

= Mermaid =

A mermaid is a legendary aquatic creature with the head and upper body of a female human and the tail of a fish . Mermaids appear in the folklore of many cultures worldwide , including the Near East , Europe , Africa and Asia . The first stories appeared in ancient Assyria , in which the goddess Atargatis transformed herself into a mermaid out of shame for accidentally killing her human lover . Mermaids are sometimes associated with perilous events such as floods , storms , shipwrecks and drownings . In other folk traditions (or sometimes within the same tradition) , they can be benevolent or beneficent , bestowing boons or falling in love with humans .

The male equivalent of the mermaid is the merman , also a familiar figure in folklore and heraldry . Although traditions about and sightings of mermen are less common than those of mermaids , they are generally assumed to co - exist with their female counterparts .

Some of the attributes of mermaids may have been influenced by the Sirens of Greek mythology . Historical accounts of mermaids , such as those reported by Christopher Columbus during his exploration of the Caribbean , may have been inspired by manatees and similar aquatic mammals . While there is no evidence that mermaids exist outside of folklore , reports of mermaid sightings continue to the present day , including 21st century examples from Israel and Zimbabwe .

Mermaids have been a popular subject of art and literature in recent centuries , such as in Hans Christian Andersen 's well - known fairy tale " The Little Mermaid " (1836) . They have subsequently been depicted in operas , paintings , books , films and comics .

= = Etymology and related terms = =

The word mermaid is a compound of the Old English mere (sea) , and maid (a girl or young woman) . The equivalent term in Old English was merewif . They are conventionally depicted as beautiful with long flowing hair . As cited above , they are sometimes equated with the sirens of Greek mythology (especially the Odyssey) , half - bird femmes fatales whose enchanting voices would lure soon - to - be shipwrecked sailors to nearby rocks , sandbars or shoals .

= = Sirenia = =

Sirenia is an order of fully aquatic , herbivorous mammals that inhabit rivers , estuaries , coastal marine waters , swamps and marine wetlands . Sirenians , including manatees and dugongs , possess major aquatic adaptations : arms used for steering , a paddle used for propulsion , and remnants of hind limbs (legs) in the form of two small bones floating deep in the muscle . They look ponderous and clumsy but are actually fusiform , hydrodynamic and highly muscular , and mariners before the mid - nineteenth century referred to them as mermaids .

= = Sirenomelia = =

Sirenomelia , also called " mermaid syndrome " , is a rare congenital disorder in which a child is born with his or her legs fused together and small genitalia . This condition is about as rare as conjoined twins , affecting one out of every 100 ,000 live births and is usually fatal within a day or two of birth because of kidney and bladder complications . Four survivors were known as of July 2003 .

= = Folklore = =

As the anthropologist A. Asbjørn Jøn noted : " these ' marine beasts ' have featured in folk tradition for many centuries now , and until relatively recently they have maintained a reasonably standard set of characteristics . Many folklorists and mythographers deem that the origin of the mythic mermaid is the dugong , posing a theory that mythicised tales have been constructed around early

sightings of dugongs by sailors . "

= = = Near East , Ancient Greece = = =

The first known mermaid stories appeared in Assyria c . 1000 BC . The goddess Atargatis , mother of Assyrian queen Semiramis , loved a mortal (a shepherd) and unintentionally killed him . Ashamed , she jumped into a lake and took the form of a fish , but the waters would not conceal her divine beauty . Thereafter , she took the form of a mermaid ? human above the waist , fish below ? although the earliest representations of Atargatis showed her as a fish with a human head and arm , similar to the Babylonian god Ea . The Greeks recognized Atargatis under the name Derketo . Sometime before 546 BC , Milesian philosopher Anaximander postulated that mankind had sprung from an aquatic animal species . He thought that humans , who begin life with prolonged infancy , could not have survived otherwise .

A popular Greek legend turned Alexander the Great 's sister , Thessalonike , into a mermaid after her death , living in the Aegean . She would ask the sailors on any ship she would encounter only one question : " Is King Alexander alive ? " (Greek : " ??? ? ????????? ?????????? ; ") , to which the correct answer was : " He lives and reigns and conquers the world " (Greek : " ??? ??? ?????????? ??? ??? ?????? ?????????? ") . This answer would please her , and she would accordingly calm the waters and bid the ship farewell . Any other answer would enrage her , and she would stir up a terrible storm , dooming the ship and every sailor on board .

