THE ENGLISH MAJOR'S MYTHOLOGY CHEAT SHEET

A Note from the Author/Collator/Editor/Fellow Cheater:

It's ridiculous to think that you can boil down vast architectures of cultural and historical knowledge into such short summaries, yet this is what I offer. However, I would be depriving you of a great pleasure if you read only this instead of a good collection of the myths (see the bibliography) and the Homeric epics (in a good contemporary translation). This is a basic, incomplete, primer on some of the constructs I find important in Greek mythology.

Why Mythology?

The poet Philip Larkin once stated that he had "no belief in 'tradition' or a common myth-kitty or casual allusions in poems to other poems or poets, which last I find unpleasantly like the talk of literary understrappers letting you see they know the right people." He is certainly in the minority. Artists of almost every discipline, genre, and persuasion access the myth-kitty all the time. They count on us knowing the contents of the kitty, and bank on their allusions to add depth to the meaning of their work. Since we're the professional readers and assessors of many arts, we've got to be conversant with this form of artistic shorthand. And yes, we may all be "literary understrappers," but I don't feel a need to prove my worth to Larkin's legacy or legitimate my study of myths, because the obvious use of such study does so for me.

The Problem with Greek Mythology

Greek mythology is rife with inconsistencies. In other words, many of the stories are going to sound absolutely ridiculous and, at times, even contradict each other. When considering these stories, we must remember that the Greeks were creating stories based on their own fallible human nature. Thus the Greek gods are often as cruel, inconsistent, and sinful as humans are. Also keep in mind that the Greeks were not attempting to create a system of absolute truth; they were simply telling stories to explain the world around them.

Contents:

The Gods 1 — From Chaos to Olympus

Hesiod in his epic poem the *Theogony* offers the earliest Greek version of genesis. Chaos ("the yawning void") provides the beginning for creation. Out of Chaos the universe came into being. Later writers interpret Chaos as a mass of many elements (or only four: earth, air, fire, and water) from which the universe was created. From Hesiod's Chaos came Gaia, Tartarus, Eros, Erebus, and Nyx.

Gaia (Gaea, Ge)

Most important and first, Gaia, the earth and fertility mother, came from Chaos. Contemporary feminist approaches to mythology lay great importance on the fact that many early societies first conceived of deity as a woman.

Tartarus

Tartarus, which came out of Chaos, was an area in the depths of the earth. It became a place of punishment in the Underworld; Erebus, its darkness, became another name for Tartarus itself.

Eros

From Chaos came Eros, the potent concept of Love, which is fundamental. Hesiod says, "fairest among the deathless gods, who unnerves the limbs and overcomes the mind and wise counsels of all gods and all men within them."

Erebus (Erebos)

Darkness, brother and husband of Nyx (Night), whose dark mists enveloped the edges of the world, and filled the deep hollows of the earth.

Nyx

Night, sister and wife of Erebus (Darkness), who drew the mists he created across the heavens to bring night to the world.

The Sacred Marriage of Earth and Sky

Uranus (Ouranos)

Of the elements that Gaia, earth, produced on her own, most significant is Uranus, the male sky or heavens, with his lightning and thunder. The deification of the feminine, mother earth, and masculine, god of the sky, is basic to mythological and religious thinking. Their marriage is designated as a holy, or sacred marriage, a translation of the Greek "Heiros Gamos," which has become the technical term.

The Children of Uranus and Gaia

The holy marriage of sky and earth produced the following:

- *The three Cyclopes (Kyklopes):* each Cyclops (Kyclops), meaning "orb-eyed," had only one eye in the middle of his forehead. The Cyclopes forged lightning and thunderbolts.
- *The three Hecatonchires (Hekatoncheires):* "hundred-handed": strong and monstrous creatures.
- *The twelve Titans:* six brothers and six sisters who mate with each other.

Some Titans and Their Offspring

Deities of Waters

The Titan Oceanus (Okeanos), was the stream of Ocean that encircles the disc of the earth in the early concept of geography. He is the father of the many spirits of waters (rivers, springs, etc.), the Oceanids, three thousand daughters and three thousand sons.

Gods of the Sun

The titan Hyperion, god of the sun, was father of Helius (Helios), also a god of the sun. Later the god Apollo became a god of the sun as well. The sun-god dwells in the East, crosses the dome of the sky in his chariot drawn by a team of four horses, descends in the West into the stream of Oceanus, which encircles the earth, and then sails back to the East to begin a new day.

The Son of a Sun-God

Phaëthon (Phaëton), son of the sun-god, whether he be called Hyperion, Helius, or Apollo, wanted to be certain that the Sun was really his father and so he went to the splendid palace of the Sun to find out. The sun-god assured Phaëthon that he was his father, swearing a dread oath that the boy could have anything that he desired. Thus Phaëthon was granted his adamant request that he be allowed to drive the sun-chariot for one day. Too inexperienced to control the horses, Phaëthon created havoc, and in answer to the prayers of Earth was hurtled to his death by the lightning of the supreme god, Zeus or Jupiter. This tale illustrates the brave folly of youth, the conflict between parents and their children, and the search for identity.

Goddesses of the Moon

Selene, goddess of the moon, is a daughter of the titan Hyperion, and she drives a two-horse chariot. Later the goddess Artemis (Diana) becomes a moon-goddess. Selene (or Artemis) fell desperately in love with the hunter Endymion and used to abandon her duties in the heaven to visit the cave of her beloved. In the end, Endymion was granted perpetual sleep and eternal youth.

Goddess of the Dawn

Eos (Aurora), goddess of the dawn, was a third child of Hyperion. She, like Selene, drives a two-horse chariot. Eos fell in love with the mortal Tithonus (Tithonos) and carried him off. The supreme god Zeus granted her prayer that Tithonus be made immortal and live forever. Poor Eos forgot to ask for eternal youth for her beloved. Tithonus grew older and older, finally being turned into a shriveled grasshopper, while the passion of the eternally beautiful goddess cooled to become dutiful devotion. This tragic story illustrates how our ignorant wishes may be granted to our woe and illuminates the contrast between lovely and sensuous youth and ugly and debilitating old age.

Eos and Tithonus had a son named Memnon, who was killed by Achilles in the Trojan saga. The amorous Eos also carried off other lovers, including Cephalus, who became the husband of Procris in Athenian saga.

The Castration of Uranus and the Birth of Aphrodite

Uranus hated his children, and as they were about to be born he hid them in the depths of Gaia, the mother earth. The mythic image is Hesiod's poetic merging of vast sky and earth imagined, at the same time, as man and woman, husband and wife. Gaia's anguished appeals for revenge were answered by the last-born, the wily Cronus. He agreed to accept the jagged-toothed sickle that his mother had fashioned and, from his ambush, he castrated his father as he was about to make love to his mother. The severed genitals of Uranus were cast upon the sea and from them a maiden grew, Aphrodite (Venus), the powerful goddess of beauty and love.

The Titans Cronus and Rhea and the Birth of Zeus

Cronus (Kronos, Saturn) and Rhea, two important Titans, had several children who were devoured by their father as they were born. Cronus, who had castrated and overthrown his own father, Uranus, was afraid that he too would be overcome by one of his children. Therefore, when his son Zeus (Jupiter) was born, the mother, Rhea, contrived that the birth be hidden from Cronus. She bore Zeus on the island of Crete and gave her husband a stone wrapped in baby's clothes to devour. Zeus was hidden in a cave and grew up eventually to overthrow his unwitting father; he will marry his sister Hera and they will become secure as king and queen of the gods.

The Titanomachy: Zeus Defeats His Father Cronus

This epic battle was waged for ten years between Zeus and the Olympians and Cronus and the Titans. Cronus fought from Mt. Othrys; his allies were the Titans except for Themis and her son Prometheus. Prometheus' brother Atlas sided with Cronus.

Zeus fought from Mt. Olympus and his allies, in addition to Themis and Prometheus, were his brothers and sisters, who had been swallowed by Cronus but later regurgitated, namely: Hestia, Demeter, Hera, Hades, and Poseidon. Also on his side were the Hecatonchires and the Cyclopes.

Zeus was victorious and the Titans were imprisoned in Tartarus, guarded by the Hecatonchires; and Atlas was punished with the task of holding up the sky.

The Gigantomachy: Zeus Defeats the Giants and Typhoeus

Giants (Gegeneis, since they were "born from the Earth"), challenged Zeus and the new order of the gods. They were defeated in a fierce battle and were imprisoned under the earth. Volcanoes, when they erupt, reveal the presence of the giants below.

Typhoeus (Typhaon, Typhon) was a ferocious dragon-god, whom earth produced to do battle with Zeus, either separately, or alongside the giants in the great Gigantomachy. Zeus' triumph singles him out as an archetypal dragon-slayer.

The giants Otus (Otos) and Ephialtes, in a separate attack, failed in their attempt to storm heaven by piling Olympus, Ossa, and Pelion, one upon the other.

The Titanomachy and the Gigantomachy are often confused in literature and art, and details vary considerably.

The Gods 2 — The Olympians

Although Zeus was the most powerful of the Olympians and thus the leader, he delegated control of the universe to his brothers and sisters. Zeus, Poseidon, Hades, Hera, Demeter, and Hestia were the children of Cronus and the original six Olympians; all additional Olympians were children of Zeus (though not all were birthed by traditional means).

With the exception of Hades, who was often depicted dwelling in Tartarus, all of the Greek gods lived in a city that they named Olympus. This city hovered high above Mount Olympus. Clouds served as the gates of Olympus and no rough wind or foul weather ever shook the city of the gods.

Zeus (Jupiter)

After the overthrow of the Titans, Zeus was the ruler of the universe. Symbolized by the eagle and wielding lightning bolts as his weapons, there were few who could challenge his will. Those who did often did so through trickery and guile rather than through direct confrontation. Zeus's personality could range from a benevolent father figure to detached, all-powerful tyrant. Because the Greek gods mirrored all the same faults and foibles as humanity, Zeus could make mistakes and be deceived. He often took a variety of forms to seduce mortal woman.

Zeus' Progeny and their Mothers

Children of Zeus and Hera

- Eileithyia: A goddess of childbirth, like her mother, Hera, and Artemis.
- Hebe: "youthful bloom," was a cupbearer of the gods. She became the wife of Herakles.
- Hephaestus (Hephaistos, Vulcan): was sometimes considered to be the son of Hera alone.

  He was lame from birth and Hera, ashamed of his deformity, cast him out of Olympus; we are also told that once, when he interfered in a quarrel between Zeus and Hera on behalf of his mother, Zeus hurled him down from Olympus and he landed on the island of Lemnos, which became his cult-place. In either case, he was restored to Olympus. Hephaestus was above all a divine artisan and smith, a god of the forge and its fire, whose workshop was said to be in various places, including Olympus. Assisted by the three Cyclopes, he could create marvelous masterpieces of every sort, among them the shield of Achilles.

Daughters of Zeus and Mnemosyne

Zeus mated with Mnemosyne ("Memory") to produce the Nine Muses ("reminders"), patron goddesses of the arts; thus allegorically, god and memory provide creative inspiration. Their spheres are sometimes specifically assigned:

Calliope: epic poetry	Polyhymnia: sacred music, dancing
Clio: history, lyre playing	Terpsichore: choral dancing, flute playing
Melpomene: tragedy, lyre playing	Thalia: comedy
Euterpe: lyric poetry, tragedy, flute playing	Urania: astronomy
Erato: love poetry, hymns to the gods, lyre playing	

Daughters of Zeus and Themis

The Fates, the Moirai (Parcae), were the daughters of Zeus and Themis (or Night and Erebus). They were imagined as three old women spinners, and were considered to control the thread of life and thus each person's destiny:

- Clotho: "spinner," spins out the thread of life.
- Lachesis: "apportioner," measures the thread.
- Atropos: "inflexible," cuts the thread.

