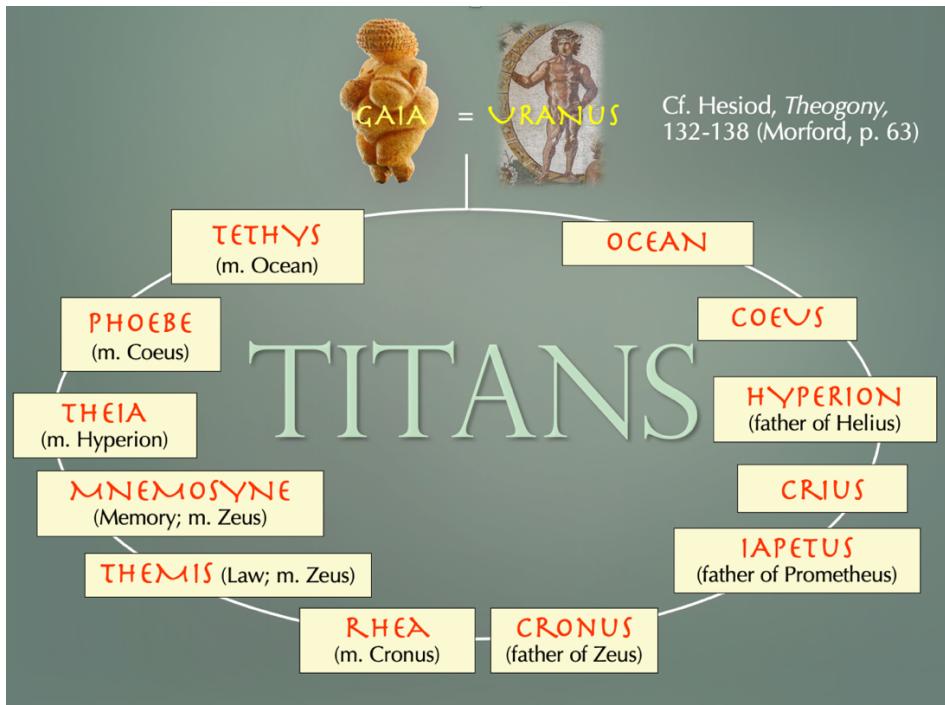


5. *The Titans*

Assigned Reading: Chapter I.3, “Myths of Creation”,
in Mark Morford et al., *Classical Mythology* (11th ed.), pp. 65-81;
Chapter I.4, “Zeus’ Rise to Power”, pp. 82-86

*Children of Gaia and Uranus*

1. “But then Gaia lay with Uranus and bore the deep-eddyng **Oceanus**, and **Coeus**, and **Crius**, and **Hyperion**, and **Iapetus**, and **Theia**, and **Rhea**, and **Themis**, and **Mnemosyne**, and golden-crowned **Phoebe**,* and lovely [erateinē**] **Tethys**. After them, she brought forth wily [*ankylomētēs****] **Cronus**, the youngest and most terrible [*deinotatos*] of her children, and he hated his lusty father.”

Hesiod, *Theogony* 132-138 (cf. Morford, p. 63)

*Your textbook has (erroneously) *Thebe* instead of *Phoebe*.

**This epithet is etymologically related to *erōs*, as ‘lovely’ is to ‘love’ in English.

***Cronus’ epithet means, literally, ‘crooked-scheming’.

‘Titans’

2. Their father, mighty Uranus, often called them by the nickname ‘**Titans**’, reproaching the children that he himself had sired. He would say that, straining [*titainontas*] with presumption [*atasthalia*], they had performed a mighty deed, and that thereafter vengeance [*tisis*] would ensue.”

Hesiod, *Theogony* 207-210 (not in Morford)

*The children of Gaia and Uranus, twelve in number—six male and six female—are called **Titans**, a name that Hesiod artfully but unscientifically derives from the Greek words *titainō* (‘to strain’ or ‘overreach’) and *tisis* (‘vengeance’). The first etymology looks backward to the story the poet has just told of Uranus’ castration (when his son Cronus had, quite literally, ‘overreached’ himself, straining to remove his father’s genitals from inside his mother Gaia’s womb). The second etymology looks forward to the ‘vengeance’ that Cronus himself will suffer, in turn, at the hands of his son, Zeus. The theme of violence and retribution, as we have seen, is endemic to the Succession*

Myth, but it especially haunts the generation known as the Titans. This, at any rate, is the service into which Hesiod puts their myth for his own schematic purposes.

