

WHO'S WHO IN CLASSICAL MYTHOLOGY

MICHAEL GRANT & JOHN HAZEL



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Who's Who in Classical Mythology

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Who's Who in Classical Mythology

MICHAEL GRANT and JOHN HAZEL



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Introduction

The Greek and Roman myths are an indelible, indispensable, inescapable part of our cultural background and heritage. They originated not according to some single, all-explaining pattern—as is often sweepingly argued—but in a wide variety of different ways and in response to a great many different social and psychological needs. They were invented to explain natural phenomena in a pre-scientific world, to elucidate sites and rituals and names of which the original meaning had been lost, to justify customs and institutions, to endow the gods with dramatic personalities and careers, to glorify nations and tribes and families and hierarchies and priesthoods, to fill out early history by inventive additions, to indulge wishful thinking by tales of adventure and heroism and, sometimes, merely to amuse and entertain: to beguile the long hours of darkness, or the tedium of a dusty journey, or a perilous tossing on the sea.

In every sort of myth, it is the story, the course of mythical ‘events’, which matters. The names of Achilles, Helen, Oedipus, Romulus or Horatius on the Bridge still evoke an echo today, but these echoes are dim and pointless unless the sequence of what was believed to have happened to them and what they were believed to have done are seen and pursued through their often devious courses and ramifications. That is the purpose of this book. It will endeavour to identify and describe the principal and best known and most influential incidents built into each mythological narrative over the ancient centuries, noting, from time to time, when these assumed alternative and contradictory forms.

What will then emerge, it is hoped, is a picture of the different pieces which add up to one of the greatest imaginative achievements in the history of civilisation. These are marvellous tales, which have rightly been thought worth retelling on countless thousands of occasions. As many a psychologist and anthropologist will readily confirm, they are full of profound revelations about the universal human condition and predicament. What they tell us, of course, is not historical truth. It is truth of another kind, which can perhaps be described as para-history: and in its effects upon what the Greeks and Romans, who so keenly studied these myths, did and thought, it seemed almost as significant and stimulating and uplifting as their actual past histories in which they took so much pride. And the same effects of this mythical para-history of ancient times can easily be traced onwards from then to now. It can be traced in the conscious and unconscious reliance of every intervening generation—of whatever epoch—upon the ways of thinking and ideas manifested by these mythologies. It can also be traced, very specifically, in the great and diverse fields of European art, and of European and American literature, which owe a major part of their meaning to this same mythical corpus. And as a readily apparent proof of its durability, the writers of this twentieth century have shown themselves every bit as conscious of their mythical inheritance as any of their predecessors.

Some of the Greek myths (in so far as they were not borrowed from the East) welled up from the humbler, anonymous sections of the population. Others were handed down

and imposed on the people by the leaders and the ruling classes that supported them. It seems to some students more respectable and attractive to think in terms of the former process. But the latter often occurred as well, and its manifestations have been inadequately studied: they offer a wide field of research for the future. As for Roman myths, that is to say, the truly Roman myths, as opposed to those Rome adopted from the Greeks—they came up from below far less often than they were invented at the top and deliberately diffused downwards for patriotic or religious or political edification. But this does not make them any less interesting or significant, especially in our present age to which such a phenomenon is far from unfamiliar.

Everyone who compares the Greek and Roman mythologies with those of other cultures throughout the various countries of the world, and throughout the successive periods of history, will be amazed, indeed staggered, by the frequency with which the same stories recur, in closely similar or identical form, in a vast number of different lands, times and contexts. To take a single example out of many, more than nine hundred versions of the story of Cupid and Psyche are known; and they are scattered over tens of thousands of miles, and over widely separated epochs. There are two main theories about why this sort of thing has happened. One suggests that different cultures unavoidably go through the same stages of development, and that when a certain stage has been reached they tend, even without contact with each other, to produce similar myths, because their 'collective unconscious', to use the term familiarised by Karl Gustav Jung, gets to work in the same sort of fashion and in satisfaction of the same sort of inner needs. The alternative, 'diffusionist' theory maintains that, however widely the different cultures manifesting a similar myth may be separated in geographical terms, the stories were, in fact, *transmitted* from one culture to another—and, according to this view, it is only our lack of the requisite knowledge which prevents us from recognising the routes and channels and intermediaries and methods through which this transmission took place. Both these two theories may, up to a point, be right. But sometimes the resemblances between different mythologies are too close to be explained by any 'collective unconscious'. In such cases, actual transmissions must have occurred—however difficult it may be for us today to trace the various successive links in the chain. Moreover, this conclusion tends to be confirmed by the advances of modern research: for example, it now seems that the resemblance between Greek and Far Eastern myths may be attributable to the mediating role of an Indo-Greek civilisation in northern India. As time goes on, it can be foreseen that other such channels of transmission may emerge out of the general obscurity, and become clear to us. And who knows, we may even one day be able to identify some single epoch and region in which the germs of the world's leading mythologies had their origins and began to be disseminated.

