

# HISTORY OF GREECE.

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## PART I.

### LEGENDARY GREECE.

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#### CHAPTER I.

##### LEGENDS RESPECTING THE GODS.

THE mythical world of the Greeks opens with the gods, anterior as well as superior to man: it gradually descends, first to heroes, and next to the human race. Along with the gods are found various monstrous natures, ultra-human and extra-human, who cannot with propriety be called gods, but who partake with gods and men in the attributes of freewill, conscious agency, and susceptibility of pleasure and pain,—such as the Harpies, the Gorgons, the Grææ, the Sirens, Scylla and Charybdis, Echidna, Sphinx, Chimæra, Chrysaor, Pegasus, the Cyclôpes, the Centaurs, &c. The first acts of what may be termed the great mythical cycle describe the proceedings of these gigantic agents—the crash and collision of certain terrific and overboiling forces, which are ultimately reduced to obedience, or chained up, or extinguished,

Opening of  
the mythi-  
cal world.

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George Grote

Excerpt

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under the more orderly government of Zeus, who supplants his less capable predecessors, and acquires presidence and supremacy over gods and men—subject however to certain social restraints from the chief gods and goddesses around him, as well as to the custom of occasionally convoking and consulting the divine agora.

How the  
mythes are  
to be told.

I recount these events briefly, but literally, treating them simply as mythes springing from the same creative imagination, addressing themselves to analogous tastes and feelings, and depending upon the same authority, as the legends of Thebes and Troy. It is the inspired voice of the Muse which reveals and authenticates both, and from which Homer and Hesiod alike derive their knowledge—the one, of the heroic, the other, of the divine, foretime. I maintain, moreover, fully, the character of these great divine agents as Persons, which is the light in which they presented themselves to the Homeric or Hesiodic audience. Uranos, Nyx, Hypnos and Oneiros (Heaven, Night, Sleep and Dream), are Persons, just as much as Zeus and Apollo. To resolve them into mere allegories, is unsafe and unprofitable: we then depart from the point of view of the original hearers, without acquiring any consistent or philosophical point of view of our own<sup>1</sup>. For although some of the attributes and actions ascribed to these persons are often explicable by allegory, the whole series and system of them never are so: the theorist who adopts this course of explanation finds that, after

Allegory  
rarely ad-  
missible.

<sup>1</sup> It is sufficient, here, to state this position briefly: more will be said respecting the allegorizing interpretation in a future chapter.

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one or two simple and obvious steps, the path is no longer open, and he is forced to clear a way for himself by gratuitous refinements and conjectures. The allegorical persons and attributes are always found mingled with other persons and attributes not allegorical; but the two classes cannot be severed without breaking up the whole march of the mythical events, nor can any explanation which drives us to such a necessity be considered as admissible. To suppose indeed that these legends could be all traced by means of allegory into a coherent body of physical doctrine, would be inconsistent with all reasonable presumptions respecting the age or society in which they arose. Where the allegorical mark is clearly set upon any particular character, or attribute, or event, to that extent we may recognise it; but we can rarely venture to divine further, still less to alter the legends themselves on the faith of any such surmises. The theogony of the Greeks contains some cosmogonic ideas; but it cannot be considered as a system of cosmogony, or translated into a string of elementary, planetary, or physical changes.

In the order of legendary chronology, Zeus comes after Kronos and Uranos; but in the order of Grecian conception, Zeus is the prominent person, and Kronos and Uranos are inferior and introductory precursors, set up in order to be overthrown and to serve as mementos of the prowess of their conqueror. To Homer and Hesiod, as well as to the Greeks universally, Zeus is the great and predominant god, "the father of gods and men," whose power none of the other gods can hope to resist,

*Zeus—fore-  
most in  
Grecian  
conception.*

or even deliberately think of questioning. All the other gods have their specific potency and peculiar sphere of action and duty, with which Zeus does not usually interfere; but it is he who maintains the lineaments of a providential superintendence, as well over the phænomena of Olympus as over those of earth. Zeus and his brothers Poseidôn and Hadês have made a division of power: he has reserved the æther and the atmosphere to himself—Poseidôn has obtained the sea—and Hadês the under-world or infernal regions; while earth, and the events which pass upon earth, are common to all of them, together with free access to Olympus<sup>1</sup>.