Objects of Cult

Hesiod portrays the Titans (not individually, but as a group) as tyrannical, not because they are such inherently, but for his own schematic purposes. The Succession Myth, with its recurring motif of generational oppression and overthrow, requires it. Elsewhere in Hesiod's own poetry the Titans are, in fact, benign figures. Some of them are even objects of his prayer and praise, as we seen in the opening invocation of the Theogony (#3 below).

3. “Let me begin by singing of the Heliconian Muses, who . . . utter their hymn with lovely voice, praising Zeus the aegis-holder, and Mistress [Potnia] Hera of Argos . . . and the daughter of aegis-holding Zeus, bright-eyed Athena, and brilliant [Phoibos] Apollo, and arrow-pouring Artemis, and earth-holding Poseidon, the Earth-Shaker, and revered *Themis*, and quick-glancing Aphrodite, and lovely golden-crowned Hebe, and Dione, and Leto and *Iapetus* and crooked-counselling *Cronus*, and Eos [Dawn] and great *Helios* [Sun] and bright *Selene* [Moon] and *Gaia* [Earth] and great *Oceanus* [Ocean] and black *Nyx* [Night], and the holy race [*hieron genos*] of other deathless ones [athanatoi] who are forever.”

Hesiod, *Theogony* 1-21 (not in Morford)

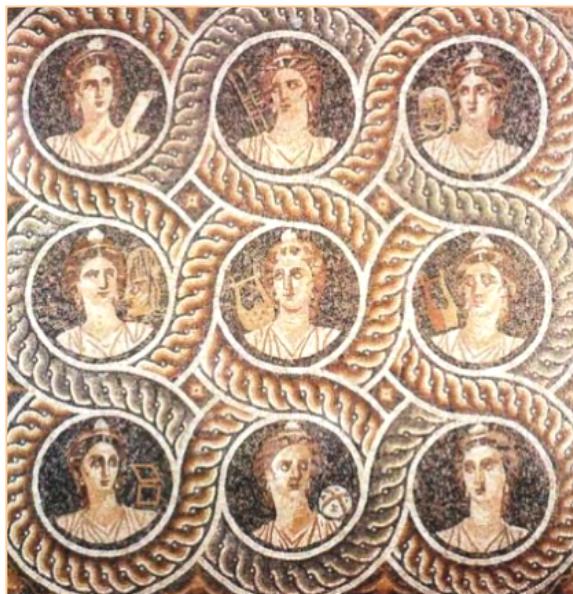
In Hesiod's other poem, the Works and Days, moreover, Cronus will be honoured as the god who presided over the Golden Race, an Edenic time of peace and plenty (more on that in an upcoming lecture). The same figures, in other words, may serve startlingly different mythological purposes, even within the pages of the same author. At their most innocent, the Titans are simply place-holders, marking the generation in between the primordial gods (Gaia, Uranus, Tartarus, Eros, etc.) and the first set of Olympians (Zeus et alii). As such, they could be regarded as ‘otiose’—‘in retirement’, so to speak—having surrendered their jobs to the next generation, as must always happen in an orderly society. Themis ('Lawful Order'), like Gaia before her, is a rare case of an older deity retaining her importance for all time: without 'order', the whole system would collapse. As such, Themis was honoured with her own cult, as may be seen from the statue that was erected in a temple she shared with Nemesis near Athens. Most of the other Titans are quite faceless and lack their own mythologies; their names say everything we need to know about them.

(right) Statue of the Titaness Themis, daughter of Uranus and Gaia, and wife of Zeus. She bore him the Seasons (Horae). This is a rare instance of a Titan who was actually portrayed in ancient art. Marble, c. 300 B.C., from Temple of Nemesis at Rhamnous near Athens. National Archaeological Museum, Athens.



The Titanic Twelve

Ocean's name is self-evident: he is a place more than a person, representing the flowing river that encircles the continents, which is how the ancient Greeks conceived of the ocean. (Homer, you will remember, did give Ocean and his sister/wife *Tethys* ['grandmother'] pride of place as "the source of the gods" [Iliad 14.120], but he did not supply them with personalities. Their nephew Poseidon, by contrast, will cut a much more dramatic figure.) *Phoebe* ('radian') is the moon—or, at any rate, she stands for the moon until her niece Selene, and then her great-niece Artemis, will take over that portfolio (while Apollo, Artemis' brother, will be known as Phoebus). Her brother/husband's name, *Coeus*, is of uncertain meaning; the two of them are less important in themselves than as being the parents of Leto, mother of Apollo and Artemis. *Hyperion* ('high') is a sun god, who will eventually yield that post to his son Helius and then to Apollo; his wife *Theia*'s name simply means 'divine', which is as generic a name for a goddess as you could imagine. The names and roles of other Titans are even less clear: *Crius* and *Iapetus* are of uncertain etymology, famous for their descendants (especially the latter's offspring, Atlas and Prometheus) rather than in their own right. *Mnemosyne* ('memory') and *Themis* ('lawful order') are much more prominent, only because they will eventually bear important children to Zeus: the nine Muses and the three Horae or 'Seasons'.



