from the earth. They saw the tender plants and flowers force their way through the ground in the early spring of the year after the frost of winter had disappeared, and so they naturally concluded that man must also have issued from the earth in a similar manner. Like the wild plants and flowers, he was supposed to have had no cultivation, and resembled in his habits the untamed beasts of the field, having no habitation except that which nature had provided in the holes of the rocks, and in the dense forests whose main branches protected him from the bad weather.



## DEUCALION AND PYRRHA

In the course of time these primitive human beings became tamed and civilized by the gods and heroes, who taught them to work in metals, to build houses, and other useful arts of civilization. But humans became in the course of time so degenerate that the gods resolved to destroy all mankind by means of a flood; Deucalion (son of Prometheus) and his wife Pyrrha, being, on account of their piety, the only mortals saved.

By the command of his father, Deucalion built a ship, in which he and his wife took refuge during the deluge, which lasted for nine days.



## PALLAS-ATHE NE (Minerva)

Pallas-Athene, goddess of Wisdom and Armed Resistance, was a purely Greek divinity; that is to say, no other nation possessed a corresponding conception. She was supposed, as already related, to have issued from the head of Zeus himself, dressed in armor from head to foot. The miraculous appearance of this maiden goddess is beautifully described by Homer in one of his hymns: snow-capped Olympus shook to its foundation; the glad earth re-echoed her battle cry; the wavy sea became agitated; and Helios, the sun-god, stopped his fiery horses in their headlong course to welcome this wonderful emanation from the godhead. Athene was at once admitted into the assembly of the gods, and henceforth took her place as the most faithful and insightful of all her father's counsellors. This brave, fearless maiden, so exactly the essence of all that is noble in the character of "the father of gods and men," remained throughout chaste in word and deed, and kind at heart, without exhibiting any of those failings which somewhat mar the nobler features in the character of Zeus. This direct emanation from his own self, justly his favorite child, his better and purer counterpart, received from him several important prerogatives.

## PALLAS-ATHENE (Minerva)

She was permitted to throw the thunderbolts, to prolong the life of man, and to grant the gift of prophecy; in fact, Athene was the only divinity whose authority was equal to that of Zeus himself, and when he had ceased to visit the earth in person, she was empowered by him to act as his deputy. It was her especial duty to protect the state and all peaceful associations of mankind, which she possessed the power of defending when occasion required.

She encouraged the maintenance of law and order, and defended the right on all occasions, for which reason, in the Trojan war she supports the cause of the Greeks and exerts all her influence on their behalf. The Areopagus, a court of justice where religious causes and murders were tried, was believed to have been instituted by her, and when both sides happened to have an equal number of votes she gave the casting-vote in favor of the accused.

She was the patroness of learning, science, and art, more particularly where these contributed directly towards the welfare of nations. She presided over all inventions connected with agriculture, invented the plough, and taught mankind how to use oxen for farming purposes. She also instructed mankind in the use of numbers, trumpets, chariots, &c., and presided over the building of the Argo, thereby encouraging the useful art of navigation. She also taught the Greeks how to build the wooden horse by means of which the destruction of Troy was affected.

The safety of cities depended on her care, for which reason her temples were generally built on the citadels, and she was supposed to watch over the defense of the walls, fortifications, harbors, &c. A divinity who so faithfully guarded the best interests of the state, by not only protecting it from the attacks of enemies, but also by developing its chief resources of wealth and prosperity, was worthily chosen as the presiding deity of the state, and in this character as an essentially political goddess she was called Athene-Polias.

The fact of Athene having been born dressed in armor, which merely signified that her virtue and purity were immutable, has given rise to the erroneous supposition that she was the presiding goddess of war; but a deeper study of her character in all its aspects proves that, in contradistinction to her brother Ares, the god of war, who loved war for its own sake, she only takes up arms to protect the innocent and deserving against tyrannical oppression.

It is true that in the Iliad we frequently see her on the battlefield fighting valiantly and protecting her favorite heroes; but this is always at the command of Zeus, who even supplies her with arms for the purpose, as it is supposed that she possessed none of her own.

A marked feature in the representations of this deity is the aegis, that wonderful shield given to her by her father as a further means of defense, which, when in danger, she swung so swiftly round and round that it kept at a distance all antagonistic influences; hence her name Pallas, from pallo, I swing. In the center of this shield, which was covered with dragon's scales, bordered with serpents, and which she sometimes wore as a breastplate, was the awe-inspiring head of the Medusa, which had the effect of turning to stone all beholders.

