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Opening extract from

Mythology

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A Harpy.



A Siren.



A Fury.



The Graeae.

July 5th, leaving Crete: I have decided to visit western Greece before heading on to Athens. By that time, I hope to have found some relics to offer Mr. Petakis for his museum.

A thought. If I begin to believe Zeus is real and is helping me to find relics, shouldn't I start believing the Greek monsters are real, too?

MONSTERS AND MYTHICAL BEASTS.

AS WELL AS BELIEVING in the Olympian gods, the ancient Greeks believed the world was populated with terrible monsters and fabulous beasts. Most of these creatures were relatives of the gods or Titans. The Gorgons, for example, were three savage sisters. Descendants of Gaia and the sea, they had wings of gold and snakes for hair. Only one, Medusa, was mortal and all who looked upon her were turned to stone.



THE HERO PERSEUS FIGHTS MEDUSA.

PERSEUS AND THE GORGONS.

Only one hero was brave enough to face the Gorgons: the demigod Perseus. He was the child of Danaë and Zeus. The story goes that Perseus and his mother were locked in a chest and cast into the sea by a wicked king named Acrisius. The chest landed at Seriphos, where King Polydectes fell in love with Danaë and wanted to get rid of Perseus. When Perseus boasted that he could fetch him Medusa's head, the king was delighted. Perseus could not achieve his boast until he was helped by Hermes and Athena, who gave him a scythe and shield. They led him to the Graeae—three crones with one eye and one tooth between them, who were the Gorgons' sisters. Perseus stole the eye and tooth to make the Graeae tell him where the Gorgons were. They also told him how to find three nymphs, who lent him a cap of invisibility, a purse and winged sandals. Then, Perseus flew invisibly to the Gorgons and fought Medusa by looking at her reflection in his shield. He cut off Medusa's head, placed it in the purse and returned with it to Seriphos, where he turned Polydectes and his wicked court to stone.

MONSTERS.

Many ancient Greek monsters looked part human. The Cyclopes, for example, who made Zeus's famous thunderbolt, looked like giant humans with only one eye each. The centaurs were a race of beings that had a man's torso on a horse's body. Some, like Chiron, were wise teachers, but most were warlike. They were defeated with the help of Theseus, the Athenian hero who also slew the bull-headed Minotaur in the Labyrinth of Crete.



A MENAGERIE OF MONSTERS.

BEASTS.

The Calydonian boar was one of the fiercest beasts in the Greek myths, although it looked like an ordinary boar. Most mythical beasts were fantastical blends of many animals. The fire-breathing Chimaera, for example, had a lion's head, a dragon's tail and a goat's body. It was slain by the hero Bellerophon, who also tamed another beast, the winged horse Pegasus, using a magic bridle that was given to him by the goddess Athena.

THE SPHINX.

There were few monsters as intelligent as the Sphinx. With the face of a woman, the body of a lion and the wings of a bird, it terrorised the city of Thebes, strangling anyone who could not answer its riddle: "What goes on four legs in the morning, two at noon and three in the evening?" The hero Oedipus hit upon the answer: "Man". Oedipus realised that the Sphinx was comparing a man's life to a day. In the morning of life, when a man is a baby, he crawls on his hands and feet, making "four legs". In the middle of life, when he is an adult, he walks on two legs. And in the evening of life, when he is old, he uses a stick, making "three legs". Having been defeated, the Sphinx destroyed itself.





OEDIPUS AND THE SPHINX.

DRAGONS.

Many of the ancient Greek monsters that heroes needed to defeat were dragon-like in appearance. On the left, the student will find a short booklet describing these creatures. On its cover is a picture of Echidna, the mate of evil Typhon.



July 19th, Borodinghi: This is the town where the famous Lord Byron died. I tried to retrieve pieces of statue from the nearby ruins of Calydon but was chased off by a mad boar. A superstitious person might even have thought the creature was protecting the ruins. I fared much better back in town, where a trader sold me a genuine piece of the original Golden Fleece. Zeus be praised!



The Boar of Calydon.

THE WAR AGAINST TROY.

IN TURKEY LIES THE PLAIN where the town of Troy once stood. The walls of the town were said to have been built by Poseidon himself. It was surrounding these walls that the most famous war in all of Greek mythology took place – the Trojan War. When Helen, the wife of the Greek king Menelaus, was abducted by Paris, a prince of Troy, a thousand Greek ships set sail for Troy to lay siege to the city and rescue her.



GREEK VERSES TROJANS.