(left) *The Nine Muses, daughters of Zeus and the Titaness Mnemosyne ('Memory')*. Roman mosaic from Kos, 1st cent. B.C. Great Master's Palace, Rhodes. Like all of the divine groups mentioned by Hesiod, their number is a multiple of three. The Muses, though capable of telling lies, "also know . . . how to utter the absolute truth" (Theogony 27f.): as such, they are venerated by Hesiod in the opening invocation of his poem.

Finally, as the youngest conceived of the Titans, we have *Rhea* ('Earth'?) and *Cronus* ('Ruler'?). In keeping with a motif that occurs with some frequency in ancient literature (cf. Zeus in Greek mythology, or King David in the Hebrew Bible), Cronus supplants his older siblings to become the ruler of his clan. It was his act of violence (castration) against Uranus that allowed the Titans to be born. Unfortunately, the Succession Myth will demand that he fulfil the same role in turn, becoming a tyrannical father-figure in his own right.

Monstrous Births

Gaia and Uranus' other offspring, the Cyclopes and Hecatonchires, will be discussed more fully in our next lecture, on the subject of monsters. It is worth noting here that they will play an important role in the Titanomachy (see below).

The Succession Myth, Part II

4. "Great Cronus swallowed his children as each one came from the womb to the knees of their holy mother [Rhea], with the intent that no other of the illustrious descendants of Uranus should hold kingly power among the immortals. For he learned from Ge and starry Uranus that it was

fated that he be overcome by his own child. And so, he kept vigilant watch and lying in wait he swallowed his children. A deep and lasting grief took hold of Rhea and when she was about to bring forth Zeus, father of gods and men, then she entreated her own parents, Ge and starry Uranus, to plan with her how she might bring forth her child in secret and how the avenging fury [Erinys] of her father, Uranus, and of her children whom great Cronus of the crooked counsel swallowed, might exact vengeance [*tisis*] And they sent her to . . . Crete when she was about



Gaia (not Rhea as in Morford) offers a stone to Cronus.
Roman marble copy of original Greek bas-relief (4th cent. B.C.).
Capitoline Museums, Rome. (Cf. Morford et al., p. 73).

to bring forth the youngest of her children, great Zeus. And vast Ge received him from her in wide Crete to nourish and foster. . . . And [Ge] wrapped up a great stone in infant's coverings and gave it to the son of Uranus Then he took it in his hands, poor wretch, and rammed it down his belly. He did not know in his heart that there was left behind, in the stone's place, his son unconquered and secure, who was soon to overcome him and drive him from his power and rule among the immortals.”

Hesiod, *Theogony* 459-491 (cf. Morford, p. 74)

*The second installment of Hesiod's Succession Myth differs from the first in only a few details. As in the case of Uranus, Cronus likewise tries to suppress the emergence of the next generation, jealous of his own power and unwilling to surrender it. He swallows all but the last of his six children (notice, again, the multiple of three). Rhea, on the advice of Gaia, prevents the same fate for Zeus by hiding the infant in a Cretan cave; Cronus is given a stone wrapped in swaddling clothes instead. Here we have an important difference from the Uranus/Castration story. Cronus will be defeated in his purpose not by violence but by trickery (*mētis*).*

The Pythian Stone

4. “Cronus vomited forth his offspring . . . and he vomited up first the stone which he had swallowed last. Zeus set it fast in the wide-patched earth at goodly Pytho [Delphi] beneath the glens of Mount Parnassus, to be a sign thenceforth and a marvel to mortal men.”

Hesiod, *Theogony* 492ff. (not in Morford)



In a nice set-up for later stages of myth, Hesiod ties the fate of this stone to Delphi (Pythos), the future temple of Apollo. A so-called 'omphalos stone' (literally, 'belly-button') was venerated at Delphi. It may actually have been the remnants of a meteorite, set up in the sacred shrine to mark the centre of the universe. Hesiod identifies it with the stone swallowed by Cronus and then vomited forth: a trophy, in other words, of intelligence over violence, trickery over tyranny. Zeus, the youngest conceived of the first six Olympians, thus became the oldest sibling (his brothers and sisters emerging from Cronus' 'womb' only afterwards). The struggle, of course, is not over; the Titanomachy awaits.