**PALLAS-ATHENE (Minerva)**



**Brother Ares, the  
god of war**



**Trojan Horse**



## PALLAS-ATHENE (Minerva)

In addition to the many functions which she exercised in connection with the state, Athene presided over the two chief departments of feminine industry, spinning and weaving. In the latter art she herself displayed unmatched ability and exquisite taste. She wove her own robe and that of Hera, which last, she is said to have embroidered very richly; she also gave Jason a cloak made by herself when he set forth in quest of the Golden Fleece.

Being on one occasion challenged to a contest in this accomplishment by a mortal maiden named Arachne, whom she had instructed in the art of weaving, she accepted the challenge and was completely beaten by her pupil. Angry at her defeat, she struck the unfortunate maiden on the forehead with the shuttle which she held in her hand; and Arachne, being of a sensitive nature, was so hurt by this offence that she hung herself in despair and was changed by Athene into a spider.

This goddess is said to have invented the flute, upon which she played with considerable talent, until one day, being laughed at by the assembled gods and goddesses for the contortions which her face assumed during these musical efforts, she hastily ran to a fountain to convince herself whether she deserved their ridicule.

Finding to her intense disgust that such was indeed the fact, she threw the flute away, and never raised it to her lips again.

Athene is usually represented fully draped; she has a serious and thoughtful aspect, as though full of earnestness and wisdom; the beautiful oval contour of her countenance is adorned by the luxuriance of her wealth of hair, which is drawn back from the temples and hangs down in careless grace; she looks the embodiment of strength, grandeur, and majesty; whilst her broad shoulders and small hips give her a slightly masculine appearance.

When represented as the war-goddess she appears clad in armor, with a helmet on her head, from which waves a large plume; she carries the aegis on her arm, and in her hand a golden staff, which possessed the property of endowing her chosen favorites with youth and dignity.



Orpheus als Argonaut. Liebig 1927. Photo ©Maicar Fördsz-GML



# PALLAS-ATHENE (Minerva)

Athene was universally worshipped throughout Greece, but was regarded with special veneration by the Athenians, she was being the guardian deity of Athens. Her most celebrated temple was the Parthenon, which stood on the Acropolis at Athens, and contained her world-famous statue by Phidias, which ranks second only to that of Zeus by the same great artist.

This colossal statue was 39 feet high and was composed of ivory and gold; its majestic beauty formed the chief attraction of the temple. It represented her standing erect, bearing her spear and shield; in her hand she held an image of Nike, and at her feet there lay a serpent.

The tree sacred to her was the olive, which she herself produced in a contest with Poseidon. The olive-tree thus called into existence was preserved in the temple of Erectheus, on the Acropolis, and is said to have possessed such marvelous vitality, that when the Persians burned it after sacking the town it immediately burst forth into new shoots.

The principal festival held in honor of this divinity was the Panathenæa.

The owl, cock, and serpent were the animals sacred to her, and her sacrifices were rams, bulls, and cows. The Minerva of the Romans was identified with the Pallas-Athene of the Greeks. Like her she presides over learning and all useful arts, and is the patroness of the feminine accomplishments of sewing, spinning, weaving, &c.

