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MAP OF THE GREEK WORLD

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The death of the Old Bull of the Year apparently poleaxed, and the birth of the New Year's Bull-Calf from a date cluster; under the supervision of a Cretan priestess, who identifies herself with the palm-tree.

From a Middle-Minoan bead-seal in the author's collection (diameter enlarged 1½ times). About 1900 B.C.

FOREWORD

SINCE revising *The Greek Myths* in 1958, I have had second thoughts about the drunken god Dionysus, about the Centaurs with their contradictory reputation for wisdom and misdemeanour, and about the nature of divine ambrosia and nectar. These subjects are closely related, because the Centaurs worshipped Dionysus, whose wild autumnal feast was called 'the Ambrosia'. I no longer believe that when his Maenads ran raging around the countryside, tearing animals or children in pieces (see 27. *f*) and boasted afterwards of travelling to India and back (see 27. *c*), they had intoxicated themselves solely on wine or ivy-ale (see 27. 3). The evidence, summarized in my *What Food the Centaurs Ate* (Steps: Cassell & Co., 1958, pp. 319–343), suggests that Satyrs (goat-totem tribesmen), Centaurs (horse-totem tribesmen), and their Maenad womenfolk, used these brews to wash down mouthfuls of a far stronger drug: namely a raw mushroom, *amanita muscaria*, which induces hallucinations, senseless rioting, prophetic sight, erotic energy, and remarkable muscular strength. Some hours of this ecstasy are followed by complete inertia; a phenomenon that would account for the story of how Lycurgus, armed only with an ox-goad, routed Dionysus's drunken army of Maenads and Satyrs after its victorious return from India (see 27. *e*).

On an Etruscan mirror the *amanita muscaria* is engraved at Ixion's feet; he was a Thessalian hero who feasted on ambrosia among the gods (see 63. *b*). Several myths (see 102, 126, etc.) are consistent with my theory that his descendants, the Centaurs, ate

this mushroom; and, according to some historians, it was later employed by the Norse 'berserks' to give them reckless power in battle. I now believe that 'ambrosia' and 'nectar' were intoxicant mushrooms: certainly the *amanita muscaria*; but perhaps others, too, especially a small, slender dung-mushroom named *panaeolus papilionaceus*, which induces harmless and most enjoyable hallucinations. A mushroom not unlike it appears on an Attic vase between the hooves of Nessus the Centaur. The 'gods' for whom, in the myths, ambrosia and nectar were reserved, will have been sacred queens and kings of the pre-Classical era. King Tantalus's crime (see 108. c) was that he broke the taboo by inviting commoners to share his ambrosia.

Sacred queenships and kingships lapsed in Greece; ambrosia then became, it seems, the secret element of the Eleusinian, Orphic and other Mysteries associated with Dionysus. At all events, the participants swore to keep silence about what they ate or drank, saw unforgettable visions, and were promised immortality. The 'ambrosia' awarded to winners of the Olympic footrace when victory no longer conferred the sacred kingship on them was clearly a substitute: a mixture of foods the initial letters of which, as I show in *What Food the Centaurs Ate*, spelled out the Greek word 'mushroom'. Recipes quoted by Classical authors for nectar, and for *cecyon*, the mint-flavoured drink taken by Demeter at Eleusis, likewise spell out 'mushroom'.

I have myself eaten the hallucigenic mushroom, *psilocybe*, a divine ambrosia in immemorial use among the Masatec Indians of Oaxaca Province, Mexico; heard the priestess invoke Tlaloc, the Mushroom-god, and seen transcendental visions. Thus I

wholeheartedly agree with R. Gordon Wasson, the American discoverer of this ancient rite, that European ideas of heaven and hell may well have derived from similar mysteries. Tlaloc was engendered by lightning; so was Dionysus (see 14. *c*); and in Greek folklore, as in Masatec, so are all mushrooms – proverbially called ‘food of the gods’ in both languages. Tlaloc wore a serpent-crown; so did Dionysus (see 27. *a*). Tlaloc had an underwater retreat; so had Dionysus (see 27. *e*). The Maenads’ savage custom of tearing off their victims’ heads (see 27. *f* and 28. *d*) may refer allegorically to tearing off the sacred mushroom’s head – since in Mexico its stalk is never eaten. We read that Perseus, a sacred King of Argos, converted to Dionysus worship (see 27. *i*), named Mycenae after a toadstool which he found growing on the site, and which gave forth a stream of water (see 73. *r*). Tlaloc’s emblem was a toad; so was that of Argos; and from the mouth of Tlaloc’s toad in the Tepentitla fresco issues a stream of water. Yet at what epoch were the European and Central American cultures in contact?

These theories call for further research, and I have therefore not incorporated my findings in the text of the present edition. Any expert help in solving the problem would be greatly appreciated.

R. G.

Deyá, Majorca,
Spain, 1960.

INTRODUCTION

THE medieval emissaries of the Catholic Church brought to Great Britain, in addition to the whole corpus of sacred history, a Continental university system based on the Greek and Latin Classics. Such native legends as those of King Arthur, Guy of Warwick, Robin Hood, the Blue Hag of Leicester, and King Lear were considered suitable enough for the masses, yet by early Tudor times the clergy and the educated classes were referring far more frequently to the myths in Ovid, Virgil, and the grammar school summaries of the Trojan War. Though official English literature of the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries cannot, therefore, be properly understood except in the light of Greek mythology, the Classics have lately lost so much ground in schools and universities that an educated person is now no longer expected to know (for instance) who Deucalion, Pelops, Daedalus, Oenone, Laocoön, or Antigone may have been. Current knowledge of these myths is mostly derived from such fairy-story versions as Kingsley's *Heroes* and Hawthorne's *Tanglewood Tales*; and at first sight this does not seem to matter much, because for the last two thousand years it has been the fashion to dismiss the myths as bizarre and chimerical fancies, a charming legacy from the childhood of the Greek intelligence, which the Church naturally depreciates in order to emphasize the greater spiritual importance of the Bible. Yet it is difficult to overestimate their value in the study of early European history, religion, and sociology.

‘Chimerical’ is an adjectival form of the noun *chimaera*, meaning ‘she-goat’. Four thousand years ago the Chimaera can have seemed no more bizarre than any religious, heraldic, or commercial emblem does today. She was a formal composite beast with (as Homer records) a lion’s head, a goat’s body, and a serpent’s tail. A Chimaera has been found carved on the walls of a Hittite temple at Carchemish and, like such other composite beasts as the Sphinx and the Unicorn, will originally have been a calendar symbol: each component represented a season of the Queen of Heaven’s sacred year – as, according to Diodorus Siculus, the three strings of her tortoise-shell lyre also did. This ancient three-season year is discussed by Nilsson in his *Primitive Time Reckoning* (1920).

Only a small part, however, of the huge, disorganized corpus of Greek mythology, which contains importations from Crete, Egypt, Palestine, Phrygia, Babylonia, and elsewhere, can properly be classified with the Chimaera as true myth. True myth may be defined as the reduction to narrative shorthand of ritual mime performed on public festivals, and in many cases recorded pictorially on temple walls, vases, seals, bowls, mirrors, chests, shields, tapestries, and the like. The Chimaera and her fellow calendar-beasts must have figured prominently in these dramatic performances which, with their iconographic and oral records, became the prime authority, or charter, for the religious institutions of each tribe, clan, or city. Their subjects were archaic magic-makings that promoted the fertility or stability of a sacred queendom, or kingdom – queendoms having, it seems, preceded kingdoms throughout the Greek-speaking area – and amendments

to these, introduced as circumstances required. Lucian's essay *On the Dance* lists an imposing number of ritual mimes still performed in the second century A.D.; and Pausanias's description of the temple paintings at Delphi and the carvings on Cypselus's Chest, suggests that an immense amount of miscellaneous mythological records, of which no trace now remains, survived into the same period.

True myth must be distinguished from:

- (1) Philosophical allegory, as in Hesiod's cosmogony.
- (2) 'Aetiological' explanation of myths no longer understood, as in Admetus's yoking of a lion and a boar to his chariot.
- (3) Satire or parody, as in Silenus's account of Atlantis.
- (4) Sentimental fable, as in the story of Narcissus and Echo.
- (5) Embroidered history, as in Arion's adventure with the dolphin.
- (6) Minstrel romance, as in the story of Cephalus and Procris.
- (7) Political propaganda, as in Theseus's Federalization of Attica.
- (8) Moral legend, as in the story of Eriphyle's necklace.
- (9) Humorous anecdote, as in the bedroom farce of Heracles, Omphale, and Pan.
- (10) Theatrical melodrama, as in the story of Thestor and his daughters.
- (11) Heroic saga, as in the main argument of the *Iliad*.
- (12) Realistic fiction, as in Odysseus's visit to the Phaeacians.¹

Yet genuine mythic elements may be found embedded in the least promising stories, and the fullest or most illuminating version of a given myth is seldom supplied by any one author; nor, when searching for its original form, should one assume that the more ancient the written source, the more authoritative it must be. Often, for instance, the playful Alexandrian Callimachus, or the frivolous Augustan Ovid, or the dry-as-dust late-Byzantine Tzetzes, gives an obviously earlier version of a myth than do Hesiod or the Greek tragedians; and the thirteenth-century *Excidium Troiae* is, in parts, mythically sounder than the *Iliad*. When making prose sense of a mythological or pseudo-mythological narrative, one should always pay careful attention to the names, tribal origin, and fates of the characters concerned; and then restore it to the form of dramatic ritual, whereupon its incidental elements will sometimes suggest an analogy with another myth which has been given a wholly different anecdotal twist, and shed light on both.

A study of Greek mythology should begin with a consideration of what political and religious systems existed in Europe before the arrival of Aryan invaders from the distant North and East. The whole of neolithic Europe, to judge from surviving artifacts and myths, had a remarkably homogeneous system of religious ideas, based on worship of the many-titled Mother-goddess, who was also known in Syria and Libya.

