

Mycenaean, Any member of a group of warlike Indo-European peoples who entered [Greece](#) from the north starting c. 1900 bc and established a [Bronze Age culture](#) on the mainland and nearby islands. Their culture was dependent on that of the [Minoans](#) of [Crete](#), who for a time politically dominated them. They threw off Minoan control c. 1400 and were dominant in the Aegean until they themselves were overwhelmed by the next wave of invaders c. 1150. [Mycenae](#) continued to exist as a city-state into the period of Greek dominance, but by the 2nd century ad it was in ruins. Mycenaean [myths](#) and [legends](#) lived on through oral transmission into later stages of Greek civilization and form the basis of Homeric epic and Greek tragedy. Their language is believed to be the most ancient form of Greek.

Greek mythology, body of stories concerning the gods, heroes, monsters, and rituals of the [ancient Greeks](#) and [Classical antiquity](#). The [myths](#) and [legends](#) often explained natural events, such as seasonal change, helped determine social and [moral](#) values, and deeply influenced ancient art and literature. In the popular piety of the Greeks, the [myths](#) were viewed as true though complex accounts and formed the basis of religious beliefs and practices. Greek mythology has subsequently had extensive influence on [the arts](#) and [literature](#) of Western civilization, which fell heir to much of Greek [culture](#). Poets and artists from ancient times to the present have derived inspiration from Greek mythology and have discovered contemporary significance and relevance in classical mythological themes.

The Greek Pantheon: Who Are the 12 Olympians?

Meet the [gods and goddesses](#) who lived on [Mount Olympus](#).

- [Zeus](#): Chief deity, god of weather
- [Hera](#): Queen of the Olympians, goddess of marriage and the life of women

- **Athena**: Goddess of war (representing the intellectual and strategic side of war), handicraft, and practical reason
- **Aphrodite**: Goddess of sexual love and beauty
- **Poseidon**: God of the sea, earthquakes, and horses
- **Hermes**: God of fertility, travelers, merchants, and thieves, protector of cattle, divine messenger
- **Hades**: God of the underworld, only one of the 12 not to reside on **Mount Olympus**
- **Dionysus**: God of fruitfulness and vegetation, wine, and ecstasy
- **Demeter**: Goddess of agriculture
- **Apollo**: God of many functions, associated with prophecy, music, archery, and healing
- **Ares**: God of war (representing the distasteful aspects of brutal warfare and slaughter)
- **Artemis**: Goddess of wild animals, the hunt, and vegetation and of chastity and childbirth

Sources of myths: Literary and archaeological

The **Homeric poems**: The **Iliad** and the **Odyssey**

The 5th-century-bce Greek historian **Herodotus** remarked that **Homer** and **Hesiod** gave to the Olympian gods—the 12 gods who lived on **Mount Olympus** and presided over every facet of human life—their familiar characteristics. In the first book of the *Iliad*, the god **Apollo**, unnamed but described as the son of **Zeus** and **Leto**, was instantly identifiable to the Greek reader, as were the Greek kings **Agamemnon** and **Menelaus** when described as the sons of **Atreus**.

In both cases, the audience is expected to have knowledge of the myths that preceded their literary rendering. Little is known to suggest that the Greeks treated Homer, or any other source of Greek myths, as mere entertainment.

The works of [Hesiod](#): *Theogony* and *Works and Days*

The First Woman

Hesiod relates the story of [Pandora](#), the first woman in Greek mythology, in the *Theogony* and in *Works and Days*. The first epic chronicles her creation by Zeus after [Prometheus](#) gives fire to mortals. The second epic records the tale of Pandora's jar of evils (16th-century translations of the epic changed the jar to the more well-known box).

The fullest and most important source of myths about the origin of the gods is the *Theogony* of [Hesiod](#) (c. 700 bce). The elaborate genealogies are accompanied by folktales and etiological myths (myths that explain origins). The *Works and Days* shares some of these myths in the narrative framework of a farming almanac and uses them to deliver homilies on [justice](#) and [morality](#). The orthodox view treats the two poems as quite different in theme and treats the *Works and Days* as a [theodicy](#) (an explanation of why God permits evil). It is possible, however, to treat the two poems as a diptych, each part dependent on the other. The *Theogony* declares the identities and alliances of the gods, while the *Works and Days* gives advice on the best way to succeed in a dangerous world, and Hesiod urges that the most reliable—though by no means certain—way is to be just.

Fragmentary post-Homeric epics of varying date and authorship filled the gaps in the accounts of the [Trojan War](#) recorded in the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. The *Homeric Hymns*—a series of 34 poems addressing the gods by unknown authors but [ascribed](#) to Homer—are the source of several important religious myths. Many of the [lyric](#) poets preserved various

myths, but the odes of [Pindar](#) of [Thebes](#) (flourished 6th–5th century bce) are particularly rich in [myth](#) and [legend](#). The works of the three tragedians—[Aeschylus](#) (author of the [Oresteia](#) and [Prometheus Bound](#)), [Sophocles](#) (author of [Antigone](#) and [Oedipus Rex](#)), and [Euripides](#) (author of [Medea](#) and [Andromache](#)), all of the 5th century bce—are remarkable for the variety of the traditions they preserve.

In [Hellenistic](#) times (323–30 bce) [Callimachus](#), a 3rd-century-bce poet and scholar in [Alexandria](#), recorded many obscure myths; his contemporary, the mythographer [Euhemerus](#), suggested that the gods were originally human, a view known as [Euhemerism](#). [Apollonius of Rhodes](#), another scholar of the 3rd century bce, preserved the fullest account of [Jason](#) and the [Argonauts](#) in search of the Golden Fleece.

In the period of the [Roman Empire](#), the *Geography* of [Strabo](#) (1st century bce), the *Library* (attributed to a 2nd-century-ce scholar), the antiquarian writings of the Greek biographer [Plutarch](#), and the works of [Pausanias](#), a 2nd-century-ce historian, as well as the *Latin Genealogies* of Hyginus, a 2nd-century-ce mythographer, have provided valuable sources in Latin of later Greek mythology.

The discovery of the [Mycenaean civilization](#) by [Heinrich Schliemann](#), a 19th-century [German](#) amateur archaeologist, and the discovery of the [Minoan civilization](#) in [Crete](#) (from which the [Mycenaean](#) ultimately derived) by [Sir Arthur Evans](#), a 20th-century [English](#) archaeologist, are essential to the 21st-century understanding of the development of [myth](#) and [ritual](#) in the Greek world. Such discoveries [illuminated](#) aspects of Minoan culture from about 2200 to 1450 bce and Mycenaean culture from about 1600 to 1200 bce; those eras were followed by a Dark Age that lasted until about 800 bce. Much of the evidence about myth and ritual at Mycenaean and Minoan sites is derived from the surviving architecture and monuments, because the [Linear B](#) script (an ancient form of [Greek](#) found in both Crete and Greece) was mainly used to record inventories.

Geometric designs on pottery of the 8th century bce depict scenes from the [Trojan](#) cycle, as well as the adventures of [Heracles](#). The extreme formality of the style, however, renders much of the identification difficult, and there is no inscriptional evidence accompanying the designs to assist scholars in identification and interpretation. In the succeeding [Archaic](#) (c. 750–c. 500 bce), Classical (c. 480–323 bce), and Hellenistic periods, Homeric and various other mythological scenes appear to [supplement](#) the existing literary evidence.