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Page | 1

## **Mythology**

### **Radically Biblical, Apostolic, Christianity**



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Page | 2



## Contents

<b>Achilles</b> .....	8
<b>Adonis</b> .....	8
<b>Aeneas</b> .....	9
<b>Aeolus</b> .....	9
<b>Agamemnon</b> .....	10
<b>Amon or Ammon</b> .....	10
<b>Aphrodite</b> .....	11
<b>Apis</b> .....	11
<b>Apollo</b> .....	12
<b>Artemis</b> .....	12
<b>Astarte</b> .....	13
<b>Athena</b> .....	13
<b>Atlantis</b> .....	14
<b>Atlas</b> .....	14
<b>Bel</b> .....	15
Castor and Polydeuces.....	15
<b>Cecrops</b> .....	16
<b>Centaur</b> , .....	16
<b>Ceres</b> .....	16
<b>Chaos</b> .....	17
<b>Cimmerians</b> ,.....	17
<b>Cupid</b> .....	17
<b>Cybele</b> .....	18
<b>Cyclops</b> .....	18
<b>Dagon</b> .....	18
<b>Demeter</b> .....	18
<b>Diana</b> .....	19
<b>Dionysus</b> .....	19
<b>Egyptian Mythology</b> , .....	20
Creation .....	20
Local Gods .....	21
Iconography.....	22
Sun Worship.....	22

Burial Ritual .....	23
<b>Europa</b> .....	23
The Rape of Europa.....	24
<b>Greek Mythology</b> .....	24
Principal Gods .....	24
Worship and Beliefs .....	25
Origins .....	26
<b>Hades</b> .....	27
<b>Hathor</b> .....	28
<b>Hecate</b> .....	28
<b>Helen of Troy</b> .....	28
<b>Helios</b> .....	29
<b>Hephaestus</b> .....	30
<b>Hercules</b> .....	30
The Twelve Labors.....	31
Death of the Hero .....	32
<b>Hermes</b> .....	32
<b>Hippolytus</b> .....	33
<b>Horus</b> .....	33
<b>Huitzilopochtli</b> .....	33
<b>Ishtar</b> .....	34
<b>Isis</b> .....	35
<b>Janus</b> .....	35
<b>Jinni</b> .....	36
<b>Juno</b> .....	36
<b>Jupiter</b> .....	36
<b>Laocoon</b> .....	37
<b>Marduk</b> .....	37
<b>Mars</b> .....	38
<b>Mercury</b> .....	38
<b>Mysteries</b> .....	38
<b>Mythology</b> .....	39
Meaning and Interpretation .....	40
<b>Myth, History, and Reason</b> .....	40

Western Mythical Traditions.....	41
Modern Concern with Mythology.....	41
<b>Types of Myth</b> .....	42
Cosmogonic Myths .....	42
Myths of Culture Heroes .....	44
Myths of Birth and Rebirth .....	44
Foundation Myths .....	45
Studies of Myth .....	45
<b>Myth and Language</b> .....	45
<b>Myth and Knowledge</b> .....	46
<b>Myth and Society</b> .....	48
<b>Myth and Psychology</b> .....	50
<b>Neptune</b> .....	51
<b>Odysseus</b> .....	51
<b>Orion</b> .....	52
<b>Orphism</b> .....	52
<b>Osiris</b> .....	53
<b>Pandora</b> .....	53
<b>Phoenix</b> .....	54
<b>Pleiades</b> .....	54
<b>Pluto</b> .....	54
<b>Poseidon</b> .....	55
<b>Ptah</b> .....	55
<b>Quetzalcoatl</b> .....	56
<b>Ra</b> .....	56
<b>Remus</b> .....	56
<b>Roman Mythology</b> .....	57
Gods of the Roman People.....	57
Inclusion of Other Deities .....	59
Religious Festivals .....	59
Roman Temples.....	60
Decline of the Roman Religion.....	60
<b>Romulus</b> .....	61
<b>Saturn</b> .....	62

<b>Serapis, also Sarapis</b> .....	63
<b>Sibyl</b> .....	63
<b>Sphinx</b> .....	64
<b>Tammuz or Dumuzi</b> .....	64
<b>Tartarus</b> .....	65
<b>Thor</b> .....	65
<b>Unicorn</b> .....	65
<b>Uranus (mythology)</b> .....	65
<b>Venus</b> .....	65
<b>Vesta</b> .....	66
<b>Vestal Virgins</b> .....	66
<b>Vulcan</b> .....	67
<b>Zeus</b> .....	67

## Mythology

**Achilles**, in Greek mythology, greatest of the Greek warriors in the Trojan War. He was the son of the sea nymph, Thetis and Peleus, king of the Myrmidons of Thessaly. When he was a child, his mother dipped him into the River Styx to make him immortal. The waters made him invulnerable, except for the heel, by which his mother held him. Achilles fought many battles during the 10-year siege of Troy. When the Mycenaean king, Agamemnon seized the captive maiden, Briseis from him, Achilles withdrew the Myrmidons from battle and sulked in his tent. The Trojans, emboldened by his absence, attacked the Greeks and drove them into headlong retreat. Then Patroclus, Achilles' friend and companion, begged Achilles to lend him his armor and let him lead the Myrmidons into battle. Achilles consented. When Patroclus was killed by the Trojan prince, Hector, the grief-stricken Achilles returned to battle, slew Hector, and dragged his body in triumph behind his chariot. He later permitted Priam, king of Troy, to ransom Hector's body. Achilles fought his last battle with Memnon, king of the Ethiopians. After killing the king, Achilles led the Greeks to the walls of Troy. There he was mortally wounded in the heel, by Paris. The quarrel between Achilles and Agamemnon, the subsequent battle, and the ransoming of Hector's body, are recounted in the *Iliad*.

**Adonis (mythology)**, in Greek mythology, beautiful youth beloved by the goddesses, Aphrodite and Persephone. Born of the incestuous union of King Cinyras of Cyprus and his daughter, Adonis, was concealed in a chest and placed in the custody of Persephone, queen of the underworld. When Adonis was slain by a wild boar while hunting, Aphrodite pleaded with the god, Zeus, to restore him to her. Zeus decreed that Adonis should spend the winter months with Persephone in Hades and the summer months with Aphrodite. The story of his death and resurrection is symbolic of the natural cycle of death and rebirth. The name, Adonis, is etymologically related to *adon*, a Semitic word meaning, "lord" that occurs in the Old Testament in the form Adonai.

**Aeneas**, in Roman mythology, the son of Anchises, a Trojan prince, and Venus, goddess of love. After the capture of Troy by the Greeks, Aeneas escaped from the fallen city with the help of his mother. Carrying his aged father on his back and leading his little son by the hand, Aeneas made his way to the seacoast. In the confusion of flight, his wife was left behind.

A long, adventure-filled voyage took Aeneas to Thrace, Delos, Crete, and Sicily, where his father died. The goddess, Juno, who had always hated Aeneas and wanted to prevent him from founding Rome, which she knew to be his destiny, tried to drown him in a violent storm. He and his crew were cast up on the African coast, where they were welcomed by Dido, the beautiful queen of Carthage. Dido fell in love with Aeneas and begged him to remain. When he refused and set sail, she took her own life in despair.

After several years of wandering, Aeneas reached Italy and the mouth of the Tiber. There he was hospitably received by Latinus, king of Latium. He became betrothed to Lavinia, the daughter of Latinus, but before he could marry her, Juno caused Turnus, king of the Rutuli, and a rejected suitor of Lavinia, to make war against Aeneas and Latinus. The war was resolved by hand-to-hand combat, in which Turnus was defeated and slain by Aeneas. Aeneas then ruled for several years in Latium and, by marrying Lavinia, accomplished the union of Trojans and Latin's that would one day produce the Roman people.

The great Roman epic, the *Aeneid*, by Vergil, tells the story of Aeneas's perilous wanderings in detail and ends with the death of Turnus.

**Aeolus**, name of two figures in Greek mythology. The best known was keeper of the winds. He lived on the floating island, Aeolia, with his six sons and six daughters. The god, Zeus, had given him the power to still and arouse the winds. When the Greek hero, Odysseus, visited Aeolus, he was welcomed as an honored guest. As a parting gift, Aeolus, gave him a favoring wind and a leather bag filled with all the winds. Odysseus's sailors, thinking the bag contained gold, opened it and were, at once, swept back to

Aeolia. There, Aeolia refused to help them again.

Another Aeolus, in Greek mythology, was the king of Thessaly. He was the son of Hellen, ancestor of the Hellenes, the ancient Greek peoples. Aeolus was himself, the ancestor of the Aeolian Greeks.

Page | 10

**Agamemnon**, in Greek mythology, king of Mycenae, and commander of the Greek forces in the Trojan War. He was the son of Atreus and suffered the curse laid on his house. When the Greeks had assembled in Aulis, for their voyage to Troy, they were held back by adverse winds. To calm the winds, Agamemnon sacrificed his daughter, Iphigenia, to the goddess, Artemis. His quarrel with Achilles over the captive princess, Briseis and the consequences of that quarrel, form much of the plot of Homer's *Iliad*. After a ten-year siege, Troy fell and Agamemnon returned in triumph to Mycenae. With him, came the Trojan princess, Cassandra, who had been awarded to him by the victorious Greek army.

Clytemnestra, Agamemnon's wife, greeted him with protestations of love, but while he was in his bath, she killed him with the assistance of her lover, Aegisthus. His death was avenged seven years later by his son, Orestes. The story of Agamemnon's death is told in the first play of the trilogy, *Oresteia*, by ancient Greek poet, Aeschylus.

**Amon or Ammon** (Egyptian, "hidden"), ancient Egyptian deity, originally a local Theban god of reproductive forces, represented as a ram, Amon, his wife, Mut (Egyptian, "the mother"), and his son, the moon god, Khon (Egyptian, "to traverse the sky"), formed the divine triad of Thebes. Later, Amon was identified with the sun god, Ra of Heliopolis, and was known as Amon-Ra, "the father of the gods, the fashioner of men, the creator of cattle, the lord of all being." As a universal god, he became the god of the Egyptian nation and the empire. The power of his high priest rivaled that of the pharaoh, provoking political problems similar to modern Church-state rivalry. The most massive temple ever built was constructed for Amon-Ra at Al Karnak. Amon was worshiped in the ancient Greek colonies of Cyrene, where he was identified with Zeus, and in Rome,

where he was associated with Jupiter.

**Aphrodite**, in Greek mythology, the goddess of love and beauty and the counterpart of the Roman goddess, Venus. In Homeric legend, she is said to be the daughter of Zeus and Dione, one of Zeus's consorts, but in the *Theogony* of Hesiod, she is described as having sprung from the foam of the sea, and etymologically, her name may mean "foam-risen." According to Homer, Aphrodite is the wife of Hephaestus, the lame and ugly god of fire. Her lovers include Ares, god of war, who in later mythology was represented as her husband. She was the rival of Persephone, queen of the underworld, for the love of the beautiful Greek youth, Adonis.

Page | 11

Perhaps the most famous legend about Aphrodite concerns the cause of the Trojan War. Eris, the personification of discord -- the only goddess not invited to the wedding of King Peleus and the sea nymph, Thetis -- resentfully tossed into the banquet hall, a golden apple on which were inscribed the words, "for the fairest." When Zeus refused to judge between Hera, Athena, and Aphrodite, the three goddesses who claimed the apple, they asked Paris, prince of Troy, to make the award. Each goddess offered Paris a bribe: Hera, that he would be a powerful ruler; Athena, that he would achieve great military fame; and Aphrodite, that he should have the fairest woman in the world. Paris declared Aphrodite the fairest and chose as his prize, Helen of Troy, the wife of the Greek king, Menelaus. Paris's abduction of Helen, led to the Trojan War.

Probably, of Near Eastern origin, Aphrodite was identified in early Greek religious belief with the Phoenician goddess, Astarte, and was known under a variety of cult titles, including Aphrodite Urania, queen of the heavens, and Aphrodite Pandemos, goddess of the whole people.

**Apis**, sacred bull of the ancient Egyptians. It was known to them as Hapi and was regarded as the incarnation of Osiris or of Ptah. A court was set apart for Apis in the temple of Ptah at Memphis. It was believed that when Apis died, a new Apis appeared and had to be searched out; he would be recognizable by certain sacred marks upon his

body, such as his color (mainly black) and a knot under his tongue. Apis is sometimes represented as a man with the head of a bull.

**Apollo**, in Greek mythology, son of the god, Zeus and Leto, daughter of a Titan. He also bore the epithets, "Delian" from Delos, the island of his birth, and "Pythian," from his killing of the Python, the fabled serpent that guarded a shrine on the slopes of Mount Parnassus. In Homeric legend, Apollo was primarily a god of prophecy. His most important oracle was at Delphi, the site of his victory over the Python. He sometimes gave the gift of prophecy to mortals whom he loved, such as the Trojan princess, Cassandra.

Page | 12

Apollo was a gifted musician, who delighted the gods with his performance on the lyre. He was also a master archer and a fleet-footed athlete, credited with having been the first victor in the Olympian Games. His twin sister, Artemis, was the guardian of young women, and Apollo was the special protector of young men. He was also the god of agriculture and cattle and of light and truth. He taught humans the art of healing.

Some tales depict Apollo as stern or cruel. According to Homer's *Iliad*, Apollo answered the prayers of the priest, Chryses, to obtain the release of his daughter from the Greek general, Agamemnon, by shooting fiery, pestilential arrows into the Greek army. He also abducted and ravished the young Athenian princess, Creusa, and abandoned her and the child born to them. Perhaps because of his beauty, Apollo was represented in ancient art more frequently than any other deity.

**Artemis**, in Greek mythology, one of the principal goddesses, counterpart of the Roman goddess, Diana. She was the daughter of the god, Zeus and Leto, and the twin sister of the god, Apollo. She was chief hunter to the gods and goddess of hunting and of wild animals, especially bears. Artemis was also the goddess of childbirth, of nature, and of the harvest. As the moon goddess, she was sometimes identified with the goddesses, Selene and Hecate.

Although traditionally, the friend and protector of youth, especially young women, Artemis

prevented the Greeks from sailing to Troy during the Trojan War until they sacrificed a maiden to her. According to some accounts, just before the sacrifice, she rescued the victim, Iphigenia. Like Apollo, Artemis was armed with a bow and arrows, which she often used to punish mortals who angered her. In other legends, she is praised for giving young women, who died in childbirth, a swift and painless death.