Ancient Europe had no gods. The Great Goddess was regarded as immortal, changeless, and omnipotent; and the concept of fatherhood had not been introduced into religious thought. She took lovers, but for pleasure, not to provide her children with a father. Men feared, adored, and obeyed the matriarch; the hearth

which she tended in a cave or hut being their earliest social centre, and motherhood their prime mystery. Thus the first victim of a Greek public sacrifice was always offered to Hestia of the Hearth. The goddess's white aniconic image, perhaps her most widespread emblem, which appears at Delphi as the *omphalos*, or navel-boss, may originally have represented the raised white mound of tightly-packed ash, enclosing live charcoal, which is the easiest means of preserving fire without smoke. Later, it became pictorially identified with the lime-whitened mound under which the harvest corn-doll was hidden, to be removed sprouting in the spring; and with the mound of sea-shells, or quartz, or white marble, underneath which dead kings were buried. Not only the moon, but (to judge from Hemera of Greece and Grainne of Ireland) the sun, were the goddess's celestial symbols. In earlier Greek myth, however, the sun yields precedence to the moon – which inspires the greater superstitious fear, does not grow dimmer as the year wanes, and is credited with the power to grant or deny water to the fields.

The moon's three phases of new, full, and old recalled the matriarch's three phases of maiden, nymph (nubile woman), and crone. Then, since the sun's annual course similarly recalled the rise and decline of her physical powers – spring a maiden, summer a nymph, winter a crone – the goddess became identified with seasonal changes in animal and plant life; and thus with Mother Earth who, at the beginning of the vegetative year, produces only leaves and buds, then flowers and fruits, and at last ceases to bear. She could later be conceived as yet another triad: the maiden of the upper air, the nymph of the earth or sea, the crone of the underworld – typified respectively by Selene, Aphrodite, and

Hecate. These mystical analogues fostered the sacredness of the number three, and the Moon-goddess became enlarged to nine when each of the three persons – maiden, nymph, and crone – appeared in triad to demonstrate her divinity. Her devotees never quite forgot that there were not three goddesses, but one goddess; though, by Classical times, Arcadian Stymphalus was one of the few remaining shrines where they all bore the same name: Hera.

Once the relevance of coition to child-bearing had been officially admitted – an account of this turning-point in religion appears in the Hittite myth of simple-minded Appu (H. G. Güterbock: *Kumarbi*, 1946) – man's religious status gradually improved, and winds or rivers were no longer given credit for impregnating women. The tribal Nymph, it seems, chose an annual lover from her entourage of young men, a king to be sacrificed when the year ended; making him a symbol of fertility, rather than the object of her erotic pleasure. His sprinkled blood served to fructify trees, crops, and flocks, and his flesh was torn and eaten raw by the Queen's fellow-nymphs – priestesses wearing the masks of bitches, mares, or sows. Next, in amendment to this practice, the king died as soon as the power of the sun, with which he was identified, began to decline in the summer; and another young man, his twin, or supposed twin – a convenient ancient Irish term is 'tanist' – then became the Queen's lover, to be duly sacrificed at midwinter and, as a reward, reincarnated in an oracular serpent. These consorts acquired executive power only when permitted to deputize for the Queen by wearing her magical robes. Thus kingship developed, and though the Sun became a symbol of male fertility once the king's life had been identified with its seasonal

course, it still remained under the Moon's tutelage; as the king remained under the Queen's tutelage, in theory at least, long after the matriarchal phase had been outgrown. Thus the witches of Thessaly, a conservative region, would threaten the Sun, in the Moon's name, with being engulfed by perpetual night.

There is, however, no evidence that, even when women were sovereign in religious matters, men were denied fields in which they might act without female supervision, though it may well be that they adopted many of the 'weaker-sex' characteristics hitherto thought functionally peculiar to man. They could be trusted to hunt, fish, gather certain foods, mind flocks and herds, and help defend the tribal territory against intruders, so long as they did not transgress matriarchal law. Leaders of totem clans were chosen and certain powers awarded them, especially in times of migration or war. Rules for determining who should act as male commander-in-chief varied, it appears, in different matriarchies: usually the queen's maternal uncle, or her brother, or the son of her maternal aunt was chosen. The most primitive tribal commander-in-chief also had authority to act as judge in personal disputes between men, in so far as the queen's religious authority was not thereby impaired. The most primitive matrilineal society surviving today is that of the Nayars of Southern India, where the princesses, though married to child-husbands whom they immediately divorce, bear children to lovers of no particular rank; and the princesses of several matrilineal tribes of West Africa marry foreigners or commoners. The royal women of pre-Hellenic Greece also thought nothing of taking lovers from among their serfs, if the Hundred Houses of Locris and Epizephyrian Locri were not exceptional.

Time was first reckoned by lunations, and every important ceremony took place at a certain phase of the moon; the solstices and equinoxes not being exactly determined but approximated to the nearest new or full moon. The number seven acquired peculiar sanctity, because the king died at the seventh full moon after the shortest day. Even when, after careful astronomical observation, the solar year proved to have 364 days, with a few hours left over, it had to be divided into months – that is, moon-cycles – rather than into fractions of the solar cycle. These months later became what the English-speaking world still calls ‘common-law months’, each of twenty-eight days; which was a sacred number, in the sense that the moon could be worshipped as a woman, whose menstrual cycle is normally twenty-eight days, and that this is also the true period of the moon’s revolutions in terms of the sun. The seven-day week was a unit of the common-law month, the character of each day being deduced, it seems, from the quality attributed to the corresponding month of the sacred king’s life. This system led to a still closer identification of woman with moon and, since the 364-day year is exactly divisible by twenty-eight, the annual sequence of popular festivals could be geared to these common-law months. As a religious tradition, the thirteen-month years survived among European peasants for more than a millennium after the adoption of the Julian Calendar; thus Robin Hood, who lived at the time of Edward II, could exclaim in a ballad celebrating the May Day festival:

How many merry months be in the year?

There are thirteen, I say...

which a Tudor editor has altered to '... There are but twelve, I say...' Thirteen, the number of the sun's death-month, has never lost its evil reputation among the superstitious. The days of the week lay under the charge of Titans: the genii of sun, moon, and the five hitherto discovered planets, who were responsible for them to the goddess as Creatrix. This system had probably been evolved in matriarchal Sumeria.

Thus the sun passed through thirteen monthly stages, beginning at the winter solstice when the days lengthen again after their long autumnal decline. The extra day of the sidereal year, gained from the solar year by the earth's revolution around the sun's orbit, was intercalated between the thirteenth and the first month, and became the most important day of the 365, the occasion on which the tribal Nymph chose the sacred king, usually the winner of a race, a wrestling match, or an archery contest. But this primitive calendar underwent modifications: in some regions the extra day seems to have been intercalated, not at the winter solstice, but at some other New Year – at the Candlemas cross-quarter day, when the first signs of spring are apparent; or at the spring equinox, when the sun is regarded as coming to maturity; or at midsummer; or at the rising of the Dog Star, when the Nile floods; or at the autumnal equinox, when the first rains fall.

Early Greek mythology is concerned, above all else, with the changing relations between the queen and her lovers, which begin with their yearly, or twice-yearly sacrifices; and end, at the time when the *Iliad*, was composed and kings boasted: 'We are far better than our fathers!', with her eclipse by an unlimited male

monarchy. Numerous African analogues illustrate the progressive stages of this change.

A large part of Greek myth is politico-religious history. Bellerophon masters winged Pegasus and kills the Chimaera. Perseus, in a variant of the same legend, flies through the air and beheads Pegasus's mother, the Gorgon Medusa; much as Marduk, a Babylonian hero, kills the she-monster Tiamat, Goddess of the Sea. Perseus's name should properly be spelled *Pterseus*, 'the destroyer'; and he was not, as Professor Kerenyi has suggested, an archetypal Death-figure but, probably, represented the patriarchal Hellenes who invaded Greece and Asia Minor early in the second millennium B.C., and challenged the power of the Triple-goddess. Pegasus had been sacred to her because the horse with its moon-shaped hooves figured in the rain-making ceremonies and the instalment of sacred kings; his wings were symbolical of a celestial nature, rather than speed. Jane Harrison has pointed out (*Prolegomena to the Study of Greek Religion*, chapter v) that Medusa was once the goddess herself, hiding behind a prophylactic Gorgon mask: a hideous face intended to warn the profane against trespassing on her Mysteries. Perseus beheads Medusa: that is, the Hellenes overran the goddess's chief shrines, stripped her priestesses of their Gorgon masks, and took possession of the sacred horses – an early representation of the goddess with a Gorgon's head and a mare's body has been found in Boeotia. Bellerophon, Perseus's double, kills the Lycian Chimaera: that is, the Hellenes annulled the ancient Medusan calendar, and replaced it with another.

Again, Apollo's destruction of the Python at Delphi seems to record the Achaeans' capture of the Cretan Earth-goddess's shrine; so does his attempted rape of Daphne, whom Hera thereupon metamorphosed into a laurel. This myth has been quoted by Freudian psychologists as symbolizing a girl's instinctive horror of the sexual act; yet Daphne was anything but a frightened virgin. Her name is a contraction of *Daphoene*, 'the bloody one', the goddess in orgiastic mood, whose priestesses, the Maenads, chewed laurel-leaves as an intoxicant and periodically rushed out at the full moon, assaulted unwary travellers, and tore children or young animals in pieces; laurel contains cyanide of potassium. These Maenad colleges were suppressed by the Hellenes, and only the laurel grove testified to Daphoene's former occupancy of the shrines: the chewing of laurel by anyone except the prophetic Pythian Priestess, whom Apollo retained in his service at Delphi, was tabooed in Greece until Roman times.