But that day lies far ahead; and meanwhile there is much else to ponder upon. For in the tales of the ancient classical world, mainly Greek but including a valuable and individual Roman corpus as well, we have before our eyes the greatest and most varied and influential of those mythological collections. What we are hoping to do here is to make it readily accessible, and to illustrate it by a representative choice from the visual art to which it so abundantly gave rise. As for terminology, no endeavour has been made to draw firm lines of delimitation between myth, legend, saga, folk-tale and *märchen*. For such lines are hard to draw, to say the least, and are drawn by different scholars in radically differing ways. Perhaps the most helpful distinction, at least potentially, is

between myth, meaning purely fictitious material, and legend, consisting of stories which contain at least a germ or nucleus of historical truth. But even this differentiation will deliberately not be attempted here, since it is, in fact, impossible in most cases to determine whether such a nucleus is present or not. To take an obvious example, Troy was certainly destroyed by violent means—we can tell this by looking at the remains of the place for ourselves—but the question is, were its destroyers Greeks? If they were, then (according to this definition) the *Iliad*, which attributes the destruction of the city to invaders, is legend: if not, it is myth. The trouble is that we do not know the answer; and this being so, it seems more important, at least for our present purpose, to apprehend and admire the great stories that have come down to us, in all their variety, than to concentrate on attempting to classify them under different headings. Another problem of presentation, incidental, but not unimportant, is the spelling of ancient names. Here, while keeping consistency in mind as an overall aim, we have not hesitated to sacrifice it when convenience seems to exercise a prior claim, and have tried to derive the spellings adopted from the most familiar current usage.

We wish to express our acknowledgments towards many modern writers on Greek and Roman myths. In particular, we would appreciatively record our debt to H.J.Rose's *Handbook of Greek Mythology* and other works, and *Crowell's Handbook of Classical Mythology* by Edward Tripp, published in England as *The Handbook of Classical Mythology* (Arthur Barker, 1970). We are also grateful to Messrs. Weidenfeld and Nicolson Ltd for a great deal of helpful assistance, and especially to Martha Bates for seeing the book through the press.

London and Gattaiola, 1973

Note to the 2002 edition

It is nearly thirty years since the first publication of this book in a glossy illustrated coffee-table format by Weidenfeld & Nicolson. It has spent most of its career since then in paperback format, and has passed through the hands of several publishers before coming to land with Taylor & Francis. It has proved a vigorous creature and fully justified the faith we had in it at its first launch. The stories it contains are told in a straightforward, intelligible manner, and are certainly capable of being enjoyed by people of any age. We believe it will also provide useful to serious students of literature and other disciplines when they wish to refer to the characters and plots of the ancient myths. The text is the same as that originally published with but a few minor corrections. We consider that it covers its subject in a sufficiently comprehensive manner and trust that it will continue to find a useful place on the shelves of those engaged in classical studies.

Michael Grant and John Hazel

London and Gattaiola
2002

A

Abas

1. Son of Lynceus and Hypermnestra. He succeeded his father as king of Argos, and married Aglaia, daughter of Mantineus. They had twin sons, Acrisius and Proetus, and a daughter, Idomene.

2. Son of Melampus; father of Coeranus and Lysimache.

Abderus

Son of Hermes, originating from Opuntian Locris in central Greece. Heracles loved him and made him his armour-bearer, posting him to guard the man-eating horses of Diomedes, king of the Bistones; but they devoured him. Heracles founded the city of Abdera in Thrace in his memory.

Absyrtus

see APSYRTUS.

Acacallis

Daughter of Minos and Pasiphae. She bore Apollo a son, Amphithemis, and perhaps Miletus also.

Acamas

1. Theseus and Phaedra had two sons, Acamas and Demophon. When Menestheus expelled their father from Athens, the two boys were lodged with Elephenor, king of the Abantes in Euboea. He took them to fight in the Trojan War. There, on an embassy to Troy to demand the return of Helen, Acamas fell in love with Priam's daughter Laodice, who bore him a son, Munychus; Theseus' mother Aethra took charge of the child. The brothers were in the Wooden Horse, and later rescued Aethra from Troy. On his way home Acamas married a Thracian princess, Phyllis. However, although offered her father's kingdom as a dowry, he left her, promising to return later. She gave him a box containing a sacred object, telling him to open it only if he changed his mind about coming back. Settling in Cyprus, he subsequently opened the box, and was so frightened by its contents that he galloped away on his horse. It threw him, and he fell off on to his sword and died. A similar story is told of Demophon *1*.

2. Son of Antenor and Theano, and one of the leaders of Troy's Dardanian allies in the Trojan War.

Acarnan

see ALCMAEON.

Acastus

King of Iolcus and son of Pelias and Anaxibia. He sailed with the Argonauts against his father's wishes. On their return from Colchis, his father was deceitfully killed by Medea, and Acastus expelled Jason and her from his kingdom. In honour of his father he held funeral games to which many of the Argonauts came. He then took part in the Calydonian boar-hunt. Acastus married Astydamia, or else Hippolyta, daughter of Cretheus. They had three daughters, Laodamia, Sterope and Sthenele, as well as a number of sons.

Peleus, a fellow-Argonaut, came to Acastus after killing Eurytion, and Acastus purified him of the guilt of homicide. But Astydamia made advances to Peleus and, when he rejected them, accused him of having taken the initiative. Acastus, to punish him, took him hunting on Mount Pelion, where he treacherously stole Peleus' sword and abandoned him while he was asleep. Acastus hoped the wild Centaurs would kill Peleus, but Chiron rescued him. Peleus later conquered Iolcus with the help of Jason and the Dioscuri; he killed Acastus' wife and, according to some, Acastus himself. Acastus' sons subsequently drove him out of Phthia.