

The Contest of Athena and Poseidon

There once came a time in Ancient Greece when the first king of Athens, Cecrops, who was half person and half snake, had to find a patron deity for the city state of Athens. The two Olympian gods who were particularly interested in the patronage were Poseidon, the god of the Seas and Athena, the goddess of Wisdom and Skill. They presented themselves in front of Cecrops and Cecrops asked from them to offer a gift truly valuable for Athens.

Poseidon came first: he struck the earth powerfully and created a well with his trident. Immediately, streaming water shot forth, but the water turned out to be salty and not very useful for the population.

Next, it was the turn of goddess Athena. Athena stepped forward, struck her spear into the ground and then she kneeled and planted an olive branch in it. This way she created an olive tree, as a symbolization of peace and prosperity on earth.

Cecrops was very impressed by Athena's gift. So he chose Athena to lay claim of the city of Athens and the city was named after her. God Poseidon, however, was not pleased with the decision of Cecrops and cursed the city of Athens to never have enough water from then on. After that, it is said that a major problem of water shortage started in Athens, which continues until nowadays.

The Birth of Dionysus

Semele was a daughter of Cadmus, the first king of Thebes, famous for her extraordinary beauty and grace. When Zeus, the King of the gods, saw the princess, he fell in love with her .

Soon Semele became pregnant of Zeus, but Zeus' jealous wife Hera begrudged Semele's pregnancy and tried to destroy her... so one day she planted seeds of doubt in Semele's mind and made her very suspicious about Zeus' divine nature.

At that time, Zeus was deeply in love with Semele. To please her, he swore upon the sacred river of the gods Styx to make any wish of Semele come true. Semele asked from Zeus to reveal all his dignity among his lightnings and his thunderbolts.

Zeus first tried to hold back...but he had already made a sacred oath and was forced to obey Semele's order. So he revealed himself! Immediately, lightnings appeared and everything Zeus' thunderbolt touched was shaking and moving, wrapped in fire. Undoubtedly, Zeus was the Supreme God of Mount Olympus.

Fires were also wrapped around the beautiful Semele, burning her body to death, because any mortal who would sight a deity in all his glory was cursed to die.

By that time, Dionysus was still in Semele's womb. However, Zeus managed to rescue the infant by binding him in his thigh. Then he handed Dionysus to his messenger Hermes, who brought the baby to Semele's sister Ino and her husband Athamantas. This was the couple Zeus had chosen to raise his newborn child.

Posiedon, Agaeus, and the Fatal Curse

Once, Poseidon, the god of the Seas, fell in love with Astypalaia, the sister of Europe, and abducted her. The couple gave birth to a son and named him Agaeus, who later on would participate in the Argonautic expedition.

Agaeus lived on the island of Samos and was an excellent winegrower. But undoubtedly, he was very harsh on his workers and treated them like slaves. One day, a servant became furious about the way Agaeus treated him: "Never should you drink wine from your vineyard!", he cursed his master.

Time passed by, until one fine day the wine was prepared and ready to drink. Happily, Agaeus called his servant and told him: "See how ridiculous you were! Your curse was in vain!"

Calmly, the servant replied: "There is a long distance between this glass and your lips..."

Right at that moment, a slave informed Agaeus about a wild boar that destroyed his country. Hastily, Agaeus left his glass and rushed against the beast. Ultimately, the boar devoured Agaeus and the prophecy was verified.

This myth was dedicated to the people who quickly jump to conclusions.

Artemis, Apollo, and the tears of Niobe

Niobe was the wife of Amphion, the King of Thebes. Together they had seven sons and seven daughters. Niobe and Amphion were very proud of their children.

Until day, Niobe started boasting that she was superior than Leto, since Leto was only blessed with two children, Apollo, the god of the sun and Artemis, the goddess of the hunt. Outraged by the insult, Leto swore revenge on Niobe, so she asked from her children Apollo and Artemis to eliminate Niobe's children one by one.

Apollo and Artemis obeyed and they killed all fourteen children with arrows dipped in poison. Apollo aimed at the male, whereas Artemis aimed at the female children. After their awful death, Niobe's children had to remain without burial for nine whole days, because Zeus, the King of the Gods, promised he would turn anyone who attempted to bury the children into stone.

The royal couple was inconsolable. Amphion committed suicide, while Niobe resorted to Siplyos, a city of the Near East. Once there, she pleaded with the gods for mercy, asking them to take away her life. The gods finally sympathized and they turned Niobe into stone, placing her at the peak of the city.