**Astarte**, Greek and Roman name of Ashtoreth, the supreme female divinity of the Phoenician nations, the goddess of love and fruitfulness. Like that of Baal, the corresponding male divinity, the name is frequently found in the earlier books of the Old Testament in the plural form, Ashtaroth; not until the time of King Solomon of Israel (10th century BC) did the singular form, Ashtoreth occur. She symbolized the female principle in all its aspects, as Baal symbolized maleness. Astarte has been identified with various Greek goddesses: the goddess of the moon, Selene; the goddess of wild nature, Artemis; and the goddess of love and beauty, Aphrodite. The Babylonian and Assyrian counterpart of Astarte, was Ishtar.

**Athena**, one of the most important goddesses in Greek mythology. In Roman mythology, she became identified with the goddess, Minerva. Also known as Pallas Athena. Athena sprang full-grown and armored from the forehead of the god, Zeus, and was his favorite child. He entrusted her with his shield, adorned with the hideous head of Medusa the Gorgon, his buckler, and his principal weapon, the thunderbolt. A virgin goddess, she was called Parthenos ("the maiden"). Her major temple, the Parthenon, was in Athens, which, according to legend, became hers as a result of her gift of the olive tree to the Athenian people.

Athena was primarily the goddess of the Greek cities, of industry and the arts, and, in later mythology, of wisdom; she was also goddess of war. Athena was the strongest supporter, among the gods, of the Greek side in the Trojan War. After the fall of Troy, however, the Greeks failed to respect the sanctity of an altar to Athena, at which, the Trojan prophet, Cassandra, sought shelter. As punishment, storms sent by the god of the sea, Poseidon, at Athena's request, destroyed most of

the Greek ships returning from Troy.

Athena was also a patron of the agricultural arts and of the crafts of women, especially spinning and weaving. Among her gifts to man were the inventions of the plow and the flute and the arts of taming animals, building ships, and making shoes. She was often associated with birds, especially the owl.

Page | 14

**Atlantis**, in the tradition of antiquity, a large island in the Western Ocean (the ocean to the west of the known world), near the Pillars of Hercules. The first recorded accounts of Atlantis, which is said to have been engulfed by the ocean as the result of an earthquake, appear in *Timaeus* and *Critias*, two dialogues by Plato. According to the account in *Timaeus*, the island was described to the Athenian statesman, Solon, by an Egyptian priest, who maintained that Atlantis was larger than Asia Minor and Libya, combined. The priest further revealed that a flourishing civilization centered on Atlantis, reputedly about the 10th millennium BC, and that the nation had conquered all the Mediterranean peoples, except the Athenians. In *Critias*, Plato records the history of Atlantis and depicts the nation as a utopian commonwealth. Although Plato's descriptive material and history are probably fictional, the possibility exists, that he had access to records no longer extant.

The tradition that a lost island such as Atlantis once flourished has always fascinated the popular imagination, and the tradition continues to survive. In the 20th century, some oceanographers have advanced the theory that Atlantis was once a Greek island in the Aegean Sea. The island, called Thira, was buried by a volcanic eruption about 1500 BC. Other theories have been based on archaeological discoveries. Scholars have variously identified the island with Crete, the Canary Islands, the Scandinavian Peninsula, and America.

**Atlas (mythology)**, in Greek mythology, son of the Titan, Iapetus and the nymph, Clymene, and brother of Prometheus. Atlas fought with the Titans in the war against the deities of Mount Olympus. As punishment, he was condemned to bear forever on his back, the earth and the heavens, and on his shoulders, the great pillar that separates

them.

Atlas was the father of the Hesperides, the nymphs who guarded the tree of golden apples, and Hercules sought his help in performing one of his labors. Hercules offered to assume Atlas's burden, if Atlas would obtain the golden apples for him. Atlas happily agreed, thinking to rid himself forever of the wearying load. After Atlas returned with the apples, Hercules asked him to take the burden back for a moment while he arranged a pad to ease the pressure on his shoulders. Atlas assumed the load again, and Hercules departed with the apples.

Page | 15

Because the figure of Atlas supporting the earth was often used in the title pages of early map collections, the name now denotes a volume of maps. In classical architecture, atlantes (the plural form of *atlas*) are male figures, used as columns, to support a superstructure. Atlantes are the male counterpart of caryatids and are sometimes also called telamones.

**Bel**, supreme god of the Babylonians (see *Isaiah 46*). Bel is the Chaldaic form of Baal and is believed, by some, to be identical with that god. Like the equivalent Hebrew, *Baal*, the name, Bel, was used also, in the sense of "lord" or "owner." Bel presided over the air. His consort was Belit. Bel was identified with the Greek god, Zeus, by the Greek historian, Herodotus, and was believed, by the British Orientalist, George Rawlinson, to have been different from the Syrian, Baal. As Bel-Merodach, the god, was connected with the planet Jupiter, associated in astral mythology, with the productive power of nature.

**Castor and Polydeuces**, in Greek and Roman mythology, the twin sons of Leda, wife of the Spartan king, Tyndareus. Polydeuces is also called Pollux. They were the brothers of Clytemnestra, queen of Mycenae, and Helen of Troy. Although both boys were known as the

Dioscuri, or Sons of Zeus, in most accounts, only Polydeuces was held to be immortal, having been conceived when Zeus appeared to Leda in the form of a swan. Castor, his

fraternal twin, was considered the mortal son of Tyndareus. Both were worshiped as deities in the Roman world, however, and were regarded as the special protectors of sailors and warriors. Living just before the Trojan War, the brothers took part in many of the famous events of the day, including the Calydonian boar hunt, the expedition of the Argonauts, and the rescue of their sister, Helen, when she was carried off by the Greek hero, Theseus. Throughout their adventures, the brothers were inseparable, and when Castor was slain by Idas, a cattle owner, in a dispute about his oxen, Polydeuces was inconsolable. In response to his prayers for death for himself or immortality for his brother, Zeus reunited the brothers, allowing them to be together always, half the time in the underworld and half with the gods on Mount Olympus. According to a later legend, Castor and Polydeuces were transformed, by Zeus, into the constellation, Gemini, or The Twins.

**Cecrops**, in Greek mythology, the founder of Athens and of Greek civilization. Reputed to have sprung half man, half serpent from the soil, he became the first king of Attica, which he divided into 12 communities. He established marriage and property laws, introduced bloodless sacrifice and burial of the dead, and invented writing. During his 50-year rule, he arbitrated a dispute over possession of Athens between Athena and Poseidon, awarding it to Athena.

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**Centaur**, in Greek mythology, a race of monsters believed to have inhabited the mountain regions of Thessaly and Arcadia. They were usually represented as human down to the waist, with the lower torso and legs of a horse. The centaurs were characterized by savageness and violence; they were known for their drunkenness and lust and were often portrayed as followers of Dionysus, the god of wine. The centaurs were driven from Thessaly when, in a drunken frenzy, they attempted to abduct the bride of the king of the Lapiths from her wedding feast. An exception to their bestial behavior was the centaur, Chiron, who was noted for his goodness and wisdom. Several Greek heroes, including Achilles and Jason, were educated by him.

**Ceres (mythology)**, in Roman mythology, the goddess of agriculture. She and her daughter, Proserpine, were the counterparts of the Greek goddesses, Demeter and

Persephone. The Greek belief that her joy at being reunited with her daughter, each spring, caused the earth to bring forth an abundance of fruits and grains, was introduced into Rome in the 5th century BC, and her cult became extremely popular, especially with the plebeians. The word, *cereal*, is derived from her name. Her chief festival, the Cerealia, was celebrated from April 12 to 19.

**Chaos**, in one ancient Greek myth of creation, the dark, silent abyss from which all things came into existence. According to the *Theogony* of Hesiod, Chaos generated the solid mass of Earth, from which arose the starry, cloud-filled Heaven. Mother Earth and Father Heaven, personified respectively, as Gaea and her offspring, Uranus, were the parents of the Titans. Other children of Chaos include Tartarus and Eros. In a later theory, Chaos is the formless matter from which the cosmos, or harmonious order, was created.

**Cimmerians**, in the poetry of Homer, a mythical people, who lived in northwestern Europe, on the shores of the ocean, where perpetual darkness reigned. The name is also used to designate a historical people, who settled along the northern shore of the Black Sea and presumably made several inroads into Asia Minor (the accounts are confused). The Cimmerians, driven from their homes, probably in the 8th century BC, by the Scythians, overran Asia Minor; they plundered Sardis and destroyed Magnesia. After their defeat by the empire of Lydia, about the 7th century BC, the Cimmerians disappeared.

**Cupid** (*Latin cupido, "desire"*), in Roman mythology, son of Venus, goddess of love. His counterpart, in Greek mythology, was Eros, god of love. He is best known as the handsome young god who falls in love with the beautiful maiden, Psyche. This story is told in *The Golden Ass*, a romance by the Roman writer, Lucius Apuleius. In other tales, he appears as a mischievous boy, who indiscriminately wounds both gods and humans with his arrows, thereby causing them to fall deeply in love. Cupid is commonly represented, in art, as a naked, winged infant, often blindfolded, carrying a bow and a quiver of arrows.

**Cybele**, Latin name of a goddess native to Phrygia in Asia Minor and known to the Greeks as Rhea, the wife of the Titan, Cronus and mother of the Olympian gods. Cybele was a goddess of nature and fertility, who was worshiped in Rome as the Great Mother of the Gods. Because Cybele presided over mountains and fortresses, her crown was in the form of a city wall, and she was also known to the Romans as Mater Turrita. The cult of Cybele was directed by eunuch priests called Corybantes, who led the faithful in orgiastic rites accompanied by wild cries and the frenzied music of flutes, drums, and cymbals.

**Cyclops**, in Greek mythology, giants with one enormous eye in the middle of the forehead. In Hesiod, the three sons -- Arges, Brontes, and Steropes -- of Uranus and Gaea, the personifications of heaven and earth, were Cyclopes. They were thrown into the lower world by their brother, Cronus, one of the Titans, after he dethroned Uranus. But Cronus's son, the god Zeus, released the Cyclopes from the underworld, and they, in gratitude, gave him the gifts of thunder and lightning with which he defeated Cronus and the Titans, and thus, became lord of the universe.

In Homer's *Odyssey*, the Cyclopes were shepherds living in Sicily. They were a lawless, savage, and cannibalistic race, fearing neither gods, nor humans. The Greek hero, Odysseus, was trapped with his men in the cave of the Cyclops, Polyphemus, a son of Poseidon, god of the sea. In order to escape from the cave, after the giant devoured several men, Odysseus blinded him.

**Dagon**, god of fertility, worshiped by the Philistines, and throughout the ancient Middle East. His cult is known to have existed as early as 2500 BC, and a number of references to him are made in the Old Testament. The possible derivations of his name are numerous; from the Hebrew word for "grain;" from the Semitic word for "corn," and from a Hebrew word for "fish." The last of these derivations gave rise to the common image of Dagon as a merman -- half man, half fish. Dagon is also regarded as the legendary inventor of the plow.

**Demeter**, in Greek mythology, goddess of corn and the harvest, and daughter of the

Titans, Cronus and Rhea. When her daughter, Persephone, was abducted by Hades, god of the underworld,

Demeter's grief was so great that she neglected the land; no plants grew, and famine devastated the earth. Dismayed at this situation, Zeus, the ruler of the universe, demanded that his brother, Hades, return Persephone to her mother. Hades agreed, but before he released the girl, he made her eat some pomegranate seeds that would force her to return to him for four months each year. In her joy at being reunited with her daughter, Demeter caused the earth to bring forth bright spring flowers and abundant fruit and grain for the harvest. However, her sorrow returned each fall when Persephone had to go back to the underworld. The desolation of the winter season and the death of vegetation were regarded as the yearly manifestation of Demeter's grief when her daughter was taken from her. Demeter and Persephone were worshiped in the rites of the Eleusinian Mysteries. The cult spread from Sicily to Rome, where the goddesses were worshiped as Ceres and Proserpine.

**Diana**, in Roman mythology, goddess of the moon and of the hunt. The Latin counterpart of the Greek virgin goddess, Artemis, Diana was the guardian of springs and streams and the protector of wild animals. She was, in addition, especially revered by women, and was believed to grant an easy childbirth to her favorites. In art, she is typically shown as a young hunter, often carrying bow and arrows. The most celebrated shrine to Diana was on Lake Nemi, near Aricia.

**Dionysus**, in Greek mythology, god of wine and vegetation, who showed mortals how to cultivate grapevines and make wine. A son of Zeus, Dionysus is usually characterized in one of two ways. As the god of vegetation -- specifically of the fruit of the trees -- he is often represented on Attic vases with a drinking horn and vine branches. He eventually became the popular Greek god of wine and cheer, and wine miracles were reputedly performed at certain of his festivals. Dionysus is also characterized as a deity, whose mysteries inspired ecstatic, orgiastic worship. The maenads, or bacchantes, were a group of female devotees, who left their homes to roam the wilderness in ecstatic

devotion to Dionysus. They wore fawn skins and were believed to possess occult powers. Dionysus was good and gentle to those who honored him, but he brought madness and destruction upon those who spurned him or the orgiastic rituals of his cult.

According to tradition, Dionysus died each winter and was reborn in the spring. To his followers, this cyclical revival, accompanied by the seasonal renewal of the fruits of the earth, embodied the promise of the resurrection of the dead. The yearly rites, in honor of the resurrection of Dionysus, gradually evolved into the structured form of the Greek drama, and important festivals were held in honor of the god, during which, great dramatic competitions were conducted. The most important festival, the Greater Dionysia, was held in Athens for five days each spring. It was for this celebration, that the Greek dramatists, Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides wrote their great tragedies.

By the 5th century BC, Dionysus was also known to the Greeks as Bacchus, a name referring to the loud cries with which Dionysus was worshiped at the *orgia*, or Dionysiac mysteries. These frenetic celebrations, which probably originated in spring nature festivals, became occasions for licentiousness and intoxication. This was the form in which the worship of Dionysus became popular in the 2nd century BC in Roman Italy, where the Dionysiac mysteries were called the Bacchanalia. The indulgences of the Bacchanalia became increasingly extreme, and the celebrations were prohibited by the Roman Senate in 186 BC. In the 1st century AD, however, the Dionysiac mysteries were still popular, as evidenced by representations of them found on Greek sarcophagi.