Zeus' Women and Children (after marrying Hera)

- Alkmene: A Lady of Thebes in Boiotia (Central Greece) who was seduced by Zeus in the form of her own husband. She bore twins: Herakles by Zeus and Likymnios by her husband Amphitryon.
- Antiope: A Lady of Thebes in Boiotia (Central Greece) who was seduced by Zeus in the shape of Satyros. She bore him twin sons, Amphion and Zethos, who were exposed at birth.
- Danae: A Princess of Argos (in Central Greece) who was imprisoned by her father in a bronze tower. Zeus seduced her in the form of a golden shower, and she gave birth to a son, the hero Perseus.
- Dia: A Queen of the Lapith tribe of Thessalia (in Northern Greece), wife of King Ixion. She was seduced by Zeus and bore him a son, Peirithoos (but others say the father was her husband Ixion).
- Elare: A Princess of Orkhomenos (in Central Greece) who was loved by Zeus. In fear of the wrath of Hera, he hid her beneath the earth, where she gave birth to a son, the Gigante Tityos.
- Europa: A Princess of Phoinikia (Phoenicia in West Asia) who was abducted to Crete (in the Greek Aegean) by Zeus in the form of a bull. She bore him three sons: Minos, Sarpedon, and Rhadamanthys.
- Eurymedousa: A Princess of Phthiotis (in Northern Greece) who was seduced by Zeus in the form of an ant. Their son was named Myrmidon ("Ant-Man").
- Kallisto: A Princess of Arkadia (in Southern Greece) who was seduced by Zeus in the guise of the goddess Artemis. She was transformed into a bear by a wrathful goddess and in this form bore a son, Arkas.
- Kalyke: A Queen of Elis (in Southern Greece), the wife of King Aithlios. She was the mother by Zeus (or by her husband Aithlios) of Endymion.
- Kassiopeia: A Lady of Crete (in the Greek Aegean) who bore Zeus a son, Atymnios.
- Lamia: A Queen of Libya (in North Africa) who was loved by Zeus. When the jealous Hera stole her children by the god—Herophile and Akhilleus—she was driven mad with grief.
- Laodamelia: A Princess of Lykia (in Asia Minor) who was loved by Zeus and bore him a son, Sarpedon.
- Leda: A Queen of Lakedaimonia (in Southern Greece) who was seduced by Zeus in the form of swan. She laid an egg from which were hatched the Dioskouroi twins. One, Polydeukes, was the son of Zeus, the other, Kastor, the son of her husband

Tyndareus. According to some, she was also the mother of egg-hatched Helen (though others say this egg was given her by the goddess Nemesis).

- Lysithoe: A woman who bore Zeus a son named Herakles (not the famous hero; they just share the same name).
- Niobe: A Princess of Argolis (in Southern Greece). She was the very first mortal woman loved by Zeus, and bore him two sons: Argos and Pelasgos (though according to others Pelasgos was a son of Poseidon).
- Olympias: An (historical) Queen of Macedonia, and mother of Alexandros the Great. According to legend, her son was fathered by the god Zeus.
- Pandora: A Princess of the Hellenes, one of the daughters of King Deukalion, survivor of the Great Flood. She was loved by Zeus and bore him sons Latinos and Graikos.
- Protogeneia: A Princess of the Hellenes, also one of the daughters of King Deukalion. She was loved by Zeus and bore him a son Aithlios.
- Pyrrha: The wife of King Deukalion of the Hellenes, who survived the Great Flood along with her husband. According to some, her first born son, Hellen, was fathered by Zeus rather than Deukalion.
- Phthia: A girl from Aegion in Akhaia (southern Greece). Zeus seduced her in the guise of a pigeon or dove.
- Semele: A Princess of Thebes in Boiotia (Central Greece) who was loved by Zeus, but through the machinations of Hera was consumed by the heat of his lightning bolts. Zeus rescued their unborn son, Dionysos, from her body and sewed him up in his thigh until he was old enough to be born.
- Thyia: A Princess of the Hellenes, yet another daughter of King Deukalion. She was loved by Zeus and bore him sons Magnes and Makedon.

Zeus's Man (after marrying Hera)

- Ganymede: Prince of Troy (in Asia Minor) who was abducted to Olympus by Zeus (in the form of an eagle or a whirlwind) to be his lover and the cupbearer of the gods.

Poseidon (Neptune)

A brother of Zeus and the god of the seas, Poseidon was also responsible for earthquakes, and was thus called "Earth-Shaker." He was often portrayed wielding a trident, which he used to churn the oceans and create storms. Though he was certainly not as powerful as Zeus, Poseidon was not to be trifled with. His dominion over the oceans and influence on land could make or break a sea-faring culture like that of the Greeks. Poseidon was credited with the creation of all sea life, but when the other god and goddesses mocked Poseidon's creations (fish and other sea life), they challenged him to create something beautiful. In response, he created horses.

Hades (Pluto)

Contrary to popular belief, Hades was not the Greek equivalent of the devil in the Judeo-Christian tradition. A brother of Zeus and Poseidon, Hades simply got the short stick when the Olympian brothers divided up their domains. Hades ruled over the underworld, also known as Tartarus. Unlike the Judeo-Christian concept of heaven and hell, all souls—whether good or evil—arrived in Tartarus, where Hades was responsible

for their care. The only exception to this rule was the "Isle of the Blessed." There was some degree of punishment for the wicked and reward for the just, but not to the same degree as in the heaven-and-hell dichotomy. Hades was the only Olympian who did not make his home atop Mount Olympus. He brooded in Tartarus with his three-headed dog Cerberus, who guarded the gates and prevented the living from entering and the dead from leaving. Hades' wife, Persephone, was a mortal woman whom Hades abducted. Persephone's mother, Demeter, struck a deal with Hades that her daughter would spend half the year with her and the other half in the underworld with him. The Greeks believed that the result of this was spring/summer when Persephone was with her mother and fall/winter when she was with her husband.

Hera (Juno)

Hera was the wife of Zeus and, ironically, the goddess of fidelity. She was particularly irritable when Zeus seduced fellow goddesses or, worse, mortal women. To be mortal and the object of Zeus' affections was a curse; not only would the woman have to explain the odd circumstances surrounding her child's birth, but she would also suffer the wrath of Hera, which could be cruel indeed. Furthermore, the child the woman bore would suffer as well. No one knows this better than Herakles. Hera was symbolized by the peacock and, though she rarely engaged in any sort of combat herself, she was cunning, stealthy, and held sway over her husband, making her formidable in a way no other Olympian could boast of being.

Hestia (Vesta)

Hestia wasn't as flashy or dramatic as many of the other Olympians, thus she rarely got the spotlight, but that does not diminish her importance to the Greeks. She was the goddess of the hearth, which meant that if you had a comfortable home and a happy family then Hestia had blessed you.

Demeter (Ceres)

Like Hestia, Demeter was often upstaged by her fellow Olympians. She was the goddess of grain (the fertility of the Earth), which made her very important to everyday life.

Pallas Athena (Minerva)

Pallas Athena, usually referred to simply as Athena, was the goddess of wisdom. The Greek hoplite helmet she wore perched atop her head easily identified her. She was frequently shown with a shield and spear in hand as well. Though she is not directly associated with war, she was nonetheless frequently involved in the Greeks' battles. If Ares was the savage brutality and strength of war, Athena was the cunning, strategic side of it. She was most famous for her regard of Odysseus, who was known as the cleverest of all the Greeks. Like much of mythology, there are conflicting stories about Athena's origin; however, the most widely known is that she sprang full-grown from Zeus' head.

Apollo (Apollo)

Apollo was very popular with the Greeks as he was the god of truth and prophecy. Temples and oracles were scattered all over Greece that boasted of having a direct line to Apollo; however, the most prestigious of these was the Oracle at Delphi. It was common for Greek kings to consult Apollo's Oracle at Delphi regarding war and political conflicts. The Olympian was no stranger to combat; his weapon of choice was the bow, but he was also frequently pictured with a lyre, which displays the diverse qualities of this particular god.

Apollo is a very complex deity. As a god of shepherds, he was associated with music and was a protector of flocks. He was also god of medicine, and he replaced Hyperion and Helius as a god of the sun. He is often called Phoebus (Phoibos) Apollo, an epithet that means "bright." There is a moving, tragic humanity to many of his stories. Yet he is subject to many moods and passions, not least of all his terrifying anger, however just.

Yet this same god was worshiped as the epitome of classical restraint—handsome, strong, and intelligent, preaching the Greek maxims of "Know thyself" and "Nothing too much." He can bring enlightenment, atonement, truth, and a new civic order of justice. It is because of the disciplined and controlled side of his character that Apollo can be pitted against Dionysus to encompass the basic duality of human nature: the rational (Apollonian) and irrational (Dionysian).

Hermes (Mercury)

Hermes was a curious-looking Olympian: he wore a helmet that looked something like a bowl with wings sprouting from it. In addition, his sandals had wings and he carried a caduceus (the winged rod entwined with snakes that we now use as a symbol for medical practice). He was the messenger god, a sort of mailman for Olympus and, like the Judeo-Christian angels, declares the will of Zeus to the mortal world. He could move with great speed, and was also the god of thieves.

Artemis (Diana)

Like Hestia and Demeter, Artemis rarely took center stage. She was the goddess of the hunt and preservation of the wild. Like the aforementioned goddesses, Artemis was essential to the daily lives of the Greeks, but didn't make for very compelling stories.

Aphrodite (Venus)

Aphrodite, the goddess of beauty and love, stood out even amidst the physical perfection of the Olympians. She is frequently entwined in the more memorable Greek myths. There are conflicting stories regarding her birth; Homer says she's the daughter of Zeus and Dione, but Hesiod's idea that she sprang forth out of the foam ("aphros") created when Uranus' castrated genitals fell into the sea seems to be the most popular.

In general, Aphrodite was the captivating goddess of beauty, love, and marriage and her power was very great. Her universality led to a gamut of conceptions of this goddess, who presided over everything from hallowed married love to temple prostitution. Depictions of her in art, literature, and music reflect not only the duality but also the multiplicity of her nature.

This *Aphrodite Urania*, born from the male alone and not as the result of sexual union, came to be characterized as the goddess of pure love that has as its end not physical satisfaction but spiritual gratification. The sensual Aphrodite Urania, sprung from Uranus, god of the heavens, became the Heavenly or Celestial Aphrodite of philosophy and religion.

In contrast to Celestial Aphrodite, *Aphrodite Pandemos* ("Aphrodite of the people" or "common Aphrodite")—who is usually seen as the daughter of Zeus and Dione, becomes the goddess of sex and the procreation of children, whose concerns are of the body and not of the mind, the spirit, or the soul. This duality in Aphrodite's nature came to be described as sacred and profane love, the most universal of all archetypal conceptions.

Aphrodite's Companions and Attendants

The Erotes were four winged creatures associated with Aphrodite:

- Eros (Love) and Himeros (Desire), twin brothers, were the companions of Aphrodite from her birth. Some say Aphrodite was born pregnant with the pair. Eros was the elder of the two and the primary agent of Aphrodite's power.
- Pothos (Yearning) was the son of Eros, or an independent aspect of him.
- Anteros was the son of Aphrodite and Ares. He was the god of requited love, literally "love returned" or "counterpart love." He punished those who scorned love and the advances of others, and was the avenger of unrequited love.

The Horai (Horae) were the goddesses of the seasons and the natural portions of time. They presided over the revolutions of the heavenly constellations by which the year was measured, while their three sisters, the Fates, spinned out the web of fate. The Horai also guarded the gates of Olympus and rallied the stars and constellations of heaven. They were honored by farmers who planted and tended their crops in time with the rising and setting of the stars, measures of the passing seasons. Individually they represented the conditions required for farming prosperity. The three were usually named:

- Eunomia (Good Order, Good Pasture),
- Eirene (Peace, Spring), and
- Dike (Justice).

The Graces (Charites, Kharites) were the three goddesses of grace, beauty, adornment, mirth, festivity, dance and song. A number of "younger Kharites" presided over the other pleasures of life, including play, amusement, banqueting, floral decoration, happiness, rest and relaxation.

The three elder Graces, the handmaidens of Aphrodite:

- Aglaia (Beauty),
- Euphrosyne (Merriment), and
- Thalia (Good Cheer).

The younger Kharites—Paidia (Play), Eudaimonia (Happiness), Pandaisia (Banquets), Pannyakhis (Parties & Night Revels), Antheia (Floral Decorations), Harmonia (Harmony) and others—were frequently depicted as attendants of the goddess in Greek vase painting.

Ares (Mars)

Ares was the infamous god of war. He was not the sort of god the Greeks would consult like Zeus, Apollo, or Athena, but rather he was a personified savage force of nature. He was quite intimidating on the battlefield until he was wounded, at which point he would bellow in rage and flee to Olympus. Ares also had a torrid love affair with Aphrodite, which came back to bite him in a significant way. Ares had a long love affair with Aphrodite which lasted for the duration of her marriage to Hephaestus and beyond. She bore him a daughter, Harmonia—born while she was still married to Hephaestus—and four sons, born after her divorce: Eros, Anteros, Deimos, and Phobos.

Hephaestus (Vulcan)

Only one Olympian was truly ugly. Poor Hephaestus was so unsightly that his mother, Hera, cast him off of the peak of Olympus when he was born. As a result, Hephaestus walked with a limp. Angry at his mother's treatment, Hephaestus sent various gifts to Olympus, including a Golden Throne for Hera. When the goddess sat upon this cursed throne she was bound fast. Zeus sought the assistance of the gods in freeing his Queen, and offered the goddess Aphrodite in marriage to the god who could bring Hephaestus to Olympus. Aphrodite agreed to the arrangement in the belief that her beloved Ares would prevail. Ares stormed the forge of Hephaestus, bearing arms, but was driven back by the Divine Smith with showers of flaming metal.