Lucian of Samosata in Syria (2nd century A.D.) , in De Dea Syria (About the Syrian Goddess) wrote of the Syrian temples he had visited :

" Among them ? Now that is the traditional story among them concerning the temple . But other men swear that Semiramis of Babylonia , whose deeds are many in Asia , also founded this site , and not for Hera but for her own mother , whose name was Derketo . "

" I saw Derketo 's likeness in Phoenicia , a strange marvel . It is woman for half its length ; but the other half , from thighs to feet , stretched out in a fish 's tail . But the image in the Holy City is entirely a woman , and the grounds for their account are not very clear . They consider fish to be sacred , and they never eat them ; and though they eat all other fowls they do not eat the dove , for they believe it is holy . And these things are done , they believe , because of Derketo and Semiramis , the first because Derketo has the shape of a fish , and the other because ultimately Semiramis turned into a dove . Well , I may grant that the temple was a work of Semiramis perhaps ; but that it belongs to Derketo I do not believe in any way . For among the Egyptians some people do not eat fish , and that is not done to honor Derketo . "

= = = One Thousand and One Nights = = =

The One Thousand and One Nights collection includes several tales featuring " sea people " , such as " Djullanar the Sea @-@ girl " . Unlike depictions of mermaids in other mythologies , these are anatomically identical to land @-@ bound humans , differing only in their ability to breathe and live underwater . They can (and do) interbreed with land humans , and the children of such unions have the ability to live underwater . In the tale " Abdullah the Fisherman and Abdullah the Merman " , the protagonist Abdullah the Fisherman gains the ability to breathe underwater and discovers an underwater society that is portrayed as an inverted reflection of society on land . The underwater society follows a form of primitive communism where concepts like money and clothing do not exist . In " The Adventures of Bulukiya " , the protagonist Bulukiya 's quest for the herb of immortality leads him to explore the seas , where he encounters societies of mermaids .

Due to their vaguely anthropomorphic shape , dried skates have long been described as mermaids . Often their appearance is deliberately modified to make them look even more human . In Europe , dried skates , sometimes called devil fish , (not to be confused with devil fish or devil rays , two species of ray native to the north Atlantic) were displayed as mermaids , angels , demons , or basilisks . In Britain they are known as Jenny Hanivers , perhaps in reference to Antwerp , where they were made by sailors . Dried skates are also known in Mexico , where they are believed to

have magical powers , and are used in healing rituals .

= = = British Isles = = =

The Norman chapel in Durham Castle , built around 1078 by Saxon stonemasons , has what is probably the earliest surviving artistic depiction of a mermaid in England . It can be seen on a south @-@ facing capital above one of the original Norman stone pillars .

Mermaids appear in British folklore as unlucky omens , both foretelling disaster and provoking it . Several variants of the ballad Sir Patrick Spens depict a mermaid speaking to the doomed ships . In some versions , she tells them they will never see land again ; in others , she claims they are near shore , which they are wise enough to know means the same thing . Mermaids can also be a sign of approaching rough weather , and some have been described as monstrous in size , up to 2 @,@ 000 feet (610 m) .

Mermaids have also been described as able to swim up rivers to freshwater lakes . In one story , the Laird of Lorntie went to aid a woman he thought was drowning in a lake near his house ; a servant of his pulled him back , warning that it was a mermaid , and the mermaid screamed at them that she would have killed him if it were not for his servant . But mermaids could occasionally be more beneficent ; e.g. , teaching humans cures for certain diseases . Mermen have been described as wilder and uglier than mermaids , with little interest in humans .

According to legend , a mermaid came to the Cornish village of Zennor where she used to listen to the singing of a chorister , Matthew Trehella . The two fell in love , and Matthew went with the mermaid to her home at Pendour Cove . On summer nights , the lovers can be heard singing together . At the Church of Saint Senara in Zennor , there is a famous chair decorated by a mermaid carving which is probably six hundred years old .