**Egyptian Mythology**, specifically, the religion of ancient Egypt. The religious beliefs of the ancient Egyptians were the dominating influence in the development of their culture, although a true religion, in the sense of a unified theological system, never existed among them. The Egyptian faith was based on an unorganized collection of ancient myths, nature worship, and innumerable deities. In the most influential and famous of these myths, a divine hierarchy is developed and the creation of the earth is explained.

### **Creation**

According to the Egyptian account of creation, only the ocean existed at first. Then Ra,

the sun, came out of an egg (a flower, in some versions) that appeared on the surface of the water. Ra brought forth four children, the gods, Shu and Geb and the goddesses, Tefnut and Nut. Shu and Tefnut became the atmosphere. They stood on Geb, who became the earth, and raised up Nut, who became the sky. Ra ruled over all. Geb and Nut later had two sons, Set and Osiris, and two daughters, Isis and Nephthys. Osiris succeeded Ra as king of the earth, helped by Isis, his sister-wife. Set, however, hated his brother and killed him. Isis then embalmed her husband's body with the help of the god, Anubis, who thus, became the god of embalming. The powerful charms of Isis resurrected Osiris, who became king of the netherworld, the land of the dead. Horus, who was the son of Osiris and Isis, later defeated Set in a great battle and became king of the earth.

### Local Gods

From this myth of creation came the conception of the ennead, a group of nine divinities, and the triad, consisting of a divine father, mother, and son. Every local temple in Egypt possessed its own ennead and triad. The greatest ennead, however, was that of Ra and his children and grandchildren. This group was worshiped at Heliopolis, the center of sun worship. The origin of the local deities is obscure; some of them were taken over from foreign religions, and some were originally the animal gods of prehistoric Africa. Gradually, they were all fused into a complicated religious structure, although comparatively few local divinities became important throughout Egypt. In addition to those already named, the important divinities included the gods, Amon, Thoth, Ptah, Khnemu, and Hapi, and the goddesses, Hathor, Mut, Neit, and Sekhet. Their importance increased with the political ascendancy of the localities where they were worshiped. For example, the ennead of Memphis was headed by a triad composed of the father, Ptah, the mother, Sekhet, and the son, Imhotep. Therefore, during the Memphite dynasties, Ptah became one of the greatest gods in Egypt. Similarly, when the Theban dynasties ruled Egypt, the ennead of Thebes was given the most importance, headed by the father, Amon, the mother, Mut, and the son, Khonsu. As the religion became more involved, true deities were sometimes confused with human beings, who had been glorified after death. Thus, Imhotep, who was originally the chief minister of the 3rd Dynasty, ruler Zoser, was

later regarded as a demigod. During the 5th Dynasty, the pharaohs began to claim divine ancestry, and from that time on, were worshiped as sons of Ra. Minor gods, some merely demons, were also given places in local divine hierarchies.

### Iconography

The Egyptian gods were represented with human torsos and human or animal heads. Sometimes the animal or bird expressed the characteristics of the god. Ra, for example, had the head of a hawk, and the hawk was sacred to him because of its swift flight across the sky; Hathor, the goddess of love and laughter, was given the head of a cow, which was sacred to her; Anubis was given the head of a jackal because these animals ravaged the desert graves in ancient times; Mut was vulture headed and Thoth was ibis headed; and Ptah was given a human head, although he was occasionally represented as a bull, called Apis. Because of the gods to which they were attached, the sacred animals were venerated, but they were never worshiped until the decadent 26th Dynasty. The gods were also represented by symbols such as the sun disk and hawk wings that were worn on the headdress of the pharaoh.

### Sun Worship

The only important god who was worshiped with consistency was Ra, chief of cosmic deities, from whom early Egyptian kings claimed descent. Beginning with the Middle Kingdom (2134 - 1668 BC), Ra worship acquired the status of a state religion, and the god was gradually fused with Amon during the Theban dynasties, becoming the supreme god, Amon-Ra. During the 18th Dynasty, the pharaoh, Amenhotep III, renamed the sun god, Aton, an ancient term for the physical solar force. Amenhotep's son and successor, Amenhotep IV, instituted a revolution in Egyptian religion by proclaiming Aton, the true and only god. He changed his own name to Akhenaton, meaning "Aton is satisfied." This first great monotheist was so iconoclastic that he had the plural word *gods* deleted from monuments, and he relentlessly persecuted the priests of Amon. Akhenaton's sun religion failed to survive, although it exerted a great influence on the art and thinking of his time, and Egypt returned to the ancient, labyrinthine religion of polytheism after Akhenaton's death.

### **Burial Ritual**

Burying the dead was of religious concern in Egypt, and Egyptian funerary rituals and equipment eventually became the most elaborate the world has ever known. The Egyptians believed that the vital life-force was composed of several psychical elements, of which, the most important was the ka. The ka, a duplicate of the body, accompanied the body throughout life and, after death, departed from the body to take its place in the kingdom of the dead. The ka, however, could not exist without the body; every effort had to be made, therefore, to preserve the corpse. Bodies were embalmed and mummified according to a traditional method supposedly begun by Isis, who mummified her husband, Osiris. In addition, wood or stone replicas of the body were put into the tomb in the event that the mummy was destroyed. The greater the number of statue-duplicates in his or her tomb, the more chances the dead person had of resurrection. As a final protection, exceedingly elaborate tombs were erected to protect the corpse and its equipment.

After leaving the tomb, the souls of the dead supposedly were beset by innumerable dangers, and the tombs were therefore, furnished with a copy of the *Book of the Dead*. Part of this book, a guide to the world of the dead, consists of charms designed to overcome these dangers. After arriving in the kingdom of the dead, the ka was judged by Osiris, the king of the dead, and 42 demon assistants. The Book of the Dead also contains instructions for proper conduct before these judges. If the judges decided the deceased had been a sinner, the ka was condemned to hunger and thirst or to be torn to pieces by horrible executioners. If the decision was favorable, the ka went to the heavenly realm of the fields of Yaru, where grain grew 3.7 m (12 ft.) high and existence was a glorified version of life on earth. All the necessities for this paradisiacal existence, from furniture to reading matter, were, therefore, put into the tombs. As a payment for the afterlife and his benevolent protection, Osiris required the dead to perform tasks for him, such as working in the grain fields. Even this duty could, however, be obviated by placing small statuettes, called ushabtis, into the tomb to serve as substitutes for the deceased.

### **Europa (mythology)**

In Greek mythology, daughter of Agenor, the Phoenician king of Tyre, and sister of

Cadmus, the legendary founder of Thebes. One morning, when Europa was gathering flowers by the seashore, the god, Zeus, saw her and fell in love with her. Assuming the guise of a beautiful chestnut-colored bull, he appeared before her and enticed her to climb onto his back. He then sped away with her across the ocean to the island of Crete. Among the sons she bore him were Minos and Rhadamanthus, both of whom became judges of the dead. The abduction of Europa has been the subject of many paintings, including *The Rape of Europa* by the Italian painter, Titian.

### **The Rape of Europa**

The continent of Europe was named after Europa, (*The Rape of Europa*), by 16th-century Italian artist, Paolo Veronese. Zeus spied Europa picking flowers near the sea one day and fell madly in love. He appeared to her as a bull and carried her off into the sea to the island of Crete. There, she bore him three sons, Minos, Rhadamanthus, and Sarpedon, each of whom, became kings.

### **Greek Mythology**

Beliefs and ritual observances of the ancient Greeks, who became the first Western civilization about 2000 BC. It consists mainly of a body of diverse stories and legends about a variety of gods. Greek mythology had become fully developed by about the 700's BC. Three classic collections of myths -- *Theogony*, by the poet, Hesiod and the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, by the poet, Homer -- appeared at about that time.

Greek mythology has several distinguishing characteristics. The Greek gods resembled humans in form and showed human feelings. Unlike ancient religions, such as Hinduism or Judaism, Greek mythology did not involve special revelations or spiritual teachings. It also varied widely in practice and belief, with no formal structure, such as a Church government, and no written code, such as a sacred book.

### **Principal Gods**

The Greeks believed that the gods chose Mount Olympus, in a region of Greece, called

Thessaly, as their home. On Olympus, the gods formed a society that ranked them in terms of authority and powers. However, the gods could roam freely, and individual gods became associated with three main domains -- the sky or heaven, the sea, and earth. The 12 chief gods, usually called the *Olympians*, were Zeus, Hera, Hephaestus, Athena, Apollo, Artemis, Ares, Aphrodite, Hestia, Hermes, Demeter, and Poseidon.

Zeus was the head of the gods, and the spiritual father of gods and people. His wife, Hera, was the queen of heaven and the guardian of marriage. Other gods associated with heaven were Hephaestus, god of fire and metalworkers; Athena, goddess of wisdom and war; and Apollo, god of light, poetry, and music. Artemis, goddess of wildlife and the moon; Ares, god of war; and Aphrodite, goddess of love, were other gods of heaven. They were joined by Hestia, goddess of the hearth; and Hermes, messenger of the gods and ruler of science and invention.

Poseidon was the ruler of the sea, who, with his wife, Amphitrite, led a group of less important sea gods, such as the *Nereids* and *Tritons*. Demeter, the goddess of agriculture, was associated with the earth. Hades, an important god, but not generally considered an *Olympian*, ruled the underworld, where he lived with his wife, Persephone. The underworld was a dark and mournful place, located at the center of the earth. It was populated by the souls of people who had died.

Dionysus, god of wine and pleasure, was among the most popular gods. The Greeks devoted many festivals to this earthly god, and in some regions, he became as important as Zeus. He often was accompanied by a host of fanciful gods, including satyrs, centaurs, and nymphs. Satyrs were creatures with the legs of a goat and the upper body of a monkey or human. Centaurs had the head and torso of a man and the body of a horse. The beautiful and charming nymphs haunted woods and forests.

### **Worship and Beliefs**

Greek mythology emphasized the weakness of humans in contrast to the great and terrifying powers of nature. The Greeks believed that their gods, who were immortal,

controlled all aspects of nature. So the Greeks acknowledged that their lives were completely dependent on the good will of the gods. In general, the relations between people and gods were considered friendly. But the gods delivered severe punishment to mortals who showed unacceptable behavior, such as indulgent pride, extreme ambition, or even excessive prosperity.

The mythology was interwoven with every aspect of Greek life. Each city devoted itself to a particular god or group of gods, for whom the citizens often built temples of worship. They regularly honored the gods in festivals, which high officials supervised. At festivals and other official gatherings, poets recited or sang great legends and stories. Many Greeks learned about the gods through the words of poets.

Greeks also learned about the gods by word of mouth at home, where worship was common. Different parts of the home were dedicated to certain gods, and people offered prayers to those gods at regular times. An altar of Zeus, for example, might be placed in the courtyard, while Hestia was ritually honored at the hearth.

Although the Greeks had no official Church organization, they universally honored certain holy places. Delphi, for example, was a holy site, dedicated to Apollo. A temple built at Delphi contained an *oracle*, or prophet, whom brave travelers questioned about the future. A group of priests represented each of the holy sites. These priests, who also might be community officials, interpreted the words of the gods, but did not possess any special knowledge or power. In addition to prayers, the Greeks often offered sacrifices to the gods, usually of a domestic animal, such as a goat.

### Origins

Greek mythology probably developed from the primitive religions of the people of Crete, an island in the Aegean Sea, where the region's first civilization arose about 3000 BC. These people believed that all natural objects had spirits, and that certain objects, or *fetishes*, had special magical powers. Over time, these beliefs developed into a set of legends involving natural objects, animals, and gods with a human form. Some of these

legends survived as part of the classical Greek mythology.

The ancient Greeks, themselves, offered some explanations for the development of their mythology. In *Sacred History*, Euhemerus, a mythographer from the 300's BC, recorded the widespread belief that myths were distortions of history and the gods were heroes, who had been glorified over time. The philosopher, Prodicus of Ceos, taught during the 400's BC, believed that many Greek rituals were inherited from the Egyptians.

Page | 27

As Greek civilization developed, particularly during the Hellenistic period, which began about 323 BC, the mythology also changed. New philosophies and the influence of neighboring civilizations caused a gradual modification of Greek beliefs. However, the essential characteristics of the Greek gods and their legends remain unchanged.

### **Hades**

In Greek mythology, god of the dead. He was the son of the Titans Cronus and Rhea and the brother of Zeus and Poseidon. When the three brothers divided up the universe after they had deposed their father, Cronus, Hades was awarded the underworld. There, with his queen, Persephone, whom he had abducted from the world above, he ruled the kingdom of the dead. Although he was a grim and pitiless god, unappeased by either prayer or sacrifice, he was not evil. In fact, he was known also as Pluto, lord of riches, because both crops and precious metals were believed to come from his kingdom below ground.

The underworld itself, was often called, Hades. It was divided into two regions: Erebus, where the dead pass as soon as they die, and Tartarus, the deeper region, where the Titans had been imprisoned. It was a dim and unhappy place, inhabited by vague forms and shadows and guarded by Cerberus, the three-headed, dragon-tailed dog. Sinister rivers separated the underworld from the world above, and the aged boatman, Charon, ferried the souls of the dead across these waters. Somewhere in the darkness of the underworld, Hades' palace, was located. It was represented as a many-gated, dark and gloomy place, thronged with guests, and set in the midst of shadowy fields and an

apparition-haunted landscape. In later legends, the underworld is described as the place where the good are rewarded and the wicked punished.

### **Hathor**

In Egyptian mythology, goddess of the sky and queen of heaven. Daughter of the sun god, Ra, and wife of the sky god, Horus, she was the goddess of fertility and patron of women and marriage. She was also the goddess of love and beauty; for this reason, she was identified often with the Greek goddess, Aphrodite. Worshiped throughout Egypt, she was often represented as a star-studded cow or as a woman with a cow's head. Her name also appears as Athor or Athyr.

### **Hecate**

In Greek mythology, goddess of darkness, and the daughter of the Titans Perses and Asteria. Unlike Artemis, who represented the moonlight and splendor of the night, Hecate represented its darkness and its terrors. On moonless nights, she was believed to roam the earth with a pack of ghostly, howling dogs. She was the goddess of sorcery and witchcraft and was especially worshiped by magicians and witches, who sacrificed black lambs and black dogs to her. As goddess of the crossroads, Hecate and her pack of dogs were believed to haunt these remote spots, which seemed evil and ghostly places to travelers. In art, Hecate is often represented with either three bodies or three heads and with serpents entwined about her neck.