The gods  
—how con-  
ceived: hu-  
man type  
enlarged.

Zeus, then, with his brethren and colleagues, constitute the present gods, whom Homer and Hesiod recognise as in full dignity and efficiency. The inmates of this divine world are conceived upon the model, but not upon the scale, of the human: they are actuated by the full play and variety of those appetites, sympathies, passions and affections, which divide the soul of man; invested with a far larger and indeterminate measure of power, and an exemption as well from death as (with some rare exceptions) from suffering and infirmity. The rich and diverse types thus conceived, full of energetic movement and contrast, each in his own province, and soaring confessedly above the limits of experience, were of all themes the most suitable for ad-

<sup>1</sup> See *Iliad* viii. 405, 463; xv. 20, 130, 185. Hesiod, *Theog.* 885.

This unquestioned supremacy is the general representation of Zeus: at the same time the conspiracy of Hêrê, Poseidôn, and Athênê against him, suppressed by the unexpected apparition of Briareus as his ally, is among the exceptions. (*Iliad*, i. 400.) Zeus is at one time vanquished by Titan, but rescued by Hermês. (*Apollodôr.* i. 6, 3.)

venture and narrative, and operated with irresistible force upon the Grecian fancy. All Nature was then conceived as moving and working through a number of personal agents, amongst whom the gods of Olympus were the most conspicuous; the reverential belief in Zeus and Apollo being only one branch of this omnipresent personifying faith. The attributes of all these agents had a tendency to expand themselves into illustrative legends, especially those of the gods, who were constantly invoked in the public worship. Out of this same mental source sprang both the divine and heroic mythes—the former being often the more extravagant and abnormous in their incidents, in proportion as the general type of the gods was more vast and awful than that of the heroes.

As the gods have houses and wives like men, so the present dynasty of gods must have a past to repose upon<sup>1</sup>; and the curious and imaginative Greek, whenever he does not find a recorded past ready to his hand, is uneasy until he has created one. Thus the Hesiodic theogony explains, with a certain degree of system and coherence, first the antecedent circumstances under which Zeus acquired the divine empire, next the number of his colleagues and descendants.

Past history of the gods fitted on to present conceptions.

First in order of time (we are told by Hesiod) came Chaos; next Gæa, the broad, firm, and flat Earth, with deep and dark Tartarus at her base. Erôs (Love), the subduer of gods as well as men, came immediately afterwards<sup>2</sup>.

Chaos.

<sup>1</sup> Arist. Polit. i. 1. *ὡσπερ δὲ καὶ τὰ εἶδη ἐαυτοῖς ἀφομοιοῦσιν ἄνθρωποι, οὕτως καὶ τοὺς βίους, τῶν θεῶν.*

<sup>2</sup> Hesiod, Theog. 116. Apollodorus begins with Uranos and Gæa (i. 1.); he does not recognise Erôs, Nyx, or Erebus.

From Chaos sprung Erebos and Nyx ; from these latter Æthêr and Hêmera. Gæa also gave birth to Uranos, equal in breadth to herself, in order to serve both as an overarching vault to her, and as a residence for the immortal gods ; she further produced the mountains, habitations of the divine nymphs, and Pontus, the barren and billowy sea.

Gæa and  
Uranos.