September 27th, Olympus. How I shall laugh at Lady Hestia and Sir Pallas now. Who cares for relics when I can make my own marvels. Or shall I smite them? With weapons of solid gold?



THE APPLE OF DISCORD.

September 27th, Olympus. All I touch slowly turns to gold. Even food. A horror is dawning. Could there be a clue in Midas's story? There must be an escape! Surely father Zeus wants me to eat!

THE JUDGEMENT OF PARIS.

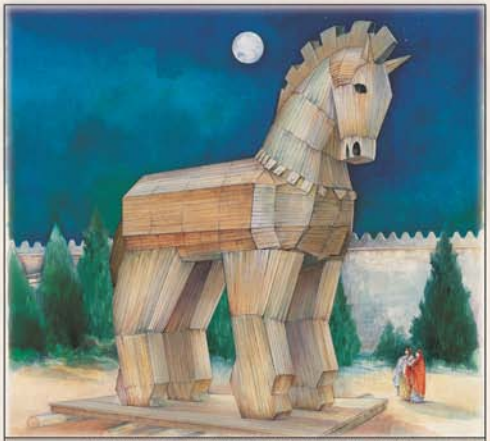
The conflict began at a wedding to which all the Gods were invited except for Eris, the goddess of Strife. Angrily, she threw an apple with the words, "for the fairest" among Athena, Hera, and Aphrodite. Zeus asked Paris to choose whom to give the apple. Athena offered wisdom, Hera all of Asia, but Paris took Aphrodite's offer – the hand of the most beautiful woman in the world.



THE JUDGEMENT OF PARIS.

THE GREEKS SET SAIL.

The problem with Aphrodite offering Paris the hand of Helen, the most beautiful woman in the world was that she was already married, to Menelaus, king of Sparta. When Paris visited Sparta, Aphrodite magically made Helen fall in love with him, helping him to kidnap her and take her to Troy. Menelaus was furious, seeking help from his brother Agamemnon, king of Mycenae, and from all of the Greek kings and princes, who were then called Acheans, including heroes such as Achilles and Odysseus. At first, not sure of the way to Troy, the Greek ships were were scattered by a storm and had to return to Greece. But eventually, they regrouped and a massive fleet of a thousand ships set sail towards Troy in order to rescue Helen. They laid siege to the city in a war that lasted ten years, with each side being helped or hindered by different Olympian gods, who each had their own reasons for joining in the struggle.



THE GREEK'S GIFT: THE WOODEN HORSE IS LEFT FOR THE TROJANS.

ACHILLES.

The Greek hero Achilles was nearly invulnerable, because his mother had dipped him in the River Styx as a baby. In doing so, she had held him by his heel, and so that did not get wet and remained vulnerable. At one stage during the Trojan War, Achilles refused to fight. The Greeks began to lose, and so his friend Patroclus donned his armour in order to give the Greeks the impression that Achilles was fighting with them once more. The ruse worked, but Patroclus was slain. Angrily, Achilles fought and killed Hector, the mightiest champion of the Trojans, and the brother of Paris. But Achilles himself was slain by an arrow shot by Paris, which struck him in his vulnerable heel.

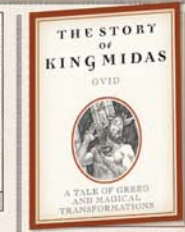


A THOUSAND GREEK SHIPS.

THE TROJAN HORSE.

After the death of Achilles at the hands of Paris, the Greeks were unsure how to continue their war against the Trojans. For although they won many battles against them on the wide plain in front of the city, they were unable to get into the city of Troy itself. And as long as the walls of Troy stood, they could not finish the war by actually rescuing Helen. But then the Greek hero Odysseus came up with a cunning plan to break the deadlock.

Odysseus ordered the Greeks to build an enormous horse – a symbol of the god Poseidon – out of wood. He then hid in the hollow belly of the horse with a number of other Greek heroes, while the main Greek fleet set sail, pretending that they had given up hope of winning the war and were returning home to Greece. In reality, the fleet merely sailed to the nearby island of Tenedos and waited out of sight. The Trojans, believing the Greek army had finally left them, dragged the wooden horse into the city in delight. But that night, Odysseus and the Greek heroes crept down out of the wooden horse and opened the gates of Troy. The Greek fleet returned in the night, and the soldiers flooded into the city. The sleeping Trojans were completely taken by surprise. The Greeks had no trouble in sacking and burning the city. Helen and Menelaus were finally reunited. Paris was killed, and the ten year war was finally over. However, although the Greeks set out to return home at once many of them, including Odysseus himself, faced difficulties, storms and adventures that would, in some cases, last too long years.