### **Helen of Troy**

In Greek mythology, the most beautiful woman in Greece, daughter of the god, Zeus and of Leda, wife of King Tyndareus of Sparta. She was abducted in childhood by the hero, Theseus, who hoped in time, to marry her, but she was rescued by her brothers, Castor and Pollux. Because Helen was courted by so many prominent heroes, Tyndareus made all of them swear to abide by Helen's choice of a husband and to defend the husband's rights should anyone attempt to take Helen away by force.

Helen's fatal beauty was the direct cause of the Trojan War. The story of the ten-year conflict began when the three goddesses Hera, Athena, and Aphrodite asked the

Trojan prince, Paris, to choose the most beautiful among them. After each of the goddesses had attempted to influence his decision, Paris awarded the golden apple to Aphrodite, who had promised him the world's most beautiful woman.

Soon afterward, Paris sailed to Greece, where he was hospitably received by Helen and her husband, Menelaus, king of Sparta. Unfortunately, Helen, as the fairest of her sex, was the prize destined for Paris. Although she was living happily with Menelaus, Helen fell under the influence of Aphrodite and allowed Paris to persuade her to elope with him, and he carried her off to Troy. Menelaus then called upon the Grecian chieftains, including Helen's former suitors, to help him rescue his wife, and with few exceptions, they responded to his call. During nine years of indecisive conflict, Helen wove a web depicting her sad story. Then Paris and Menelaus agreed to meet in single combat between the opposing armies, and Helen was summoned to view the duel. As she approached the tower, where the aged King Priam and his counselors sat, her beauty was still so matchless and her sorrow so great, that no one could feel for her anything, but compassion. Although the Greeks claimed the victory in the battle between the two warriors, Aphrodite helped Paris escape from the enraged Menelaus, by enveloping him in a cloud and taking him safely to Helen's chamber, where Aphrodite compelled the unwilling Helen to lie with him.

After the fall of Troy, Menelaus was reunited with his wife, and they soon left Troy for their native Greece. They had, however, incurred the displeasure of the gods and, were therefore, driven by storms from shore to shore in the Mediterranean Sea, stopping in Cyprus, Phoenicia, and Egypt. Arriving at length in Sparta, Menelaus and Helen resumed their reign and lived the rest of their days in royal splendor. They had one daughter, Hermione.

### **Helios**

In Greek mythology, the ancient sun god, son of the Titans, Hyperion and Thea, and brother of Selene, goddess of the moon, and Eos, goddess of the dawn. Helios was believed to ride his golden chariot across the heavens daily, giving light to gods and

mortals. At evening, he sank into the western ocean, from which, he was carried in a golden cup, back to his palace in the east. Helios, alone, could control the fierce horses that drew his fiery chariot. When his son, Phaethon persuaded Helios to let him drive the chariot across the sky, Phaethon was killed.

Helios was widely worshiped throughout the Greek world, but his principal cult was at Rhodes. One of the Seven Wonders of the World, the Colossus of Rhodes, was a representation of Helios. He is often identified with Apollo, the later Greek god of the sun.

### **Hephaestus**

In Greek mythology, god of fire and metalwork, the son of the god, Zeus and the goddess, Hera, or sometimes, the son of Hera alone. In contrast to the other gods, Hephaestus was lame and awkward. Shortly after his birth, he was cast out of Olympus, either by Hera, who was repelled by his deformity, or by Zeus, because Hephaestus had sided with Hera against him. In most legends, however, he was soon honored again on Olympus and was married to Aphrodite, goddess of love, or to Aglaia, one of the three Graces. As the artisan among the gods, Hephaestus made their armor, weapons, and jewelry. His workshop was believed to lie under Mount Etna, a volcano in Sicily. Hephaestus is often identified with the Roman god of fire, Vulcan.

### **Hercules (mythology)**

In Greek mythology, hero noted for his strength and courage and for his many legendary exploits. Hercules is the Roman name for the Greek hero, Heracles. He was the son of the god, Zeus and Alcmene, wife of the Theban general, Amphitryon. Hera, the jealous wife of Zeus, was determined to kill her unfaithful husband's offspring, and shortly after Hercules' birth, she sent two great serpents to destroy him. Hercules, although still a baby, strangled the snakes. As a young man, Hercules killed a lion with his bare hands. As a trophy of his adventure, he wore the skin of the lion as a cloak and its head as a helmet. The hero next conquered a tribe that had been exacting tribute from Thebes. As a reward, he was given the hand of the Theban princess, Megara, by whom he had three children. Hera, still relentless in her hatred of Hercules, sent a fit of madness upon him,

during which, he killed his wife and children. In horror and remorse at his deed, Hercules would have slain himself, but he was told by the oracle at Delphi, that he should purge himself, by becoming the servant of his cousin, Eurystheus, king of Mycenae. Eurystheus, urged on by Hera, devised as a penance, the 12 difficult tasks, the “Labors of Hercules.”

### **The Twelve Labors**

The first task was to kill the lion of Nemea, a beast that could not be wounded by any weapon. Hercules stunned the lion with his club first and then strangled it. He then killed the Hydra that lived in a swamp in Lerna. This monster had nine heads: One head was immortal; when one of the others was chopped off, two grew back in its place. Hercules seared each mortal neck with a burning torch to prevent reproduction of two heads; he buried the immortal head under a rock. He then dipped his arrows into the Hydra's blood to make them poisonous. Hercules' next labor was to capture alive, a stag with golden horns and bronze hoofs that was sacred to Artemis, goddess of the hunt, and the fourth labor was to capture a great boar that had its lair on Mount Erymanthus. Hercules then had to clean up, in one day, the 30 years of accumulated filth left by thousands of cattle in the Augean stables. He diverted the streams of two rivers, causing them to flow through the stables. Hercules next drove off a huge flock of man-eating birds with bronze beaks, claws, and wings that lived near Lake Stymphalus. To fulfill the seventh labor, Hercules brought to Eurystheus, a mad bull that Poseidon, god of the sea, had sent to terrorize Crete. To bring back the man-eating mares of Diomedes, king of Thrace, Hercules killed Diomedes, then drove the mares to Mycenae. Hippolyta, queen of the Amazons, was willing to help Hercules with his ninth labor. As Hippolyta, was about to give Hercules her girdle, which Eurystheus wanted for his daughter, Hera made Hippolyta's forces believe Hercules was trying to abduct the queen. Hercules killed Hippolyta, thinking she was responsible for the ensuing attack, and escaped from the Amazons with the girdle. On his way to the island of Erythia to capture the oxen of the three-headed monster, Geryon, Hercules set up two great rocks (the mountains Gibraltar and Ceuta, which now flank the Strait of Gibraltar) as a memorial of his journey. After Hercules had brought back the oxen, he was sent to fetch the golden apples of the Hesperides. Because Hercules did

not know where these apples were, he sought help from Atlas, father of the Hesperides. Atlas agreed to help him if Hercules would support the world on his shoulders while Atlas got the apples. The old man did not wish to resume his burden, but Hercules tricked Atlas into taking the world back. The 12th and most difficult labor of Hercules was to bring back the three-headed dog, Cerberus, from the lower world. Hades, god of the dead, gave Hercules permission to take the beast, if he used no weapons. Hercules captured Cerberus, brought him to Mycenae, and then carried him back to Hades.

### **Death of the Hero**

Hercules later married Deianira, whom he won from Antaeus, son of the sea god, Poseidon. When the centaur, Nessus, attacked Deianira, Hercules wounded him with an arrow that he had poisoned in the blood of the Hydra. The dying centaur told Deianira to take some of his blood, which he said was a powerful love charm, but was really a poison. Believing that Hercules had fallen in love with the princess Iole, Deianira later sent him a tunic dipped in the blood. When he put it on, the pain caused by the poison was so great that he killed himself on a funeral pyre. After death, he was brought, by the gods, to Olympus and married to Hebe, goddess of youth.

Hercules was worshiped by the Greeks, as both a god and as a mortal hero. He is usually represented as strong and muscular, clad in a lion skin and carrying a club. The most famous statue of the mythical hero is in the National Museum in Naples.

### **Hermes**

In Greek mythology, messenger of the gods, the son of the god, Zeus and of Maia, the daughter of the Titan, Atlas. As the special servant and courier of Zeus, Hermes had winged sandals and a winged hat and bore a golden Caduceus, or magic wand, entwined with snakes and surmounted by wings. He conducted the souls of the dead to the underworld and was believed to possess magical powers over sleep and dreams. Hermes was also the god of commerce, and the protector of traders and herds. As the deity of athletes, he protected gymnasiums and stadiums and was believed to be responsible for both good luck and wealth. Despite his virtuous characteristics, Hermes

was also a dangerous foe, a trickster, and a thief. On the day of his birth, he stole the cattle of his brother, the sun god, Apollo, obscuring their trail by making the herd walk backward. When confronted by Apollo, Hermes denied the theft. The brothers were finally reconciled when Hermes gave Apollo his newly invented lyre. Hermes was represented in early Greek art as a mature, bearded man; in classical art, he became an athletic youth, nude, and beardless.

### **Hippolytus**

In Greek mythology, son of the Theban hero, Theseus, and his wife, Hippolyte, queen of the Amazons, or sometimes the son of her sister, Antiope. Hippolytus was an excellent hunter and charioteer, and he was a devoted servant of Artemis, goddess of the hunt. Hippolytus spurned all women, and when his stepmother, Phaedra, fell in love with him, he rejected her advances. In despair at his refusal, Phaedra committed suicide, leaving a letter accusing Hippolytus of having attempted to ravish her. Theseus, believing his son guilty, invoked his father, Poseidon, god of the sea, to destroy Hippolytus. As the young man drove his chariot along the shore, Poseidon sent a sea monster that frightened his horses; they ran away, dashing the chariot to pieces. Mortally wounded, Hippolytus was carried to his father, who had in the meantime, learned from Artemis that his son was innocent. As Hippolytus died, the grief-stricken father and son were reconciled.

### **Horus**

In Egyptian mythology, god of the sky and of light and goodness. One of the major Egyptian deities, Horus was the son of Isis, the nature goddess, and Osiris, the god of the underworld. After Osiris was murdered by his evil brother, Set, the god of darkness and evil, Horus avenged his father's death by killing his uncle. Worshiped throughout Egypt, Horus was usually depicted as a falcon or a falcon-headed man. Another representation of him, an infant with a finger held to his lips, was known as Harpocrates by the Greeks and Romans.

### **Huitzilopochtli**

In Aztec religion, the god of war and of the sun. According to tradition, he guided the

Aztecs during their long migration from Aztlan, their mythical homeland, to the valley of Mexico. His name, from the Aztec *huitzilin*, meaning "hummingbird," expresses the Aztec belief that dead warriors were reborn as hummingbirds. His mother, the earth goddess, Coatlicue, conceived him after keeping, in her bosom, a ball of hummingbird feathers -- that is, the soul of a fallen warrior -- that dropped from the sky.

Page | 34

As the sun god, Huitzilopochtli was born anew each morning from Coatlicue's womb. He was also thought to require human hearts and blood for nourishment. Sacrificial victims included prisoners of war and warriors who had perished in battle; after their death and sacrifice, such warriors became part of the sun's brilliance until, after four years, they were incarnated permanently in the bodies of hummingbirds.

Huitzilopochtli was usually depicted, either as a hummingbird or as a warrior, wearing hummingbird feathers for armor. The temple, built in his honor at Tenochtitlan (on the site of present-day Mexico City), was a great architectural achievement in pre-Columbian America.

### **Ishtar**

The chief goddess of the Babylonians and the Assyrians and the counterpart of Astarte, a Phoenician goddess. The name appeared in different forms in every part of the ancient Semitic world; thus, it was Athtar in Arabia, Astar in Abyssinia (now Ethiopia), and Ashtart in Canaan and Israel. The sex of the divinity also varied: Athtar and Astar were male deities. Ishtar of Erech (in Babylonia) was a god, identified with the morning star. As a goddess, Ishtar was the Great Mother, the goddess of fertility and the queen of heaven. On the other hand, her character had destructive attributes; she was considered, especially by the Assyrians, a goddess of hunting and war and was depicted with sword, bow, and quiver of arrows. Among the Babylonians, Ishtar was distinctly the mother goddess and was portrayed, either naked and with prominent breasts or as a mother with a child at her breast. As goddess of love, she brought destruction to many of her lovers, of whom, the most notable was her consort, Tammuz, the Babylonian counterpart of Adonis.

## Isis

In Egyptian mythology, goddess of fertility and motherhood. According to the Egyptian belief, she was the daughter of the god, Keb ("Earth") and the goddess Nut ("Sky"), the sister-wife of Osiris, judge of the dead, and mother of Horus, god of day. After the end of the New Kingdom in the 4th century BC, the center of Isis worship, which was then reaching its greatest peak, was on Philae, an island in the Nile, where a great temple was built to her during the 30th Dynasty. Ancient stories described Isis as having great magical skill, and she was represented as human, in form, though she was frequently described as wearing the horns of a cow. Her personality was believed to resemble that of Athor, or Hathor, the goddess of love and gaiety.

The cult of Isis spread from Alexandria throughout the Hellenistic world after the 4th century BC. It appeared in Greece in combination with the cults of Horus, her son, and Serapis, the Greek name for Osiris. The Greek historian, Herodotus, identified Isis with Demeter, the Greek goddess of earth, agriculture, and fertility. The tripartite cult of Isis, Horus, and Serapis was later introduced (86 BC) into Rome in the consulship of Lucius Cornelius Sulla and became one of the most popular branches of Roman religion. It later received a bad reputation through the licentiousness of some of its priestly rites, and subsequent consuls made efforts to suppress or limit Isis worship. The cult died out in Rome after the institution of Christianity, and the last remaining Egyptian temples to Isis were closed in the middle of the 6th century AD.

## Janus

In Roman mythology, the god of doors and gateways, and also of beginnings, which the Romans believed ensured good evenings. His principal temple in the Forum had doors facing east and west for the beginning and ending of the day, and between them stood his statue with two faces, gazing in opposite directions. In every home, the morning prayer was addressed to him, and in every domestic undertaking, his assistance was sought. As the god of beginnings, he was publicly invoked on the first day of January, the month that was named for him because it began the new year. He was invoked too, at the beginning of wars, during which, the doors of his temple in the Forum always stood open; when Rome was at peace, the doors were closed. Janus has no counterpart in

Greek mythology.