Dionysus next approached the god, and suggested that he might claim Aphrodite for himself if he were to release his mother willingly. Hephaestus was pleased with the plan and ascended to Olympus with Dionysus, released his mother, and wed the reluctant Aphrodite. That marriage—and Aphrodite's subsequent affair with Ares—did not go unnoticed in the Greeks' stories. When Hephaestus learned of his wife's infidelity, he forged a net in which to capture his wife in the act of her betrayal. One day while Aphrodite and Ares were together, Hephaestus burst into the room and cast the net over the top of them, and then called the other gods to openly mock Ares and Aphrodite caught in the midst of their shameful act.

Hephaestus functioned as the god of fire and forging, and everything he created was flawless, unbreakable, and of tremendous value. To have a goblet made by him was an honor, but to have a weapon or armor forged by this Olympian was a privilege. Subsequently, Hephaestus forged the lightning bolts for his father, Zeus.

Dionysus (Bacchus)

Dionysus is always positioned last in the Pantheon, although he seems to have been the favorite of the Greeks, though he may not have been essential to survival like some of the lesser-known goddesses or be featured prominently in the drama on Olympus. He is the god of wine and festivity, but is also the god of madness and hallucination, fruit and vegetation, plays and choral song, and reincarnation and the afterlife. Theater, celebrations, athletic competitions, and rich wine all fell under the jurisdiction of Dionysus. He was depicted as either an older bearded god or a pretty effeminate, long-haired youth. He was usually accompanied by a troop of Satyrs and Mainades (female devotees or nymphs). He is the discoverer of the grape vine, and teaches humanity how to cultivate it.

He was widely worshipped as a fertility god, with numerous shrines and temples dedicated to him throughout Greece. Phallic processions and contests held in his honor were also widely celebrated.

The Gods 3 — From Olympus to Greece

The Four (Or Five) Ages of Humanity

There are several conflicting versions about the creation of mortals. According to the myth of the ages of humankind, men and women are the creation of the gods or Zeus himself. The following is a summary of Hesiod's account. Ovid describes only four ages, omitting the Age of Heroes. This tale of human degeneration mingles fact and fancy in an astonishing manner, for ages of bronze and of iron are historically very real indeed.

The Age of Gold

In the time when Cronus was king in heaven, the Olympian gods made a golden race of mortals, who lived as though in a paradise, without toil, trouble or cares. All good things were theirs in abundance, and the fertile earth brought forth fruit of its own accord. They lived in peace and harmony, never grew old, and died as though overcome by sleep. The earth covered over this race, but they still exist as holy spirits who wander over the earth.

The Age of Silver

The Olympian gods made a second race of silver, far less favored than the one of gold. Their childhood lasted a hundred years and when they grew up their lives were short and distressful. For they were arrogant against one another and refused to worship the gods or offer them sacrifice. Zeus in his anger at their senselessness hid them under the earth, where they still dwell.

The Age of Bronze

Zeus made a third race of mortals, a terrible and mighty one of bronze. Their implements and weapons were of bronze, and they relentlessly pursued the painful and violent deeds of war. They destroyed themselves by their own hands and went down to the realm of Hades without leaving a name.

The Age of Heroes

Zeus made still another race, also valiant in war but more just and more civilized. This was the race of the heroes, also called demigods, who were involved in the legendary events of Greek saga. They fought, for example, at Thebes and in the Trojan War. When they died, Zeus sent some of these heroes to inhabit the Islands of the Blessed, a paradise at the far ends of the earth, ruled over by Cronus, who had been deposed and freed by Zeus.

The Age of Iron

Zeus made still another race, that of iron, troubled by toil and misery, although good is intermingled with their evils. It is in this age that Hesiod lived, and he exclaims in woe: "Would that I were not a man of the fifth generation / but had either died before or had been born later." He predicts further moral and physical disintegration and annihilation through war, until Zeus will finally destroy human beings when it comes to pass that they are born with gray hair on their temples. More and more will this become an age of wickedness, strife, and disrespect for the gods, until Shame itself and righteous Retribution will abandon mortals to their evil folly and doom.

Prometheus Our Creator

Dominant in the tradition about creation is the myth that Prometheus—not Zeus—was the creator of human beings from clay and Athena breathed into them the divine spirit. In Hesiod, although his account is far from logical and clear, it seems that Prometheus fashioned only mankind. Womankind was created later, through the agency of Zeus, in the person of Pandora.

Prometheus Against Zeus

Although Prometheus had fought on the side of Zeus in his war against Cronus, the two mighty beings soon came into conflict once Zeus had assumed supreme power.

The Nature of Sacrifice

Their antagonism began when Prometheus dared to match wits with Zeus. There was a quarrel between mortals and the gods, apparently about how the parts of the sacrificial animals should be apportioned. Prometheus divided up a great ox and for his creatures, us mortals, he wrapped the flesh and the rich and fatty innards in the ox's paunch. For the gods, however, he deviously and artfully wrapped up the bones of the ox in its enticing, rich, white fat. He asked Zeus to take his choice between the two portions, and Zeus, fully aware of Prometheus' deception, chose the bones attractively wrapped in fat. Thus it was that when the Greeks made sacrifice to the gods, they enjoyed feasting upon the best edible portions of the animals, while only the white bones that remained were burned for the gods.

The Theft of Fire

Zeus was enraged at Prometheus' attempt to deceive him and wreaked his vengeance upon mortals, the creatures of Prometheus. He took away from them fire, essential to their livelihood and progress. Prometheus, defiantly our champion, once again tricked Zeus (who this time was presumably at first unaware?) by stealing in a hollow fennel stalk fire from heaven and restoring it to earth. Zeus was stung to the depths of his heart by Prometheus' outrage and "contrived an evil thing for mortals in recompense for the fire," namely, the woman Pandora.

The Punishment of Prometheus

A further defiance of Prometheus was his refusal to reveal to Zeus a crucial secret that he knew and Zeus did not. If Zeus mated with the sea-goddess Thetis, she would bear a son who would overthrow his father. Thus Zeus faced the terrible risk of losing his power as supreme god, like Cronus and Uranus before him. The outcome of Zeus' anger against Prometheus for his rebellious championship of mortals and his obstinate refusal to warn Zeus about Thetis was a dire punishment. Zeus had the wily and devious Prometheus bound in inescapable bonds to a crag of the remote Caucasus Mountains in Scythia, with a shaft driven through his middle. And he sent an eagle to eat his immortal liver each day, and what the eagle ate would be restored again each night. The Greeks believed that the moaning of the wind was actually the agonizing cries of Prometheus as he endured the punishment of Zeus. Generations later, however, Zeus worked out a reconciliation with Prometheus and sent his son Herakles to kill the eagle with an arrow and release Prometheus. Zeus avoided mating with Thetis, who married a mortal, Peleus, and bore a son, Achilles, to become mightier than his father.

Pandora

The woman that Zeus sent as a beautiful and treacherous evil to mortals in punishment for their possession of Prometheus' stolen fire was named Pandora ("all gifts"). He had Hephaestus fashion her out of earth and water in the image of a modest maiden, beautiful as a goddess. Athena clothed her in silvery garments and her face was covered with a wondrously embroidered veil. She placed on her head lovely garlands of flowers and a golden crown, beautifully made and intricately decorated by Hephaestus; and she taught her weaving. Aphrodite bestowed upon her the grace of sexual allurement and desire and their pain. Hermes contrived in her breast wheedling words and lies, and the nature of a thief and a bitch. All at the will of Zeus.

Zeus sent this snare to the brother of Prometheus, named Epimetheus, who received the gift even though his brother had warned him not to accept anything sent from Zeus. The name Prometheus means "forethought," but Epimetheus means "afterthought."

Pandora's Jar

Zeus sent with Pandora a jar (later mistranslated as a box) which contained evils of all sorts, and as well hope. She herself removed the cover and released the miseries within to plague human beings, who previously had led carefree and happy lives: hard work, painful diseases, and thousands of sorrows. Through the will of Zeus, hope alone remained within the jar, because life without hope would be unbearable in the face of all the horrible woes unleashed for poor mortals. In Hesiod, Pandora is not motivated to open the jar by a so-called feminine curiosity, whatever later versions may imply.

Aeschylus' Prometheus Bound

In addition to Hesiod's account, Aeschylus' play *Prometheus Bound* is fundamental for an understanding of the archetypal Prometheus. Aeschylus powerfully establishes Prometheus as our suffering champion who has advanced human beings, through his gift of fire, from savagery to civilization. Furthermore, Prometheus gave us the hope denied to us by Zeus, which, however blind, permits us to persevere and triumph over the terrible vicissitudes of life. Prometheus is grandly portrayed as the archetypal trickster and culture-god, the originator of all inventions and progress in the arts and the sciences. At the end of the play, Prometheus is still defiant, chained to his rock, and still refusing to reveal the secret of the marriage of Thetis. The conflict between the suffering hero and the tyrannical god was resolved in the lost plays of Aeschylus' Prometheus trilogy. In that resolution, Aeschylus presumably depicted Zeus as a god of wisdom who, through the suffering of Prometheus, established himself in the end as a triumphant, almighty god secure in his supreme power, brought about through his divine plan for reconciliation.

Io

This divine plan of Zeus for reconciliation with a defeated Prometheus entailed the suffering of Io, a priestess of Hera who was loved by Zeus. Hera found out and turned Io into a white cow. She appointed a guard to watch over Io, a very good one indeed, since he had many eyes (perhaps as many as one hundred), and his name was Argus Panoptes ("all-seeing"). Zeus rescued Io by sending Hermes to lull Argus to sleep and cut off his head. Henceforth Hermes was given the title "Argeiphontes" ("slayer of Argus"). Hera set Argus' eyes in the tail of a peacock, her favorite bird, and continued her jealous persecution of Io by sending a gadfly to drive her mad. Frenzied, Io in her wanderings over the world encountered Prometheus. In Aeschylus, these two "victims" of Zeus commiserate with each other. We learn, however, that Io will find peace in

Egypt, where she will be restored to her human form and bear a son, Epaphus (Epaphos), a name that means "he of the touch." Io had become pregnant, not through sexual rape, but by the mere touch of the hand of Zeus, and among the descendants of Epaphus would be mighty Herakles, destined to bring about the release of Prometheus. The fulfillment of the will of Zeus was in the end accomplished.

The Great Flood

Lycaon and the Wickedness of Mortals

In the Age of Iron, Zeus took the form of a man to find out whether reports of the great wickedness of mortals were true. He visited the home of Lycaon (Lykaon) and announced that a god was present, but Lycaon, an evil tyrant, only scoffed and planned to kill Zeus during the night to prove that the visitor was not a god. Lycaon even went so far as to slaughter a man and offer human flesh as a meal for Zeus, who in anger brought the house down in flames. Lycaon fled but was turned into a howling, bloodthirsty wolf, a kind of werewolf in fact, since in this transformation he still manifested his human, evil looks and nature. Disgusted with the wickedness that he found everywhere he roamed, Zeus decided that the human race must be destroyed by a great flood.

Deucalion and Pyrrha

Zeus allowed only two pious mortals to be saved, Deucalion (Deukalion)—the Greek Noah, the son of Prometheus, and his wife Pyrrha, the daughter of Epimetheus. When the flood subsided they found themselves in their little boat stranded on Mount Parnassus. They were dismayed to discover that they were the only survivors and consulted the oracle of Themis about what they should do. The goddess ordered them to toss the bones of their great mother behind their backs. Deucalion understood that the stones in the body of earth are her bones. And so the stones that Deucalion tossed behind his back were miraculously transformed into men, while those cast by Pyrrha became women. In this way the world was repopulated.

Hellen and the Hellenes

Deucalion and Pyrrha had a son named Hellen. The ancient Greeks called themselves Hellenes and their country Hellas, and so Hellen was their eponymous ancestor.

Why Would the Gods Create Humanity?

The reason behind the creation of man is vague at best. Much of Greek mythology seems to support the idea that the gods' interest in the human race was almost like a game. Waterfield explains it:

> The gods were truly delighted with their new toys. Every aspect of life on earth came into existence on that day. Goodness was henceforth defined as whether the brief part danced by a creature on the earth's stage was pleasing in the gods' eyes. It amused the gods to remind their creatures, in various ways, who their masters were, and to test their goodness. Just when everything was going well, they would cause a flood, or earthquake, or famine, or personal disaster. And they devised more and more complex dances for their toys. (13)

This seems like a grim outlook, but it helped the Greeks explain the difficulty, misfortune, and dumb luck that are common in life. It also sheds light on their myth of Pandora: she was both a blessing and curse—a perfect catalyst that would further ensure the survival of humanity and provide generation after generation of entertainment for Zeus and his fellow Olympians.