October 1st, Olympus. Having read the story of Midas, I begged Zeus to take his gift back, but thunder rumbled like laughter. There is no help. I touched my own head and now I too am turning to gold. I must write a letter. Morning! Before it is too late for me to hold this pen!



ACHILLES HEEL

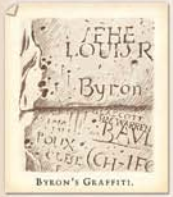
POSEIDON AND THE SEA.

SOUNION, SITE OF the temple of Poseidon, stands on a promontory near Athens. There, a watch was kept on all the ships approaching the city. Poseidon, god of the sea, was, with Athena, one of the chief gods of Athens and an important god for the Mediterranean world, where so much travel and trade went by sea. Poseidon could either keep the sea calm or raise up storms and tempests to drown even the best of sailors.



RUINS OF SOUNION.

August 3rd, Sounion.
I arrived at Athens but did not meet Mr. Pelakis. Instead, I have come to Sounion to see what I can find at the ruined temple of Poseidon.



BYRON'S GRAFFITI.

August 4th, Sounion. I have found the spot where Lord Byron carved his name in the temple. What vandalism! It's a shame I can't chip it off - it might fetch a few pounds as an interesting curiosity.



POSEIDON AND AMPHITRITE RIDE THROUGH THE WAVES IN A CHARIOT.

POSEIDON AND AMPHITRITE.

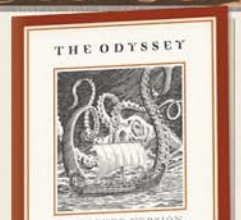
Poseidon's wife was called Amphitrite. When he first wooed her, she fled and hid in the Atlantic Ocean, so Poseidon sent a dolphin to chase after her and bring her back. Poseidon and Amphitrite married and had a son named Triton, who had the body of a man and the tail of a fish and who lived with them in their palace under the sea. Triton carried a conch shell, which he could blow either to raise or quieten the winds. Poseidon himself carried a trident, and he and Amphitrite are often shown in Greek paintings riding across the ocean in a chariot pulled either by mythical creatures known as hippocamps, which are half horse and half fish, or by horses themselves. Horses were sacred to Poseidon and some myths say that he created them as a gift for the Athenians.



TRITON BLOWING HIS CONCH.

EARTHQUAKES.

Poseidon was known as the 'Earth shaker' or god of earthquakes. He was a vengeful god. The Odyssey tells how the hero Odysseus was pursued by Poseidon's anger after he blinded his son, a Cyclops named Polyphemus. Some believed that the earthquake that devastated the city of Sparta in 464 BC was caused by Poseidon as revenge for the Spartans' killing of some of his worshippers.

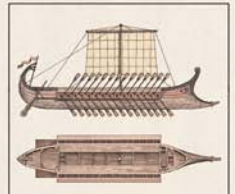


SEAFARING.

Travelling by sea was very important in the ancient Greek world, as it was a faster way to travel and trade goods than going by land. Many tales of the Greek heroes involve journeys by sea, of which one of the most famous is the story of Jason and the Argonauts. The type of ship that the Greeks used had banks of oars on either side and one or two sails. A warship often had a carved end that could be rammed into enemy ships in order to sink them, since gunpowder had not yet been invented.

SEA CREATURES.

A large number of mythological creatures were thought to live in the sea. These included the Nereids, or sea nymphs, of whom there were said to be fifty. The sea nymph Thetis was the mother of the Greek hero Achilles. There were also a number of half-beast, half-fish creatures, such as the hippocamps. In later Greek myths there were tritons, a race of beings that looked like Poseidon's son Triton, and there was Delphin, the faithful dolphin-attendant of Poseidon, who had brought Amphitrite to him. There were many monsters in the sea, including Scylla and Charybdis, and the ketea—serpent-like monsters with very sharp teeth. Perseus slew one of the ketea while rescuing Andromeda, a maiden who was chained to a rock at the edge of the sea.



AN ANCIENT GREEK BIREME.



ANCIENT SPARTA.

August 5th, Athens: Lady Hestia writes that I must hand over all my finds to Mr. Pelakis. Bah! I detest jealousy!



AN EARTHQUAKE.

August 6th, north of Athens: I survived an earthquake today. They are common here, but could it be a warning from Zeus that Lady Hestia is actually in league with Mr. Pelakis to steal my finds?