The Hellenic invasions of the early second millennium B.C., usually called the Aeolian and Ionian, seem to have been less destructive than the Achaean and Dorian ones, which they preceded. Small armed bands of herdsmen, worshipping the Aryan trinity of gods – Indra, Mitra, and Varuna – crossed the natural barrier of Mount Othrys, and attached themselves peacefully enough to the pre-Hellenic settlements in Thessaly and Central Greece. They were accepted as children of the local goddess, and provided her with sacred kings. Thus a male military aristocracy became reconciled to female theocracy, not only in Greece, but in Crete, where the Hellenes also gained a foothold and exported Cretan civilization to Athens and the Peloponnese. Greek was

eventually spoken throughout the Aegean and, by the time of Herodotus, one oracle alone spoke a pre-Hellenic language (Herodotus: viii. 134–5). The king acted as the representative of Zeus, or Poseidon, or Apollo, and called himself by one or other of their names, though even Zeus was for centuries a mere demi-god, not an immortal Olympian deity. All early myths about the gods' seduction of nymphs refer apparently to marriages between Hellenic chieftains and local Moon-priestesses; bitterly opposed by Hera, which means by conservative religious feeling.

When the shortness of the king's reign proved irksome, it was agreed to prolong the thirteen-month year to a Great Year of one hundred lunations, in the last of which occurs a near-coincidence of solar and lunar time. But since the fields and crops still needed to be fructified, the king agreed to suffer an annual mock death and yield his sovereignty for one day – the intercalated one, lying outside the sacred sidereal year – to the surrogate boy-king, or *interrex*, who died at its close, and whose blood was used for the sprinkling ceremony. Now the sacred king either reigned for the entire period of a Great Year, with a tanist as his lieutenant; or the two reigned for alternate years; or the Queen let them divide the queendom into halves and reign concurrently. The king deputized for the Queen at many sacred functions, dressed in her robes, wore false breasts, borrowed her lunar axe as a symbol of power, and even took over from her the magical art of rain-making. His ritual death varied greatly in circumstance; he might be torn in pieces by wild women, transfixed with a sting-ray spear, felled with an axe, pricked in the heel with a poisoned arrow, flung over a cliff, burned to death on a pyre, drowned in a pool, or killed in a pre-

arranged chariot crash. But die he must. A new stage was reached when animals came to be substituted for boys at the sacrificial altar, and the king refused death after his lengthened reign ended. Dividing the realm into three parts, and awarding one part to each of his successors, he would reign for another term; his excuse being that a closer approximation of solar and lunar time had now been found, namely nineteen years, or 325 lunations. The Great Year had become a Greater Year.

Throughout these successive stages, reflected in numerous myths, the sacred king continued to hold his position only by right of marriage to the tribal Nymph, who was chosen either as a result of a foot race between her companions of the royal house or by ultimogeniture – that is to say, by being the youngest nubile daughter of the junior branch. The throne remained matrilineal, as it theoretically did even in Egypt, and the sacred king and his tanist were therefore always chosen from outside the royal female house; until some daring king at last decided to commit incest with the heiress, who ranked as his daughter, and thus gain a new title to the throne when his reign needed renewal.

Achaean invasions of the thirteenth century B.C. seriously weakened the matrilineal tradition. It seems that the king now contrived to reign for the term of his natural life; and when the Dorians arrived, towards the close of the second millennium, patrilineal succession became the rule. A prince no longer left his father's house and married a foreign princess; she came to him, as Odysseus persuaded Penelope to do. Genealogy became patrilineal, though a Samian incident mentioned in the Pseudo-Herodotus's *Life of Homer* shows that for some time after the

Apatoria, or Festival of Male Kinship, had replaced that of Female Kinship, the rites still consisted of sacrifices to the Mother Goddess which men were not eligible to attend.

The familiar Olympian system was then agreed upon as a compromise between Hellenic and pre-Hellenic views: a divine family of six gods and six goddesses, headed by the co-sovereigns Zeus and Hera and forming a Council of Gods in Babylonian style. But after a rebellion of the pre-Hellenic population, described in the *Iliad* as a conspiracy against Zeus, Hera became subservient to him. Athene avowed herself 'all for the Father' and, in the end, Dionysus assured male preponderance in the Council by displacing Hestia. Yet the goddesses, though left in a minority, were never altogether ousted – as they were at Jerusalem – because the revered poets Homer and Hesiod had 'given the deities their titles and distinguished their several provinces and special powers' (Herodotus: ii. 53), which could not be easily expropriated. Moreover, though the system of gathering all the women of royal blood together under the king's control, and thus discouraging outsiders from attempts on a matrilineal throne, was adopted at Rome when the Vestal College was founded, and in Palestine when King David formed his royal harem, it never reached Greece. Patrilineal descent, succession, and inheritance discourage further myth-making; historical legend then begins and fades into the light of common history.

The lives of such characters as Heracles, Daedalus, Teiresias, and Phineus span several generations, because these are titles rather than names of particular heroes. Yet myths, though difficult to reconcile with chronology, are always practical: they insist on

some point of tradition, however distorted the meaning may have become in the telling. Take, for instance, the confused story of Aeacus's dream, where ants, falling from an oracular oak, turn into men and colonize the island of Aegina after Hera has depopulated it. Here the main points of interest are: that the oak had grown from a Dodonian acorn; that the ants were Thessalian ants; and that Aeacus was a grandson of the River Asopus. These elements combined to give a concise account of immigrations into Aegina towards the end of the second millennium B.C.

Despite a sameness of pattern in Greek myths, all detailed interpretations of particular legends are open to question until archaeologists can provide a more exact tabulation of tribal movements in Greece, and their dates. Yet the historical and anthropological approach is the only reasonable one: the theory that Chimaera, Sphinx, Gorgon, Centaurs, Satyrs and the like are blind uprushes of the Jungian collective unconscious, to which no precise meaning had ever, or could ever, have been attached, is demonstrably unsound. The Bronze and early Iron Ages in Greece were not the childhood of mankind, as Dr Jung suggests. That Zeus swallowed Metis, for instance, and subsequently gave birth to Athene, through an orifice in his head, is not an irrepressible fancy, but an ingenious theological dogma which embodies at least three conflicting views:

- (1) Athene was the parthenogenous daughter of Metis; i.e. the youngest person of the Triad headed by Metis, Goddess of Wisdom.

- (2) Zeus swallowed Metis; i.e. the Achaeans suppressed her cult and arrogated all wisdom to Zeus as their patriarchal god.
- (3) Athene was the daughter of Zeus; i.e. the Zeus-worshipping Achaeans spared Athene's temples on condition that her votaries accepted his paramount sovereignty.

Zeus's swallowing of Metis, with its sequel, will have been represented graphically on the walls of a temple; and as the erotic Dionysus – once a parthenogenous son of Semele – was reborn from his thigh, so the intellectual Athene was reborn from his head.

If some myths are baffling at first sight, this is often because the mythographer has accidentally or deliberately misinterpreted a sacred picture or dramatic rite. I have called such a process 'iconotropy', and examples of it can be found in every body of sacred literature which sets the seal upon a radical reform of ancient beliefs. Greek myth teems with iconotropic instances. Hephaestus's three-legged workshop tables, for example, which ran by themselves to assemblies of the gods, and back again (*Iliad* xviii. 368 ff.), are not, as Dr Charles Seltman archly suggests in his *Twelve Olympian Gods*, anticipations of automobiles; but golden Sun-disks with three legs apiece (like the emblem of the Isle of Man), apparently representing the number of three-season years for which a 'son of Hephaestus' was permitted to reign in the island of Lemnos. Again, the so-called 'Judgement of Paris', where a hero is called upon to decide between the rival charms of three goddesses

and awards his apple to the fairest, records an ancient ritual situation, outgrown by the time of Homer and Hesiod. These three goddesses are one goddess in triad: Athene the maiden, Aphrodite the nymph, and Hera the crone – and Aphrodite is presenting Paris with the apple, rather than receiving it from him. This apple, symbolizing her love bought at the price of his life, will be Paris's passport to the Elysian Fields, the apple orchards of the west, to which only the souls of heroes are admitted. A similar gift is frequently made in Irish and Welsh myth; as well as by the Three Hesperides, to Heracles; and by Eve, 'the Mother of All Living', to Adam. Thus Nemesis, goddess of the sacred grove who, in late myth, became a symbol of divine vengeance on proud kings, carries an apple-hung branch, her gift to heroes. All neolithic and Bronze Age paradises were orchard-islands; *paradise* itself means 'orchard'.

A true science of myth should begin with a study of archaeology, history, and comparative religion, not in the psycho-therapist's consulting-room. Though the Jungians hold that 'myths are original revelations of the pre-conscious psyche, involuntary statements about unconscious psychic happenings', Greek mythology was no more mysterious in content than are modern election cartoons, and for the most part formulated in territories which maintained close political relations with Minoan Crete – a country sophisticated enough to have written archives, four-storey buildings with hygienic plumbing, doors with modern-looking locks, registered trademarks, chess, a central system of weights and measures, and a calendar based on patient astronomic observation.

My method has been to assemble in harmonious narrative all the scattered elements of each myth, supported by little-known variants which may help to determine the meaning, and to answer all questions that arise, as best I can, in anthropological or historical terms. This is, I am well aware, much too ambitious a task for any single mythologist to undertake, however long or hard he works. Errors must creep in. Let me emphasize that any statement here made about Mediterranean religion or ritual before the appearance of written records is conjectural. Nevertheless, I have been heartened, since this book first appeared in 1955, by the close analogues which E. Meyrowitz's *Akan Cosmological Drama* (Faber & Faber) offers to the religious and social changes here presumed. The Akan people result from an ancient southward emigration of Libyo-Berbers – cousins to the pre-Hellenic population of Greece – from the Sahara desert oases (see 3. 3) and their inter-marriage at Timbuctoo with Niger River negroes. In the eleventh century A.D. they moved still farther south to what is now Ghana. Four different cult-types persist among them. In the most primitive, the Moon is worshipped as the supreme Triple-goddess Ngame, clearly identical with the Libyan Neith, the Carthaginian Tanit, the Canaanite Anatha, and the early Greek Athene (see 8. 1). Ngame is said to have brought forth the heavenly bodies by her own efforts (see 1. 1), and then to have vitalized men and animals by shooting magical arrows from her new-moon bow into their inert bodies. She also, it is said, takes life in her killer aspect; as did her counterpart, the Moon-goddess Artemis (see 22. 1). A princess of royal line is judged capable, in unsettled times, of being overcome by Ngame's lunar magic and bearing a tribal deity which

takes up its residence in a shrine and leads a group of emigrants to some new region. This woman becomes queen-mother, war-leader, judge, and priestess of the settlement she founds. The deity has meanwhile revealed itself as a totem animal which is protected by a close *tabu*, apart from the yearly chase and sacrifice of a single specimen; this throws light on the yearly owl-hunt made by the Pelasgians at Athens (see 97. 4). States, consisting of tribal federations, are then formed, the most powerful tribal deity becoming the State-god.