Human History 1 — The Heroes of Ancient Greece

The terrors unleashed by Pandora's jar left a bleak world. Humanity was in desperate need of mighty men and women to inspire them. Thus the Greeks, like all cultures throughout history, were constantly looking for heroes—individuals who experienced the struggles and joys of human life but were also somehow greater than common men and women. The following were the most revered among the Greek heroes.

Herakles (Hercules)

The greatest of all the heroes of Greece was Herakles. His story is told by at least six famous Greek poets including Ovid, Euripides, and Sophocles. In the poet Apollodonus' account, the Theban prophet Tiresias says, "[Herakles] shall be the hero of all mankind." He embodied all that the Greeks valued, namely courage and confidence. However, this son of Zeus and a mortal woman was also plagued by torments unlike any other. Herakles was not overly intelligent, but he was passionate and impulsive; there was no better man to have as a friend, and no man more terrifying to have as an enemy. He was ruled by his emotions and plagued by outbursts of rage, which could be particularly lethal given that Herakles was the strongest man to ever live. According to the myths, only two things could overpower Herakles: supernatural forces and his own guilt.

Herakles might have been able to live a normal life had it not been for Hera, who desperately hated her son Herakles. He was a reminder of her husband's unfaithfulness, which was a thorn in the side of the goddess of fidelity. Hera's fury started when Herakles was an infant when she sent two assassins in the form of serpents to kill the child during the night. Herakles' foster parents came in to the room and found the infant hero playing with the corpses of the snakes, which he had strangled to death when they entered his crib.

Hera's diabolical vengeance finally came to fruition much later in the hero's life. She recognized that Herakles' weakness was found within his own emotions. She smote Herakles with temporary insanity, which caused him to beat his wife, Megara, and their three children to death with his bare hands. When Herakles was released from his insanity, he saw the bodies of his family and his bloodstained hands. The hero fell into despair and was determined to commit suicide. Herakles' good friend and fellow hero Theseus was able to prevent him from taking his own life, but Herakles, overwhelmed by guilt and shame, was now a broken man. Hera, however, was not satisfied. She wanted to utterly destroy her husband's illegitimate son. When Herakles arrived at the palace of the Mycenaean king seeking punishment for his horrible crime, Hera inspired the king to give Herakles twelve impossible tasks that would surely destroy the guilt-laden Herakles. These twelve tasks became known as The Twelve Labors. Waterfield gives tremendous detail regarding the Labors, but here are the basics of each.

1) Herakles fought the Nemean Lion, choking it to death with his bare hands.
2) Herakles defeated the three-headed Hydra, who grew two more heads when one was chopped off.
3) Herakles captured the Cerynitian Stag after a full year of hunting it.
4) Herakles hunted and captured a particularly destructive boar the size of a bull.
5) Herakles solved the problem of King Augeus' filthy and overcrowded stables by diverting two rivers, and using this torrent of water to flush out the filth.

6) With the help of Athena, Herakles defeated the Stymphalian Birds by making a tremendous racket to drive them from their nests, then shot them all down one by one with his mighty bow.
7) The Cretan Bull was known for being fierce and untamable; Herakles tamed it.
8) Herakles killed King Diomedes and then fought his man-eating horses and drove them away, thus rescuing the people of the kingdom.
9) Herakles retrieved the golden girdle of Hippolyta, queen of the Amazons. After much confusion and the queen's accidental death, he succeeded in his task.
10) Herakles fought the three-bodied monster Geryon, then captured the cattle that Geryon was shepherding.
11) Herakles retrieved the Golden Apples of Hesperides. He recruited Atlas for help, and after tricking each other back and forth, Herakles came away with the golden apples.
12) After Herakles had succeeded in these eleven tasks, Hera and the king of Mycenae had to ensure that the final labor killed the hero, so they sent him to retrieve Cerberus, the vicious three-headed, dragon-tailed guard dog of the Underworld. But Herakles emerged victorious and hefted the horrible beast above his head.

There are more adventures of Herakles and Hera's continued attempts to destroy him, but the Twelve Labors are by far the most enduring. The end of Herakles' story sees the hero tortured by Hera to the point of death, but Zeus intervenes before Herakles' soul can enter the Underworld. Zeus snatched his son up to Olympus and commanded Hera to end her vengeful feud against him. Herakles was then granted immortality among the gods, where he presumably found rest and peace.

Theseus

In stark contrast with Herakles, Theseus was no more than a mere mortal. He was the favorite hero of Athens not only because his father was a king there, but also because Theseus was "compassionate as he was brave and a man of great intellect as well as great bodily strength" (Hamilton 225). Theseus was also revered for addressing ordinary problems as well as extraordinary ones. Hamilton speaks to this when she says, "Greece rang with the praises of the young man who had cleared the land of these [common thieves]" (221). His utter humanity and his intelligence make him a sort of Batman to Herakles' Superman. And like those two pillars of our modern mythology, these two heroes shared a sort of friendship; Theseus supported Herakles in his darkest hour following the death of his family.

Although he went on many adventures, Theseus is best known for defeating the Minotaur. The Minotaur was a terrible monster—a large bull that walked upright like a man—who lived at the center of an impossible maze called the Labyrinth. Every nine years the citizens of Athens were forced to send seven young men and seven maidens to Minos, the king of Crete, so that the evil king would not burn Athens to the ground. These fourteen tributes would be cast into the Labyrinth were the Minotaur would devour them. Theseus would not stand for this. To the dismay of his father, he volunteered himself as one of the young men to be sent to Crete. He told his father that he would slay the Minotaur and return home with white sails on his ship in place of the usual black sails.

When Theseus arrived in Crete, Minos' daughter, Ariadne, fell in love with him and provided him with twine so that Theseus might leave a trail to navigate back out of the Labyrinth. When Theseus reached the center of the maze, he slew the Minotaur with his

bare hands and used the twine trail to lead his people to freedom. There are different accounts of Ariadne's fate, but ultimately she does not make it back to Athens with Theseus. The hero also forgot his promise to his father and left the black sails raised; believing that his son had died at the hands of the Minotaur, Theseus' father cast himself off of a cliff into the sea. Thus Theseus accidentally and tragically inherited his father's throne.

Perseus

Perseus, like Herakles, was a demigod, meaning that his mother was a mortal woman and his father was Zeus. Yet unlike Herakles, Perseus was not persecuted by Hera, but rather by mortal men. Perseus' grandfather cast out both his daughter and infant grandson after hearing a prophecy that the child would kill him. He placed them in a makeshift boat and cast both into the sea. They would have starved or drowned had Zeus not intervened. He allowed both the mother and child to be rescued by kindly fishermen. Later, when Perseus had matured into adulthood, his mother was courted by Polydectes, who decided he would prefer the young hero dead. He convinced Perseus to retrieve the head of Medusa, a Gorgon, as a wedding gift.

The Gorgons were a gruesome race of creatures with the upper body of a woman, the lower body of a large serpent, and hair made of writhing, venomous snakes. Looking directly at a Gorgon would turn any mortal to solid stone.

Fortunately for Perseus, Pallas Athena and Hermes intervened; Athena gave him a mirrored shield and Hermes gave him a powerful sword. In addition, Hermes helped Perseus win the favor of the Hyperboreans, who gifted the hero with winged sandals, a magical bag that would allow any object to fit comfortably inside, and a magic helmet that would render the wearer invisible. With these tools, Perseus was able to successfully battle Medusa, using the mirrored shield to look indirectly at her horrible visage and slay her. The mighty sword allowed him to decapitate the Gorgon and the winged shoes gave him a means to escape her lair.

On his way home, he intervened and rescued Andromeda, a beautiful princess who was to be sacrificed to a sea serpent. Perseus married Andromeda and returned home. There he discovered the corruption of his father-in-law and used the Gorgon head against him. He pulled the ghastly thing from his magic bag and turned Polydectes to stone.

Perseus' grandfather, who had cast his daughter and grandchild into the sea in an attempt to save his own life, met his timely demise as well. The prophecy against him was fulfilled when Perseus, who was competing in a discus-throwing contest, accidentally hurled the disc into the audience. It slammed into his grandfather, killing him instantly.

Perseus is rare among the Greek heroes because he is one of the few to settle down after a lifetime of adventure with a wife, have children, and live—as far as we know—happily ever after.

Atalanta

One of the few female heroes in ancient Greece, Atalanta was a formidable huntress and athlete who could outperform any man. Her story, like those of many Greek heroes, includes an element of tragedy: her father, who had hoped for a son, abandoned his child in the woods. Atalanta was raised by a she-bear and eventually adopted by kindly hunters. This forged Atalanta into a formidable heroine.

When the Calydonian Boar, a massive tusked beast, terrorized cities and slew hunter after hunter, it was Atalanta who felled the savage animal with her bow. Technically it was a young man named Meleager who dealt the boar its final blow, but Meleager loved Atalanta and let everyone know that she deserved more credit than he for stopping the beast.

Meleager was not the only man to notice Atalanta, however. Her reputation brought men from far and wide seeking her hand in marriage. Hamilton says, "It seems odd that a number of men wanted to marry her because she could hunt and shoot and wrestle, but it was so; she had a great many suitors. As a way of disposing of them easily and agreeably she declared that she would marry whoever could beat her in a footrace, knowing well that there was no such man alive" (248).

It wasn't until a young man, Milanion, received help from Aphrodite that Atalanta met her match. Milanion received three irresistible golden apples from Aphrodite to distract Atalanta during the race. Milanion was a swift runner and he could keep stride with Atalanta, but any time she started to gain on him, he would toss one of the golden apples off to the side of the path. Atalanta would stop to pick up the apple, having to run faster to close the distance between her and Milanion afterward. When the second and then third apples were thrown, Atalanta could not close the gap and Milanion won the race by a matter of inches, thus winning Atalanta's hand in marriage. The myth ends with the couple transforming into lions, which seems fitting for someone as fierce and independent as Atalanta.

Jason and the Argonauts

The story of the Greek adventurer Jason contains many elements that we recognize in our modern stories and fairytales. Jason's father was one of the mighty kings of Greece, however his nephew, Pelias, usurped him. At this time Jason was still an infant and had been hidden safely away for fear of Pelias' wrath against the rightful heir to the throne.

In exile Jason became a strapping young hero and eventually returned to reclaim his father's kingdom. Pelias was shocked to see Jason alive, but Jason harbored no hatred towards his deceitful cousin. Jason told Pelias that he could keep all the wealth and spoils that had accumulated during his reign as long as he allowed Jason to return to the throne and rule. Pelias, reluctant to surrender his position as king, crafted a plot to eliminate Jason. He agreed to surrender the throne, but only after Jason had completed a dangerous adventure.

According to Pelias, Jason's dead father had bid his son to retrieve a valuable treasure known as the Golden Fleece. So Jason gathered the mightiest heroes and set sail in his ship, the Argo. Jason and his Argonauts braved many perils in their quest for the Fleece.

Along the way they fought a horde of Harpies—horrible winged beasts that leave a gut-wrenching stench in their wake strong enough to rot fresh food instantly. The Argo next navigated through the Clashing Rocks—a dangerous nautical obstacle—and snuck past the island of the Amazons.

Eventually Jason arrived at the gates of the Colchian king. The king welcomed the heroes and invited them to a feast, eager to know why they had traveled so far from their home. Jason explained his quest for the Golden Fleece to the king and, in return for the king giving him the Fleece, offered to do anything requested of him. The king was secretly furious that these foreigners would dare to ask for this great treasure, but he refused to murder his guests in cold blood. So the devious king devised another plan to

rid himself of the heroes. He told Jason that he would gladly give him the Fleece if the hero could accomplish a trial of courage to prove his worth. First, Jason would have to yoke two fire-breathing bulls and use them to plow a field.

Next, he would plant the teeth of a dragon into the freshly plowed field. When planted, the dragon teeth would sprout up into a group of bloodthirsty soldiers, which Jason would have to then defeat in combat.

Jason knew that no man could survive such a trial, but agreed to the king's terms. Fortunately, the goddess Aphrodite had intervened and caused the king's daughter, Medea, to fall in love with Jason. Medea was a powerful sorceress and concocted an ointment from the blood of Prometheus that would protect Jason. The following day, Jason completed the fearsome tasks with the help of Medea's ointment. The Colchian king was furious and began to plan a new way to kill Jason and the Argonauts. Medea, however, was so overcome with love for Jason that she snuck to his ship during the night and warned him of her father's plans. She led Jason to the Fleece, which was guarded by a fearful serpent, and used her magic to lull the beast to sleep. Jason then took both the Fleece and Medea to his ship and set sail for Greece.