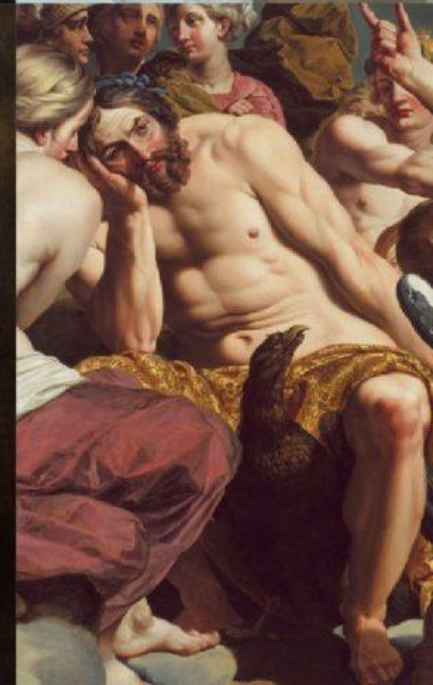
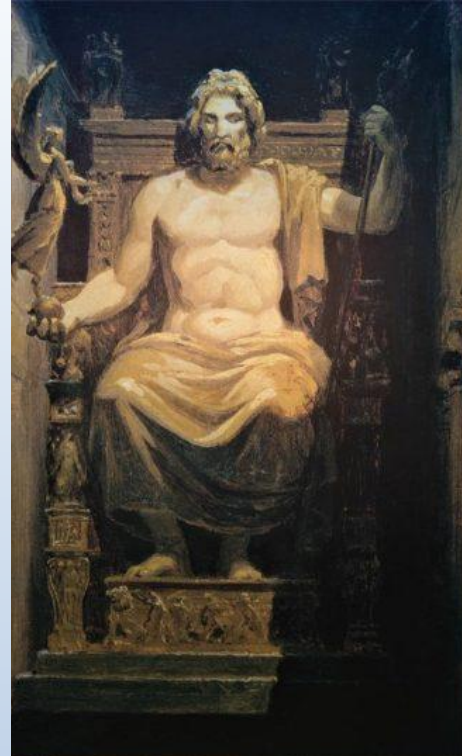
# ZEUS (Jupiter)

Zeus, the great presiding deity of the universe, the ruler of heaven and earth, was regarded by the Greeks, first, as the god of all aerial phenomena; secondly, as the personification of the laws of nature; thirdly, as lord of state-life; and fourthly, as the father of gods and men.

As the god of aerial phenomena, he could, by shaking his aegis, produce storms, tempests, and intense darkness. At his command the mighty thunder rolls, the lightning flashes, and the clouds open and pour forth their refreshing streams to fructify the earth.

As the personification of the operations of nature, he represents those grand laws of unchanging and harmonious order, by which not only the physical but also the moral world is governed.

Hence, he is the god of regulated time as marked by the changing seasons, and by the regular succession of day and night, in contradistinction to his father Cronus, who represents time absolutely,



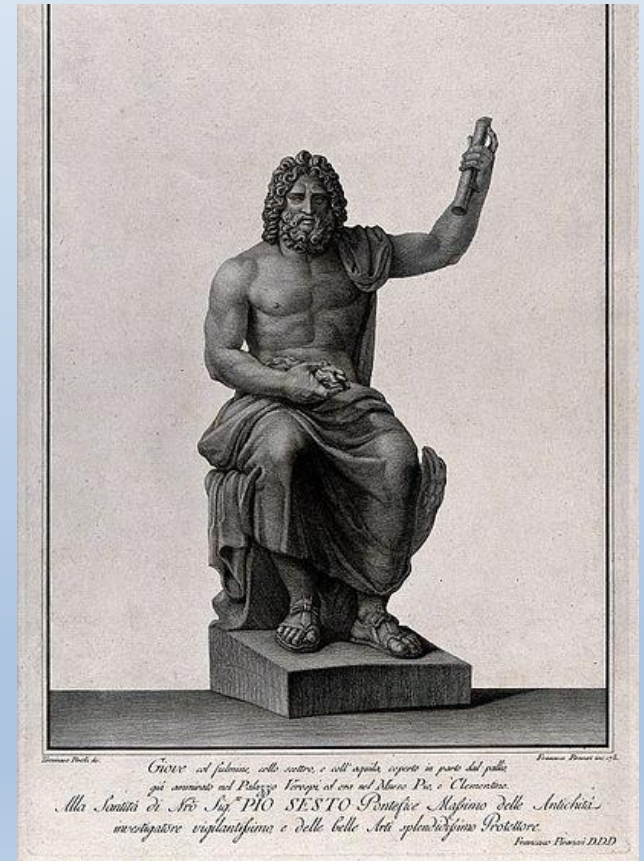
# ZEUS (Jupiter)

As the lord of state-life, he is the founder of kingly power, the upholder of all institutions connected with the state, and the special friend and patron of princes, whom he guards and assists with his advice and counsel. He protects the assembly of the people, and, in fact, watches over the welfare of the whole community.

As the father of the gods, Zeus sees that each deity performs his or her individual duty, punishes their misdeeds, settles their disputes, and acts towards them on all occasions as their all-knowing counsellor and mighty friend.

As the father of men, he takes a paternal interest in the actions and well-being of mortals. He watches over them with tender solicitude, rewarding truth, charity, and uprightness, but severely punishing perjury, cruelty, and want of hospitality. Even the poorest and most loneliest wanderer finds in him a powerful advocate, for he, by a wise and merciful dispensation, ordains that the mighty ones of the earth should help their distressed and needy brothers.