The second cult-type marks Akan coalescence with Sudanese worshippers of a Father-god, Odomankoma, who claimed to have made the universe single-handedly (see 4. c); they were, it seems, led by elected male chieftains, and had adopted the Sumerian seven-day week. As a compromise myth, Ngame is now said to have vitalized Odomankoma's lifeless creation; and each tribal deity becomes one of the seven planetary powers. These planetary powers – as I have presumed also happened in Greece when Titan-worship came in from the East (see 11. 3) – form male-and-female pairs. The queen-mother of the state, as Ngame's representative, performs an annual sacred marriage with Odomankoma's representative: namely her chosen lover whom, at the close of the year, the priests murder, skin, and flay. The same practice seems to have obtained among the Greeks (see 9. a and 21. 5).

In the third cult-type, the queen-mother's lover becomes a king, and is venerated as the male aspect of the Moon, corresponding with the Phoenician god Baal Haman; and a boy dies vicariously for him every year as a mock-king (see 30. 1). The queen-mother

now delegates the chief executive powers to a vizier, and concentrates on her ritual fertilizing functions.

In the fourth cult-type, the king, having gained the homage of several petty kings, abrogates his Moon-god aspect and proclaims himself Sun-king in Egyptian style (see 67. 1 and 2). Though continuing to celebrate the annual sacred marriage, he frees himself from dependence on the Moon. At this stage, patrilocal supersedes matrilineal marriage, and the tribes are supplied with heroic male ancestors to worship, as happened in Greece – though sun-worship there never displaced thunder-god worship.

Among the Akan, every change in court-ritual is marked by an addition to the accepted myth of events in Heaven. Thus, if the king has appointed a royal porter and given his office lustre by marrying him to a princess, a divine porter in Heaven is announced to have done the same. It is likely that Heracles's marriage to the Goddess Hebe and his appointment as porter to Zeus (see 145. *i* and *j*) reflected a similar event at the Mycenaean Court; and that the divine feastings on Olympus reflected similar celebrations at Olympia under the joint presidency of the Zeus-like High King of Mycenae and Hera's Chief Priestess from Argos.

I am deeply grateful to Janet Seymour-Smith and Kenneth Gay for helping me to get this book into shape, to Peter and Lalage Green for proof-reading the first few chapters, to Frank Seymour-Smith for sending scarce Latin and Greek texts from London, and to the many friends who have helped me to amend the first edition.

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NOTE

Each myth is first recounted as a narrative, the paragraphs being identified by italic letters (*a, b, c, ...*). Next follows a list of sources, numbered in accordance with the references in the text. Then comes an explanatory comment, divided into paragraphs identified by italic numbers (*1, 2, 3, ...*). Cross-references from one explanatory section to another are made by giving the myth number and paragraph number, thus: (43. *4*) directs the reader to par. *4* of the third (explanatory) section of myth 43.

1

THE PELASGIAN CREATION MYTH

IN the beginning, Eurynome, the Goddess of All Things, rose naked from Chaos, but found nothing substantial for her feet to rest upon, and therefore divided the sea from the sky, dancing lonely upon its waves. She danced towards the south, and the wind set in motion behind her seemed something new and apart with which to begin a work of creation. Wheeling about, she caught hold of this north wind, rubbed it between her hands, and behold! the great serpent Ophion. Eurynome danced to warm herself, wildly and more wildly, until Ophion, grown lustful, coiled about those divine limbs and was moved to couple with her. Now, the North Wind, who is also called Boreas, fertilizes; which is why mares often turn their hind-quarters to the wind and breed foals without aid of a stallion.¹ So Eurynome was likewise got with child.

b. Next, she assumed the form of a dove, brooding on the waves and, in due process of time, laid the Universal Egg. At her bidding, Ophion coiled seven times about this egg, until it hatched and split in two. Out tumbled all things that exist, her children: sun, moon, planets, stars, the earth with its mountains and rivers, its trees, herbs, and living creatures.

c. Eurynome and Ophion made their home upon Mount Olympus, where he vexed her by claiming to be the author of the

Universe. Forthwith she bruised his head with her heel, kicked out his teeth, and banished him to the dark caves below the earth.²

d. Next, the goddess created the seven planetary powers, setting a Titaness and a Titan over each. Theia and Hyperion for the Sun; Phoebe and Atlas for the Moon; Dione and Crius for the planet Mars; Metis and Coeus for the planet Mercury; Themis and Eurymedon for the planet Jupiter; Tethys and Oceanus for Venus; Rhea and Cronus for the planet Saturn.³ But the first man was Pelasgus, ancestor of the Pelasgians; he sprang from the soil of Arcadia, followed by certain others, whom he taught to make huts and feed upon acorns, and sew pig-skin tunics such as poor folk still wear in Euboea and Phocis.⁴

1. Pliny: *Natural History* iv. 35 and viii. 67; Homer: *Iliad* xx, 223.
2. Only tantalizing fragments of this pre-Hellenic myth survive in Greek literature, the largest being Apollonius Rhodius's *Argonautica* i. 496–505 and Tzetzes: *On Lycophron* 1191; but it is implicit in the Orphic Mysteries, and can be restored, as above, from the *Berossian Fragment* and the Phoenician cosmognies quoted by Philo Byblius and Damascius; from the Canaanitish elements in the Hebrew Creation story; from Hyginus (*Fabula* 197 – see 62. *a*); from the Boeotian legend of the dragon's teeth (see 58. 5); and from early ritual art. That all Pelasgians were born from Ophion is suggested by their common sacrifice,

the Peloria (Athenaeus: xiv. 45. 639–40), Ophion having been a *Pelor*, or ‘prodigious serpent’.

3. Homer: *Iliad* v. 898; Apollonius Rhodius: ii 1232; Apollodorus: i.1.3; Hesiod: *Theogony* 113; Stephanus of Byzantium *sub* Adana; Aristophanes: *Birds* 692 ff.; Clement of Rome: *Homilies* vi. 4. 72; Proclus on Plato's *Timaeus* ii. p. 307.
4. Pausanias: viii. 1. 2.

•

1. In this archaic religious system there were, as yet, neither gods nor priests, but only a universal goddess and her priestesses, women being the dominant sex and man her frightened victim. Fatherhood was not honoured, conception being attributed to the wind, the eating of beans, or the accidental swallowing of an insect; inheritance was matrilineal and snakes were regarded as incarnations of the dead. Eurynome (‘wide wandering’) was the goddess's title as the visible moon; her Sumerian name was Iahu (‘exalted dove’), a title which later passed to Jehovah as the Creator. It was as a dove that Marduk symbolically sliced her in two at the Babylonian Spring Festival, when he inaugurated the new world order.

2. Ophion, or Boreas, is the serpent demiurge of Hebrew and Egyptian myth – in early Mediterranean art, the Goddess is constantly shown in his company. The earth-born Pelasgians, whose claim seems to have been that they sprang from Ophion's teeth, were originally perhaps the neolithic ‘Painted Ware’ people; they reached the mainland of Greece from Palestine about 3500

B.C., and the early Hellads – immigrants from Asia Minor by way of the Cyclades – found them in occupation of the Peloponnese seven hundred years later. But ‘Pelasgians’ became loosely applied to all pre-Hellenic inhabitants of Greece. Thus Euripides (quoted by Strabo v. 2.4) records that the Pelasgians adopted the name ‘Danaans’ on the coming to Argos of Danaus and his fifty daughters (see 60. f). Strictures on their licentious conduct (Herodotus: vi. 137) refer probably to the pre-Hellenic custom of erotic orgies. Strabo says in the same passage that those who lived near Athens were known as Pelargi(‘storks’); perhaps this was their totem bird.

3. The Titans (‘lords’) and Titanesses had their counterparts in early Babylonian and Palestinian astrology, where they were deities ruling the seven days of the sacred planetary week; and may have been introduced by the Canaanite, or Hittite, colony which settled the Isthmus of Corinth early in the second millennium B.C. (see 67. 2), or even by the Early Hellads. But when the Titan cult was abolished in Greece, and the seven-day week ceased to figure in the official calender, their number was quoted as twelve by some authors, probably to make them correspond with the signs of the Zodiac. Hesiod, Apollodorus, Stephanus of Byzantium, Pausanias, and others give inconsistent lists of their names. In Babylonian myth the planetary rulers of the week, namely Samas, Sin, Nergal, Bel, Beltis, and Ninib, were all male, except Beltis, the Love-goddess; but in the Germanic week, which the Celts had borrowed from the Eastern Mediterranean, Sunday, Tuesday, and Friday were ruled by Titanesses, as opposed to Titans. To judge from the divine status of Aeolus’s paired-off daughters and sons

(see 43. 4), and the myth of Niobe (see 77. 1), it was decided, when the system first reached pre-Hellenic Greece from Palestine, to pair a Titaness with each Titan, as a means of safeguarding the goddess's interests. But before long the fourteen were reduced to a mixed company of seven. The planetary powers were as follows: Sun for illumination; Moon for enchantment; Mars for growth; Mercury for wisdom; Jupiter for law; Venus for love; Saturn for peace. Classical Greek astrologers conformed with the Babylonians, and awarded the planets to Helios, Selene, Ares, Hermes (or Apollo), Zeus, Aphrodite, Cronus – whose Latin equivalents, given above, still name the French, Italian, and Spanish weeks.