### **Jinni**

In Middle Eastern and Islamic folklore and mythology, a spirit or demon lower than an angel. The plural form of the name is *jinn*, the feminine form, *jinniyah*. Composed of fire or air, jinn can assume both animal and human form. They may be either good or evil; if good, they are beautiful; if wicked, they are ugly. They exist in air, in flame, under the earth, and in inanimate objects, such as rocks, trees, and ruins. In some ways, they resemble humans: They have the same bodily needs; they reproduce their kind; and they die, although they live longer. Jinn are mischievous spirits, who enjoy punishing humans for wrongs done them, even unintentionally. Thus, accidents and diseases are considered to be their work. With the proper knowledge, however, humans can control jinn for their own purposes. Popular in the folklore of Egypt, Syria, Iran, Turkey, and North Africa, jinn are familiar in the West as characters in *The Thousand and One Nights*. They are frequently known by the Anglicized form, *genie*.

### **Juno (mythology)**

In Roman mythology, queen of the gods, the wife and sister of the god, Jupiter. She was the protector of women and was worshiped under several names. As Juno Pronuba, she presided over marriage; as Juno Lucina, she aided women in childbirth; and as Juno Regina, she was the special counselor and protector of the Roman state. Her special festival, the Matronalia, was celebrated on March 1. Juno is the Latin counterpart of the Greek queen of the gods, Hera. The month of June was named after her.

### **Jupiter (mythology) or Jove**

In Roman mythology, the ruler of the gods, the son of the god, Saturn, whom he overthrew. Originally, the god of the sky and king of heaven, Jupiter was worshiped as god of rain, thunder, and lightning. As the protector of Rome, he was called Jupiter Optimus Maximus ("the best and greatest") and was worshiped in a temple on the Capitoline hill. As Jupiter Fidius, he was a guardian of law, defender of truth, and protector of justice and virtue. The Romans identified Jupiter with Zeus, the supreme god

of the Greeks, and assigned to the Roman god, the attributes and myths of the Greek divinity; the Jupiter of Latin literature, therefore, has many Greek characteristics, but the Jupiter of Roman religious worship remained substantially untouched by the Greek influence. With the goddesses, Juno and Minerva, Jupiter formed the triad, whose worship was the central cult of the Roman state.

### **Laocoon**

In Greek mythology, priest of Apollo, god of the sun, or of Poseidon, god of the sea. In the last year of the Trojan War, the Greeks prepared a giant wooden horse, which they pretended was a votive offering to the goddess, Athena, but which was in reality, a hiding place for Greek soldiers. Laocoon, fearing a ruse, vainly urged the Trojan leaders to destroy the gift, warning "I fear the Greeks, even when they come bearing gifts." While the people were trying to decide if they should risk bringing the horse inside the city walls for the sake of the favorable omens supposedly connected with it, Poseidon, the divinity most bitter toward Troy, sent two fearful sea serpents swimming to the land. Advancing straight to the spot where Laocoon stood with his two sons, the serpents wrapped their coils around the children. Laocoon struggled to tear them away, but they overpowered him and strangled him and his sons. The Trojans, convinced that this was a signal from heaven to ignore Laocoon's advice, brought the horse within the city walls and thus, directly contributed to their own destruction.

The most famous literary interpretation of the Laocoon legend is in Vergil's, *Aeneid*. The most famous representation, in art, is a marble sculpture of the priest and his sons being crushed in the coils of the serpents; this group, known simply as *Laocoon* dates from the 1st century BC, and is now in the Vatican in Rome.

### **Marduk**

In Babylonian religion, the supreme god. Originally, he was a god of thunderstorms. According to *Enuma elish*, an ancient epic poem of creation, Marduk defeated Tiamat and Kingu, the dragons of chaos, and thereby, gained supreme power. Acknowledged

as the creator of the universe and of humankind, the god of light and life, and the ruler of destinies, he rose to such eminence that he claimed 50 titles. Eventually, he was called simply Bel, meaning, "Lord."

### **Mars (mythology)**

In Roman mythology, god of war. One of the most important Roman deities, Mars was regarded as the father of the Roman people because he was the father of Romulus, the legendary founder of Rome. Although his original nature and functions are obscure, Mars was identified by the Romans with the Greek god of war, Ares. The month of March was named for Mars. To commemorate his victory over the assassin's of Julius Caesar in 42 BC, Emperor Augustus honored Mars with the cult title, *Ultor* (Avenger) and a new temple.

### **Mercury (mythology)**

In Roman mythology, messenger of the gods, the son of the god, Jupiter and of Maia, the daughter of the Titan, Atlas. Mercury was also the god of merchants and of trading and shared many of the attributes of the Greek god, Hermes. The worship of Mercury was introduced into Rome in 495 BC, when a temple was dedicated to him near the Circus Maximus. His festival was celebrated on May 15.

### **Mysteries**

Secret rites and ceremonies connected with various religious worships of ancient Greece and Rome. These rites and ceremonies were known to, and practiced by, congregations of men and women who had been duly initiated; no other persons were allowed to participate. The origin and purpose of the mysteries are unknown. The theory that the mysteries concealed deep truths and remnants of a primitive revelation too profound for the popular mind, is no longer believed, but undoubtedly, the sacred rituals brought to the initiates, secret religious doctrine, which in many instances, were concerned with the continuance of life beyond the grave. The mysteries consisted of purifications, sacrificial offerings, processions, songs, dances, and dramatic performances. Often the birth, suffering, death, and resurrection of a god were enacted in dramatic form. The aim of the mysteries seems to have been twofold, namely, to give comfort and moral instruction for

life on earth, and to inspire hope for life after death.

The earliest and most important Greek mysteries were the Orphic, the Eleusinian, and the Dionysiac. The Orphic mysteries were those of a mystic cult founded, according to tradition, by the legendary poet and musician, Orpheus, to whom was attributed a great mass of religious literature. Far more celebrated were the Eleusinian mysteries, connected with the worship of the goddesses, Demeter and Persephone at Eleusis in Attica; with these divinities were associated Pluto, god of the underworld; Iacchus, a name of the youthful Dionysus, god of vegetation and of wine; and other gods. The worship of Dionysus, or Bacchus, at Athens was accompanied by feasts, processions, and musical and dramatic performances. In later times, the mysteries associated with Dionysus became occasions for intoxication and gross licentiousness. They were forbidden at Thebes, and later, elsewhere in Greece. As the Bacchanalia, these rites were introduced into Rome early in the 2nd century BC. At first, the mysteries were celebrated only by women; when they were opened to men, the gatherings were suspected of gross immoralities, and in 186 BC, the Roman Senate attempted to suppress the rites by decree.

Secret rites were a part of the worship of several Greek deities, such as Hera, queen of the gods, Aphrodite, goddess of love, and Hecate, goddess of the underworld. Many foreign religions, adopted by the Greeks and Romans, had mysteries connected with the worship of the divinity; these religions included the worship of the Phrygian goddess, Cybele, the "great mother" of the gods; the Egyptian Isis, goddess of the moon, nature, and fertility; and the Persian Mithras, god of the sun. The worship of these deities spread throughout the Greco-Roman world and was extremely popular in the early centuries of the Roman Empire. Isis, who at an early date, had been identified with Demeter, was worshiped in Italy as late as the 5th century AD.

### **Mythology**

The study and interpretation of myth and the body of myths of a particular culture. Myth is a complex cultural phenomenon that can be approached from a number of viewpoints.

In general, myth is a narrative, that describes and portrays in symbolic language, the origin of the basic elements and assumptions of a culture. Mythic narrative relates, for example, how the world began, how humans and animals were created, and how certain customs, gestures, or forms of human activities originated. Almost all cultures possess, or at one time, possessed and lived in terms of myths.

Myths differ from fairy tales, in that they refer to a time that is different from ordinary time. The time sequence of myth is extraordinary -- an "other" time -- the time before the conventional world came into being. Because myths refer to an extraordinary time and place and to gods and other supernatural beings and processes, they have usually been seen as aspects of religion. Because of the all-encompassing nature of myth, however, it can illuminate many aspects of individual and cultural life.

### **Meaning and Interpretation**

From the beginnings of Western culture, myth has presented a problem of meaning and interpretation, and a history of controversy has accumulated about both the value and the status of mythology.

### **Myth, History, and Reason**

In the Greek heritage of the West, myth or mythos has always been in tension with reason or logos, which signified the rational and analytic mode of arriving at a true account of reality. The Greek philosophers, Xenophanes, Plato, and Aristotle, for example, exalted reason and made trenchant criticisms of myth as a proper way of knowing reality.

In the Judeo-Christian tradition, the notion of history has been opposed to myth. Complicating this opposition, was the concept that the God of the Hebrews and Christians, although existing outside of ordinary time and space, was revealed to humanity within human history and society. Thus, God was revealed to Moses in the Egypt of the pharaohs.

The distinctions between reason and myth and between myth and history, although fundamental, were never quite absolute. Aristotle concluded that in some of the early Greek creation, myths, logos and mythos overlapped. Plato used myths as allegory and also as literary devices in developing an argument. Mythos, logos, and history overlap in the prologue to the Gospel of John in the New Testament; there, Jesus, the Christ, is portrayed as the Logos, who came from eternity into historical time. Early Christian theologians, attempting to understand the Christian revelation, argued about the roles of myth and history in the biblical account.

### **Western Mythical Traditions**

The debate over whether myth, reason, or history best expresses the meaning of the reality of the gods, humans, and nature has continued in Western culture as a legacy from its earliest traditions.

Among these traditions were the myths of the Greeks. Adopted and assimilated by the Romans, they furnished literary, philosophical, and artistic inspiration to such later periods as the Renaissance and the romantic era. The pagan tribes of Europe furnished another body of tradition. After these tribes became part of Christendom, elements of their mythologies persisted as the folkloric substratum of various European cultures.

### **Modern Concern with Mythology**

The Enlightenment and the romantic movement of modern European culture stimulated interest in myth, both through theories about myth and through new academic disciplines. Although the Enlightenment emphasized the rationality of human beings, it directed attention to all human expressions, including religion and mythology. Enlightenment scholars tried to make sense of the seemingly irrational and fantastic mythic stories. Their explanations included historical evolutionary theories -- that human culture evolved from an early state of ignorance and irrationality to the modern culture of rationality -- with myths seen as products of the early ages of ignorance and irrationality. Myths were also thought to result from euhemerism, that is, the divinizing of the heroic virtues of a human being. More important than any one theory of mythology, however, was the development

of systematic disciplines devoted to the study of mythology. In new fields, such as social and cultural anthropology and the history of religions, scholars were forced to come to terms with myths from earlier historical periods outside the Western tradition, and they began to relate the study of myth to a broader understanding of culture and history.

The romantic movement turned to the older Indo-European myths as intellectual and cultural resources. Romantic scholars tended to view myth as an irreducible form of human expression: For them, myth, as a mode of thinking and perception, possessed prestige equal to or sometimes greater than the rational grasp of reality.

Myth had always been part of classical and theological studies in the West, but during and after the Enlightenment, the concern for myth, revived with new intensity, could be detected in almost all the newer university disciplines -- anthropology, history, psychology, history of religions, political science, structural linguistics. Most current theories of myth emerged from one or more of these disciplines.

### Types of Myth

Myths may be classified according to the dominant theme they portray.

#### Cosmogonic Myths

Usually the most important myth in a culture, one that becomes the exemplary model for all other myths, is the cosmogonic myth. It relates how the entire world came into being. In some narratives, as in the first chapter of the Book of Genesis, the creation of the world proceeds from nothing (*creatio ex nihilo*). Egyptian, Australian, Greek, and Mayan myths also speak of creation from nothing. In most cases, the deity in these myths is all-powerful. The deity may remain at the forefront and become the center of religious life, as with the Hebrews, or may withdraw and become a distant or peripheral deity, as in the myths of the Australian aborigines, Greeks, and Mayans.

Other cosmogonic myths describe creation as an emergence from the lower worlds. Among the Navajo and Hopi, for example, creation is the result of a progression upward

from lower worlds, and the emergence from the last world is the final progression into the world of humanity. A Polynesian myth places the various layers of emergence in a coconut shell. Similar in form to such myths, are myths of the world egg, known in Africa, China, India, the South Pacific, Greece, and Japan. In these myths, creation is symbolized as breaking forth from the fertile egg. The egg is the potential for all life, and sometimes, as in the myth of the Dogon people of West Africa, it is referred to as the "placenta of the world."

Another kind of cosmogonic myth is the world-parent myth. In the Babylonian creation story, *Enuma elish*, the world parents, Apsu and Tiamat, bear offspring, who later find themselves opposed to the parents. The offspring defeat the parents in a battle, and from the immolated body of Tiamat, the world is created. In other world-parent myths from the Egyptians, Zuni, and Polynesians, the parents beget offspring, but remain in close embrace; the offspring live in darkness, and in the desire for light, they push the parents apart, creating a space for the deities to make a human world.

In myths widespread among Siberian-Altai peoples, in Romania, and in India, creation comes about through the agency of an earth diver, an animal (a turtle or a bird) who dives into the primordial waters to bring up a small piece of earth that later expands into the world.

A motif of several cosmogonic myths is the act of sacrifice. In the Babylonian myth, Tiamat's sacrificed body is the earth, and in the Hindu myth, that is recounted in the *Rig-Veda*, the entire world is the result of a sacrifice by the gods.

Related to cosmogonic myths, but at the other extreme, are myths describing the end of the world (eschatological myths) or the coming of death into the world. Myths of the end of the world are usually products of urban traditions. They presuppose the creation of the world by a moral divine being, who in the end destroys the world. At this time, human beings are judged and prepared for a paradisiacal existence or one of eternal torments. Such myths are present among Hebrews, Christians, Muslims, and Zoroastrians.

A universal conflagration and a final battle of the gods are part of Indo-European mythology and are most fully described in Germanic branches of this mythology. In Aztec mythology, several worlds are created and destroyed by the gods before the creation of the human world.

Myths of the origin of death describe how death entered the world. In these myths, death is not present in the world for a long period of time, but enters it through an accident or because someone simply forgets the message of the gods concerning human life. In Genesis, death enters when human beings overstep the proper limits of their knowledge.

