

IT'S GREEK TO ME

INTRODUCING THE WORLD OF  
**TANTALUS**





# Denver Center Theatre Company

Donovan Marley, Artistic Director

In association with

# Royal Shakespeare Company

Adrian Noble, Artistic Director

presents

## Peter Hall's production of **TANTALUS**

An adaptation from the original ten-play cycle by  
**John Barton**

Additional text by Colin Teevan

Directed by  
**Edward Hall Peter Hall**

Associate Director and Tour Director  
**Anthony Powell**

Associate Director & Production Dramaturg  
**Colin Teevan**

Scenic and Costume Designer  
**Dionysis Fotopoulos**

Lighting Designer  
**Sumio Yoshii**

Composer and Musical Director  
**Mick Sands**

Choreographer  
**Donald McKayle**

Sound Designer  
**David R. White**

Speech & Dialect Coach  
**Gary Logan**

Dramaturg to John Barton  
**Graham Ley**

### Production Staff

Producing Director: Barbara E. Sellers • Production Manager: Rick Barbour

Stage Managers, Erock, Chris Ewing, Lyle Raper

Assistant Stage Managers: Amy McCraney, Christi Spann, Della Tilsher

Assistant to Peter Hall: Corinne Beaver • Assistant to John Barton: Emily Blacksell

Assistant to Sumio Yoshii: Noriko Ishikawa • Language Assistant for Sumio Yoshii: Miyu Hinata



PRESENTED BY

## The Denver Center for the Performing Arts

Donovan Marley, Artistic Director,  
Denver Center Theatre Company

IN ASSOCIATION WITH



ROYAL  
SHAKESPEARE  
COMPANY

Adrian Noble  
Artistic Director



# A WORD OF INTRODUCTION

The scope of *TANTALUS* makes it one of the most challenging single theatre projects ever undertaken, just as its content made that challenge irresistible to us. The essential elements of the events or myths upon which the play is based are as contemporary as today's news and a lot more entertaining. And they are of epic proportions.

For some time now, it has been our custom to create a brief study guide for each one of the Denver Center Theatre Company's productions. The magnitude of *TANTALUS* dictated that we should do more. While this booklet is not necessary for an understanding of the play, it may well serve to heighten its enjoyment by refreshing the memory of some and supplementing the knowledge of others.

Author Barbara Mackay's training and experience in the classics and the theatre uniquely qualified her for the job of producing this tantalizing treatise. Her oft-proven talent makes it as enjoyable as it is instructive.

*TANTALUS* has brought yet another dividend. Thanks to the Melina Mercouri Foundation, the Greek Ministry of Culture and the extraordinary efforts of Ms. Mercouri's brother, Spyros Mercouris, we are able to present a major exhibition of the theatre of ancient Greece and its influence on world theatre. This collection has been seen at London's Victoria and Albert Museum and other major venues throughout Europe. It will occupy the entire Space Theatre and much of the lobby of the Helen Bonfils Theatre Complex from September 12 through the end of the run of *TANTALUS*. In the words of Mr. Mercouris, "The exhibition will embrace *TANTALUS* both physically and spiritually."



*While this booklet is not necessary for an understanding of the play, it may well serve to heighten its enjoyment by refreshing the memory of some and supplementing the knowledge of others.*

*TANTALUS* has a very special meaning to me. It is the culmination of the life work of two great men who have reshaped the British theatre: John Barton, who wrote the original ten play cycle and Sir Peter Hall, its director. I have had the honor of knowing and working with them since they entered the professional theatre more than 40 years ago.

Donald H. Stewart  
Founder and Chairman  
The Denver Center for the Performing Arts

This study guide was written by

**BARBARA MACKAY**

Ms. Mackay holds a Bachelor of Arts Degree from Wellesley College, a Master of Fine Arts Degree from The Johns Hopkins University and a Doctor of Fine Arts Degree from the Yale University School of Drama.

From 1966 to 1967 she was a teaching fellow at the American College in Athens, Greece, and has taught theatre at Queens College in New York as well as at the University of Denver and Loretto Heights College.

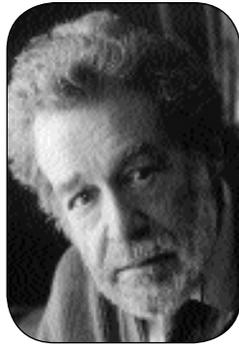
Ms. Mackay was an editor of the New York Public Theater's *Performance* and *Scripts* magazines and, from 1974 until 1976, she was a drama critic for *The Saturday Review*. Ms. Mackay was a contributing editor to the *New York Theater Review* and the drama critic and drama editor of *The Denver Post* from 1976 to 1981, when she began working for The Denver Center for the Performing Arts.