4. In the end, mythically speaking, Zeus swallowed the Titans, including his earlier self– since the Jews of Jerusalem worshipped a transcendent God, composed of all the planetary powers of the week: a theory symbolized in the seven-branched candlestick, and in the Seven Pillars of Wisdom. The seven planetary pillars set up near the Horse's Tomb at Sparta were said by Pausanias (ii. 20. 9) to be adorned in ancient fashion, and may have been connected with the Egyptian rites introduced by the Pelasgians (Herodotus: ii. 57). Whether the Jews borrowed the theory from the Egyptians, or contrariwise, is uncertain; but the so-called Heliopolitan Zeus, whom A. B. Cook discusses in his *Zeus* (i. 570–76), was Egyptian in character, and bore busts of the seven planetary powers as frontal ornaments on his body sheath; usually, also, busts of the remaining Olympians as rear ornaments. One bronze statuette of this god was found at Tortosa in Spain, another at Byblos in Phoenicia; and a marble stele from Marseilles displays six



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3

THE OLYMPIAN CREATION MYTH

AT the beginning of all things Mother Earth emerged from Chaos and bore her son Uranus as she slept. Gazing down fondly at her from the mountains, he showered fertile rain upon her secret clefts, and she bore grass, flowers, and trees, with the beasts and birds proper to each. This same rain made the rivers flow and filled the hollow places with water, so that lakes and seas came into being.

b. Her first children of semi-human form were the hundred-handed giants Briareus, Gyges, and Cottus. Next appeared the three wild, one-eyed Cyclopes, builders of gigantic walls and master-smiths, formerly of Thrace, afterwards of Crete and Lycia,¹ whose sons Odysseus encountered in Sicily.² Their names were Brontes, Steropes, and Arges, and their ghosts have dwelt in the caverns of the volcano Aetna since Apollo killed them in revenge for the death of Asclepius.

c. The Libyans, however, claim that Garamas was born before the Hundred-handed Ones and that, when he rose from the plain, he offered Mother Earth a sacrifice of the sweet acorn.³

1. Apollodorus: i. 1–2; Euripides: *Chrysippus*, quoted by Sextus Empiricus, p. 751; Lucretius: i. 250 and ii. 991 ff.



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by the Nereids, the Titans and the Giants, whom he feels bound to include. Both the Three Fates and the Three Hesperides are the Triple Moon-goddess in her death aspect.

2. The second myth, found only in Ovid, was borrowed by the later Greeks from the Babylonian Gilgamesh epic, the introduction to which records the goddess Aruru's particular creation of the first man, Eabani, from a piece of clay; but although Zeus had been the Universal Lord for many centuries, the mythographers were forced to admit that the Creator of all things might possibly have been a Creatrix. The Jews, as inheritors of the 'Pelasgian', or Canaanitish, creation myth, had felt the same embarrassment; in the *Genesis* account, a female 'Spirit of the Lord' broods on the face of the waters, though she does not lay the world egg; and Eve, 'the Mother of All Living', is ordered to bruise the Serpent's head, though he is not destined to go down to the Pit until the end of the world.

3. Similarly, in the Talmudic version of the Creation, the archangel Michael – Prometheus's counterpart – forms Adam from dust at the order, not of the Mother of All Living, but of Jehovah. Jehovah then breathes life into him and gives him Eve who, like Pandora, brings mischief on mankind (see [39. j](#)).

4. Greek philosophers distinguished Promethean man from the imperfect earth-born creation, part of which was destroyed by Zeus, and the rest washed away in the Deucalionian Flood (see [38. c](#)). Much the same distinction is found in *Genesis* vi. 2–4 between the 'sons of God' and the 'daughters of men', whom they married.

5. The Gilgamesh tablets are late and equivocal; there the 'Bright Mother of the Hollow' is credited with having formed



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e), and some tribes in the Baleares, Galicia, and the Gulf of Sirté – under which men were still the despised sex, though agriculture had been introduced and wars were infrequent. Silver is the metal of the Moon-goddess. The third race were the earliest Hellenic invaders: Bronze Age herdsmen, who adopted the ash-tree cult of the Goddess and her son Poseidon (see 6. 4 and 57. 1). The fourth race were the warrior-kings of the Mycenaean Age. The fifth were the Dorians of the twelfth century B.C., who used iron weapons and destroyed the Mycenaean civilization.

Alalcomeneus ('guardian') is a fictitious character, a masculine form of Alalcomeneïs, Athene's title (*Iliad* iv. 8) as the guardian of Boeotia. He serves the patriarchal dogma that no woman, even a goddess, can be wise without male instruction, and that the Moon-goddess and the Moon itself were late creations of Zeus.



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delivered of another child drawn from his thigh – as Dionysus was reborn from Zeus (see 27. *b*) – who rides a storm-chariot drawn by a bull, and comes to Anu's help. The 'knife that separated the the earth from the sky' occurs in the same story, as the weapon with which Kumarbi's son, the earth-born giant Ullikummi, is destroyed (see 35. 4).



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3. Polybius: xvi. 12. 6 ff.; Pausanias: viii. 38. 5.
4. Hyginus: *Poetic Astronomy* ii. 13; Aratus: *Phenomena* 163; Hesiod: *loc. cit.*
5. Philemon: *Pterygium Fragment* i.1 ff.; Apollodorus: i. 1. 6; Athenaeus: 375f. and 376a; Callimachus: *Hymn to Zeus* 42.
6. Hesiod: 485 ff.; Apollodorus: i. 1. 7; First Vatican Mythographer: 104; Callimachus: *Hymn to Zeus* 52 ff.; Lucretius: ii. 633–9; Scholiast on Aratus: v. 46; Hyginus: *Fabula* 139.
7. Hyginus: *loc. cit.*; Apollodorus: *loc. cit.*; Hesiod: *loc. cit.*
8. Hesiod: *loc. cit.*; Hyginus: *Fabula* 118; Apollodorus: i. 1. 7 and i. 2. 1; Callimachus: *Hymn to Zeus* 52 ff.; Diodorus Siculus: v. 70; Eratosthenes: *Catasterismoi* 27; Pausanias: viii. 8. 2; Plutarch: *Why Oracles Are Silent* 16.
9. Pausanias: x. 24. 5.
10. *Ibid.*: viii. 8. 2.
11. Antoninus Liberalis: *Transformations* 19; Callimachus: *Hymn to Zeus* 8.

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1. Rhea, paired with Cronus as Titaness of the seventh day, may be equated with Dione, Diana, the Triple-goddess of the Dove and Oak cult (see 11. 2). The bill-hook carried by Saturn, Cronus's Latin counterpart, was shaped like a crow's bill and apparently



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Centaur of Magnesia – *centaur* is perhaps cognate with the Latin *centuria*, ‘a war-band of one hundred’ – did not abandon their Titan cult, and continued to believe in a Far Western Paradise, and in Atlas’s support of the firmament.

8. Rhea’s name is probably a variant of *Era*, ‘earth’; her chief bird was the dove, her chief beast the mountain-lion. Demeter’s name means ‘Barley-mother’; Hestia (see 20. c) is the goddess of the domestic hearth. The stone at Delphi, used in rain-making ceremonies, seems to have been a large meteorite.

9. Dicte and Mount Lycaeus were ancient seats of Zeus worship. A fire sacrifice was probably offered on Mount Lycaeus, when no creature cast a shadow – that is to say, at noon on midsummer day; but Pausanias adds that though in Ethiopia while the sun is in Cancer men do not throw shadows, this is invariably the case on Mount Lycaeus. He may be quibbling: nobody who trespassed in this precinct was allowed to live (Aratus: *Phenomena* 91), and it was well known that the dead cast no shadows (Plutarch: *Greek Questions* 39). The cave of Psychro, usually regarded as the Dictaeon Cave, is wrongly sited to be the real one, which has not yet been discovered. Omphalion (‘little navel’) suggests the site of an oracle (see 20. 2).

10. Pan’s sudden shout which terrified the Titans became proverbial and has given the word ‘panic’ to the English language (see 26. c).



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ZEUS AND METIS

SOME Hellenes say that Athene had a father named Pallas, a winged goatish giant, who later attempted to outrage her, and whose name she added to her own after stripping him of his skin to make the aegis, and of his wings for her own shoulders;¹ if, indeed, the aegis was not the skin of Medusa the Gorgon, whom she flayed after Perseus had decapitated her.²

b. Others say that her father was one Itonus, a king of Iton in Phthiotis, whose daughter Iodama she killed by accidentally letting her see the Gorgon's head,³ and so changing her into a block of stone, when she trespassed in the precinct at night.

c. Still others say that Poseidon was her father, but that she disowned him and begged to be adopted by Zeus, which he was glad to do.⁴

d. But Athene's own priests tell the following story of her birth. Zeus lusted after Metis the Titaness, who turned into many shapes to escape him until she was caught at last and got with child. An oracle of Mother Earth then declared that this would be a girl-child and that, if Metis conceived again, she would bear a son who was fated to depose Zeus, just as Zeus had deposed Cronus, and Cronus had deposed Uranus. Therefore, having coaxed Metis to a couch with honeyed words, Zeus suddenly opened his mouth and



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Epidaurus (Pausanias: ii. 32. 5), Troezen (Pausanias: iii. 23. 10), and Pheneus (Pausanias: x. 38. 5). All these are pre-Hellenic sites.