#### **Myths of Culture Heroes**

Other myths describe the actions and character of beings who are responsible for the discovery of a particular cultural artifact or technological process. These are the myths of the culture hero. In Greek mythology, Prometheus, who stole fire from the gods, is a prototype of this kind of figure. In the Dogon culture, the blacksmith who steals seeds for the human community from the granary of the gods is similar to Prometheus. In Ceram, in Indonesia, Hainuwele, is also such a figure; from the orifices of her body, she provides the community with a host of necessary and luxury goods.

#### **Myths of Birth and Rebirth**

Usually related to initiation rituals, myths of birth and rebirth tell how life can be renewed, time reversed, or humans transmuted into new beings.

In myths about the coming of an ideal society (millenarian myths) or of a savior (messianic myths), eschatological themes are combined with themes of rebirth and renewal. Millenarian and messianic myths are found in tribal cultures in Africa, South America, and Melanesia, as well as in the world religions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Mythologies of cargo cults (religious movements found in modern technologically poor cultures, such as those of Melanesia) also invariably have millenarian and messianic elements.

### **Foundation Myths**

Since the beginnings of cities, sometime in the 4th and 3rd millennia BC, some creation myths have recounted the founding of cities. Cities developed out of ceremonial centers; the centers were seen as extraordinary manifestations of sacred power. This manifestation allowed for the expression of power in a specific place, emphasizing the value of sedentary human life. The myth of Gilgamesh, in Babylon and that of Romulus and Remus in Rome are foundation myths.

### **Studies of Myth**

Mythology has attracted scholars in many fields. Some have studied myths with the aid of materials from history, archaeology, anthropology, and other disciplines. Others have found, in myths, materials of use in their respective fields -- linguistics and psychology, for example.

### **Myth and Language**

Because myth is a narrative, many attempts to understand it have focused on its linguistic structure. In one approach, the meaning of myth is sought in the history and structure of the language itself.

The most famous proponent of myth as an example of the historical development of language is Fredrich Max Muller, a German scholar, who spent most of his academic life in England, and whose major studies dealt with the religion and myths of India. Muller believed that in Vedic texts of ancient India, the gods and their actions do not represent real beings or events; rather, they are products of a confusion of human language, of an attempt, through sensual and visual images, to give expression to natural phenomena (such as thunder or the sea).

Of more recent vintage, is the structural linguistic model, which builds on the work of the linguists Ferdinand de Saussure, a Swiss, and Roman Jakobson, a Russian-American, and the American folklorist, Stith Thompson. Structural linguists concentrate on the total

meaning of language as an internal logical system. In particular, they examine the relation between two levels of language: the words and content that are actually spoken; and the underlying systematic structure -- the grammar, syntax, and other rules of the language.

Page | 46

The most important student of myth, from this perspective, has been the French anthropologist, Claude Levi-Strauss. For him, myth represented a special case of linguistic usage, a third level beyond surface narrative and underlying structure. In myth, he discovered certain clusters of relationships that, although expressed in the narrative and dramatic content, obey the systematic order of the language's structure. He contended that the same logical form is at work in all languages and cultures, in scientific works and tribal myths alike.

### **Myth and Knowledge**

Theories stating that myth constitutes a form and way of knowledge are as old as the interpretation of myth itself. The overlapping of mythic and rational modes was confronted by the classical Greek philosophers; it can also be observed in the insistence of Origen, a 3<sup>rd</sup>-century Church father, that the Christian revelation of God in Jesus could best be understood in mythic terms.

In formulations of the relationship between myth and knowledge, two major orientations recur. In the first, myth is examined as an intellectual and logical concern. In the second, myth is studied in its imaginative, intuitive meaning -- either as a mode of perception distinguishable from rational, logical kinds of knowledge, or as one that preceded rational knowledge in human intellectual evolution.

One of the fathers of British anthropology, Sir Edward Burnett Tylor, thought that myth in archaic cultures was based on a psychological delusion and a mistaken logical inference -- on a confusion of subjective and objective reality, of the real and the ideal. Tylor believed that myth, although illogical, had moral value. R. R. Marett, a later British anthropologist, felt that myth arose from the emotional responses that people in archaic cultures make to their environment. In his view, they respond in rhythmic gestures that

develop into dance and ritual, with narrative myth forming the oral part of the communal rites.

The French linguist, Maurice Leenhardt, explained myth primarily as an expression of the living experience of the community. Leenhardt, who spent a great part of his life among the Melanesians, observed that the Melanesians responded passively to the non-human realities of their environment. They did not seek to dominate the environment conceptually or technologically, but attempted to adapt to and come to terms with its powers and forces. He coined the term *cosmographic* for this attitude and traced the myths of the Melanesians to their cosmographic experience of the world.

Page | 47

Marett referred to his theory as pre-names, to distinguish it from that of Tylor, who had called his own theory animism. Marett located the meaning of myth at an intellectual stage prior to the emergence of rational consciousness. The French philosopher, Lucien Levy-Bruhl, further developed the notion of pre-logical mentality as an explanation of myth. Levy-Bruhl held, that people in archaic cultures experience the world without benefit of logical categories, that they gain their knowledge of the world through mystical participation in reality, and that this knowledge is expressed in myths.

The 19th-century Scottish scholar, Andrew Lang and the German anthropologist, Wilhelm Schmidt, both noted in ethnographic literature, the frequent presence of a "high god," a deity who created the world and then distanced himself from it. They saw a distinction in the myths between this kind of deity and the other deities and spirits. They reasoned that this concept of a creator came from metaphysical and intellectual contemplation and not from an evolution of thought from pre-logical to rational. In their formulation, myths simultaneously encompass both the rational-logical and the intuitive.

A definitive, comprehensive view of myth as simultaneously rational-logical and intuitive-imaginative was set forth by the Romanian-born historian of religions, Mircea Eliade. In Eliade's interpretation, the myth reveals a primitive ontology -- an explanation of the nature of being. The myth, by means of symbols, expresses knowledge that is complete

and coherent; although myths may, over the centuries, become trivialized and debased, people can use them to return to the beginning of time and re-discover and re-experience their own nature. To Paul Ricoeur, a French philosopher, myth, as expressed in symbols, is necessary for serious appraisal of the origins, processes, and depths of human thought.

Page | 48

### **Myth and Society**

Philosophical and speculative understanding of myth, such as that of the Italian philosopher, Giovanni Battista Vico, raised the question of the inter-relationship of myth and society. In his *Scienza nuova* (New Science, 1725; final ed., 1744), Vico, set forth a four-stage theory of the development of myth and religion in Greece. The first stage expressed the divinization of nature: Thunder and the heavens become Zeus, the sea becomes Poseidon. In the second stage, gods related to the domestication and domination of nature appear: Hephaestus, god of fire, Demeter, goddess of grain. In the third stage, the gods embody civil institutions and parties: Hera, for example, is the institution of marriage. The fourth stage is expressed by the total humanization of the gods, as found in Homer.

The French sociologist, Emile Durkheim, in examining the relation of myth to society, drew on data from Australian aboriginal cultures. Durkheim rejected the notion that myth arises out of extra ordinary manifestations of nature. Nature, to him, was a model of regularity, and thus, is predictable and is the ordinary. He concluded that myths arise in the human response to social existence. They express the way society represents humanity and the world, and they constitute a moral system and a cosmology as well as a history. Myths and the rituals stemming from them sustain and renew these moral and other beliefs, keeping them from being forgotten, and they strengthen people in their social natures.

The Polish-born British anthropologist, Bronislaw Malinowski, refined this sociological conception of myth. For Malinowski, myth fulfills in archaic and tribal societies, an indispensable function: It expresses, enhances, and codifies belief. It safeguards and enforces morality and contains practical rules for the guidance of the individuals in these cultures.

The acceptance of the sociological meaning of myth is universal among anthropologists. This acceptance does not imply, however, that myth is understood to be a function of human society. Rather, myth and society coexist; the sociopolitical order can be seen as an inexact reflection of the social or cosmic order found in myths, and the myths give legitimacy to the order of society.

The British anthropologist, Sir James Frazer, in *The Golden Bough* (1890), first suggested the relation of myth to ritual. His theory was extended to explain the meaning of myth in literate societies. The Dutch-born Henri Frankfort, the American, Theodor Gaster, and the Danish-American, Thorkild Jacobsen, applied anthropological insights to understand the religion and society of the cultures of the ancient Middle East, the sites of some of the earliest agricultural societies in human history. Jacobsen pointed out that the imaginative mythical perception of plants was the practical and philosophical basis for the domestication of plant life, and that agriculture itself became part of a perception both of cosmic order and of the structure of society.

Gaster held that certain myths and rites have, as their function, the replenishment of life and vitality. Such myths and rites in agricultural societies are so generalized in their relation to the cosmic and societal order, that religious and mythical meaning is given to the entire culture.

The French linguist, Georges Dumézil, who made extensive investigation of Indo-European myth in Indian, Greek, Roman, German, Scandinavian, and other cultures, discerned a common cosmo- sociological structure in these myths. He found in every form of Indo-European myth, a tripartite structure, with a priest or ruler at the top of a hierarchy, warriors in the middle, and farmers, herdsman, and craftsmen at the base. These classes are correlated with cosmic deities; and in the narrative form of the epic, the inter-relationships, antagonisms, and conflicts among these three classes are dramatized. Dumézil does not claim that all Indo-European societies possess this social structure empirically, but rather that this structure operates as an archetypal language for

the statement of ideal meanings within Indo-European cultures.

The German philosopher, Ernst Cassirer, refined the concepts of the intellectual-logical and the intuitive-imaginative aspects of myth in his discussion of the meanings of myth and of the social group. He allied himself with those who say that myth arises from the emotions. He stressed, however, that myth is not identical with the emotion from which it arises, but that it is the expression -- the objectification -- of the emotion. In this expression or objectification, the identity and basic values of the group are given an absolute meaning. Cassirer believed that myth and mythic modes of thinking form a deep substratum in the scientific, technological cultures of the West.

Page | 50

### **Myth and Psychology**

In myth, depth psychologists found material to delineate the structure, order, and dynamics of both the psychic life of individuals and the collective unconscious of society. Sigmund Freud utilized themes from older mythological structures to exemplify the conflicts and dynamics of the unconscious psychic life (in, for example, his Oedipus and Electra complexes). Carl Jung, in his psychological interpretations of the large body of myths, that have been collected from cultures throughout the world, saw evidence for the existence of a collective unconscious shared by all. He developed a theory of archetypes -- patterns of great impact, at one's emotions and ideas -- that are expressed in behavior and images. Both Jung and Freud viewed dreams as expressions of the structure and dynamic of the life of the unconscious. The dream, they pointed out, in many of its particulars, resembles the narrative, of myth in cultures, in which myth still expresses the totality of life.

Geza Roheim, a Hungarian anthropologist, applied Freudian theory in interpreting archaic myths and religion and, more generally, in explaining the development of human culture. The most comprehensive study of myths from the perspective of depth psychology, however, was made by the American scholar, Joseph Campbell. In *The Masks of God* (4 vol., 1959-67), he combined insights from depth psychology (primarily Jungian), theories of historical diffusion, and linguistic analysis to formulate -- from the perspective

of the dynamics that are found in mythical forms of expression -- a general theory of the origin, development, and unity of all human cultures.

### Nebo

In ancient literature, the name given to a mountain and to a deity. In the Bible, Nebo is a mountain in Moab where Moses saw the Promised Land. In certain ancient religions, Nebo was the name of the patron deity of the city, Borsippa, in Babylon. He was the god of wisdom, and the planet, Mercury, was sacred to him.

### Neptune (mythology)

In Roman mythology, god of the sea, son of the god, Saturn, and brother of Jupiter, king of the gods, and Pluto, god of the dead. Originally, a god of springs and streams, he became identified with the Greek god of the sea, Poseidon. His festival was celebrated on July 23.

### Odysseus

In Greek legend, a Greek hero, ruler of the island of Ithaca and one of the leaders of the Greek army during the Trojan War. Homer's *Odyssey*, recounts Odysseus's adventures and ultimate return home ten years after the fall of Troy. Initially, Odysseus was mentioned as the son of Laertes, king of Ithaca, although in later tradition, Sisyphus, king of Corinth, was considered his real father, his mother having later married Laertes. At first, Odysseus refused to accompany the

Greeks to Troy, feigning madness by sowing his fields with salt, but the Greeks placed his son, Telemachus, in front of the plow, and Odysseus was compelled to admit his ruse and join the invading army. Throughout the *Illiad* of Homer, he is portrayed as a brave, sagacious, cunning warrior, and he is awarded the famous armor of the Greek warrior, Achilles, on the latter's death. Odysseus was responsible for bringing the Greek heroes, Neoptolemus and Philoctetes to Troy for the final stage of the conflict. In the *Odyssey*, it is said that he proposed the strategem of the Trojan Horse, the means by which Troy was conquered.

In the works of later classical writers, particularly those of the Greek poet, Pindar, the Greek playwright, Euripides, and the Roman poet, Vergil, Odysseus is characterized as a cowardly and scheming politician. In Latin, his name is rendered as Ulysses.

### **Orion (mythology)**

In Greek mythology, handsome giant and mighty hunter, the son of Poseidon, the god of the sea, and Euryale, the Gorgon. Orion fell in love with Metrope, the daughter of Oenopion, king of Chios, and sought her in marriage. Oenopion, however, constantly deferred his consent to the marriage, and Orion attempted to gain possession of the maiden by violence. Incensed at his behavior, her father, with the aid of the god, Dionysus, threw him into a deep sleep and blinded him. Orion, then consulted an oracle, who told him he could regain his sight by going to the east and letting the rays of the rising sun fall on his eyes. His sight restored, he lived on Crete as the huntsman of the goddess, Artemis. The goddess eventually killed him, however, because she was jealous of his affection for Aurora, goddess of the dawn. After Orion's death, Artemis placed him in the heavens as a constellation.

### **Orphism**

In classical religion, mystic cult of ancient Greece, believed to have been drawn from the writings of the legendary poet and musician, Orpheus. Fragmentary poetic passages, including inscriptions on gold tablets found in the graves of Orphic followers from the 6th century BC, indicate that Orphism was based on a cosmogony that centered on the myth of the god, Dionysus Zagreus, the son the the deities, Zeus and Persephone. Furious because Zeus wished to make his son ruler of the universe, the jealous Titans dismembered and devoured the young god. Athena, goddess of wisdom, was able to rescue his heart, which she brought to Zeus, who swallowed it and gave birth to a new Dionysus. Zeus, then punished the Titans by destroying them with his lightning and from their ashes, created the human race. As a result, humans had a dual nature: the earthly body was the heritage of the earth-born Titans; the soul came from the divinity of Dionysus, whose remains had been mingled with that of the Titans.