The Greeks believed that the home of this their mighty and all-powerful deity was on the top of Mount Olympus, that high and lofty mountain between Thessaly and Macedon, whose summit, wrapped in clouds and mist, was hidden from mortal view.



# APHRODITE (Venus)

Aphrodite (from aphros, sea-foam, and dite, issued), the daughter of Zeus and a sea-nymph called Dione, was the goddess of Love and Beauty.



## APHRODITE (Venus)

Dione, being a sea-nymph, gave birth to her daughter beneath the waves; but the child of the heaven-inhabiting Zeus was forced to ascend from the ocean-depths and mount to the snow-capped peaks of Olympus, to breathe that ethereal and most refined atmosphere which pertains to the celestial gods.

Aphrodite was the mother of Eros (Cupid), the god of Love, also of Æneas, the great Trojan hero and the head of that Greek colony which settled in Italy, and from which arose the city of Rome. As a mother Aphrodite claims our sympathy for the tenderness she exhibits towards her children. Homer tells us in his Iliad, how, when Æneas was wounded in battle, she came to his assistance, regardless of personal danger, and was herself severely wounded in attempting to save his life.

Aphrodite was tenderly attached to a lovely youth, called Adonis, whose exquisite beauty has become proverbial. He was a motherless babe, and Aphrodite, taking pity on him, placed him in a chest and intrusted him to the care of Persephone, who became so fond of the beautiful youth that she refused to part with him.

Zeus, being appealed to by the rival adoptive mothers, decided that Adonis should spend four months of every year with Persephone, four with Aphrodite, whilst during the remaining four months he should be left to his own devices.

He became, however, so attached to Aphrodite that he voluntarily devoted to her the time at his own disposal. Adonis was killed, during the chase, by a wild boar, to the great grief of Aphrodite, who wailed his loss so persistently that Aïdes, moved with pity, permitted him to pass six months of every year with her, whilst the remaining half of the year was spent by him in the lower world.

Aphrodite possessed a magic girdle (the famous cestus) which she frequently lent to unhappy maidens suffering from the pangs of unrequited love, as it was endowed with the power of inspiring affection for the wearer, whom it invested with every attribute of grace, beauty, and fascination.

Her usual attendants are the Charites or Graces (Euphrosyne, Aglaia, and Thalia), who are represented undraped and intertwined in a loving embrace.

# HELIOS (Sol)

The worship of Helios was introduced into Greece from Asia. According to the earliest conceptions of the Greeks he was not only the sun-god, but also the personification of life and all life-giving power, for light is well known to be a precondition of all healthy terrestrial life. The worship of the sun was originally very widely spread, not only among the early Greeks themselves, but also among other primitive nations. To us the sun is simply the orb of light, which, high above our heads, performs each day the functions assigned to it by a mighty and invisible Power; we can, therefore, form but a faint idea of the impression which it produced upon the spirit of a people whose intellect was still in its infancy, and who believed, with child-like simplicity, that every power of nature was a divinity, which, according as its character was malicious or beneficent, worked for the destruction or benefit of the human race.

Helios, who was the son of the Titans Hyperion and Theia, is described as rising every morning in the east, preceded by his sister Eos (the Dawn), who, with her rosy fingers, paints the tips of the mountains, and draws aside that misty veil through which her brother is about to appear. When he has burst forth in all the glorious light of day, Eos disappears, and Helios now drives his flame-darting chariot along the accustomed track. This chariot, which is of burnished gold, is drawn by four fire-breathing horses, behind which the young god stands erect with flashing eyes, his head surrounded with rays, holding in one hand the reins of those fiery coursers which in all hands save his are unmanageable. When towards evening he descends the curve to cool his burning forehead in the waters of the deep sea, he is followed closely by his sister Selene (the Moon), who is now prepared to take charge of the world and illumine with her silver crescent the dark night. Helios meanwhile rests from his labors, and, reclining softly on the cool fragrant couch prepared for him by the sea-nymphs, prepares for another life-giving, joy-inspiring, and beautiful day.

It may appear strange that, although the Greeks considered the earth to be a flat circle, no explanation is given of the fact that Helios sinks down in the far west regularly every evening, and yet reappears as regularly every morning in the east.