Then Gæa intermarried with Uranos, and from this union came a numerous offspring—twelve Titans and Titanides, three Cyclôpes, and three Hekatoncheires or beings with a hundred hands each. The Titans were Oceanus, Kœos, Krios, Hyperion, Iapetos, and Kronos : the Titanides, Theia, Rhea, Themis, Mnêmosynê, Phœbê, and Têthys. The Cyclôpes were Brontês, Steropês, and Argês, —formidable persons, equally distinguished for strength and for manual craft, so that they made the thunder which afterwards formed the irresistible artillery of Zeus<sup>1</sup>. The Hekatoncheires were Kottos, Briareus, and Gygês, of prodigious bodily force.

Uranos contemplated this powerful brood with fear and horror ; as fast as any of them were born, he concealed them in cavities of the earth, and would not permit them to come out. Gæa could find no room for them, and groaned under the pressure : she produced iron, made a sickle, and implored her sons to avenge both her and themselves against the oppressive treatment of their father. But none of them, except Kronos, had courage to undertake the deed : he, the youngest and the most daring, was armed with the sickle and

<sup>1</sup> Hesiod, Theog. 140, 156. Apollod. *ut sup.*

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placed in suitable ambush by the contrivance of Gæa. Presently night arrived, and Uranos descended to the embraces of Gæa: Kronos then emerged from his concealment, cut off the genitals of his father, and cast the bleeding member behind him far away into the sea<sup>1</sup>. Much of the blood was spilt upon the earth, and Gæa in consequence gave birth to the irresistible Erinnys, the vast and muscular Gigantes, and the Melian nymphs. Out of the genitals themselves, as they swam and foamed upon the sea, emerged the goddess Aphroditê, deriving her name from the foam out of which she had sprung. She first landed at Cythêra, and then went to Cyprus: the island felt her benign influence, and the green herb started up under her soft and delicate tread. Erôs immediately joined her, and partook with her the function of suggesting and directing the amorous impulses both of gods and men<sup>2</sup>.

Uranos disabled.

Uranos being thus dethroned and disabled, Kronos and the Titans acquired their liberty and became predominant: the Cyclôpes and the Hekatoncheires had been cast by Uranos into Tartarus, and were still allowed to remain there.

Each of the Titans had a numerous offspring: Oceanus, especially, marrying his sister Têthys, begat three thousand daughters, the Oceanic nymphs,

Kronos and the Titans.

<sup>1</sup> Hesiod, Theog. 160, 182. Apollod. i. 1, 4.

<sup>2</sup> Hesiod, Theog. 192. This legend respecting the birth of Aphroditê seems to have been derived partly from her name (*ἀφρός*, foam), partly from the surname Urania, Ἀφροδίτη Ὀυρανία, under which she was so very extensively worshiped, especially both in Cyprus and Cythêra, seemingly originated in both islands by the Phœnicians. Herodot. i. 105. Compare the instructive section in Boeckh's *Métrologie*, c. iv. § 4.

and as many sons : the rivers and springs passed for his offspring. Hyperion and his sister Theia had for their children Hélios, Selênê, and Eôs; Kœos with Phœbê begat Lêtô and Asteria; the children of Krios were Astræos, Pallas, and Persês,—from Astræos and Eôs sprang the winds Zephyrus, Boreas, and Notus. Iapetos, marrying the Oceanic nymph Clymenê, counted as his progeny the celebrated Promêtheus, Epimêtheus, Menœtius, and Atlas. But the offspring of Kronos were the most powerful and transcendent of all. He married his sister Rhea, and had by her three daughters—Hestia, Dêmêtêr, and Hêrê—and three sons, Hadês, Poseidôn, and Zeus, the latter at once the youngest and the greatest.

Kronos over-reached. Birth and safety of Zeus and his brethren.