Some tales raised the question of whether mermaids had immortal souls , answering in the negative . The figure of Lí Ban appears as a sanctified mermaid , but she was a human being transformed into a mermaid . After three centuries , when Christianity had come to Ireland , she was baptized . The Irish mermaid is called merrow in tales such as " Lady of Gollerus " published in the 19th century . In Scottish mythology , a ceasg is a fresh @-@ water mermaid , though little beside the term has been preserved in folklore .

Mermaids from the Isle of Man , known as ben @-@ varrey , are considered more favorable toward humans than those of other regions , with various accounts of assistance , gifts and rewards . One story tells of a fisherman who carried a stranded mermaid back into the sea and was rewarded with the location of treasure . Another recounts the tale of a baby mermaid who stole a doll from a human little girl , but was rebuked by her mother and sent back to the girl with a gift of a pearl necklace to atone for the theft . A third story tells of a fishing family that made regular gifts of apples to a mermaid and was rewarded with prosperity .

= = = Western Europe = = =

A freshwater mermaid @-@ like creature from European folklore is Melusine . She is sometimes depicted with two fish tails , or with the lower body of a serpent .

The best @-@ known example of mermaids in literature is probably Hans Christian Andersen 's fairy tale , The Little Mermaid , first published in 1837 . In the original story , a young mermaid falls in love with a human prince whom she saves from drowning when his ship is wrecked in a storm . Although her grandmother tells her not to envy humans , who live much shorter lives than mermaids , and whose only consolation is an immortal soul , the mermaid chooses to risk her life in order to be with the prince . She trades her tongue and her beautiful voice to the sea @-@ witch in exchange for a draught that will make her human and allow her to live on land . She will have to rely on her beauty and charm to win the prince 's love , as she will be entirely mute .

The sea @-@ witch warns the mermaid that , although she will be graceful , each step will feel as though she is stepping on knives ; and that if she does not earn the prince 's love , she will die of a broken heart after he weds another . The spell is worked , and the mermaid is found by the prince ,

who sees the resemblance between her and the one who rescued him from drowning , although he does not realize that they are the same person . Although the prince cares deeply for the mermaid , he is betrothed to the daughter of a neighboring king , and the mermaid cannot prevent their marriage .

The mermaid 's sisters trade their beautiful hair to the sea @-@ witch for a knife that the mermaid can use to break the spell and return to the sea . She must kill the prince before dawn on the day after his wedding . But the mermaid still loves the prince and cannot harm him . She flings the knife into the sea and jumps in after it , then begins to dissolve into foam . Then she is transformed into one of the daughters of the air , ethereal beings who strive to earn an immortal soul by doing good deeds in the world of men .

A world @-@ famous statue of the Little Mermaid , based on Andersen 's fairy tale , has been in Copenhagen , Denmark since August 1913 , with copies in 13 other locations around the world ? almost half of them in North America .

In 1989 , Walt Disney Studios released a full @-@ length animated film based on the Andersen fairy tale . Featuring an Academy Award @-@ winning soundtrack with songs by Alan Menken and Howard Ashman , the film garnered glowing reviews , and was credited with revitalizing both the studio and the concept of animated feature films . Notable changes to the plot of Andersen 's story include the elimination of the grandmother character and the religious aspects of the fairy tale , including the mermaid 's quest to obtain an immortal soul . The sea @-@ witch herself replaces the princess to whom the prince becomes engaged , using the mermaid 's voice to prevent her from obtaining the prince 's love . However , on their wedding day the plot is revealed , and the sea @-@ witch is vanquished . The knife motif is not used in the film , which ends with the mermaid and the prince marrying . Among other things , the film was praised for portraying the mermaid as an independent and even rebellious young woman , rather than a passive actor content to let others determine her destiny .