According to the tenets of Orphism, people should endeavor to rid themselves of the Titanic or evil element in their nature and should seek to preserve the Dionysiac or divine nature of their being. The triumph of the Dionysiac element would be assured by following the Orphic rites of purification and asceticism. Through a long series of reincarnated lives, people would prepare for the afterlife. If they had lived in evil, they would be punished, but if they had lived in holiness, after death, their souls would be completely liberated from Titanic elements and reunited with the divinity.

### **Osiris**

In Egyptian mythology, one of the principal deities. Originally, the local god of Abydos and Busiris, Osiris, who represented the male productive force in nature, became identified with the setting sun. Thus, he was regarded as the ruler of the realm of the dead in the mysterious region below the western horizon. Osiris was the brother and husband of Isis, goddess of the earth and moon, who represented the female productive force in nature. According to legend, Osiris, as king of Egypt, found his people plunged in barbarism and taught them law, agriculture, religion, and other blessings of civilization. He was murdered by his evil brother, Set, who tore the body to pieces and scattered the fragments. Isis found and buried his scattered remains, however, and each burial place, was thereafter, revered as sacred ground. Their son Horus, sired by a temporarily regenerated Osiris, avenged his father's death by killing Set and then ascended the throne. Osiris lived on, in the underworld as the ruler of the dead, but he was also, through Horus, regarded as the source of renewed life.

### **Pandora**

In Greek mythology, first woman on earth, created by the god, Hephaestus, at the request of the god, Zeus. Zeus wished to counteract the blessing of fire, which had been stolen from the gods by the Titan, Prometheus, and given to human beings. Endowed by the gods with every attribute of beauty and goodness, Pandora was sent to Epimetheus, who was happy to have her for his wife, although he had been warned by his brother, Prometheus, never to accept anything from Zeus. In bestowing their gifts on Pandora,

the gods had given her a box, warning her never to open it. Her curiosity finally overcame her, however, and she opened the mysterious box, from which flew innumerable plagues for the body and sorrows for the mind. In terror, she tried to shut the box, but only Hope, the one good thing among many evils the box had contained, remained to comfort humanity in its misfortunes. In another legend, the box contained blessings that would have been preserved if Pandora had not allowed them to escape.

### **Phoenix (mythology)**

A legendary bird that lived in Arabia. According to tradition, the phoenix consumed itself by fire every 500 years, and a new young phoenix sprang from its ashes. In the mythology of ancient Egypt, the phoenix represented the sun, which dies at night and is reborn in the morning. Early Christian tradition adopted the phoenix as a symbol of both immortality and resurrection.

### **Pleiades (mythology)**

In Greek mythology, seven daughters of Atlas and of Pleione, the daughter of Oceanus. Their names were Electra, Maia, Taygete, Alcyone, Celaeno, Sterope, and Merope. According to some versions of the myth, they committed suicide from grief at the fate of their father, Atlas, or at the death of their sisters, the Hyades. Other versions, made them the attendants of Artemis, goddess of wildlife and of hunting, who were pursued by the giant hunter, Orion, but were rescued by the gods and changed into doves. After their death, or metamorphosis, they were transformed into stars, but are still pursued across the sky by the constellation, Orion.

### **Pluto (mythology)**

In Roman mythology, god of the dead, the husband of Proserpine. The Latin counterpart of the Greek god, Hades; Pluto assisted his two brothers, Jupiter, and Neptune, in overthrowing their father, Saturn. In dividing the world among them, Jupiter chose the earth and the heavens as his realm, Neptune became the ruler of the sea, and Pluto received as his kingdom, the lower world in which he ruled over the shades of the dead. He was originally considered a fierce and unyielding god, deaf to prayers and

unappeased by sacrifices. In later cults and popular belief, the milder and more beneficent aspects of the god, were stressed. Believed to be the bestower of the blessings hidden in the earth, such as mineral wealth and crops, Pluto was also known as Dis or Orcus, the giver of wealth.

### **Poseidon**

In Greek mythology, god of the sea, the son of the Titans, Cronus and Rhea, and the brother of Zeus and Hades. Poseidon was the husband of Amphitrite, one of the Nereids, by whom he had a son, Triton. Poseidon had numerous other love affairs, however, especially with nymphs of springs and fountains, and was the father of several children, famed for their wildness and cruelty, among them the giant, Orion and the Cyclops, Polyphemus. Poseidon and the Gorgon, Medusa were the parents of Pegasus, the famous winged horse.

Poseidon plays a prominent part in numerous ancient myths and legends. He contended unsuccessfully with Athena, goddess of wisdom, for the control of Athens. When he and Apollo, god of the sun, were cheated of their promised wages after having helped Laomedon, king of Troy, build the walls of that city, Poseidon's revenge against Troy knew no bounds. He sent a terrible sea monster to ravage the land, and during the Trojan War, he helped the Greeks.

In art, Poseidon is represented as a bearded and majestic figure, holding a trident and often accompanied by a dolphin. Every two years, the Isthmian Games, featuring horse and chariot racers, were held in his honor at Corinth. The Romans identified Poseidon with their god of the sea, Neptune.

### **Ptah**

In ancient Egyptian mythology, one of the greatest of gods. Ancient inscriptions describe him as "creator of the earth, father of the gods and all the being of this earth, father of beginnings." He was regarded as the patron of metalworkers and artisans and as a mighty healer. He is usually represented as a mummy bearing the symbols of life, power,

and stability. The main center of his worship was in Memphis.

### **Quetzalcoatl**

The Toltec and Aztec god and legendary ruler of Mexico, usually referred to as the Plumed, or Feathered, Serpent, the translation of his Nahuatl name. In the 10th century AD, the Toltecs transformed what had been a god of soil fertility, worshiped in Teotihuacan before the 9th century, into a deity associated with the morning and evening star, Venus. The Aztecs later made him a symbol of death and resurrection and a patron of priests. The opposing deity in the dualistic Toltec religion was Tezcatlipoca, the god of the night sky. He was believed to have driven Quetzalcoatl from his capital, Tula, into exile, from which, according to prophecy, Quetzalcoatl, described as light-skinned and bearded, would return in a certain year. Thus, when the Spanish conqueror, Hernan Cortes, appeared in 1519, the Aztec king, Montezuma II, was easily convinced that Cortes was the returning god.

The legend of the exile of Quetzalcoatl may reflect changes in Toltec religion from agricultural ceremonies to the practice of human sacrifice (also adopted by the Aztecs), or it may have been based on the exile from Tula of a priest-king, named Quetzalcoatl in the 10th century.

### **Ra or Re**

In ancient Egyptian mythology, sun god depicted with a human body and the head of a hawk. Ra was usually considered the creator and controller of the universe, his chief symbols being the sun disk and the obelisk. Originally, a local cult, the worship of Ra first became widespread during the Old Kingdom in Egypt. The chief temple of Ra was at the city of Heliopolis, which became an important center when the cult was adopted as a state religion. Ra, later became associated with other important deities, particularly Amon and Horus.

### **Remus**

In Roman mythology, the twin brother of Romulus, who was believed to have founded the

city of Rome in 735 BC.

### Roman Mythology

Various beliefs, rituals, and other observances concerning the supernatural held or practiced by the ancient Romans from the legendary period until Christianity finally completely supplanted the native religions of the Roman Empire at the start of the Middle Ages. The original religion of the early Romans was so modified by the addition of numerous and conflicting beliefs in later times, and by the assimilation of a vast amount of Greek mythology, that it cannot be reconstructed precisely. Because extensive changes in the religion had already taken place before the literary tradition began, its origins were in most cases unknown to the early Roman writers on religion, such as the 1st-century BC scholar, Marcus Terentius Varro. Other classical writers, such as the poet, Ovid, in his *Fasti* (Calendar), were strongly influenced by Alexandrian models, and in their works, they frequently employed Greek beliefs to fill gaps in the Roman tradition.

### Gods of the Roman People

The Roman ritual clearly distinguishes two classes of gods, the *di indigetes* and the *de novensides* or *novensiles*. The *indigetes* were the original gods of the Roman state, and their names and nature are indicated by the titles of the earliest priests and by the fixed festivals of the calendar; 30 such gods were honored with special festivals. The *novensides* were later divinities, whose cults were introduced in the historical period. Early Roman divinities included, in addition to the *di indigetes*, a host of so-called specialist gods, whose names were invoked in the carrying out of various activities, such as harvesting. Fragments of old ritual accompanying such acts as plowing or sowing reveal that at every stage of the operation, a separate deity was invoked, the name of each deity being regularly derived from the verb for the operation. Such divinities may be grouped under the general term of attendant, or auxiliary, gods, who were invoked along with the greater deities. Early Roman cult was not so much a polytheism as a polydemonism -- the worshipers' concepts of the invoked beings consisted of little more than their names and functions, and the being's numen, or power, manifested itself in highly specialized ways.

The character of the *indigetes* and their festivals show that the early Romans were not only members of an agricultural community, but also were fond of fighting and much engaged in war. The gods represented, distinctly, the practical needs of daily life, as felt by the Roman community to which they belonged. They were scrupulously accorded the rites and offerings considered proper. Thus, Janus and Vesta guarded the door and hearth, the Lares protected the field and house, Pales, the pasture, Saturn, the sowing, Ceres, the growth of the grain, Pomona, the fruit, and Consus and Ops, the harvest. Even the majestic Jupiter, the ruler of the gods, was honored for the aid his rains might give to the farms and vineyards. In his more encompassing character, he was considered, through his weapon of lightning, the director of human activity and, by his widespread domain, the protector of the Romans in their military activities beyond the borders of their own community. Prominent in early times, were the gods, Mars and Quirinus, who were often identified with each other. Mars was a god of young men and their activities, especially war; he was honored in March and October. Quirinus is thought, by modern scholars, to have been the patron of the armed community in time of peace.

At the head of the earliest pantheon were the triad Jupiter, Mars, and Quirinus (whose three priests, or flamens, were of the highest order), and Janus and Vesta. These gods in early times, had little individuality, and their personal histories lacked marriages and genealogies. Unlike the gods of the Greeks, they were not considered to function in the manner of mortals, and thus, not many accounts of their activities exist. This older worship was associated with Numa Pompilius, the second legendary king of Rome, who was believed to have had, as his consort and adviser, the Roman goddess of fountains and childbirth, Egeria. New elements were added at a relatively early date, however. To the royal house of the Tarquins, was ascribed by legend, the establishment of the great Capitoline triad, Jupiter, Juno, and Minerva, which assumed the supreme place in Roman religion. Other additions were the worship of Diana on the Aventine Hill and the introduction of the Sibylline Books, prophecies of world history, which, according to legend, were purchased by Tarquin in the late 6th century BC from the Cumaean Sibyl.

### Inclusion of Other Deities

The absorption of neighboring native gods took place as the Roman state conquered the surrounding territory. The Romans commonly granted the local gods of the conquered territory the same honors as the earlier gods who had been regarded as peculiar to the Roman state. In many instances, the newly acquired deities were formally invited to take up their abode in the new sanctuaries at Rome. Moreover, the growth of the city attracted foreigners, who were allowed to continue the worship of their own gods. In addition to Castor and Pollux, the conquered settlements in Italy seem to have contributed to the Roman pantheon, Diana, Minerva, Hercules, Venus, and other deities of lesser rank, some of whom, were Italian divinities, others originally derived from Greece. The important Roman deities were eventually identified with the more anthropomorphic Greek gods and goddesses, whose attributes and myths were also taken over.

### Religious Festivals

The Roman religious calendar reflected Rome's hospitality to the cults and deities of conquered territories. Originally, Roman religious festivals were few in number. Some of the oldest survived to the very end of the pagan empire, preserving the memory of the fertility and propitiatory rites of a primitive agricultural people. New festivals were introduced, however, to mark the naturalization of new gods. So many festivals were adopted, eventually, that the work days on the calendar were outnumbered. Among the more important of the Roman religious festivals were the Saturnalia, the Lupercalia, the Equiria, and the Secular Games.

Under the empire, the Saturnalia was celebrated for seven days, from December 17 to 23, during the period in which the winter solstice occurred. All business was suspended, slaves were given temporary freedom, gifts were exchanged, and merriment prevailed. The Lupercalia was an ancient festival originally honoring Lupercus, a pastoral god of the Italians. The festival was celebrated on February 15, at the cave of the Lupercal on the Palatine Hill, where the legendary founders of Rome, the twins, Romulus and Remus, were supposed to have been nursed by a wolf. Among the Roman legends connected

with them, is that of Faustulus, a shepherd, who was supposed to have discovered the twins in the wolf's den and to have taken them to his home, in which, they were brought up by his wife, Acca Larentia.

The Equiria, a festival in honor of Mars, was celebrated on February 27 and March 14, traditionally the time of year when new military campaigns were prepared. Horse races in the Campus Martius notably marked the celebration.

The Secular Games, which included both athletic spectacles and sacrifices, were held at irregular intervals, traditionally once only, in about every century, to mark the beginning of a new *saeculum*, or era. The tradition, however, was often neglected.

### **Roman Temples**

The numbers and architecture of Roman temples also reflect the city's receptivity to all the religions of the world. The temple of Isis and Serapis in the Campus Martius, built of Egyptian materials and in the Egyptian style, to house the Hellenized cult of the Egyptian deity, Isis, is typical of the heterogeneity of Roman religious monuments. The most noteworthy temples of Rome were the temple of Jupiter Capitolinus and the Pantheon. The temple of Jupiter Capitolinus, on the Capitoline Hill, was dedicated in 509 BC to Jupiter, Juno, and Minerva. Constructed, originally in the Etruscan style, it was rebuilt or restored several times under the empire and was finally ruined by the Vandals in AD 455. The Pantheon was built from AD 117 to 138, by Emperor Hadrian and dedicated to all the gods; this building replaced a smaller temple built by the general and statesman, Marcus Agrippa. The Pantheon became a Christian Church in 607 and is now an Italian national monument.