But Kronos foreboded to himself destruction from one of his own children, and accordingly, as soon as any of them were born, he immediately swallowed them and retained them in his own belly. In this manner had the five first been treated, and Rhea was on the point of being delivered of Zeus. Grieved and indignant at the loss of her children, she applied for counsel to her father and mother, Uranos and Gæa, who aided her to conceal the birth of Zeus. They conveyed her by night to Lyctus in Crête, hid the new-born child in a woody cavern on Mount Ida, and gave to Kronos, in place of it, a stone wrapped in swaddling clothes, which he greedily swallowed, believing it to be his child. Thus was the safety of Zeus ensured<sup>1</sup>. As he grew up his vast powers fully developed themselves; at the suggestion of Gæa, he induced Kronos by stra-

<sup>1</sup> Hesiod, *Theog.* 452, 487. *Apollod.* i. 1, 6.



tagem to vomit up, first the stone which had been given to him,—next, the five children whom he had previously devoured. Hestia, Dêmêtêr, Hêrê, Poseidôn and Hadês, were thus allowed to grow up along with Zeus; and the stone to which the latter owed his preservation was placed near the temple of Delphi, where it ever afterwards stood, as a conspicuous and venerable memorial to the religious Greek<sup>1</sup>.

We have not yet exhausted the catalogue of beings generated during this early period, anterior to the birth of Zeus. Nyx, alone and without any partner, gave birth to a numerous progeny: Thanatos, Hypnos and Oneiros; Mômus and Oïzys (Grief); Klôthô, Lachesis and Atropos, the three Fates; the retributive and equalising Nemesis; Apatê and Philotês (Deceit and amorous Propensity), Gêras (Old Age) and Eris (Contention). From Eris proceeded an abundant offspring, all mischievous and maleficent: Ponos (Suffering), Lêthê, Limos (Famine), Phonos and Machê (Slaughter and Battle), Dysnomia and Atê (Lawlessness and reckless Impulse), and Horkos, the ever-watchful sanctioner of oaths, as well as the inexorable punisher of voluntary perjury<sup>2</sup>.

Gæa, too, intermarrying with Pontus, gave birth to Nereus, the just and righteous old man of the sea; to Thaumás, Phorkys and Kêtô. From Ne-

<sup>1</sup> Hesiod, Theog. 498.—

*Τὸν μὲν Ζεὺς στήριξε κατὰ χθονὸς εὐρυοδείης  
Πυθοῖ ἐν ἡγαθέῃ, γνάλους ὑπὸ Παρνήσοιο,  
Σῆμ' ἔμεν ἔξοπίσω, θαῦμα θνητοῖσι βροτοῖσι.*

<sup>2</sup> Hesiod, Theog. 212-232.

reus, and Doris daughter of Oceanus, proceeded the fifty Nereids or Sea-nymphs. Thaumás also married Electra daughter of Oceanus, and had by her Iris and the two Harpies, Aellô and Okypetê, —winged and swift as the winds. From Phorkys and Kêtô sprung the Dragon of the Hesperides, and the monstrous Grææ and Gorgons: the blood of Medusa, one of the Gorgons, when killed by Perseus, produced Chrysaor and the horse Pegasus; Chrysaor and Kallirrhoê gave birth to Geryôn as well as to Echidna,—a creature half-nymph and half-serpent, unlike both to gods and to men. Other monsters arose from the union of Echidna with Typhaôn,—Orthros, the two-headed dog of Geryôn; Cerberus, the dog of Hadês, with fifty heads, and the Lernæan Hydra. From the latter proceeded the Chimæra, the Sphinx of Thêbes, and the Nemean lion<sup>1</sup>.

A powerful and important progeny, also, was that of Styx, daughter of Oceanus, by Pallas; she had Zêlos and Nikê (Imperiousness and Victory), and Kratos and Bia (Strength and Force). The hearty and early co-operation of Styx and her four sons with Zeus was one of the main causes which enabled him to achieve his victory over the Titans.

Ambitious schemes of Zeus.

Zeus had grown up not less distinguished for mental capacity than for bodily force. He and his brothers now determined to wrest the power from the hands of Kronos and the Titans, and a long and desperate struggle commenced, in which all the gods and all the goddesses took part. Zeus

<sup>1</sup> Hesiod, Theog. 240–320. Apollodôr. i. 2, 6, 7.