= = = Eastern Europe = = =

Rusalkas are the Slavic counterpart of the Greek sirens and naiads . The nature of rusalkas varies among folk traditions , but according to ethnologist D.K. Zelenin they all share a common element : they are the restless spirits of the unclean dead . They are usually the ghosts of young women who died a violent or untimely death , perhaps by murder or suicide , before their wedding and especially by drowning . Rusalkas are said to inhabit lakes and rivers . They appear as beautiful young women with long pale green hair and pale skin , suggesting a connection with floating weeds and days spent underwater in faint sunlight . They can be seen after dark , dancing together under the moon and calling out to young men by name , luring them to the water and drowning them . The characterization of rusalkas as both desirable and treacherous is prevalent in southern Russia , the Ukraine and Belarus , and was emphasized by 19th @-@ century Russian authors . The best @-@ known of the great Czech nationalist composer Antonín Dvořák 's operas is *Rusalka* .

In *Sadko* (Russian : ?????) , a Russian medieval epic , the title character ? an adventurer , merchant and gusli musician from Novgorod ? lives for some time in the underwater court of the " Sea Tsar " and marries his daughter before finally returning home . The tale inspired such works as the poem " *Sadko* " by Alexei Tolstoy (1817 ? 75) , the opera *Sadko* composed by Nikolai Rimsky @-@ Korsakov and the painting by Ilya Repin .

= = = China = = =

Mermaids are included in the *Shanhaijing* (*Classic of Mountains and Seas*) compilation of Chinese geography and mythology , dating from the 4th century BC . A 15th @-@ century compilation of quotations from Chinese literature tells of a mermaid who " wept tears which became pearls " . An early 19th @-@ century book entitled *Jottings on the South of China* contains two stories about mermaids . In the first , a man captures a mermaid on the shore of Namtao island . She looks human in every respect except that her body is covered with fine hair of many colors . She can 't talk

, but he takes her home and marries her . After his death , the mermaid returns to the sea where she was found . In the second story , a man sees a woman lying on the beach while his ship was anchored offshore . On closer inspection , her feet and hands appear to be webbed . She is carried to the water , and expresses her gratitude toward the sailors before swimming away .

= = = Hinduism = = =

Suvannamaccha (lit. golden mermaid) is a daughter of Ravana that appears in the Cambodian and Thai versions of the Ramayana . She is a mermaid princess who tries to spoil Hanuman 's plans to build a bridge to Lanka but falls in love with him instead . She is a popular figure of Thai folklore .

= = = Africa = = =

Mami Water (Lit . " Mother of the Water ") are water spirits venerated in west , central and southern Africa , and in the African diaspora in the Caribbean and parts of North and South America . They are usually female , but are sometimes male . They are regarded as diabolical beings , and are often femme fatale , luring men to their deaths . The Persian word " ?????? ????? " or " maneli " means both " mermaid " and " stay with me " .

= = = Other = = =

The Neo @-@ Taíno nations of the Caribbean identify a mermaid called Aycayia with attributes of the goddess Jagua and the hibiscus flower of the majagua tree *Hibiscus tiliaceus* . In modern Caribbean culture , there is a mermaid recognized as a Haitian vodou loa called La Sirene (lit . " the mermaid ") , representing wealth , beauty and the orisha Yemaya .

Examples from other cultures are the jengu of Cameroon , the iara of Brazil and the Greek oceanids , nereids and naiads . The ningyo is a fishlike creature from Japanese folklore , and consuming its flesh bestows amazing longevity . Mermaids and mermen are also characters of Philippine folklore , where they are locally known as sirena and siyokoy respectively . The Javanese people believe that the southern beach in Java is a home of Javanese mermaid queen Nyi Roro Kidul . The myth of " Pania of the Reef " , a well known tale of M?ori mythology , has many parallels with stories of sea @-@ people in other parts of the world .

= = Reported sightings = =

In 1493 , sailing off the coast of Hispaniola , Columbus reported seeing three " female forms " which " rose high out of the sea , but were not as beautiful as they are represented " . The logbook of Blackbeard , an English pirate , records that he instructed his crew on several voyages to steer away from charted waters which he called " enchanted " for fear of merfolk or mermaids , which Blackbeard himself and members of his crew reported seeing . These sightings were often recounted and shared by sailors and pirates who believed that mermaids brought bad luck and would bewitch them into giving up their gold and dragging them to the bottom of the sea . Two sightings were reported in Canada near Vancouver and Victoria , one from sometime between 1870 and 1890 , the other from 1967 . A Pennsylvania fisherman reported five sightings of a mermaid in the Susquehanna River near Marietta in June 1881 .