# HEPHÆSTUS (Vulcan)

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Hephæstus, the son of Zeus and Hera, was the god of fire in its beneficial aspect, and the presiding deity over all workmanship accomplished by means of this useful element.

He was universally honored, not only as the god of all mechanical arts, but also as a house and hearth divinity, who exercised a beneficial influence on civilized society in general.

Unlike the other Greek divinities, he was ugly and deformed, being awkward in his movements, and limping in his gait.

This latter defect originated, as we have already seen, in the wrath of his father Zeus, who threw him down from heaven in consequence of his taking the part of Hera, in one of the domestic disagreements, which so frequently arose between this royal pair. Hephæstus was a whole day falling from Olympus to the earth, where he at length alighted on the island of Lemnos.

The inhabitants of the country, seeing him descending through the air, received him in their arms; but despite their care, his leg was broken by the fall, and he remained ever afterwards lame in one foot. Grateful for the kindness of the Lemnians, he henceforth settled in their island, and there built for himself a superb palace, and forges for the pursuit of his avocation. He instructed the people how to work in metals and taught them other valuable and useful arts.



# HEPHÆSTUS (Vulcan)

It is said that the first work of Hephæstus was a most ingenious throne of gold, with secret springs, which he presented to Hera. It was arranged in such a manner that, once seated, she found herself unable to move, and though all the gods tried to pull her out, their efforts were unsuccessful. Hephæstus thus revenged himself on his mother for the cruelty she had always displayed towards him, on account of his want of prettiness and grace.

Dionysus, the wine god, contrived, however, to intoxicate Hephæstus, and then induced him to return to Olympus, where, after having released the queen of heaven from her very deprecativè position, he became reconciled to his parents.

He now built for himself a glorious palace on Olympus, of shining gold, and made for the other deities those magnificent buildings which they inhabited. He was assisted in his various and exquisitely skillful works of art, by two female statues of pure gold, formed by his own hand, which possessed the power of motion, and always accompanied him wherever he went.

With the assistance of the Cyclops, he forged for Zeus his wonderful thunderbolts, thus investing his mighty father with a new power of terrible import. Zeus testified his appreciation of this precious gift, by giving Hephæstus the beautiful Aphrodite in marriage, but this was a questionable blessing; for the lovely Aphrodite, who was the personification of all grace and beauty, felt no affection for her ungainly and unattractive spouse, and amused herself by ridiculing his awkward movements and ugly person.

On one occasion especially, when Hephæstus good-naturedly took upon himself the office of cup-bearer to the gods, his hobbling gait and extreme awkwardness created the greatest fun amongst the celestials, in which his disloyal partner was the first to join, with unconcealed merriment.

Aphrodite greatly preferred Ares to her husband, and this preference naturally gave rise to much jealousy on the part of Hephæstus and caused them great unhappiness.

Hephæstus appears to have been an indispensable member of the Olympic Assembly, where he plays the part of smith, armorer, chariot-builder, &c. As already mentioned, he constructed the palaces where the gods resided, fashioned the golden shoes with which they trod the air or water, built for them their wonderful chariots, and shod with brass the horses of celestial breed, which conveyed these glittering equipages over land and sea. He also made the tripods which moved of themselves in and out of the celestial halls, formed for Zeus the far-famed aegis, and erected the magnificent palace of the sun. He also created the brazen-footed bulls of Aetes, which breathed flames from their nostrils, sent forth clouds of smoke, and filled the air with their roaring.

Among his most famous works of art for the use of mortals were: the armor of Achilles and Æneas, the beautiful necklace of Harmonia, and the crown of Ariadne; but his masterpiece was Pandora, of whom a detailed account has already been given.

There was a temple on Mount Etna erected in his honor, which none but the pure and virtuous were permitted to enter. The entrance to this temple was guarded by dogs, which possessed the extraordinary ability of being able to discriminate between the righteous and the unrighteous, licking and caressing the good, whilst they rushed upon all evil-doers and drove them away.

Hephæstus is usually represented as a powerful, brawny, and very muscular man of middle height and mature age; his strong uplifted arm is raised in the act of striking the anvil with a hammer, which he holds in one hand, whilst with the other he is turning a thunderbolt, which an eagle beside him is waiting to carry to Zeus. The principal seat of his worship was the island of Lemnos, where he was regarded with special reverence.