On their way home, Medea protected them from many other dangers, such as the combined threats of Scylla (a six-headed dragon) and Charybdis (an enormous whirlpool that could consume a ship whole). When he arrived at Pelias' throne room with the Fleece, he finally learned the full extent of his cousin's treachery: Pelias had forced Jason's father to kill himself and Jason's mother had died of grief. Jason turned to Medea for help, who used her magic to concoct a horrible death for Pelias.

Now Jason took his rightful place on the throne and Medea, who had betrayed her father and left her home for Jason, looked forward to being at peace with the love of her life. Jason, however, had different plans: "All that [Medea] did of evil and of good was done for [Jason] alone, and in the end, all the reward she got was that he turned traitor to her" (Hamilton 175). After she had borne him two sons, Jason abandoned Medea and went to marry the daughter of the king of Corinth.

Medea used her magic to create a "wedding gift"—a beautiful robe doused in poisons and magic potions—for Jason's new bride. As soon as Jason's bride put the dress on, she was consumed by flames and died. Jason recognized Medea's handiwork. He intended to kill her, but all he could do was curse her name as he watched her ride out of sight on a chariot drawn by dragons.

Human History 2 — Greece Rising — The Trojan War

Did the Trojan War Really Happen?

Scholars are uncertain about the historical details of the Trojan War. There is evidence that a city named Troy did exist and that it was ransacked and destroyed by the Greeks, but the proportions of the battle and some of the events described may have been elaborated by Greek authors, who took artistic liberties and embellished the heroes and events of the Trojan War. It is also interesting to note that no single ancient text provides the complete story of the Trojan War; instead, it has been pieced together from several sources, most notably from Homer's *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*. Another significant chunk of the story comes from the Roman poet Virgil's *The Aeneid* as well as plays by Sophocles and Euripides. Some excellent sources that assemble the pieces include Edith Hamilton's *Mythology*, Thomas Bulfinch's *Bulfinch's Mythology*, and Robin Waterfield's *The Greek Myths*. Regardless of the tale's level of accuracy or the number of contributing authors, the Trojan War is one of the most famous stories within Greek mythology, second only to Odysseus' adventures returning home from it.

How the Olympians Accidentally Started the Trojan War

The story begins with a celebration on Olympus. Understandably, the goddess of discord, Eris, was not invited to the festivities. Bitter about her exclusion, Eris devised a party-crashing gift to spite the Olympians. She inscribed "for the fairest" on a golden apple and tossed it in the midst of the beautiful Olympian goddesses Aphrodite, Athena, and Hera. Of course, each goddess felt that she was the fairest and rightfully deserved the apple. The dispute between the three goddesses became so violent that it was brought before Zeus for judgment. Zeus, knowing better than to get in the middle of an argument among women, particularly an argument about who was the most beautiful, told the goddesses that they should allow the dispute to be settled by a mortal man:

The Judgment of Paris

Paris, a prince of Troy who was living with a nymph named Oenone, was surprised to have the goddesses appear and give him the honor of choosing the most beautiful. Lacking confidence in their own beauty and knowing the wayward hearts of mortal men, each goddess promised Paris an extravagant bribe. Athena offered Paris victory over the Greeks, who were enemies of the Trojans. Hera offered Paris dominion over all of Europe and Asia. But it was Aphrodite, the goddess of love and beauty, who understood the lustful heart of Paris best: she offered him the most beautiful mortal woman in the world. Though each offer was tempting, Paris chose Aphrodite, thus angering both Athena and Hera.

Unfortunately, the most beautiful woman in the world, Helen, was soon to be married. For years the champions of Greece had begged for the Spartan princess' hand in marriage. Seeing the potential for disaster, her father shrewdly asked these Grecian heroes to swear an oath to honor and protect whomever he chose to wed his daughter. Once they had done so, Helen's father named Menelaus as Helen's lucky husband-to-be and the new king of Sparta.

Helen's impending marriage was but a minor obstacle for a goddess to overcome, so Aphrodite led Paris to Sparta, where he was welcomed as a guest at the wedding feast despite being a Trojan. When Menelaus was called away to business in Crete, Paris betrayed his generous host, took Helen, and fled back to Troy. It is unclear whether Helen was kidnapped or willingly left with Paris. Waterfield believes that Helen fell in

love with him. In contrast, Bulfinch posits that Helen genuinely loved Menelaus but was forced to comply with the will of Aphrodite, thus making Helen an unwilling abductee. Homer's account in *The Odyssey* synthesizes these viewpoints: Helen's dialogue reveals that she genuinely loves Menelaus, but also implies that she did at some point also fall for Paris. She goes on to express bewilderment at her own behavior and denounces her foolish, fleeting love for the Trojan.

Regardless of what lay in Helen's heart, Paris' actions were intolerably heinous to the Greeks. Aphrodite's involvement had made Paris too bold: not only had he abducted the bride of the Spartan king, but he had also shown open contempt for the gracious, undeserved hospitality of his enemies. The only option left to the Greeks was war.

"The Face That Launched A Thousand Ships"

Menelaus, upon discovering that his wife was gone, was infuriated and called on the Greek champions to fulfill their oath. Menelaus' brother, Agamemnon, assembled the Greek army. The two most notable warriors to be called were Odysseus and Achilles.

One thousand Greek warships set sail for Troy, thus earning Helen the distinction of being "the face that launched one thousand ships." King Priam of Troy prepared for battle and appointed his sons, Paris and Hector, to serve as his generals. Despite the hefty heroic roster of the Greeks—Menelaus, Agamemnon, Odysseus, Achilles, Diomedes, and Ajax were all warriors of the highest caliber—they could not gain an advantage over the thick walls of Troy, the leadership of Hector, and a pestilence sent from Apollo.

The Gods Choose Sides

The war lingered for nine years in a stalemate. Olympus took notice and intervened. Athena and Hera, still harboring a grudge against Paris, came to the aid of the Greeks, along with Poseidon. Aphrodite, Artemis, and Apollo sided with the Trojans. Zeus vowed to remain neutral, but in his heart he favored the Trojans. The gods fought alongside men and the battle became bloodier.

At the worst possible time, Achilles and Agamemnon found themselves at odds with each other. This was the moment Homer chose to begin his account of the story in *The Iliad*. Here is Ian Johnston's translation of the epic's opening lines:

> Sing, Goddess, sing of the rage of Achilles, son of Peleus—
> that murderous anger which condemned Achaeans
> to countless agonies and threw many warrior souls
> deep into Hades, leaving their dead bodies
> carrion food for dogs and birds—
> all in fulfilment of the will of Zeus.

Achilles discovered that Chryseis, a Trojan prisoner of war and prophetess of Apollo, was the cause of Apollo's pestilence on the Greeks and ordered her to be released. Angered by Achilles' action, Agamemnon countered by taking Achilles' slave-girl, Briseis. This petty feud caused devastating losses for the Greeks. Achilles refused to fight until Agamemnon returned Briseis to him, and the Greeks could not win the war without their nearly invulnerable hero.

Paris v. Menelaus

It was at this time that the Trojans and the Greeks came to an agreement. In order to stem the loss of life, Menelaus and Paris would battle one-on-one for Helen. Menelaus, a vicious warrior, was more than a match for Paris, who was weak by comparison. In

the midst of the fight, Menelaus' sword broke in half, perhaps due to the interference of a god. This was a minor setback for Menelaus, however. The brutal Spartan king engaged Paris in hand-to-hand combat, seizing the weak Trojan by the helmet and dragging him around. Had Aphrodite not intervened and cut the strap holding Paris' helmet, the young Trojan surely would have died at Menelaus' hands. Free of the Spartan's death-grip, Paris fled back to the safety of Troy with the help of a cloud provided by Aphrodite.

The honor of the Greeks was once again offended by the cowardice of Paris and blood-lust spread among the soldiers: "Terror and Destruction and Strife, whose fury never slackens, all friends of the murderous War-god, were there to urge men on to slaughter each other" (Hamilton 266). With a little additional goading from Athena and Hera, the war was back on.

Gods on the Battlefield

Now the battle reached a fever pitch. Hera and Athena joined with the Greek hero Diomedes to battle Ares, who was fighting alongside Hector. The two goddesses guided Diomedes' spear directly into the chest of Ares, who roared in pain: "The War-god bellowed as loud as ten thousand cry in battle, and at the awful sound trembling seized the whole host, Greeks and Trojans alike" (Hamilton 267). Ares, whose savage pride could not tolerate an injury from a mere mortal, fled back to Olympus to tend his wound and the battle outside the walls of Troy resumed. Aphrodite, being the least warlike of the gods, also fled to Olympus after she received a minor injury.

To further complicate matters for the Greeks, Achilles' mother, Thetis, persuaded Zeus to act on behalf of the Trojans to further avenge Achilles' loss of Briseis. She hoped the war would end before her son could change his mind and return to the fight. Hera would not stand for her husband's interference, however. She dressed in her most alluring gown and used Aphrodite's girdle, which rendered the wearer irresistible, to seduce Zeus. While the ruler of Olympus was thus preoccupied, the battle turned in favor of the Greeks.

The Death of Patroclus

Despite Hera's timely assistance, Hector was still a troublesome obstacle. It seemed that the home-field advantage was too much for the Greeks to overcome. Furthermore, the Greeks were weary from nine years of fighting to reclaim one man's wife. When Zeus discovered Hera's treachery and returned in full force, even the ambitious Agamemnon, who looked forward to adding Troy to his kingdom, considered retreat. It was at this bleak moment that Patroclus, the cousin of Achilles, donned Achilles' armor and went on to the battlefield. Patroclus met Hector in combat and Hector swiftly killed him, thinking that the young man was Achilles. Despite being robbed of such a glorious victory, Hector still relished the death of a formidable opponent and took Achilles' armor off Patroclus' body to wear as a trophy.

The following day, the gods of Olympus were in the heat of the battle again. "The gods were now fighting, too, as hotly as the men, and Zeus sitting apart in Olympus laughed pleasantly to himself when he saw god matched against god: Athena felling Ares to the ground; Hera seizing the bow of Artemis from her shoulders and boxing her ears with it this way and that; Poseidon provoking Apollo with taunting words to strike him first" (Hamilton 273).

The Wrath of Achilles

Meanwhile, Thetis reluctantly brought her son replacement armor forged by Hephaestus. With his new armor, Achilles was eager to rejoin the fight and avenge his cousin Patroclus. Hector knew Achilles would be his undoing. In an uncharacteristic act of cowardice, Hector fled from Achilles, who chased the Trojan around the city walls three times before Hector stopped to face him. Knowing that his death was at hand, Hector requested a covenant that the victor would honor the dead body of the defeated, even going so far as to offer Achilles a reward for doing so. In Fagles' translation Achilles replied:

> Would to god my rage, my fury would drive me now
> To hack your flesh away and eat you raw—
> Such agonies you have caused me! Ransom?
> No man alive could keep the dog-packs off you,
> Not if they haul in ten, twenty times that ransom
> And pile it here before me and promise me fortunes more—
> No, not even if Dardan Priam should offer to weigh out
> Your bulk in gold! Not even then will your noble mother
> Lay you on your deathbed, mourn the son she bore…
> The dogs and the birds will rend you—blood and bone!

Achilles then viciously attacked Hector and exploited the weak points in his old armor, which Hector wore. He drove a spear through Hector's throat, tied the Trojan hero's ankles together, and dragged the corpse behind his chariot as he rode around the walls of Troy.

Later that night, King Priam boldly entered the Greek camp with the support of the gods, approached Achilles, and requested the return of his son's mutilated body for burial. Achilles showed sympathy to the aging king and surrendered Hector's body; the Trojans honored Hector with a funeral pyre behind the city walls the same night. This is where Homer chose to end *The Iliad*. Robert Fagles' translation is 537 pages long without the additional material provided by the publisher, which should give you a clear idea of how much detail Homer includes about this relatively brief portion of the war.

The Death of Achilles

Soon after defeating Hector, Achilles met his own doom. Having battled the Trojans all the way back against their city walls, Achilles felt that victory was near, but also knew his own death would be at hand. It was at this critical moment that Paris shot an arrow, guided by Apollo, directly into Achilles' heel, killing the otherwise unstoppable Greek warrior. Ajax took the body of Achilles back to the Greek camp while Odysseus and his men held the Trojans at bay.

In the Greek camp, the surviving warriors mourned the loss of Achilles and struggled to decide who would don his mighty Hephaestus-forged armor. Odysseus and Ajax were selected as the most worthy candidates. The remaining Greek heroes took a secret vote, and Odysseus received the armor. Ajax, furious that the armor was not given to him, temporarily went mad, slaughtered a number of livestock, and beat a ram to death with his bare hands; in his delirious fury he believed the ram was Odysseus. When Ajax returned to his right mind, he realized the shame he had brought on himself and chose to commit suicide.