10

THE FATES

THERE are three conjoined Fates, robed in white, whom Erebus begot on Night: by name Clotho, Lachesis, and Atropos. Of these, Atropos is the smallest in stature, but the most terrible.¹

b. Zeus, who weighs the lives of men and informs the Fates of his decisions can, it is said, change his mind and intervene to save whom he pleases, when the thread of life, spun on Clotho's spindle, and measured by the rod of Lachesis, is about to be snipped by Atropos's shears. Indeed, men claim that they themselves can, to some degree, control their own fates by avoiding unnecessary dangers. The younger gods, therefore, laugh at the Fates, and some say that Apollo once mischievously made them drunk in order to save his friend Admetus from death.²

c. Others hold, on the contrary, that Zeus himself is subject to the Fates, as the Pythian priestess once confessed in an oracle; because they are not his children, but parthenogenous daughters of the Great Goddess Necessity, against whom not even the gods contend, and who is called 'The Strong Fate'.³

d. At Delphi only two Fates are worshipped, those of Birth and Death; and at Athens Aphrodite Urania is called the eldest of the three.⁴



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3. The Athenians called Aphrodite Urania 'the eldest of the Fates' because she was the Nymph-goddess, to whom the sacred king had, in ancient times, been sacrificed at the summer solstice. 'Urania' means 'queen of the mountains' (see 19.3).

THE BIRTH OF APHRODITE

APHRODITE, Goddess of Desire, rose naked from the foam of the sea and, riding on a scallop shell, stepped ashore first on the island of Cythera; but finding this only a small island, passed on to the Peloponnese, and eventually took up residence at Paphos, in Cyprus, still the principal seat of her worship. Grass and flowers sprang from the soil wherever she trod. At Paphos, the Seasons, daughters of Themis, hastened to clothe and adorn her.

b. Some hold that she sprang from the foam which gathered about the genitals of Uranus, when Cronus threw them into the sea; others, that Zeus begot her on Dione, daughter either of Oceanus and Tethys the sea-nymph, or of Air and Earth. But all agree that she takes the air accompanied by doves and sparrows.¹

1. Hesiod: *Theogony* 188–200 and 353; Festus Grammaticus: iii. 2; *Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite* ii. 5; Apollodorus: i. 1. 3.

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1. Aphrodite ('foam-born') is the same wide-ruling goddess who rose from Chaos and danced on the sea, and who was worshipped in Syria and Palestine as Ishtar, or Ashtaroth (see 1. *I*). Her most famous centre of worship was Paphos, where the original white

aniconic image of the goddess is still shown in the ruins of a grandiose Roman temple; there every spring her priestess bathed in the sea, and rose again renewed.

2. She is called daughter of Dione, because Dione was the goddess of the oak-tree, in which the amorous dove nested (see 51. *a*). Zeus claimed to be her father after seizing Dione's oracle at Dodona, and Dione therefore became her mother. 'Tethys' and 'Thetis' are names of the goddess as Creatrix (formed, like 'Themis' and 'Theseus', from *tithenai*, 'to dispose' or 'to order'), and as Sea-goddess, since life began in the sea (see 2. *a*). Doves and sparrows were noted for their lechery; and sea food is still regarded as aphrodisiac throughout the Mediterranean.

3. Cythera was an important centre of Cretan trade with the Peloponnese, and it will have been from here that her worship first entered Greece. The Cretan goddess had close associations with the sea. Shells carpeted the floor of her palace sanctuary at Cnossus; she is shown on a gem from the Idean Cave blowing a triton-shell, with a sea-anemone lying beside her altar; the sea-urchin and cuttle-fish (see 81. *I*) were sacred to her. A triton-shell was found in her early sanctuary at Phaestus, and many more in late Minoan tombs, some of these being terracotta replicas.



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he had imprisoned her in a mechanical chair with arms that folded about the sitter, thus forcing her to swear by the River Styx that she did not lie. Others say that Hephaestus was her son by Talos, the nephew of Daedalus.⁵

1. Pausanias: vii. 4. 4 and viii. 22. 2; Strabo: ix. 2. 36; Olen, quoted by Pausanias: ii. 13. 3.
2. Diodorus Siculus: v. 72; Pausanias ii. 36. 2 and 17. 4.
3. Scholiast on Homer's *Iliad* i. 609; Pausanias: ii. 38. 2.
4. Homer: *Iliad* iv. 441; Ovid: *Fasti* v. 255; First Vatican Mythographer: 204.
5. Servius on Virgil's *Eclogues* iv. 62; Cinaethon, quoted by Pausanias: viii. 53. 2.

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1. Hera's name, usually taken to be a Greek word for 'lady', may represent an original Herwā ('Protectress'). She is the pre-Hellenic Great Goddess. Samos and Argos were the chief seats of her worship in Greece, but the Arcadians claimed that their cult was the earliest, and made it contemporary with their earth-born ancestor Pelasgus ('ancient'). Hera's forced marriage to Zeus commemorates conquests of Crete and Mycenaean – that is to say Cretanized – Greece, and the overthrow of her supremacy in both countries. He probably came to her disguised as a bedraggled cuckoo, in the sense that certain Hellenes who came to Crete as fugitives accepted employment in the royal guard, made a palace conspiracy and seized the kingdom. Cnossus was twice sacked, apparently by Hellenes; about 1700 B.C., and about 1400 B.C.; and

Mycenae fell to the Achaeans a century later. The God Indra in the Ramayana had similarly wooed a nymph in cuckoo disguise; and Zeus now borrowed Hera's sceptre, which was surmounted with the cuckoo. Gold-leaf figurines of a naked Argive goddess holding cuckoos have been found at Mycenae; and cuckoos perch on a gold-leaf model temple from the same site. In the well-known Cretan sarcophagus from Hagia Triada a cuckoo perches on a double-axe.

2. Hebe, the goddess as child, was made cup-bearer to the gods in the Olympian cult. She eventually married Heracles (see 145.i and 5), after Ganymedes had usurped her office (see 29. c).

'Hephaestus' seems to have been a title of the sacred king as solar demi-god; 'Ares', a title of his war-chief, or tanist, whose emblem was the wild boar. Both became divine names when the Olympian cult was established and they were chosen to fill the roles, respectively, of War-god and Smith-god. The 'certain flower' is likely to have been the may-blossom: Ovid makes the goddess Flora – with whose worship the may-blossom was associated – point it out to Hera. The may, or whitethorn, is connected with miraculous conception in popular European myth: in Celtic literature its 'sister' is the blackthorn, a symbol of Strife – Ares's twin, Eris.

3. Talos, the smith, was a Cretan hero born to Daedalus's sister Perdix ('partridge'), with whom the mythographer is identifying Hera. Partridges, sacred to the Great Goddess, figured in the spring equinox orgies of the Eastern Mediterranean, when a hobbling dance was performed in imitation of cock-partridges. The hens were said by Aristotle, Pliny, and Aelian to conceive merely by



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worshipped at Stymphalus as Child, Bride, and Widow (Pausanias: vii. 22. 2 – see 128. *d*).

7. The wedding-night on Samos lasted for three hundred years: perhaps became the Samian sacred year, like the Etruscan one, consisted of ten thirty-day months only: with January and February omitted (Macrobius: i. 13). Each day was lengthened to a year. But the mythographer may here be hinting that it took the Hellenes three hundred years before they forced monogamy on Hera's people.

ZEUS AND HERA

ONLY Zeus, the Father of Heaven, might wield the thunderbolt; and it was with the threat of its fatal flash that he controlled his quarrelsome and rebellious family of Mount Olympus. He also ordered the heavenly bodies, made laws, enforced oaths, and pronounced oracles. When his mother Rhea, foreseeing what trouble his lust would cause, forbade him to marry, he angrily threatened to violate her. Though she at once turned into a menacing serpent, this did not daunt Zeus, who became a male serpent and, twining about her in an indissoluble knot, made good his threat.¹ It was then that he began his long series of adventures in love. He fathered the Seasons and the Three Fates on Themis; the Charites on Eurynome; the Three Muses on Mnemosyne, with whom he lay for nine nights; and, some say, Persephone, the Queen of the Underworld, whom his brother Hades forcibly married, on the nymph Styx.² Thus he lacked no power either above or below earth; and his wife Hera was equal to him in one thing alone: that she could still bestow the gift of prophecy on any man or beast she pleased.³

b. Zeus and Hera bickered constantly. Vexed by his infidelities, she often humiliated him by her scheming ways. Though he would confide his secrets to her, and sometimes accept her advice, he



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2. Apollodorus: i. 3. 1–2.
3. Homer: *Iliad* xix. 407.
4. *Ibid.*: i. 547; xvi. 458; viii. 407–8; xv. 17; viii. 397–404; xiv. 197–223; xv. 166.
5. Scholiast on Homer's *Iliad* xxi. 444; Tzetzes: *On Lycophron* 34; Homer: *Iliad* i. 399 ff. and xv. 18–22.

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1. The marital relations of Zeus and Hera reflect those of the barbarous Dorian Age, when women had been deprived of all their magical power, except that of prophecy, and come to be regarded as chattels. It is possible that the occasion on which the power of Zeus was saved only by Thetis and Briareus, after the other Olympians had conspired against him, was a palace revolution by vassal princes of the Hellenic High King, who nearly succeeded in dethroning him; and that help came from a company of loyal non-Hellenic household troops, recruited in Macedonia, Briareus's home, and from a detachment of Magnesians, Thetis's people. If so, the conspiracy will have been instigated by the High-priestess of Hera, whom the High King subsequently humiliated, as the myth describes.

2. Zeus's violation of the Earth-goddess Rhea implies that the Zeus-worshipping Hellenes took over all agricultural and funerary ceremonies. She had forbidden him to marry, in the sense that hitherto monogamy had been unknown; women took whatever lovers they pleased. His fatherhood of the Seasons, on Themis, means that the Hellenes also assumed control of the calendar: Themis ('order') was the Great Goddess who ordered the year of

thirteen months, divided by the summer and winter solstices into two seasons. At Athens these seasons were personified as Thallo and Carpo (originally 'Carpho'), which mean respectively 'sprouting' and 'withering', and their temple contained an altar to the phallic Dionysus (see 27. 5). They appear in a rock-carving at Hattusas, or Pteria, where they are twin aspects of the Lion-goddess Hepta, borne on the wings of a double-headed Sun-eagle.