In August 2009 , after dozens of people reported seeing a mermaid leaping out of Haifa Bay waters and doing aerial tricks , the Israeli coastal town of Kiryat Yam offered a \$ 1 million award for proof of its existence . In February 2012 , work on two reservoirs near Gokwe and Mutare in Zimbabwe stopped when workers refused to continue , stating that mermaids had hounded them away from the sites . It was reported by Samuel Sipepa Nkomo , the water resources minister .

= = = Animal Planet broadcasts = = =

In May 2012 , a Mermaids : The Body Found , a television docufiction aired on Animal Planet which centered on the experiences of former National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration scientists , showing a CGI recreation of amateur sound and video of a beached mermaid and discussing scientific theories involving the existence of mermaids . In July 2012 in response to public inquiries , and the possibility that some viewers may have mistaken the programme for a documentary , the National Ocean Service (a branch of NOAA) made the unusual declaration that " no evidence of aquatic humanoids has ever been found " .

A year later in May 2013 , Animal Planet aired another docu @-@ fiction titled Mermaids : The New Evidence featuring " previously unreleased video evidence " , including what a former Iceland GeoSurvey scientist witnessed while diving off the coast of Greenland in an underwater submersible . The videos provide two different shots of what appears to be a humanoid creature approaching and touching their vehicle . NOAA once again released a statement saying " The person identified as a NOAA scientist was an actor . " The actor is separately identified as David Evans of Ontario , Canada .

= = = Hoaxes = = =

In the middle of the 17th century , John Tradescant the elder created a wunderkammer (called Tradescant 's Ark) in which he displayed , among other things , a " mermaid 's hand " . P. T. Barnum 's 19th century taxidermal hoax called the Fiji mermaid has been mentioned above . Others have perpetrated similar hoaxes , which are usually papier @-@ mâché fabrications or parts of deceased creatures , usually monkeys and fish , stitched together for the appearance of a grotesque mermaid . In the wake of the 2004 tsunami , pictures of Fiji " mermaids " circulated on the Internet as supposed examples of items that had washed up amid the devastation , though they were no more real than Barnum 's exhibit .

= = Symbolism = =

According to Dorothy Dinnerstein 's book The Mermaid and the Minotaur , human @-@ animal hybrids such as mermaids and minotaurs convey the emergent understanding of the ancients that human beings were both one with and different from animals :

[Human] nature is internally inconsistent , that our continuities with , and our differences from , the earth 's other animals are mysterious and profound ; and in these continuities , and these differences , lie both a sense of strangeness on earth and the possible key to a way of feeling at home here . "

= = Art and literature = =

Famous in more recent centuries is the fairy tale The Little Mermaid (1836) by Hans Christian Andersen , whose works have been translated into over 100 languages . The mermaid (as conceived by Andersen) is similar to an undine , a water nymph in German folklore who could only obtain an immortal soul by marrying a human being . Andersen 's heroine inspired a bronze sculpture in Copenhagen harbour and influenced Western literary works such as Oscar Wilde 's The Fisherman and His Soul and H.G. Wells ' The Sea Lady . Sue Monk Kidd wrote a book called The Mermaid Chair loosely based on the legends of Saint Senara and the mermaid of Zennor .

Sculptures and statues of mermaids can be found in many countries and cultures , with over 130 public art mermaid statues across the world . Countries with public art mermaid sculptures include Russia , Finland , Lithuania , Poland , Romania , Denmark , Norway , England , Scotland , Ireland , Germany , Netherlands , Belgium , France , Spain , Italy , Austria , Switzerland , Greece , Turkey , India , China , Thailand , South Korea , Japan , Guam , Australia , New Zealand , Brazil , Ecuador , Colombia , Mexico , Cayman Islands , Mexico , Saudi Arabia (Jeddah) , the United States (including Hawaii and Virgin Islands) and Canada . Some of these mermaid statues have become icons of their city or country , and have become major tourist attractions in themselves . The Little

Mermaid (statue) in Copenhagen is an icon of that city as well as of Denmark . The Havis Amanda statue symbolizes the rebirth of the city of Helsinki , capital of Finland . The Syrenka (mermaid) is part of the Coat of Arms of Warsaw , and is considered a protector of Warsaw , capital of Poland , which publicly displays statues of their mermaid .