### **Decline of the Roman Religion**

The transference of the anthropomorphic qualities of Greek gods to Roman religion, and perhaps even more, the prevalence of Greek philosophy among well-educated Romans, brought about an increasing neglect of the old rites, and in the 1st century BC, the religious importance of the old priestly offices declined rapidly. Many men, whose

patrician birth, called them to these duties had no belief in the rites, except perhaps, as a political necessity, and the mass of the uneducated populace became increasingly interested in foreign rites. Nevertheless, the positions of pontiff and augur remained coveted political posts.

A thorough reform and restoration of the old system was carried out by Emperor Augustus, who himself, became a member of all the priestly orders. Even though the earlier ritual had had little to do with morality, being mainly a businesslike relation with unseen powers in which humans paid proper service to the gods and were rewarded by security, it had promoted piety and religious discipline, and thus, was fostered by Augustus as a safeguard against internal disorder. During this period, the legend of the founding of Rome by the Trojan hero, Aeneas, became prominent because of the publication of Vergil's *Aeneid*.

In spite of the reforms instituted by Augustus, the Roman religion in the empire tended more and more to center on the imperial house, and eventually, the emperors were deified after death. Such deification began even before the establishment of the empire, with Julius Caesar. The emperors Augustus, Claudius, Vespasian, and Titus were also deified, and after the reign (AD 96-98) of Marcus Cocceius Nerva, few emperors failed to receive this distinction.

Under the empire, numerous foreign cults grew popular and were widely extended, such as the worship of the Egyptian goddess, Isis, and that of the Persian god, Mithras, which was similar to Christianity in some respects. Despite persecutions extending from the reign of Nero to that of Diocletian, Christianity steadily gained converts, and it became an officially supported religion in the Roman state under Constantine the Great, who ruled as sole emperor from AD 324 to 337. All the pagan cults were prohibited in AD 392 by an edict of Emperor Theodosius I.

### **Romulus (mythology)**

In Roman mythology, founder and first king of Rome. He and his twin brother, Remus,

were the sons of Mars, god of war, and of Rhea Silvia, also called Ilia, one of the vestal virgins. Rhea Silvia was the daughter of Numitor, king of Alba Longa, who had been deposed by his younger brother, Amulius. Amulius had made Rhea Silvia a priestess so that she would have no children to make claims against his throne. After the birth of her two boys, to remove any threat against himself, he had them thrown in a basket into the Tiber River. The twins were not drowned, however. They were rescued and nursed by a she-wolf on the slope of the Palatine Hill and were later discovered by the shepherd, Faustulus, and reared by his wife, Acca Larentia. When they grew to manhood, the brothers deposed Amulius and placed their grandfather, Numitor, on the throne.

The brothers then decided to build a city. After quarreling over the spot, they finally chose the Palatine Hill. Romulus built a wall, over which Remus, to show its inadequacy, scornfully leaped; Remus, was thereupon, killed by Romulus or one of his companions, and Romulus became sole ruler of the city. He provided an asylum on the Capitoline Hill for runaway slaves and homicides and procured wives for them by seizing the Sabine women at a festival to which he had invited the Sabines. After a series of wars between Romulus and the Sabines, they were finally reconciled, with Romulus as king. According to legend, Romulus was carried up to the heavens by his father, and was later worshped as the god, Quirinus.

### **Saturn (mythology)**

In Roman mythology, ancient god of agriculture. In later legends, he was identified with the Greek god, Cronus, who, after having been dethroned by his son, Zeus (in Roman mythology, Jupiter), fled to Italy, where he ruled during the Golden Age, a time of perfect peace and happiness. Beginning on December 17 of each year, during the festival known as the Saturnalia, the Golden Age was restored for seven days. All business stopped and executions and military operations were postponed. It was a period of goodwill, devoted to banquets and the exchange of visits and gifts. A special feature of the festival, was the freedom given to slaves, who during this time, had first place at the family table and were served by their masters.

Saturn was the husband of Ops, goddess of plenty. Besides Jupiter, who was ruler of their gods, Saturn's children also included Juno, goddess of marriage; Neptune, god of the sea; Pluto, god of the dead; and Ceres, goddess of the grain. In art, Saturn is usually shown bearded, carrying a sickle or an ear of corn.

### **Serapis, also Sarapis**

In Greek and Egyptian mythology, a deity, variously associated with Osiris, Hermes, and Hades, introduced in the 3rd century BC, as a state god, for both Greeks and Egyptians. Serapis was believed by Egyptians to be a human manifestation of Apis, a sacred dead bull that symbolized Osiris; in Greek mythology, Serapis was represented as a god of fertility and medicine and the ruler of the dead in Tartarus. The worship of Serapis spread throughout the ancient world and the Roman Empire. The cult waned with the ascendancy of Isis, the Egyptian goddess of motherhood and fertility, and the destruction of the temple to Serapis in Alexandria in AD 375, marked the virtual end of paganism in the Roman Empire.

### **Sibyl**

In Greek and Roman mythology, any woman inspired with prophetic power by the god, Apollo. The sibyls lived in caves or near streams and prophesied in a frenzied trance, usually in Greek hexameters, which were handed down in writing. Early Greek writers mention only one sibyl, probably the Erythraean Herophile, who predicted the Trojan War. In later legends, the number of sibyls was increased to ten, including the Samian, the Trojan or Hellespontine, the Phrygian, the Cimmerian, the Delphian, the Cumaean, the Libyan, the Tiburtine, and the Babylonian or Persian sibyls. Of these, the most important in Roman mythology, was the Cumaean sibyl, Deiphobe. Apollo had promised to grant her anything she wished, and she asked to live for as many years as there were grains of sand in her hand. She did not ask, however, for eternal youth, as well, and became so withered that she was hung upside down in a bottle. Her overwhelming desire to die could not happen. In later legend, she guided the Trojan prince, Aeneas, through the underworld to visit his father, Anchises. According to another legend, she appeared in the form of an aged woman before Lucius Tarquinius Superbus, the seventh and last king

of Rome, and offered him nine prophetic books at a high price. When he refused her, she destroyed three books and then offered the remaining six at the original price; again, Tarquin refused, and she destroyed three more. The king finally bought the remaining three at the price demanded for the nine. These three books were placed in the temple of the god, Jupiter, in Rome, and were consulted in times of great emergency. Although the original Sibylline Books were destroyed in a fire, in 83 BC, a new collection was subsequently compiled. These, however, were destroyed in AD 405.

### **Sphinx**

In Greek mythology, monster with the head and breasts of a woman, the body of a lion, and the wings of a bird. Lying crouched on a rock, she accosted all who were about to enter the city of Thebes by asking them a riddle, "What is it that has four feet in the morning, two at noon, and three at night?" If they could not solve the riddle, she killed them. When the hero, Oedipus, solved the riddle by answering, "Man, who crawls on four limbs as a baby, walks upright on two as an adult, and walks with the aid of a stick in old age," the sphinx killed herself. For ridding them of this terrible monster, the Thebans made Oedipus, their king.

In ancient Egypt, sphinxes were statues representing deities, with the body of a lion and the head of some other animal or of man, frequently a likeness of the king. The most famous of all Egyptian sphinxes is the Great Sphinx of Giza, near the pyramids. Dating from before 2500 BC, the Great Sphinx is about 20 m (about 66 ft.) high and about 73 m (about 240 ft.) long.

### **Tammuz or Dumuzi**

In Sumerian, Babylonian, and Assyrian mythology, a god of animal and plant fertility. The principal features of his cult were his ritual marriage to the goddess of the harvest, Ishtar, in which the deities were represented by the king and high priestess, and the annual lamenting of his early death, which marked the end of the spring season. Tammuz was the counterpart of the Phoenician fertility god, known to the Greeks as Adonis.

### **Tartarus**

In Greek mythology, the lowest region of the underworld. According to Hesiod and Vergil, Tartarus is as far below Hades as the earth is below the heavens and is closed in by iron gates. In some accounts, Zeus, the father of the gods, after leading the gods to victory over the Titans, banished his father, Cronus, and the other Titans to Tartarus. The name, Tartarus, was later employed sometimes, as a synonym for Hades, or the underworld, in general, but more frequently, for the place of damnation where the wicked were punished after death. Such legendary sinners as Ixion, king of the Lapiths, Sisyphus, king of Corinth, and Tantalus, a mortal son of Zeus, were placed in Tartarus.

### **Thor**

In Norse mythology, the god of thunder, eldest son of Odin, ruler of the gods, and Jord, the earth goddess. Thor was the strongest of the Aesir, the chief gods, whom he helped protect from their enemies, the giants. He had a magic hammer, which he threw with the aid of iron gloves and which always returned to him. Thunder was supposed to be the sound of the rolling of his chariot. Thursday is named for Thor.

### **Unicorn**

A fabled beast, pure white in color, having the head and legs of a horse and a long, twisted horn, set in the middle of its forehead. Symbolic of holiness and chastity, the unicorn was prominent in tapestries of the Middle Ages. It has been widely used in heraldic signs.

### **Uranus (mythology)**

In Greek mythology, the god of the heavens and husband of Gaea, the goddess of the earth. Uranus was the father of the Titans, the Cyclopes, and the 100-handed giants. The Titans, led by their ruler, Cronus, dethroned and mutilated Uranus, and from the blood that fell upon the earth, sprang the three Erinyes, or Furies, who avenge crimes of patricide and perjury. Although Uranus may have been worshiped as a god by earlier inhabitants of Greece, he was never an object of worship by the Greeks of the historical period.

### **Venus (mythology)**

In Roman mythology, originally a goddess of gardens and fields, but later identified with Aphrodite, the Greek goddess of love and beauty. In imperial times, she was worshiped under several aspects. As Venus Genetrix, she was worshiped as the mother of the hero, Aeneas, the founder of the Roman people; as Venus Felix, the bringer of good fortune; as Venus Victrix, the bringer of victory; and as Venus Verticordia, the protector of feminine chastity. Venus was the wife of Vulcan, god of metalwork, but she was often unfaithful to him. Among her many lovers were Mars, the god of war, the handsome shepherd, Adonis; and Anchises, the father of Aeneas. Venus was also the mother of Cupid, god of love.

### **Vesta (mythology)**

In Roman mythology, the goddess of the hearth, worshiped by Roman families as a household deity. The most important public shrine to Vesta was her round temple in the Forum at Rome, where her fire was said to have been brought from Troy by Aeneas, the legendary founder of Rome. The shrine was symbolic of the safety of the city and was watched continually by six vestal virgins, priestesses who kept the fire burning and who served for terms of 30 years according to severe rules. In early June of each year a festival honoring Vesta, called Vestalia, was held. In form, the goddess was associated with the flames of her fire. Her Greek counterpart was Hestia.

### **Vestal Virgins**

In Roman antiquity, priestesses of Vesta, goddess of the hearth. Originally, two and then four vestals, were selected by the king; later the number was increased to six, and they were selected by the Pontifex Maximus, the high priest in the Roman religion. The vestals were vowed to 30 years of service as virgins: 10 of learning, 10 of performance, and 10 of teaching. A vestal who broke her vow of chastity was buried alive. To be eligible, a girl had to be over six and under ten years of age and without physical or mental defects; she had to be the daughter of a freeborn citizen resident of Italy; and both her mother and father had to be living. Among the duties of the vestals was the guarding and annual renewing of the sacred fire at the public shrine to Vesta and preparation of the sacrifices. They enjoyed many privileges, including the right to wear bridal dress.

**Vulcan** (Latin *Volcanus*)

In Roman mythology, the god of fire. Originally, an old Italian deity, who seems to have been associated with volcanic fire, Vulcan was identified with the Greek god, Hephaestus, in classical times. At Rome, his festival, the Volcanalia, was celebrated on August 23. He was particularly revered at Ostia, where his was the principal cult.

**Zeus**

In Greek mythology, the god of the sky and ruler of the Olympian gods. Zeus corresponds to the Roman god, Jupiter.

Zeus was considered, according to Homer, the father of the gods and of mortals. He did not create either gods or mortals; he was their father in the sense of being the protector and ruler, both of the Olympian family, and of the human race. He was lord of the sky, the rain god, and the cloud gatherer, who wielded the terrible thunderbolt. His breastplate was the aegis, his bird, the eagle, his tree, the oak. Zeus presided over the gods on Mount Olympus in Thessaly. His principal shrines were at Dodona, in Epirus, the land of the oak trees and the most ancient shrine, famous for its oracle, and at Olympia, where the Olympian Games were celebrated in his honor every fourth year. The Nemean games, held at Nemea, northwest of Argos, were also dedicated to Zeus.

Zeus was the youngest son of the Titans, Cronus and Rhea, and the brother of the deities Poseidon, Hades, Hestia, Demeter, and Hera. According to one of the ancient myths of the birth of Zeus, Cronus, fearing that he might be dethroned by one of his children, swallowed them as they were born. Upon the birth of Zeus, Rhea wrapped a stone in swaddling clothes for Cronus to swallow and concealed the infant god in Crete, where he was fed on the milk of the goat, Amalthea and reared by nymphs. When Zeus grew to maturity, he forced Cronus to disgorge the other children, who were eager to take vengeance on their father. In the war that followed, the Titans fought on the side of Cronus, but Zeus and the other gods were successful, and the Titans were consigned to the abyss of Tartarus. Zeus, henceforth, ruled over the sky, and his brothers, Poseidon

and Hades were given power over the sea and the underworld, respectively. The earth was to be ruled in common by all three.

Beginning with the writings of the Greek poet Homer, Zeus is pictured in two very different ways. He is represented as the god of justice and mercy, the protector of the weak, and the punisher of the wicked. As husband to his sister, Hera, he is the father of Ares, the god of war; Hebe, the goddess of youth; Hephaestus, the god of fire; and Eileithyia, the goddess of childbirth. At the same time, Zeus is described as falling in love with one woman after another and resorting to all kinds of tricks to hide his infidelity from his wife. Stories of his escapades were numerous in ancient mythology, and many of his offspring were a result of his love affairs with both goddesses and mortal women. It is believed that, with the development of a sense of ethics in Greek life, the idea of a lecherous, sometimes ridiculous father god became distasteful, so later legends tended to present Zeus in a more exalted light. His many affairs with mortals are sometimes explained as the wish of the early Greeks to trace their lineage to the father of the gods.

Zeus's image was represented in sculptural works as a kingly, bearded figure. The most celebrated of all statues of Zeus was Phidias's gold and ivory colossus at Olympia.

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