3. Charis ('grace') had been the Goddess in the disarming aspect she presented when the High-priestess chose the sacred king as her lover. Homer mentions two Charites – Pasithea and Cale, which seems to be a forced separation of three words: *Pasi thea cale*, 'the Goddess who is beautiful to all men'. The two Charites, Auxo ('increase') and Hegemone ('mastery'), whom the Athenians honoured, corresponded with the two Seasons. Later, the Charites were worshipped as a triad, to match the Three Fates – the Triple-goddess in her most unbending mood (see 106.3). That they were Zeus's children, born to Eurynome the Creatrix, implies that the Hellenic overlord had power to dispose of all marriageable young women.

4. The Muses ('mountain goddesses'), originally a triad (Pausanias: ix. 19. 2), are the Triple-goddess in her orgiastic aspect. Zeus's claim to be their father is a late one; Hesiod calls them daughters of Mother Earth and Air.

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Persephone, with whom Zeus coupled in the likeness of a serpent; and some, Lethe.⁴

c. But the common story runs as follows. Zeus, disguised as a mortal, had a secret love affair with Semele ('moon'), daughter of King Cadmus of Thebes, and jealous Hera, disguising herself as an old neighbour, advised Semele, then already six months with child, to make her mysterious lover a request: that he would no longer deceive her, but reveal himself in his true nature and form. How, otherwise, could she know that he was not a monster? Semele followed this advice and, when Zeus refused her plea, denied him further access to her bed. Then, in anger, he appeared as thunder and lightning, and she was consumed. But Hermes saved her six-months son; sewed him up inside Zeus's thigh, to mature there for three months longer; and, in due course of time, delivered him. Thus Dionysus is called 'twice-born', or 'the child of the double door'.⁵

1. Hesiod: *Theogony* 918; Apollodorus: i. 4. 1; Aristophanes: *Birds* 870; Servius on Virgil's *Aeneid* iii. 72.
2. *Homeric Hymn to Apollo* 14 ff.; Hyginus: *Fabula* 140; Aelian: *Varia Historia* v. 4; Thucydides: iii. 104; Strabo: x. 5.5.
3. Diodorus Siculus: iii. 67 and 74; iv. 4.
4. Scholiast on Pindar's *Pythian Odes* iii. 177; *Orphic Fragment* 59; Plutarch: *Symposiacs* vii. 5.
5. Apollodorus: iii. 4. 3; Apollonius Rhodius: iv. 1137.



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nine pieces and sacrificed to her: one piece being burned, the remainder eaten raw by the worshippers. *Semele* is usually explained as a form of Selene ('moon'), and nine was the traditional number of orgiastic moon-priestesses who took part in such feasts – nine such are shown dancing around the sacred king in a cave painting at Cogul, and nine more killed and devoured St Samson of Dol's acolyte in medieval times.

THE BIRTH OF EROS

SOME argue that Eros, hatched from the world-egg, was the first of the gods since, without him, none of the rest could have been born; they make him coeval with Mother Earth and Tartarus, and deny that he had any father or mother, unless it were Eileithyia, Goddess of Childbirth.¹

b. Others hold that he was Aphrodite's son by Hermes, or by Ares, or by her own father, Zeus; or the son of Iris by the West Wind. He was a wild boy, who showed no respect for age or station but flew about on golden wings, shooting barbed arrows at random or wantonly setting hearts on fire with his dreadful torches.²

1. *Orphic Hymn* v; Aristotle: *Metaphysics* i. 4; Hesiod: *Theogony* 120; Meleager: *Epigrams* 50; Olen, quoted by Pausanias: ix. 27. 2.
2. Cicero: *On the Nature of the Gods* iii. 23; Virgil : *Ciris* 134; Alcaeus, quoted by Plutarch: *Amatorius* 20.

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1. Eros ('sexual passion') was a mere abstraction to Hesiod. The early Greeks pictured him as a *Ker*, or winged 'Spite', like Old Age, or Plague, in the sense that uncontrolled sexual passion could

be disturbing to ordered society. Later poets, however, took a perverse pleasure in his antics and, by the time of Praxiteles, he had become sentimentalized as a beautiful youth. His most famous shrine was at Thespiae, where the Boeotians worshipped him as a simple phallic pillar – the pastoral Hermes, or Priapus, under a different name (see 150. *a*). The various accounts of his parentage are self-explanatory. Hermes was a phallic god; and Ares, as a god of war, increased desire in the warrior's womenfolk. That Aphrodite was Eros's mother and Zeus his father is a hint that sexual passion does not stop short at incest; his birth from the Rainbow and the West Wind is a lyrical fancy. Eileithyia, 'she who comes to the aid of women in childbed', was a title of Artemis; the meaning being that there is no love so strong as mother-love.

2. Eros was never considered a sufficiently responsible god to figure among the ruling Olympian family of Twelve.

POSEIDON'S NATURE AND DEEDS

WHEN Zeus, Poseidon, and Hades, after deposing their father Cronus, shook lots in a helmet for the lordship of the sky, sea, and murky underworld, leaving the earth common to all, Zeus won the sky, Hades the underworld, and Poseidon the sea. Poseidon, who is equal to his brother Zeus in dignity, though not in power, and of a surly, quarrelsome nature, at once set about building his underwater palace off Aegae in Euboea. In its spacious stables he keeps white chariot horses with brazen hooves and golden manes, and a golden chariot at the approach of which storms instantly cease and sea-monsters rise, frisking, around it.¹

b. Needing a wife who would be at home in the sea-depths, he courted Thetis the Nereid; but when it was prophesied by Themis that any son born to Thetis would be greater than his father, he desisted, and allowed her to marry a mortal named Peleus. Amphitrite, another Nereid, whom he next approached, viewed his advances with repugnance, and fled to the Atlas Mountains to escape him; but he sent messengers after her, among them one Delphinus, who pleaded Poseidon's cause so winningly that she yielded, and asked him to arrange the marriage. Gratefully, Poseidon set Delphinus's image among the stars as a constellation, the Dolphin.²

Amphitrite bore Poseidon three children: Triton, Rhode, and Benthesticyme; but he caused her almost as much jealousy as Zeus did Hera by his love affairs with goddesses, nymphs, and mortals. Especially she loathed his infatuation with Scylla, daughter of Phorcys, whom she changed into a barking monster with six heads and twelve feet by throwing magical herbs into her bathing pool.³

c. Poseidon is greedy of earthly kingdoms, and once claimed possession of Attica by thrusting his trident into the acropolis at Athens, where a well of sea-water immediately gushed out and is still to be seen; when the South Wind blows you may hear the sound of the surf far below. Later, during the reign of Cecrops, Athene came and took possession in a gentler manner, by planting the first olive-tree beside the well. Poseidon, in a fury, challenged her to single combat, and Athene would have accepted had not Zeus interposed and ordered them to submit the dispute to arbitration. Presently, then, they appeared before a divine court, consisting of their supernal fellow-deities, who called on Cecrops to give evidence. Zeus himself expressed no opinion, but while all the other gods supported Poseidon, all the goddesses supported Athene. Thus, by a majority of one, the court ruled that Athene had the better right to the land, because she had given it the better gift.

d. Greatly vexed, Poseidon sent huge waves to flood the Thriasian Plain, where Athene's city of Athenae stood, whereupon she took up her abode in Athens instead, and called that too after herself. However, to appease Poseidon's wrath, the women of Athens were deprived of their vote, and the men forbidden to bear their mothers' names as hitherto.⁴



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Zeus, and Persephone's to marry Hades; the marriage involved the interference of male priests with female control of the fishing industry. The fable of Delphinus is sentimental allegory: dolphins appear when the sea grows calm. Amphitrite's children were herself in triad: Triton, lucky new moon; Rhode, full harvest-moon; and Benthescyme, dangerous old moon. But Triton has since become masculinized. Aegae stood on the sheltered Boeotian side of Euboea and served as a port for Orchomenus; and it was hereabouts that the naval expedition mustered against Troy.

2. The story of Amphitrite's vengeance on Scylla is paralleled in that of Pasiphaë's vengeance on another Scylla (see 91. 2). Scylla ('she who rends' or 'puppy') is merely a disagreeable aspect of herself: the dog-headed Death-goddess Hecate (see 31.f), who was at home both on land and in the waves. A seal impression from Cnossus shows her threatening a man in a boat, as she threatened Odysseus in the Straits of Messina (see 170. *t*). The account quoted by Tzetzes seems to have been mistakenly deduced from an ancient vase-painting in which Amphitrite stands beside a pool occupied by a dog-headed monster; on the other side of the vase is a drowned hero caught between two dog-headed triads of goddesses at the entrance to the Underworld (see 31. *a* and 134. *I*).

3. Poseidon's attempts to take possession of certain cities are political myths. His dispute over Athens suggests an unsuccessful attempt to make him the city's tutelary deity in place of Athene. Yet her victory was impaired by a concession to patriarchy: the Athenians abandoned the Cretan custom which prevailed in Caria until Classical times (Herodotus: i. 173) when they ceased to take

their mother's names. Varro, who gives this detail, represents the trial as a plebiscite of all the men and women of Athens.

It is plain that the Ionian Pelasgians of Athens were defeated by the Aeolians, and that Athene regained her sovereignty only by alliance with Zeus's Achaeans, who later made her disown Poseidon's paternity and admit herself reborn from Zeus's head.

4. The cultivated olive was originally imported from Libya, which supports the myth of Athene's Libyan origin; but what she brought will have been only a cutting – the cultivated olive does not breed true, but must always be grafted on the oleaster, or wild olive. Her tree was still shown at Athens during the second century A.D. The flooding of the Thriasian Plain is likely to be a historical event, but cannot be dated. It is possible that early in the fourteenth century B.C., which meteorologists reckon to have been a period of maximum rainfall, the rivers of Arcadia never ran dry, and that their subsequent shrinking was attributed to the vengeance of Poseidon. Pre-Hellenic Sun-worship at Corinth is well established (Pausanias: ii. 4. 7 – see [67. 2](#)).