The Death of Paris

Odysseus, eager to return to his wife and son, took matters into his own hands. Capturing a Trojan prophet, he held the man at knife's point and demanded to know how to defeat the Trojans. The prophet revealed that the Greeks would need Hercules' bow if they were to secure victory. Odysseus took his men and traveled to find Philoctetes, the keeper of Hercules' bow. When they returned to the battlefield, Philoctetes used the bow to shoot Paris through the chest. Frightened and dying, Paris cried out to Oenone, the nymph with whom he had been romantically involved prior to receiving his prize from Aphrodite. Oenone refused to heal Paris' wound and he died. In her grief, Oenone then killed herself.

The Trojan Horse

It was now the tenth year of the war. With both Hector and Paris dead, the Greeks had the edge they needed to defeat the Trojans. Once again Odysseus took matters into his own hands. He had his men build a wooden horse with enough hollow space inside to hold Odysseus and several dozen soldiers. Odysseus then told Agamemnon to take the remaining Greek soldiers and sail to a cove out of sight of the Trojan watchtowers. The following day when the Trojans came on to the battlefield all they found was the large wooden horse and a solitary Greek soldier, who reported that the Greek army had given up and left in the night. In return for sparing his life, he told the Trojans about the mysterious wooden horse. He claimed that the Greeks had built the horse as an offering to Athena in hopes that the suspicious Trojans would destroy it and invoke the wrath of the goddess. The Trojans bought the story and took the horse into the city as part of their victory celebration; inside, wily Odysseus and dozens of his best men crouched, silently waiting for nightfall.

During the course of the celebration, Helen walked past the wooden horse, running her hand along it. The men inside, most of whom had not seen a woman in ten years, were eager to call out to her. Only Odysseus had the self-control to resist, clamping his strong hands over the mouth of his weakest soldier to prevent the man's lust from revealing their hiding place.

When the Trojans retired for the night, Odysseus and his men sprang into action. They leapt out of their hiding spot inside the horse, killed the watchtower guards, and opened the city gates for the rest of the Greek army (which had left their hiding spot under cover of darkness). The Greeks began to burn down the city. By the time the Trojans woke and saw what was happening, all was lost. The Trojans fought savagely that night; their only concern was killing as many Greeks as possible. A few clever Trojans donned the armor of fallen Greek soldiers to disguise themselves, but it was too little too late. The Greeks had won. The Trojan War was over.

Interestingly, despite the supposed support of Zeus, Artemis, and Apollo, the Olympians did not come to the aid of the Trojans that day. Aphrodite was the only one to act: she helped one of her mortal sons, Aeneas, escape the city and returned Helen to the waiting arms of Menelaus.

Human History 3 — Going Home — *The Odyssey*

Homer's *The Odyssey*

Odysseus was the king of Ithaca and one of the heroes of the Trojan War. Though Achilles generally takes the spotlight in that infamous battle, you could argue that the real hero of the war was Odysseus. He is the mastermind behind the death of Paris and the Trojan Horse, both of which directly led to the victory of the Greeks.

But Odysseus never wanted to join the war; he only left his wife Penelope and infant son Telemachus because he was forced to honor an oath. At the end of the war, Odysseus was eager to reunite with his family, but he had greater difficulty returning home than any other Greek. It took him an additional ten years, resulting in a total of twenty years away from his family and his kingdom. Odysseus' epic struggle to return to Ithaca is told by Homer in *The Odyssey*, which is a sort of sequel to *The Iliad*.

The Narrative Structure of *The Odyssey*

The narrative structure that Homer used to tell his tale can be jarring if you are unprepared. The story of Odysseus would have been well-known by the time Homer crafted his definitive version, so he plunges in, fully expecting that the audience is already familiar with the hero. As with *The Iliad*, he begins by invoking the muse (the translation here is again by Ian Johnston):

> Muse, speak to me now of that resourceful man
> who wandered far and wide after ravaging
> the sacred citadel of Troy.1 He came to see
> many people's cities, where he learned their customs,
> while on the sea his spirit suffered many torments,
> as he fought to save his life and lead his comrades home.
> But though he wanted to, he could not rescue them—
> they all died from their own stupidity, the fools.
> They feasted on the cattle of Hyperion,
> god of the sun—that's why he snatched away their chance
> of getting home someday. So now, daughter of Zeus,
> tell us his story, starting anywhere you wish.

The adventure with the Cattle of the Sun is near the end of Odysseus' suffering abroad, yet it is one of the first things Homer tells us. It is a narrative technique called *in medias res*, which means to begin "in the middle of things." As a result, the majority of Odysseus' most famous adventures are told in a flashback sequence that spans four lengthy chapters. We also bounce between what is happening with Odysseus abroad and what is occurring with his wife Penelope and son Telemachus back in Ithaca. Additionally, there are a few abrupt transitions to the gods conversing on Olympus.

Greek Hospitality

The Greeks' sense of hospitality exceeds our own. There were three basic tenets that would govern your interactions with houseguests at that time. First, any person who arrived on your doorstep was to be welcomed in, regardless of who he or she was. A guest could be rich or poor, male or female, young or old, a familiar face or a total stranger. Second, the guest was to be given the privilege of staying in your home, where you would be expected to provide food and shelter. Last, the host would provide the guest with a parting gift. This gift was usually something meaningful and—by our standards—extravagant.

As you can see, the responsibilities of a host were much more than what is demanded by our contemporary culture. This helps us understand the lavish treatment of Telemachus and Odysseus during their respective travels. It also sheds light on the "villainous" behavior of a few of Odysseus' hosts. More importantly, understanding the Greek sense of hospitality explains why the suitors, who were vying for Penelope's affections during Odysseus' long absence, were tolerated for so long in the palace. That being said, the suitors' behavior was not acceptable to the Greeks; Homer's audience would have been outraged at the thought of these brazen men exploiting a loophole in the hospitality system. It was generally understood that you were not to take advantage of a host.

Odysseus and Telemachus: Men's Men

We read the biographies of great men so that we can learn from their virtues and flaws. The tales of the Greek heroes, though based largely in fiction, are no different, and none of mythology's pantheon of mighty men are quite so human as Odysseus and Telemachus.

Odysseus is known for being wise and clever. He is loved and respected as a friend, husband, warrior, and king among those who know him. He displays a degree of selflessness in his concern for his men (despite their stubborn, foolish behavior). He has tenacity, perseverance, and courage that we can all learn from, and his penchant for using his brain before using his brawn is admirable. But he also had the ability to exert physical force. When Odysseus cleanses his house of the suitors, we see how savage the fury of a man can be when he defends his family and home. This thrilling, cathartic portion of the story includes Odysseus' eagle-eyed marksmanship, blood-soaked beard, and rippling muscles (Homer goes out of his way to highlight Odysseus' muscular thighs).

Though Odysseus clearly has a wealth of virtues, he also suffers from two common male vices: lust and pride. Though he will stop at nothing to get home to his wife and son, he is not opposed to making a detour to bed a demigoddess or two. In one instance, Odysseus is quite comfortable taking a year-long sabbatical from his arduous journey in order to spend some "quality time" with the sorceress Circe. The double standard in the story is unavoidable: if Penelope had such a lapse, it would be utterly unforgiveable, yet Odysseus is free to sow his royal oats as he pleases.

Although Odysseus' lust is to blame for a portion of the delay, his pride is ultimately the greatest cause. In the famous encounter with Polyphemus, the cycloptic bastard son of Poseidon, Odysseus brilliantly tricks the beast before gouging out its eye. As he sails away and mocks the creature, he shouts his name so that all might know who had victory over the muscular brute. This crescendo of pride over the humiliation of

Polyphemus results in Poseidon's relentless interference with the remainder of Odysseus' journey.

Though Odysseus often brings problems upon himself, Telemachus is a different issue. Raised by a lonely mother, Telemachus knows of his father only through legend and rumor. As a result, he is a man-boy when we first meet him, but a hero's blood flows in his veins and he refuses to accept his lackluster fate. Telemachus boldly leaves Ithaca on his own journey to cultivate his manhood and find his father. His is the tale of every young man's longing to have a relationship with his father, and become a man in his own right. Though Odysseus' story is one of a man finding his way back, Telemachus' is one of a man finding his way forward.

Penelope: A Man's Woman

Penelope is a sample of an ideal woman. She is both beautiful and clever, and against all odds remains fiercely loyal to her husband. It might be easy to miss this because of Penelope's circumstances in the story: we encounter her at the end of twenty long years of waiting, and she is not certain her husband is alive. Over one hundred handsome young men are clamoring for her attention, and she sometimes appears to be at her limits. Yet despite the moments where she seems ready to falter (and who can blame her?) she holds fast to her faith in Odysseus' return. The story sets Penelope in stark contrast to Clytemnestra, who murdered her husband Agamemnon when he returned from Troy. The true beauty of Penelope's character is most apparent in the final act of the story when she talks to the "beggar" (who is Odysseus in disguise) and inadvertently plays a crucial role in the suitors' demise (though her cleverness makes me question whether or not it was truly inadvertent). *The Odyssey* is predominantly action and adventure, but Penelope's reunion with Odysseus and the symbolism of their great rooted bed are a love story fit for even the manliest of men.

Other Important Myths

Apollo and Daphne

The story of Apollo's love for Daphne ("laurel"), explaining why the laurel was sacred to him, is one of the most famous and inspiring of all myths because of Ovid's version.

After Apollo had just slain the Python, he boasted to Cupid that the god of love with his bow and arrows could not compete with his glorious slaying of a dragon. Cupid got even for this slight by shooting at Daphne, the daughter of the river-god Peneus, a dull, leaden arrow that repels love and piercing Apollo's heart with a bright, short one that arouses passion.

Daphne was extraordinarily beautiful but refused her many suitors. She vowed to remain a virgin devoted to Diana, the forests, and the hunt; both her father and Jupiter respected her wishes. As soon as Apollo saw her he was inflamed by passion and he desired to marry her, but because of Cupid his hopes were doomed. Daphne fled in fear as Apollo made his appeals and pursued her. Exhausted, she reached the waters of Peneus, and her prayer that the power of the river would destroy her too-enticing beauty was granted. She was transformed into a lovely laurel tree, and the heartbroken Apollo, as he embraced its trunk and branches, promised that since she could not be his wife, she would be his tree, and from it would come the laurel wreath, a symbol of love, honor, and glory forever.

Apollo and Hyacinthus

Apollo, as the archetypal Greek god, was also susceptible to the love of young men. He was devoted to Cyparissus (Kyparissos), who was turned into a cypress tree, the meaning of his name. But the story of Apollo's devotion to Hyacinthus (Hykinthos), a handsome Spartan youth, also told by Ovid, is more famous.

The god and the youth enjoyed competing with the discus. Apollo's first throw showed magnificent skill and great strength, for he sent the discus high up into the clouds. When it eventually came back to earth, an enthusiastic Hyacinthus dashed to pick it up, but as it hit the earth it bounced back and struck him full in the face. All of Apollo's medical arts were of no avail, and his beloved companion died. Overcome by grief and guilt, the god vowed everlasting devotion by singing of Hyacinthus to the tune of his lyre and by causing a new flower, the hyacinth, to arise from his blood. Apollo himself marked his laments on his petals, the mournful letters AI AI, and predicted the suicide of the valiant Ajax, whose initals (these same letters) would appear on this same flower, which would arise from his heroic blood. An annual festival, the Hyacinthia, was celebrated at Sparta in honor of Hyacinthus.

Echo and Narcissus

Also famous is Echo's love for Narcissus (Narkissos). In this story she is a lovely nymph, but almost annoyingly talkative. She once detained Juno (according to Ovid) in a lengthy conversation so that the goddess would not be able to catch her husband Jupiter lying with the nymphs. Juno was furious and caused Echo to have a limited use of her tongue, by which Juno had been tricked. Thereafter Echo could only repeat the final words spoken by others.

The river-god Cephisus and the nymph Lirope were the parents of a beautiful son named Narcissus. When his mother inquired if Narcissus would live to a ripe old age, the seer Tiresias answered, "Yes, if he will not have come to know himself."

Narcissus had reached the age of sixteen and was so extraordinarily beautiful that many youths and many maidens desired him, but they did not dare even to touch him because of his fierce pride. One of his male admirers who was scorned called out to the heavens, "So may he himself fall in love, so may he not be able to possess his beloved." Nemesis ("retribution") heard his just prayer.

When Echo saw Narcissus as he was hunting, she burned with an insatiable passion. She followed him wherever he went but could only echo the last words that he had uttered. Narcissus vehemently rejected her advances and so, spurned and embarrassed, Echo hid in the woods and from that time has inhabited solitary caves.