Ancient replica of the omphalos ('navel stone') from Apollo's Delphic shrine: it marked the centre of the universe, an emblem of kosmos. Archaeological Museum, Delphi.

The Birth of the Elder Olympians

With the birth of Rhea and Cronus' six children, we arrive finally at properly mythical gods, i.e., divinities of whom elaborate stories will be told, each with a dramatic personality and an important (not merely otiose) role to play in the history of the cosmos. Once again, they are equally divided among females and males, with the last conceived (Zeus) becoming, through the machinations of his grandmother Gaia, the first born and head of the new pantheon.

5. “Rhea, overpowered by Cronus, bore him glorious children: *Hestia, Demeter* and golden-sandalled *Hera*, strong *Hades*, who dwells in his house beneath the earth with a pitiless heart, and the loud-crashing Earth-Shaker [*Poseidon*], and wise [*mētioeis*] *Zeus*, father of gods and men, by whose thunder the wide earth is shaken.” *Hesiod, Theogony 453-458 (not in Morford)*



The Elder Olympians (left to right): Hestia, goddess of the hearth (Temple of Vesta in the Roman Forum); Demeter, goddess of grain (enthroned); Hera, goddess of marriage and wife of Zeus (bronze bust); Hades, god of the Underworld (with his bride Persephone; vase-painting); Poseidon, god of the sea, earthquakes, and horses (detail of bronze statue); Zeus, god of the sky, Father of men and gods (bronze statuette, with thunderbolt).

The Titanomachy (Succession Myth, Part III)

6. “The gods, givers of good things . . . longed for war more than ever. They roused dire battle, all of them—female and male—on that day, the Titans and the gods born of Cronus, / and those whom Zeus raised to the light from Erebus beneath the earth, terrible and mighty in their monstrous strength, each of whom had one hundred hands springing from his shoulders, and fifty heads growing from his shoulders upon sturdy limbs. These then faced the Titans in baneful warfare, holding enormous boulders in their stout hands. / From the other side, the Titans zealously strengthened their ranks [*phalanxes*].”

Hesiod, *Theogony* 664-676 (not in Morford)



(above) Zeus, thunderbolt in hand, defeats his father Cronus. Detail of the pedimental sculpture from the Temple of Artemis at Corfu, c. 590 B.C. Archaeological Museum of Corfu.

Although engaged in a titanic(!) struggle, the figures' faces betray none of the energy or violence inherent in Hesiod's text. Rather, both Zeus and Cronus wear that famous 'archaic smile' so typical of pre-classical Greek sculpture. Is this a limitation of the sculptor's art, or do we have here a purposeful 'take' on the story, which sees the Olympian victory as a foregone conclusion? This sculpture, after all, occupied the architectural space above the front entrance of Artemis' shrine; it was intended, therefore, to be a visual celebration of the inevitability of Olympian order.

Back to Chaos?

8. “The boundless sea echoed terribly, earth resounded with the great roar, wide heaven trembled and groaned, and high Olympus was shaken from its base by the onslaught of the immortals; the quakes came thick and fast and, with the dread din of the endless chase and mighty weapons, reached down to gloomy Tartarus . . . Earth, the giver of life, roared, everywhere aflame, and on all sides the vast woods crackled loudly with the fire. The whole of the land boiled, and as well the streams of Ocean, and the barren sea. The hot blast engulfed the earth-born Titans and the endless blaze reached the divine Aether; the flashing gleam of the thunder and lightning blinded the eyes even of the mighty. Unspeakable heat possessed Chaos.”

Hesiod, *Theogony* 678-683, 695-700 (Morford et al., p. 83)

7. “Thus they hurled their deadly weapons against one another. The cries of both sides as they shouted reached up to starry heaven, for they came together with a great clamour. Then Zeus did not hold back his might any longer, but now immediately his heart was filled with strength and he showed clearly all his force. He came direct from heaven and Olympus hurling perpetual lightning, and the bolts with flashes and thunder flew in succession from his stout hand with a dense whirling of holy flame.”

Hesiod, *Theogony* 684-694
(Morford et al., p. 83)



The Battle of the Gods and Giants. Giulio Romano, 16th century. Ceiling mural in the Sala dei Giganti, Palazzo del Te, Mantua. Although this Mannerist painting has the Gigantomachy (i.e., the battle of the Olympians against the earth-born Giants, not recorded in Hesiod's account) for its subject, rather than the Titanomachy as such, the two battles are virtual doublets of each other. They represent, in each case, the cosmic struggle between chaos and order. Romano's trompe-l'oeil perspective nicely captures the teetering threat of a world collapsing upon itself, but for the intervention of thunderbolt-wielding Jupiter (Zeus).