# POSEIDON (Neptune)

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Poseidon was the son of Kronos and Rhea, and the brother of Zeus.

He was god of the sea, more particularly of the Mediterranean, and, like the element over which he presided, was of a variable disposition, now strongly excited, and now calm and serene, for which reason he is sometimes represented by the poets as quiet and composed, and at others as disturbed and angry.



# POSEIDON (Neptune)

In the earliest ages of Greek mythology, he merely symbolized the watery element; but in later times, as navigation and intercourse with other nations increased traffic by sea, Poseidon gained in importance, and came to be regarded as a distinct divinity, holding indisputable dominion over the sea, and over all sea-divinities, who acknowledged him as their sovereign ruler.

He possessed the power of causing at will, mighty and destructive storms, in which the billows rise mountains high, the wind becomes a hurricane, land and sea being enveloped in thick fog, whilst destruction assails the unfortunate mariners exposed to their fury. On the other hand, his alone was the power of stilling the angry waves, of soothing the troubled waters, and granting safe voyages to mariners. For this reason, Poseidon was always invoked and propitiated by a libation before a voyage was undertaken, and sacrifices and thanksgivings were gratefully offered to him after a safe and prosperous journey by sea.

The symbol of his power was the fisherman's fork or trident, by means of which he produced earthquakes, raised up islands from the bottom of the sea, and caused wells to spring forth out of the earth.

Poseidon was essentially the presiding deity over fishermen, and was on that account, more particularly worshipped and revered in countries bordering on the sea-coast, where fish naturally formed a staple commodity of trade. He was supposed to vent his displeasure by sending disastrous floods, which destroyed whole countries, and were usually accompanied by terrible marine monsters, who swallowed up and devoured those whom the floods had spared. It is probable that these sea-monsters are the poetical figures which represent the demons of hunger, necessarily accompanying a general flood.

Poseidon is generally represented as resembling his brother Zeus in features, height, and general aspect; but we miss in the countenance of the sea-god the kindness and generosity which so pleasingly distinguish his mighty brother. The eyes are bright and piercing, and the contour of the face somewhat sharper in its outline than that of Zeus, thus corresponding, as it were, with his more angry and violent nature.

His hair waves in dark, disorderly masses over his shoulders; his chest is broad, and his frame powerful and stalwart; he wears a short, curling beard, and a band round his head. He usually appears standing erect in a graceful shell-chariot, drawn by hippocamps, or sea-horses, with golden manes and brazen hoofs, who bound over the dancing waves with such wonderful swiftness, that the chariot scarcely touches the water. The monsters of the deep, acknowledging their mighty lord, gambol playfully around him, whilst the sea joyfully smooths a path for the passage of its all-powerful ruler.

He inhabited a beautiful palace at the bottom of the sea at Ægea in Eubœa, and possessed a royal residence on Mount Olympus, which, however, he only visited when his presence was required at the council of the gods.

His wonderful palace beneath the waters was of vast extent; in its lofty and capacious halls thousands of his followers could assemble. The exterior of the building was of bright gold, which the continual wash of the waters preserved unspotted; in the interior, lofty and graceful columns supported the gleaming dome. Everywhere fountains of glistening, silvery water played; everywhere groves and arbors of feathery-leaved sea-plants appeared, whilst rocks of pure crystal glistened with all the varied colors of the rainbow.

Some of the paths were strewn with white sparkling sand, interspersed with jewels, pearls, and amber. This delightful abode was surrounded by wide fields, where there were whole groves of dark purple coralline, and tufts of beautiful scarlet-leaved plants, and sea-anemones of every shade. Here grew bright, pinky sea-weeds, mosses of all hues and shades, and tall grasses, which, growing upwards, formed emerald caves and grottoes such as the Nereides love, whilst fish of various kinds playfully darted in and out, in the full enjoyment of their native element.