Once when Narcissus was hot and tired from the hunt, he came upon a pool of glistening clear water amidst a lovely, cool grove. As he continued to drink, he was captivated as he gazed upon his own beauty, and he fell hopelessly in love with his insubstantial reflection. He marveled at what others had marveled at and like them could not quench his passion. As he bestowed kisses and tried to embrace himself, he could never get and possess his deceptive image. Gradually he was so weakened and consumed by love of his own reflection that he wasted away and died. While he was dying, poor Echo watched and felt sorry for him as she repeated his cries of woe and his last farewell. At his death the nymphs of the waters and forest wept, and Echo sounded their laments. In the Underworld, Narcissus gazed at himself in the waters of the river Styx. On earth his body had disappeared, and in its place was a yellow flower with white petals in its center.

Demeter and Persephone

Persephone (Proserpina) the daughter of Zeus and Demeter, was also called Kore ("girl" or "maiden"). While she was picking beautiful flowers with the daughters of Ocean, Earth, at the will of Zeus and to please Hades, produced a most wondrous and radiant narcissus. As Persephone reached out to pluck the flower, Earth yawned open, and Hades appeared in his golden chariot and carried her away in tears. Persephone shouted and called out to Zeus, but he did not hear her for it was by his will that Hades, his brother and her uncle, carried her off to be his wife and queen of the Underworld.

Demeter heard her daughter's screams and frantically rushed in pursuit. For nine days she did not eat ambrosia or drink nectar, nor did she bathe; she roamed the earth, disconsolate and holding burning torches in her hands. Hecate had heard Persephone's screams, but could not tell Demeter who carried her daughter off. On the tenth day, the sun-god Helius, who had seen everything, explained to Demeter what had happened. He added that Demeter should not lament. Her brother Hades would make a fine husband for her daughter, since he was a great god, who when divine power was first divided three ways was made king of the Underworld.

Now that she knew the truth, Demeter's grief was intensified and a great anger rose up in her heart against Zeus because he had willed the kidnapping of her daughter. She avoided the gods on Olympus and, disguising her beautiful appearance, wandered among mortals.

In her grief and longing for her daughter, Demeter caused for mortals a most devastating year with no harvest. The earth would not send up a single sprout. By continuing in this fashion, she would not only have destroyed the entire human race with cruel famine but would also have deprived the Olympian gods of their glorious prestige from gifts and sacrifices. Zeus finally took notice, commanding her to rejoin the

company of the gods. Demeter refused to obey. So Zeus sent down all the immortal gods, who approached Demeter one by one, offering any gifts or honors that she might choose. Demeter stubbornly insisted that she would never set foot on Olympus until she with her own eyes saw her daughter again.

Thus Zeus was forced to send Hermes down to explain to Hades all that Demeter had said and done; Hermes also delivered the command that Persephone return with him out of the Underworld so that her mother might see her and desist from her wrath. Hades smiled grimly and immediately obeyed Zeus the king. He ordered Persephone to return with a loving heart to her mother; but he also told her that he was not an unworthy husband for her, since he was the full brother of her father Zeus and that while she was with him she would rule as his queen, a great goddess.

Joyous Persephone jumped up quickly. But (according to the poet of the Hymn) Hades secretly gave his wife the fruit of the pomegranate to eat to ensure the fulfillment of his words to her as her husband; she should not remain the whole year above with her mother Demeter but would rule with him below for part of the time. He then yoked his immortal horses to his golden chariot, which Persephone mounted. Hermes took the reins, and in no time at all they came to a halt in front of the temple where Demeter waited.

At the sight of her daughter, Demeter rushed out of the temple, and Persephone leaped down from the chariot and ran to meet her mother, throwing her arms around her neck. Immediately Demeter sensed some treachery and asked if Persephone had eaten any food in the Underworld. If she had not, she would live with her father Zeus and mother Demeter above, but if she had eaten anything, she would live a third part of the year in the Underworld and the other two thirds in the upper world. With the burgeoning spring she would wondrously rise again from the gloomy region below.

Zeus sent Rhea to lead Demeter back among the gods with the following message. He promised to grant Demeter the honors among the immortals that she would choose, and he consented that her daughter live a third part of the year below and the other two-thirds above, with her mother and the other gods. Rhea swiftly rushed down and delivered Zeus' pronouncements and encouraged Demeter to comply, first by restoring the earth's fertility for mortals. Demeter obeyed. She miraculously caused fruit to spring up from earth that had previously been barren, and the whole land blossomed with flowers.

Orpheus and Eurydice

The Thracian bard Orpheus summoned Hymen, the god of marriage, to be present at his marriage to his beloved Eurydice. The omens, however, were bad, and the new bride was bitten on the ankle by a snake and died.

The grieving Orpheus was so inconsolable that he dared to descend to the Underworld, where he made his appeal to the king and queen themselves, Hades and Persephone, in a song sung to the accompaniment of his lyre. In the name of Love, Orpheus asked that his Eurydice be returned to him in life; if not, he would prefer to remain there in death with his beloved. His words, his music, and his art held the shades spellbound, and the king and queen were moved to grant his request, but on one condition: Orpheus was not to turn back to look at Eurydice until he had left the Underworld. As they approached the border of the world above, Orpheus, anxious and yearning, turned and looked back, through love. At his gaze, Eurydice slipped away

from her husband's embrace with a faint farewell, to die a second time. Orpheus was stunned, and his appeals to Charon that he cross the Styx again were denied. Overwhelmed by grief, he withdrew to the mountains and for three years rejected the many advances of passionate women.

While he was charming the woods, rocks, and wild beasts to follow him, a group of Bacchic women, clad in animal skins, caught sight of him and, angry at his rejection of them, hurled weapons and stones, which at first did no harm because they were softened by his song. As the madness and the frenzied music of the maenads grew more wild and the bard's song was drowned out, he was overcome and killed and finally torn to pieces by their fury. His limbs were scattered, but his head and lyre floated on the river Hebrus out to sea, both all the while making lamentations. They were washed ashore at Lesbos. Here, Apollo froze into stone a serpent that was about to bite the head of Orpheus.

Orpheus now at last was reunited with his Eurydice in the Underworld, where they remain together, side by side, forever.

Oedipus

Laius came to Thebes as king and married Jocasta (Iokaste). Apollo's oracle at Delphi warned that their son would kill his father as the working out of the curse of Pelops. So Laius ordered a shepherd to expose his infant son on Mount Cithaeron (Kithairon), driving a spike through his ankles. The baby was found by a shepherd of King Polybus of Corinth, who called the baby Oedipus (Oidipous), or "swellfoot." When he was brought to the palace, the king and his wife Merope (Periboea) brought him up as their own child.

As a young man, Oedipus was taunted for not really being the son of Polybus, so he left Corinth to ask the oracle at Delphi who his parents were. He was warned that he was destined to kill his father and marry his mother. Oedipus therefore did not return to Corinth, and at a crossroad that led to Thebes, he killed a regal old man in a chariot who had struck him and driven him off the road. The old man, whom he did not recognize, was Laius.

At that time, the city of Thebes was suffering from the Sphinx ("strangler"), a monster that was part woman, part lion, and part bird. She had settled on a rock, and put a riddle to every Theban that passed by, and whoever was unable to solve it was killed by the monster. This calamity induced the Thebans to make known that whoever should deliver the country of it should be made king, and receive Jocasta as his wife. Oedipus was one of those that came forward, and when he approached the Sphinx she gave the riddle as follows; "A being with four feet has two feet and three feet, and only one voice; but its feet vary, and when it has most it is weakest." Oedipus answered "Man, who as a baby crawls on all fours, in his prime he walks on two feet, and in old age he uses a stick as a third foot." The Sphinx hurled itself to its death, and Oedipus became king of Thebes in place of the dead Laius, and took the widowed queen, Jocasta, as his wife.

Oedipus the King

Thebes was afflicted with a plague after many years of Oedipus' reign. The oracle at Delphi advised the Thebans that the plague had been caused by the pollution of the murderer of Laius living in their city. Oedipus was determined to find out the murderer's identity, yet he refused to believe the prophet Tiresias, who told him that he

was the murderer. A messenger (who was the same shepherd to whom the infant Oedipus had been given by the Theban shepherd) came from Corinth to announce the death of Polybus and offer the throne of Corinth to Oedipus. He told Oedipus, who refused to return to Corinth because of the prophecy that he would marry his mother, that he was not the son of Polybus. Oedipus sent for the Theban shepherd and the truth was discovered. Jocasta had already silently gone into the palace, where she hanged herself; Oedipus rushed into the palace and blinded himself with the brooches from Jocasta's robe.

Oedipus at Colonus.

Creon (Kreon), the brother of Jocasta, became king, and Oedipus went into exile accompanied by his daughters, Antigone and Ismene. He wandered eventually to Colonus (Kolonos) in Attica, and was kindly received by Theseus, king of Athens. At Colonus Oedipus bid farewell to his daughters and then miraculously disappeared from the earth, observed only by Theseus. A hero-cult was established at the place where he vanished.

The Seven Against Thebes

In another version, Oedipus was shut up in the palace at Thebes and cursed his sons, Etocles (Eteokles) and Polynices (Polynikes), for putting before him one day a less honorable portion of food. He prayed that after his death they might fight to divide the kingdom.

Oedipus died at Thebes (in this version), and his sons quarreled over the throne, agreeing finally that each should reign in alternate years while the other went into exile. After the first year, Eteocles refused to give up the throne, and Polynices raised an army with the help of Adrastus, king of Argos, to march against Thebes. The army was anchored by seven heroes. During the battle, Polynices and Eteocles killed each other in single combat. Creon assumed the kingship, and decreed that those who fought against Thebes should not be given the honor of a proper burial.

Antigone defied the edict of Creon forbidding the burial of Polynices. Obeying instead the decrees of Zeus, she gave her brother symbolic burial and was condemned to death by Creon. Haemon (Haimon), Creon's son and her fiancé, shared her death, and Creon, warned by Tiresias, relented too late.

Theseus helped the widows and mothers of the dead Argive heroes recover the unburied corpses and give them proper funerals.

A Historical / Archeological Chronology

2500 to 2000 BCE

Invasion of Greek-speaking Indo-Europeans into northern Greece (Macedonia) and gradual movement south in three waves (Ionians, Aeloians, Dorians); displacement of earlier Ionians into Attica and the Aegean Islands.

Around 2500 to 2000 BCE large groups of Indo-European peoples moved away from the Pontic regions near the Black Sea to the west and south, arriving in Macedonia around 2200 BCE. In the thousand years which followed, scholars conjecture, three waves of Indo-Europeans populated Mainland Greece: the Ionians, the Aeolians, and the Dorians (the names indicate different dialects of Greek, which persisted throughout Classical times).

The actual development of the Greek language is disputed. It seems unlikely that the immigrants brought Greek (in one or more dialects) with them in a well-developed form. More likely, the language they had was fundamentally altered in the new territory by contact with the indigenous people, so that what we call Greek, in effect, evolved as a new language out of this mixture (rather like English emerging out of the indigenous language, Latin, Anglo-Saxon, Danish, French, and so on). According to this view, the different Greek dialects may not represent different languages of the invaders but may be the result of linguistic developments once the invaders had settled in the new lands.

The arrival of the Dorians (around 1100 BCE) forced the earlier Ionians into the poorer sections of Mainland Greece (i.e., Attica) and beyond Attica into the islands and the coast of Asia Minor. The Dorian invaders settled largely in the fertile areas of the Peloponnese, subjugating or displacing the inhabitants, the Messenians.

It is worth remembering that, in terms of their origins, the Athenians were Ionians, naturally related to many of the inhabitants of the Aegean Islands, and that the Spartans were Dorians. This ethnic difference was reinforced by the difference between the agricultural and conservative society in the Peloponnese and the more dynamic trading society of Attica.

2000 to 1500 BCE

The island of Crete was unified under one or two dynasties, which flourished in trade (with Egypt) and in art. Rise of Macedonian power in the Peloponnese.

1400 BCE (approximately)

The destruction of the Minoan palaces, perhaps by the power of the Mycenaeans.

Following the destruction of the Minoan palaces, the people of Mycenae, in the Peloponnese, came to dominate much of the Aegean. This culture was centered at Argos and Mycenae (in the Argolid). Where the Mycenaeans came from and whether or not they were among the first Greek-speaking peoples to reach Mainland Greece are disputed questions. It seems that they probably came from Anatolia (now in Western Turkey) either to escape or as part of the first great wave of Indo-European people (who in other places became the Hittites).

The Mycenaeans were clearly different from the Minoans, although much influenced by them. They were a more warlike people, physically larger, patriarchal in social structure, and with different burial customs. They had a form of writing, derived from the Minoans, Linear Script B, which in 1952 was deciphered as a form of Greek (but this fact is disputed).

The heroes of Homer's epics and the legends of Troy are based on Mycenaean oral history. The Greeks and modern scholarship date the Trojan War near the end of the 12th century (BC), traditionally ending in 1184 BCE. Given the fundamental importance of these legends to the history of Greece, one can understand why the Greeks themselves and so many modern scholars have identified the Mycenaeans as early Greeks. However, the evidence for this is not conclusive.