Ever since that day, every summer, one can see drops of water seeping out of the stone's pores...they are nothing but the tears of Niobe!

Hades and Menthe

Minthe (Menthe) was a beautiful water Nymph deeply in love with Hades, the Greek God of the Underworld.

One day, while Hades' wife Persephone was strolling along the river Acheron (the river of woes), she stumbled upon her husband and his mistress Menthe. Infuriated, she took revenge by transforming Menthe into a herbaceous, tiny plant, with inconspicuous leaves so that anyone could easily step upon her.

Hades, however, showed mercy for Menthe and, on his try to comfort her, he endowed Menthe with an divine, aromatic scent to last forever. It is the plant which is nowadays known as the **mint**.

Hermes and the Crocus Flower

Crocus was a dear friend of Greek god Hermes (Mercury), the god of the Trade in Ancient Greece.

One day, while the two friends were throwing the disc to each other, Hermes hit Crocus on the head and wounded him fatally.

Three drops of the blood that spilled on the earth transformed into a small flower with shiny stamens. The flower was named after Crocus to honor the Greek hero.

Goddess Demeter and the Wrath of Nature

Erysichthon, the Cruel Hero

In Ancient times, there was a hero from Thessaly in Central Greece, whose name was Erysichthon. His reputation was not exactly one of being kind, but rather an insulter, a very arrogant and greedy person, who was thinking only about himself.

The Sacred Grove and the Hero's Disrespect

During that time in Thessaly, there was a grove dedicated to the goddess Demeter and right in its center, a huge oak tree was rising so high that it could reach the heaven. This tree was dedicated to Demeter and the people in Thessaly loved it very much. They were decorating it and used it to make vows to the goddess.

But Erysichthon differs from all others... consumed with greed, he orders his slaves to destroy the grove and cut the tree in order to make a banquet table. However, no one of the slaves dare to do a disrespect like that, so Erysichthon undertakes the task himself.

With his first chop, the goddess appears to him disguised as a priest, and asks him to stop his destructive work, but without avail...Seeing that Erysichthon will not compromise, she throws the disguise and emerges with all her divine glory. All slaves get scared, but Demeter removes their fears and sends them away. Then she turns to the sacrilegious Erysichthon and punishes him without mercy.

The Fatal Curse

From this moment on, Erysichthon is cursed with a never-ending appetite, longing for anything edible on his way. He starts with the food in his own home, but yet he cannot still his hunger. Then he goes on searching for food in the streets, craving for any food he can find, even that dedicated to gods. Still, his yearning seems invincible. Not knowing what to do, he decides to sell his daughter Mystra, who has powers of a witch and by transforming herself into various shapes always escapes and returns to her father.

Soon Erysichthon finds nothing more to eat and he ends up eating his own flesh until he dies.

An allegorical myth that teaches us to respect nature

The Dragon of Ares and the foundation of Thebes

When Zeus, the King of gods abducted Europe, her brother Cadmus began searching for her everywhere. Soon he reached the city of Delphi, where he encountered the god Apollo, who told Cadmus to stop his quest and follow an cow. Wherever Cadmus would see the cow kneel, right there he was meant to establish a city.

Soon, they approached the area of Thebes, where the Greek hero Cadmus was confronted with a dragon and killed it. The dragon was a son of Ares, the god of war, and the Nymph Telphousa and was guarding the spring of Ares.

When Ares found out that someone killed his sacred dragon, he became furious and forced Cadmus to serve Ares for eight years as a slave in order to become purified. As a reconciliation, Ares gave Cadmus the hand of his daughter Harmonia. Their wedding was attended by all the gods, who endowed the couple with beautiful, precious gifts.

Following the advice of goddess Athena, Cadmus then sowed the dragon's teeth in the earth. Soon, fully armed warriors sprang up, the *Spartoi*, who were aggressive and very angry. Cadmus tried to defeat them by throwing stones at them, while the Spartoi thought that they were attacking each other and so they started fighting disorderly against each until finally they lost their lives.

Only five Spartoi survived: Echion, Oudaios, Chthonius, Hyperenor and Pelorus. Those five were the ones who founded the city of Thebes together with Cadmus and became the first citizens of Thebes. The citadel of ancient Thebes was named "Cadmeia" to honor the hero.