5. The myth of Demeter and Poseidon records a Hellenic invasion of Arcadia. Demeter was pictured at Phigalia as the mare-headed patroness of the pre-Hellenic horse cult. Horses were sacred to the moon, because their hooves make a moon-shaped mark, and the moon was regarded as the source of all water; hence the association of Pegasus with springs of water (see [75. b](#)). The early Hellenes introduced a larger breed of horse into Greece from Trans-Caspia, the native variety having been about the size of a Shetland pony and unsuitable for chariotry. They seem to have seized the centres of the horse cult, where their warrior-kings

forcibly married the local priestesses and thus won a title to the land; incidentally suppressing the wild-mare orgies (see 72. 4). The sacred horses Arion and Despoena (this being a title of Demeter herself) were then claimed as Poseidon's children. Amymone may have been a name for the goddess at Lema, the centre of the Danaid water cult (see 60. g and 4).

6. Demeter as Fury, like Nemesis as Fury (see 32. 3), was the goddess in her annual mood of murder; and the story also told of Poseidon and Demeter at Thelpusia (Pausanias; viii. 42), and of Poseidon and an unnamed Fury at the fountain of Tilphusa in Boeotia (Scholiast on Homer's *Iliad* xxiii. 346) was already old when the Hellenes came. It appears in early Indian sacred literature, where Saranyu turns herself into a mare, Vivaswat becomes a stallion and covers her; and the fruit of this union are the two heroic Asvins. 'Demeter Erinnys' may, in fact, have stood not for 'Demeter the Fury', but for 'Demeter Saranyu' – an attempted reconciliation of the two warring cultures; but to the resentful Pelasgians Demeter was, and remained, outraged.

HERMES'S NATURE AND DEEDS

WHEN Hermes was born on Mount Cyllene his mother Maia laid him in swaddling bands on a winnowing fan, but he grew with astonishing quickness into a little boy, and as soon as her back was turned, slipped off and went looking for adventure. Arrived at Pieria, where Apollo was tending a fine herd of cows, he decided to steal them. But, fearing to be betrayed by their tracks, he quickly made a number of shoes from the bark of a fallen oak and tied them with plaited grass to the feet of the cows, which he then drove off by night along the road. Apollo discovered the loss, but Hermes's trick deceived him, and though he went as far as Pylus in his westward search, and to Onchestus in his eastern, he was forced, in the end, to offer a reward for the apprehension of the thief. Silenus and his satyrs, greedy of reward, spread out in different directions to track him down but, for a long while, without success. At last, as a party of them passed through Arcadia, they heard the muffled sound of music such as they had never heard before, and the nymph Cyllene, from the mouth of a cave, told them that a most gifted child had recently been born there, to whom she was acting as nurse: he had constructed an ingenious musical toy from the shell of a tortoise and some cow-gut, with which he had lulled his mother to sleep.

b. 'And from whom did he get the cow-gut?' asked the alert satyrs, noticing two hides stretched outside the cave. 'Do you charge the poor child with theft?' asked Cyllene. Harsh words were exchanged.

c. At that moment Apollo came up, having discovered the thief's identity by observing the suspicious behaviour of a long-winged bird. Entering the cave, he awakened Maia and told her severely that Hermes must restore the stolen cows. Maia pointed to the child, still wrapped in his swaddling bands and feigning sleep. 'What an absurd charge!' she cried. But Apollo had already recognized the hides. He picked up Hermes, carried him to Olympus, and there formally accused him of theft, offering the hides as evidence. Zeus, loth to believe that his own new-born son was a thief, encouraged him to plead not guilty, but Apollo would not be put off and Hermes, at last, weakened and confessed.

'Very well, come with me,' he said, 'and you may have your herd. I slaughtered only two, and those I cut up into twelve equal portions as a sacrifice to the twelve gods.'

'*Twelve* gods?' asked Apollo. 'Who is the twelfth?'

'Your servant, sir,' replied Hermes modestly. 'I ate no more than my share, though I was very hungry, and duly burned the rest.'

Now, this was the first flesh-sacrifice ever made.

d. The two gods returned to Mount Cyllene, where Hermes greeted his mother and retrieved something that he had hidden underneath a sheepskin.

'What have you there?' asked Apollo.



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j. Hermes had numerous sons, including Echion the Argonauts' herald; Autolycus the thief; and Daphnis the inventor of bucolic poetry. This Daphnis was a beautiful Sicilian youth whom his mother, a nymph, exposed in a laurel grove on the Mountain of Hera; hence the name given him by the shepherds, his foster parents. Pan taught him to play the pipes; he was beloved by Apollo, and used to hunt with Artemis, who took pleasure in his music. He lavished great care on his many herds of cattle, which were of the same stock as Helius's. A nymph named Nomia made him swear never to be unfaithful to her, on pain of being blinded; but her rival, Chimaera, contrived to seduce him when he was drunk, and Nomia blinded him in fulfilment of her threat. Daphnis consoled himself for a while with sad lays about the loss of sight, but he did not live long. Hermes turned him into a stone, which is still shown at the city of Cephalenitanum; and caused a fountain called Daphnis to gush up at Syracuse, where annual sacrifices are offered.⁴

1. *Homeric Hymn to Hermes* 1–543; Sophocles: *Fragments of The Trackers*; Apollodorus: iii. 10. 2.
2. Diodorus Siculus: v. 75; Hyginus: *Fabula* 277; Plutarch: *Symposiacs* ix. 3.
3. *Homeric Hymn to Hermes* 51; Diodorus Siculus: i. 16; Macrobius: *Saturnaliorum Conviviorum* i. 19; Callimachus: *Hymn to Delos* 253.
4. Diodorus Siculus: iv. 84; Servius on Virgil's *Eclogues* v. 20; viii. 68; x. 26; Philargyrius on Virgil's *Eclogues* v. 20; Aelian: *Varia Historia* x. 18.

1. The myth of Hermes's childhood has been preserved in a late literary form only. A tradition of cattle raids made by the crafty Messenians on their neighbours (see 74. *g* and 171. *h*), and of a treaty by which these were discontinued, seems to have been mythologically combined with an account of how the barbarous Hellenes took over and exploited, in the name of their adopted god Apollo, the Creto-Helladic civilization which they found in Central and Southern Greece – boxing, gymnastics, weights and measures, music, astronomy, and olive culture were all pre-Hellenic (see 162. 6) – and learned polite manners.

2. Hermes was evolved as a god from the stone phalli which were local centres of a pre-Hellenic fertility cult (see 15. *1*) – the account of his rapid growth may be Homer's playful obscenity – but also from the Divine Child of the pre-Hellenic Calendar (see 24. 6, 44. *1*, 105. *1*, 171. 4, etc.); from the Egyptian Thoth, God of Intelligence; and from Anubis, conductor of souls to the Underworld.

3. The heraldic white ribbons on Hermes's staff were later mistaken for serpents, because he was herald to Hades; hence Echion's name. The Thriae are the Triple-Muse ('mountain goddess') of Parnassus, their divination by means of dancing pebbles was also practised at Delphi (Mythographi Graeci: *Appendix Narrationum* 67). Athene was first credited with the invention of divinatory dice made from knuckle-bones (Zenobius: *Proverbs* v. 75), and these came into popular use; but the art of augury remained an aristocratic prerogative both in Greece and at Rome. Apollo's 'long-winged bird' was probably Hermes's own

sacred crane; for the Apollonian priesthood constantly trespassed on the territory of Hermes, an earlier patron of soothsaying, literature, and the arts; as did the Hermetic priesthood on that of Pan, the Muses, and Athene. The invention of fire-making was ascribed to Hermes, because the twirling of the male drill in the female stock suggested phallic magic.

4. Silenus and his sons, the satyrs,, were conventional comic characters in the Attic drama (see [83. 5](#)); originally they had been primitive mountaineers of Northern Greece. He was called an autochthon, or a son of Pan by one of the nymphs (Nonnus; *Dionysiaca* xiv. 97; xxix. 262; Aelian: *Varia Historia* iii. 18).

5. The romantic story of Daphnis has been built around a phallic pillar at Cephalenitanum, and a fountain at Syracuse, each probably surrounded by a laurel grove, where songs were sung in honour of the sightless dead. Daphnis was said to be beloved by Apollo because he had taken the laurel from the orgiastic goddess of Tempe (see [21. 6](#)).

APHRODITE'S NATURE AND DEEDS

APHRODITE could seldom be persuaded to lend the other goddesses her magic girdle which made everyone fall in love with its wearer; for she was jealous of her position. Zeus had given her in marriage to Hephaestus, the lame Smith-god; but the true father of the three children with whom she presented him – Phobus, Deimus, and Harmonia – was Ares, the straight-limbed, impetuous, drunken, and quarrelsome God of War. Hephaestus knew nothing of the deception until, one night, the lovers stayed too long together in bed at Ares's Thracian palace; then Helius, as he rose, saw them at their sport and told tales to Hephaestus.

b. Hephaestus angrily retired to his forge, and hammered out a bronze hunting-net, as fine as gossamer but quite unbreakable, which he secretly attached to the posts and sides of his marriage-bed. He told Aphrodite who returned from Thrace, all smiles, explaining that she had been away on business at Corinth: 'Pray excuse me, dear wife, I am taking a short holiday on Lemnos, my favourite island.' Aphrodite did not offer to accompany him and, when he was out of sight, sent hurriedly for Ares, who soon arrived. The two went merrily to bed but, at dawn, found themselves entangled in the net, naked and unable to escape. Hephaestus, turning back from his journey, surprised them there, and summoned all the gods to witness his dishonour. He then



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