# POSEIDON (Neptune)

~~~~~POSEIDON~~~~~



THE PROTECTOR OF SAILORS

# POSEIDON (Neptune)

Nor was illumination wanting in this fairy-like region, which at night was lit up by the glow-worms of the deep.

But although Poseidon ruled with absolute power over the ocean and its inhabitants, he nevertheless obeyed submissively to the will of the great ruler of Olympus and always appeared desirous of conciliating him. We find him coming to his aid when emergency demanded, and frequently rendering him valuable assistance against his opponents.

At the time when Zeus was harassed by the attacks of the Giants, he proved himself a most powerful ally, engaging in single combat with a hideous giant named Polybotes, whom he followed over the sea, and at last succeeded in destroying, by brought down upon him the island of Cos.

These amicable relations between the brothers were, however, sometimes interrupted. Thus, for instance, upon one occasion Poseidon joined Hera and Athene in a secret conspiracy to seize upon the ruler of heaven, place him in chains, and deprive him of the sovereign power.

The conspiracy being discovered, Hera, as the chief instigator of this sacrilegious attempt on the divine person of Zeus, was severely chastised, and even beaten, by her angry spouse, as a punishment for her rebellion and treachery, whilst Poseidon was condemned, for the space of a whole year, to forego his dominion over the sea, and it was at this time that, in conjunction with Apollo, he built for Laomedon the walls of Troy.

Poseidon married a sea-nymph named Amphitrite, whom he wooed under the form of a dolphin. She afterwards became jealous of a beautiful maiden called Scylla, who was beloved by Poseidon, and to revenge herself she threw some herbs into a well where Scylla was bathing, which had the effect of metamorphosing her into a monster of terrible aspect, having twelve feet, six heads with six long necks, and a voice which resembled the bark of a dog.

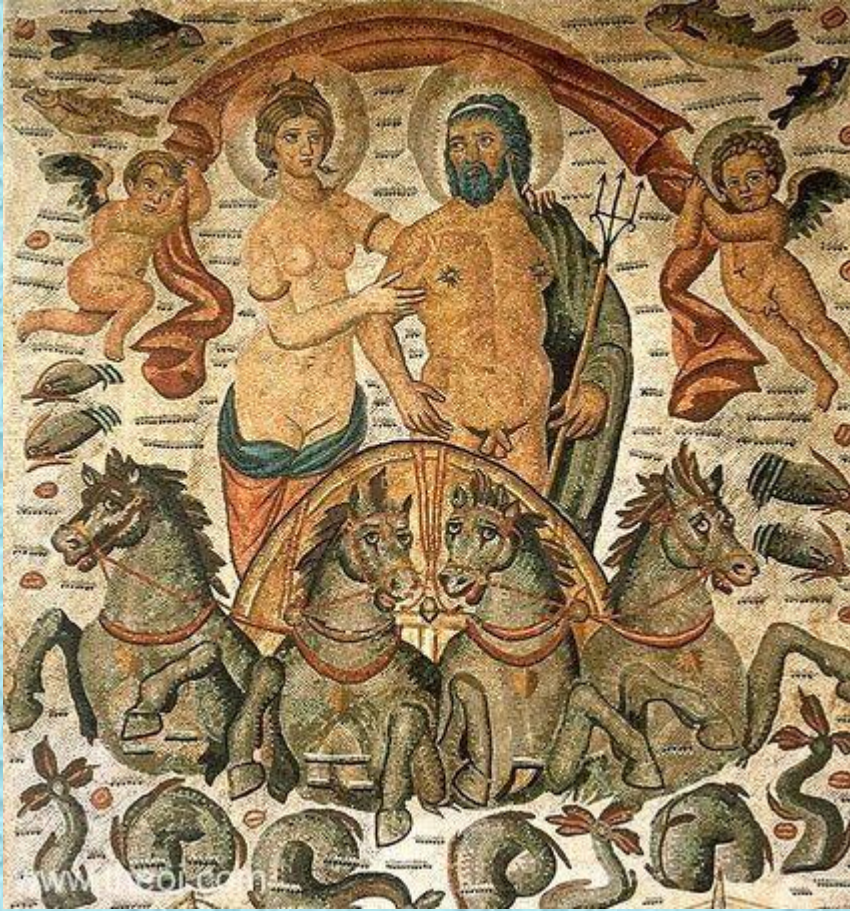
This awful monster is said to have inhabited a cave at a very great height in the famous rock which still bears her name and was supposed to swoop down from her rocky eminence upon every ship that passed, and with each of her six heads to secure a victim.

Amphitrite is often represented assisting Poseidon in attaching the sea-horses to his chariot.

The Cyclops, who have been already mentioned in the history of Cronus, were the sons of Poseidon and Amphitrite. They were a wild race of gigantic growth, similar in their nature to the earth-born Giants and had only one eye each in the middle of their foreheads. They led a lawless life, possessing neither social manners nor fear of the gods, and were the workmen of Hephæstus, whose workshop was supposed to be in the heart of the volcanic mountain Ætna.

Here we have another striking instance of the way the Greeks personified the powers of nature, which they saw in active operation around them. They beheld with awe, mingled with astonishment, the fire, stones, and ashes which poured forth from the peak of this and other volcanic mountains, and, with their vivacity of imagination, found a solution of the mystery in the supposition, that the god of Fire must be busy at work with his men in the depths of the earth, and that the mighty flames which they beheld, issued in this manner from his subterranean forge.

## POSEIDON (Neptune)



**Poseidon and Amphitrite, Greco-Roman mosaic  
C4th A.D., Musée du Louvre**



**Glaucus and Scylla by Bartholomeus Spranger**

# POSEIDON (Neptune)

The chief representative of the Cyclops was the man-eating monster Polyphemus, described by Homer as having been blinded and misguided at last by Odysseus. This monster fell in love with a beautiful nymph called Galatea; but, as may be supposed, his addresses were not acceptable to the fair maiden, who rejected them in favor of a youth named Acis, upon which Polyphemus, with his usual barbarity, destroyed the life of his rival by throwing upon him a gigantic rock. The blood of the murdered Acis, gushing out of the rock, formed a stream which still bears his name.