Mycenaean civilization has left many outstanding archaeological treasures, largely because the Mycenaeans buried their dead in shaft graves and beehive tombs with a great many rich possessions. The discovery of these tombs by Schliemann in the late 19th century is one of the most outstanding achievements in archaeology and has led to a complete reinterpretation of pre-classical Greek history. Schliemann thought that he had uncovered the grave of Agamemnon. In fact, however, what he found is probably from about two hundred years before the traditional date for the Trojan War.

Mycenaean civilization flourished in the 14th and 13th centuries BCE. Near the end of the 12th century Mycenae and other centers were violently destroyed, perhaps by the Indo-European Greek-speaking invaders, or the latest wave of them. Following this destruction (around 1100 BCE), the history of Greece enters what has been called the Dark Ages. The art of writing was lost. Of this era, we know almost nothing. The silence is not broken until the 8th century BCE, when the Homeric epics were composed.

1184 BCE

Traditional date for the Trojan War, an expedition of Mycenaean powers against Troy.

1100 BCE

Destruction of the Mycenaean palaces (by Dorian invaders?). The Dorian invasion of southern Mainland Greece.

1100 to 750 BCE

The Dark Ages. One important artistic legacy from this period is the development (around 900 BCE) of the Geometric Style of pottery decoration, which emphasized a formal abstract repeating pattern of lines, bands, and shapes. Athens was the most important center for this art, an important activity for trade.

800 to 600 BCE

Extensive colonization from Mainland Greece to Asia Minor and the islands, fostered by distress and food shortages and by ruling aristocrats in the city states.

775 BCE

The Dark Ages ended in the eighth century with a Renaissance of sorts, marked above all by the appearance of Homer's epics (composed as oral literature) and the works of Hesiod. Writing was rediscovered about this time. It is not clear whether or not Homer could or did write. By this time Greek colonies in Asia Minor were well established, and in this century the great panhellenic athletic festival at Olympia, the Olympian Games, started (the first was in 776 BC).

Geography

When we talk about Classical Greece we are generally referring to a relatively small area in the Eastern Mediterranean, extending from present day southern Italy to the shores of the Black Sea and Asia Minor (now Turkey). This area includes various coastal regions, what we now recognize as Mainland Greece, and a large number of islands, some large (e.g., Crete, Cyprus, Rhodes) and some quite small. Mainland Greece, which is an outward southern extension of the Balkan Mountains, falls into a number of clear geographical divisions.

In the north is Macedonia (in classical Greek times not considered a full part of Greek civilization), Thessaly (immediately to the south of Macedonia), and Epirus (west of Thessaly, not labeled on the above map). Below Thessaly lies Central Greece, the most important regions of which is Boeotia and the city state of Thebes (home of Oedipus, Cadmus, Teiresias). Immediately off the east coast of Central Greece is a large island, Euboea.

Central Greece leads to a large southern promontory, called the Peloponnese, joined to the rest of Mainland Greece by a narrow isthmus, at the west end of which is the important city state of Corinth. Hence, the isthmus is called the Isthmus of Corinth, and it is a geographical feature of major strategic importance, since any land army seeking to conquer the region or to move from the Peloponnese to invade Attica or Boeotia must pass through this narrow neck of land. The region immediately to the east of the Isthmus of Corinth is called Attica, and the chief city of this region is Athens. Athens is a few miles inland from the sea; its port is called Pireus.

South of the Isthmus of Corinth is the large area of Mainland Greece called the Peloponnese. Immediately to the south of the isthmus is an area called the Argolid, a center of Mycenaean civilization, with the important cities of Argos (home of Agamemnon, Clytaemnestra, and Orestes) and Mycenae.

The southernmost portion of the Peloponnese is called Laconia, and the chief city state of the region is Sparta, at some distance from the sea and largely hemmed in by mountains. The distance from Macedonia to Sparta as the crow flies (i.e., the approximate length of Mainland Greece) is about 350 miles. The distance from Sparta to Athens by road is about 150 miles.

To the west of Mainland Greece is the Ionian Sea, containing a number of islands, some large like Corfu, and some smaller, like Ithaca (home of Odysseus). To the east of

Mainland Greece is the Aegean Sea, with a chain of many islands between the mainland and the coast of Asia Minor.

The largest and most important of the Aegean Islands are Crete, Rhodes, Chios, and Lesbos. Another important Greek island, Cyprus, lies further east. Because of these islands, it is possible to sail from Mainland Greece to Asia Minor and stay within sight of land almost all the way.

Note the prominent feature of the northern Aegean in the large three-pronged promontory extending south just east of Macedonia. This important area is called Chalcidice (birth place of Aristotle).

In the north-east corner of the Aegean is the narrow entrance to the Propontis, an entrance called the Hellespont. To the north-east of the Propontis is the Black Sea, with the narrow channel, the Bosphorus, separating Asia and Eastern Europe (the present site of Istanbul). Located on the Asian mainland, just at the entrance to the Hellespont is the city of Troy (Ilium or Ilion).

To the south of Troy, all down the coast of Asia Minor, is a series of important Greek city-states (e.g., Miletus, Halicarnassus), several originally established as colonies of cities on the mainland. Many of the most important literary figures in classical Greek civilization came from this coast of Asia Minor (called Ionia) or the islands immediately adjacent to it (e.g., Thales, Anaximander, Sappho, Herodotus, Homer).

To the west of Mainland Greece, a number of Greek cities, originating as colonies, developed in Sicily and southern Italy. The most important of these is Syracuse, the largest city in Sicily.

We use the term "Greece" to include all these areas of Greek culture and civilization. But it is important not to be misled into thinking that the single name refers to a high degree of ethnic and political solidarity among a homogeneous people, the Greeks. The classical Greeks in this area thought of themselves as related and as superior to those who were not Greek, but the city-states tended to be fiercely independent of each other, spent much of their time fighting amongst themselves, and had distinctly different dialects. At times of extreme danger (e.g., from an invasion of the Persians) the city-states might band together into a temporary alliance, but as soon as the danger passed, they resumed their independent and frequently quarrelsome ways. The major cultural event they all celebrated together was the Olympian Games. They did share a more or less common religion (but a very flexible one) and regarded some of their traditions as common to all (e.g., Homer). Within the people we call Greek were somewhat different cultural traditions and dialects. One major difference is between the Dorians (headed by Sparta) and the Ionians (led by Athens). Non-Greeks were called barbarians, because their language sounded crude and unsophisticated to Greek ears (like "bar-bar-bar" sounds).

Much of the territory included in the area we designate as Greek is very mountainous, with small fertile valleys cut off from neighbors. Land transportation was difficult and dangerous throughout the classical period. Hence, within Greece there were many small, independent city-states, fiercely protective of their territory and, as often as not, very suspicious of and hostile to their neighbors. We cannot speak of the Greeks in the classical period as a unified political entity. And it is almost impossible to keep track of the frequently bewildering shifts in the various alliances between city states from one year to the next.

The city-states (meaning the city and the adjacent land) were generally quite small in area and population (made up of citizens, slaves, resident aliens, women, and children). The most populous city-state, Athens, with an area of about 1000 square miles, had in 431 BCE a population of about 310,000 (about 45,000 of whom were citizens). Sparta, by contrast, although occupying a larger and more fertile area of about 3000 square miles, had a population of about 12,000, the majority of whom were not citizens. Most of the city states were considerably smaller in area and population than Athens or Sparta. The term city-state (polis), incidentally, refers to the city and the surrounding territory.

For many city-states the natural form of transportation was by sea. Hence, many city-states quickly developed an expertise with ships, fishing, and overseas trading. The latter activity was especially important for those city-states, like Athens, which had a relatively poor soil for agriculture. Early in historical time, some parts of Greece, like Attica and Corinth, were deforested. The resultant soil erosion and rapid off-flow of water made agriculture difficult and unprofitable. The inhabitants, therefore, imported grain from Euboea, Thessaly, and Sicily, and cultivated the olive and vine, to export oil and wine, or developed manufacturing (especially pottery). Sparta, by contrast, located in a rich agricultural area, was much more self-contained and less committed to trade as essential to its way of life. Hence, its social and political structure remained far more static and conservative than in Athens, where the shifting population and the large number of resident aliens brought about constant pressures for political reform.

To the south of Greece lay Egypt, for much of the time the richest and most centralized culture in the Mediterranean area. To the east of the Ionian cities on the coast of Asia Minor, the Persian Empire developed in the 6th and 5th centuries BCE. The complex relationship between this empire and the various Greek states is a key feature of Greek history up to the point where Alexander the Great (of Macedon) defeated the Persian Empire in the fourth century BCE.

Throughout Classical Greek times, the Romans were expanding slowly, consolidating their hold on Italy and the central Mediterranean. But they did not challenge the Greeks seriously until after the time of Alexander, finally overcoming the Greek city states in the mid-second century BCE.

The most important geopolitical fact about this area—in Classical Greek times up until modern times—is that it is the traditional meeting place of Europeans and Asians, often marked by the pressure of Eastern empires pushing to control the coast of Asia Minor and enter Europe across the Hellespont or of European powers to extend their control into Asia Minor.

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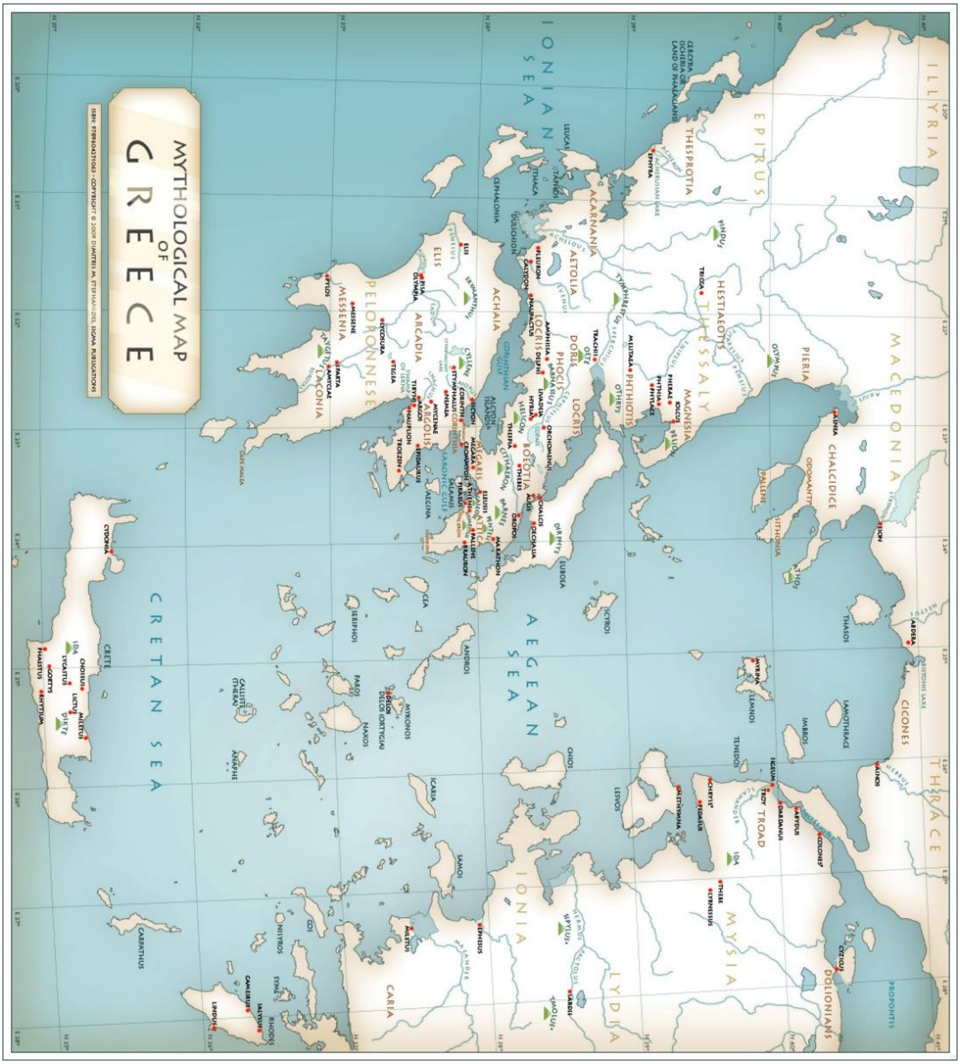
MYTHOLOGICAL MAP OF GREECE
IONIAN SEA
AEGEAN SEA
CRETAN SEA
ILLYRIA
EPIRUS
MACEDONIA
THRACE
THESSALY
PELOPONNESE
IONIA
LYDIA
MYSIA
CARIA
CRETE