

# CLAS104 Review Notes

---

## Table of Contents

<b>1</b>	<b>What is Mythology?</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1	Introduction . . . . .	1
1.2	Interpretive Theories . . . . .	1
<b>2</b>	<b>The History Behind Classical Mythology</b>	<b>2</b>
2.1	Greek and Roman History and Mythology . . . . .	2

# 1 What is Mythology?

## 1.1 Introduction

- From the Greek "Mythos" which means "word" or "speech", "tale or story".
  - Often these stories are assumed to be entirely false. This is actually not always the case.
  - Typically have historical basis. Sometimes difficult to separate history from story in Greek/Roman myths.
  - Perceptions of historical truth are inherently subjective.
- Mythology can, despite having many elements which we do not consider to be truth, reveal and explore certain absolute truths of human nature and existence.
- Myths continue to play an important role in culture and entertainment.
- A myth is then a story which can be told either through words, painting, music, dance and more.
- We divide myths into three categories:
  1. Myth Proper
    - Deals with gods and their relationship to humans.
    - Good example is Homer's poems.
  2. Saga/Legend
    - Stories with more perceivable connection to history.
    - Good example of this is the Theban saga, in which Thebes, a real Greek city, is at the centre of a more human-focused set of stories.
  3. Folktale
    - Fantastical adventure of heroes
    - Good example is the adventures of Hercules.

## 1.2 Interpretive Theories

- It is perhaps the great complexity of myths and stories from the Greek period that have led to them living on in our culture.
- Imperative to remember that there is no one correct interpretation of a myth. It is possible for one myth to have different meaning for different people.
  1. One of the ways in which mythology has been interpreted historically is one of causation or origin. Etiological stories, from the Greek word Aitia.
    - Mythology explains the causes or origins of certain things which cannot be explained in other ways.

- An example of this would be the story that is found in the Homeric Hymn to Demeter which we will read in this course. In this poem, the goddess Demeter, who is in search of her abducted daughter Persephone, is described founding the religious cult of Demeter at Eleusis in Greece. This was an actual religious cult site in Greece, and therefore the hymn can be seen in part as an explanation for the foundation of the cult.
- 2. Another way is to explain mythology as allegorical or symbolic.
  - What is encountered in myths is representative of aspects of human nature and other universal truths.
  - For example, say that the disguise which Aphrodite uses in order to fool Anchises into thinking she is a mortal woman (as told in the Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite) is representative of a certain deceitful side of erotic love.
- 3. An important approach to mythology with the advent of psychoanalysis was the connection between mythology and the deepest of humans wants and desires.
  - Freud in fact directly connected one of his most famous principles, the Oedipus Complex, with Classical mythology; Freud believed that the desire of a boy to sleep with his mother, or a girl to sleep with her father (which Jung coined the Electra complex), is a repressed desire of humanity in childhood. In the classical myth, Oedipus unwittingly sleeps with his own mother and kills his father; Freud saw this as representative of our own first desires and impulses.
  - The stories of mythology provide models which teach us how to behave and how to interact with our world.
- 4. Connection between myth and society
  - It is important to live within and study a culture, in order to understand its point of view and vision of the world, and this was significant also for understanding the myths of a culture. -Bronislav Malinowski
  - Beyond the individual narrative details of a given myth, one can see underlying structural oppositions in myths of all cultures.
  - Much more analytical approach to myths.

## 2 The History Behind Classical Mythology

### 2.1 Greek and Roman History and Mythology

#### 1. Neolithic Period

- Around 6500 BC agriculture arose in Greece in the early Neolithic period.
- This period in Greece is not of direct concern to our study of mythology. The inhabitants of Greece at this time were not Greek speakers.

#### 2. Early and Middle Bronze Ages

- The innovation of bronze, by adding tin to copper, allowed for a great deal of development in Greece between c. 3000 and 1600 BC.
- In the Middle Bronze age that historians have traditionally dated the arrival of the first Greek speakers into Greece.

### 3. Late Bronze Age (Mycenaean)

- Mycenaean civilization on mainland Greece was also developing during the Middle Bronze Age and learning from Minoan and Near Eastern civilizations.
- In 1450 BC we know that the Mycenaeans took over Crete. In Mycenaean civilization we find some roots of Greek religion and mythology. Many aspects of the myth of the Trojan war, for example, derive from Mycenaean civilization, from descriptions of instruments to the gods involved.

### 4. Dark Age, c. 1150-900 and period of revival c. 900 -750.

- Despite being a dark age in many ways culturally and politically, it is during this period that the mastery of iron was achieved and there were innovations in potting that allowed for new shapes and designs to emerge.
- Extremely important was the development of the alphabet.

### 5. Archaic Period, c. 750-500 BC

- Versions of myth from this period are the first to have survived to us today, such as the poems of Hesiod, Homer, and the so-called Homeric Hymns.
- Colonization, expansion, and innovation characterize the Archaic period in Greece.

### 6. Classical Period, c. 500-323 BC

- Myth was retold and adapted in many forms during the Classical period, including in dramatic performances developed for the first time in Athens.
- For example, the tragedies of Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides (the three most famous tragedians) deal chiefly with mythological themes.

### 7. Hellenistic Period c. 323-30 BC

- It is during this time that Greek scholarship and the study of its literary past began in earnest. Authors of this period draw upon and record earlier versions of myths, as they at the same time adapt and experiment with genres in often subtle ways.

### 8. Foundation of Rome and Roman Republic c. 753 BC - 27 BC

- Roman literature and art of this and later periods often draw extensively upon Greek versions of myth and compositional techniques, but Roman versions are not slavish. They change and adapt mythology to their own ends.

9. Early and High Roman Empire, 27 BC – 200 AD

- It was during this period that the poets Vergil (active early 30s to c. 19 BC) and Ovid (active 20s BC to 17 AD) rose to fame, poets whose works are important sources of Greco-Roman mythology.