Musical depictions of mermaids include those by Felix Mendelssohn in his Fair Melusina overture and the three " Rhine daughters " in Richard Wagner 's Der Ring des Nibelungen . Lorelei , the name of a Rhine mermaid immortalized in the Heinrich Heine poem of that name , has become a synonym for a siren . The Weeping Mermaid is an orchestral piece by Taiwanese composer Fan @-@ Long Ko .

An influential image was created by John William Waterhouse , from 1895 to 1905 , entitled A Mermaid . An example of late British Academy style artwork , the piece debuted to considerable acclaim (and secured Waterhouse 's place as a member of the Royal Academy) , but disappeared into a private collection and did not resurface until the 1970s . It is currently once again in the Royal Academy 's collection . Mermaids were a favorite subject of John Reinhard Weguelin , a contemporary of Waterhouse . He painted an image of the mermaid of Zennor as well as several other depictions of mermaids in watercolour .

Film depictions include the romantic comedy Splash (1984) and Aquamarine (2006) . A 1963 episode of the television series Route 66 entitled " The Cruellest Sea " featured a mermaid performance artist working at Weeki Wachee aquatic park . Mermaids also appeared in the popular supernatural drama television series Charmed , and were the basis of its spin @-@ off series Mermaid . In She Creature (2001) , two carnival workers abduct a mermaid in Ireland c . 1900 and attempt to transport her to America . The film Pirates of the Caribbean : On Stranger Tides mixes old and new myths about mermaids : singing to sailors to lure them to their death , growing legs when taken onto dry land , and bestowing kisses with magical healing properties . Animated films include Disney 's musical version of Andersen 's tale , The Little Mermaid , and Hayao Miyazaki 's Ponyo . The Australian teen dramedy H2O : Just Add Water chronicles the adventures of three modern @-@ day mermaids along the Gold Coast of Australia .

= = = Heraldry = = =

In heraldry , the charge of a mermaid is commonly represented with a comb and a mirror , and blazoned as a " mermaid in her vanity " . In addition to vanity , mermaids are also a symbol of eloquence .

A shield and sword @-@ wielding mermaid (Syrenka) is on the official coat of arms of Warsaw . Images of a mermaid have symbolized Warsaw on its arms since the middle of the 14th century . Several legends associate Triton of Greek mythology with the city , which may have been the origin of the mermaid 's association .

The city of Norfolk , Virginia , also uses a mermaid as a symbol . The personal coat of arms of Michaëlle Jean , a former Governor General of Canada , features two mermaids as supporters .

= = Mermaid fandom = =

Interest in mermaid costuming has grown alongside the popularity of fantasy cosplay as well as the availability of inexpensive monofins used in the construction of mermaid costumes . These costumes are typically designed to be used while swimming , in an activity known as mermaiding . Mermaid fandom conventions have also been held .

= = Human divers = =

The Ama are Japanese skin divers , predominantly women , who traditionally dive for shellfish and seaweed wearing only a loincloth and who have been in action for at least 2 @, @ 000 years . Starting in the twentieth century , they have increasingly been regarded as a tourist attraction . They operate off reefs near the shore , and some perform for sightseers instead of diving to collect a

harvest . They have been romanticized as mermaids .

Professional female divers have performed as mermaids at Florida 's Weeki Wachee Springs since 1947 . The state park calls itself " The Only City of Live Mermaids " and was extremely popular in the 1960s , drawing almost one million tourists per year . Most of the current performers work part @-@ time while attending college , and all are certified Scuba divers . They wear fabric tails and perform aquatic ballet (while holding their breath) for an audience in an underwater stage with glass walls . Children often ask if the " mermaids " are real . The park 's PR director says " Just like with Santa Claus or any other mythical character , we always say yes . We 're not going to tell them they 're not real " .

= = Gallery = =