Triton, Rhoda, and Benthesticyme were also children of Poseidon and Amphitrite.

The sea-god was the father of two giant sons called Otus and Ephialtes. When only nine years old they were said to be twenty-seven cubits in height and nine in breadth.

These youthful giants were as rebellious as they were powerful, even presuming to threaten the gods themselves with hostilities. During the war of the Gigantomachia, they endeavored to scale heaven by piling mighty mountains one upon another.

Already had they succeeded in placing Mount Ossa on Olympus and Pelion on Ossa, when this impious project was frustrated by Apollo, who destroyed them with his arrows.

It was supposed that had not their lives been thus cut off before reaching maturity, their sacrilegious designs would have been carried into effect.

Pelias and Neleus were also sons of Poseidon. Their mother Tyro was attached to the river-god Enipeus, whose form Poseidon assumed, and thus won her love. Pelias became afterwards famous in the story of the Argonauts, and Neleus was the father of Nestor, who was distinguished in the Trojan War.

The Greeks believed that it was to Poseidon they were indebted for the existence of the horse, which he is said to have produced in the following manner: Athene and Poseidon both claiming the right to name Cecropia (the ancient name of Athens), a violent dispute arose, which was finally settled by an assembly of the Olympian gods, who decided that whichever of the warring parties presented mankind with the most useful gift, should obtain the privilege of naming the city.

Upon this Poseidon struck the ground with his trident, and the horse sprang forth in all his untamed strength and graceful beauty. From the spot which Athene touched with her wand, issued the olive-tree, whereupon the gods unanimously awarded to her the victory, declaring her gift to be the emblem of peace and plenty, whilst that of Poseidon was thought to be the symbol of war and bloodshed. Athene accordingly called the city Athens, after herself, and it has ever since retained this name.

Poseidon tamed the horse for the use of mankind and was believed to have taught men the art of managing horses by the bridle. The Isthmian games (so named because they were held on the Isthmus of Corinth), in which horse and chariot races were a distinguishing feature, were instituted in honor of Poseidon.

He was more especially worshipped in the Peloponnesus, though universally revered throughout Greece and in the south of Italy. His sacrifices were generally black and white bulls, also wild boars and rams. His usual attributes are the trident, horse, and dolphin.

In some parts of Greece this divinity was identified with the sea-god Nereus, for which reason the Nereides, or daughters of Nereus, are represented as accompanying him.

**POSEIDON (Neptune)**



**Nereids preparing the body of Akhilleus**

**Musée du Louvre, Paris**



## About Author

•Edward Berens - The Ven Edward Berens, a Fellow of Oriel College, Oxford, and son in law of the Bishop of Exeter, was Archdeacon of Berkshire from 1832 until 1855.

•E.M. Berens was a scholar and author who wrote more than a half a dozen books on Greek and Roman mythology. Unlike other Classics scholars of his time, Berens wrote accessible stories that explored the myths and other oral traditions of ancient peoples rather than simply researching the history of their worship of the gods. Berens' seminal work, *The Myths and Legends of Ancient Greece and Rome*, was published in 1894.