Since leaving The Denver Center as Executive Vice President in 1992, she has worked as a teacher in Brazil and Virginia, and as a writer and editor for the Society for the Preservation of the Greek Heritage in Washington, DC. Ms. Mackay has been a Trustee of The Denver Center since 1984.

# TANTALUS AND MYTH—POWER AND

War, discrimination, pollution, sex, homelessness, violence, sickness, faith. They are all hot topics, reported and discussed daily on the Internet, on television and radio, in newspapers and magazines. And they are among the basic themes of *TANTALUS*.

John Barton's ten play cycle, which has recently been published, approaches these issues by integrating them with some of the oldest myths known in Western literature: stories of the creation of Pandora and the Judgment of Paris, of Helen of Troy, of the men who waged a long war to bring her home, and many more. But *TANTALUS* is not an updated version of an existing Greek text dressed in 21st-century costumes and mentioning IPOs to appear relevant. It is a series of new plays that use myth as a powerful lens through which we can see political, moral, economic and social questions more clearly.



John Barton

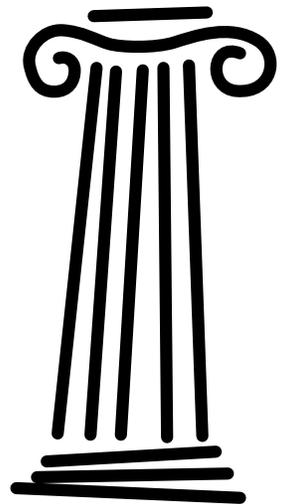
In the fifth century B.C., Greek myths had tremendous spiritual energy and impact, appealing to their listeners' most profound fears and hopes. The great dramatists of that era used them to approach important issues—birth, death, the family, religion, the limits of personal freedom—in ways that would be anything but cool or remote. Like those playwrights, John Barton, in his recently published ten play cycle, *TANTALUS*, has harnessed the vitality of myth, getting at current concerns through the old stories, whose industrial-strength power still electrifies, thrills, horrifies and delights. The result is a new theatrical environment, unconfined to a specific time or place, in which the myths that moved and inspired the ancients become appropriate for our time.

As it weaves myth into a view of our contemporary world, *TANTALUS* creates a milieu charged with humor, sexual tension and irony. Its characters are idealists and cynics, heroes, hypocrites, wits and rogues. They know physical and psychological struggles very much like our own. They witness the inevitability of international conflicts and the destructiveness of military

solutions to those conflicts. Everything here will be reflected in tomorrow's news. But unlike the news, the events in *TANTALUS* will never be out of date. The cycle happens before, during and after a war that could have occurred three or 3,000 years ago, a metaphorical fight that stands for all battles, everywhere. *TANTALUS* expands our immediate concerns, allowing them to exist simultaneously in two zones: the here-and-now and the timeless realm of myth.

Myths reveal what the moon means and where the center of the world is. They explain how life began and when and why the world will dissolve. They can tell you why Athenians have lean thighs. (Just ask Theseus and Heracles about Hades' magic chair.)

Myths are stories that are so good, every generation has wanted to preserve them for the next. But myths do far more than entertain. Some describe the causes and nature of things. Many myths are about multi-tasking goddesses or single-focus gods. Some myths define the relationships between men and their deities, some deal with passionate love, others explore political harmony or appropriate social behavior. There are personal myths, communal myths, myths that appear in many civilizations, myths that don't.



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It is a series of ten new plays that use myth as a powerful lens through which we can see political, moral, economic and social questions more clearly.

Given all this variety, it isn't surprising that historians, poets, linguists, archaeologists, anthropologists and psychiatrists disagree about how to interpret mythology. In various periods it was fashionable to view myths as allegories, symbolic explanations for natural events such as thunder and lightning, sunrise and sunset. In the 20th century, after Freud and Jung wrote extensively on mythology, it became popular to see myths as the products

of our deepest psychological urges or as archetypal patterns of meaning common to all people. Myths have been called spiritual props for rituals and narrative afterthoughts to religious acts. Some interpreters go for the historical explanation, viewing myth as a poetic shadow of actual events.

Perhaps the best way to approach mythology is to consider how it functions. Myths obey their own laws of reason, where the usual

each year in the Underworld. As long as mother and daughter are separated, the earth is hard and barren, but when the dead winter months are over, Demeter celebrates Persephone's return from the dark underground and the earth is alive again. Fact remains fact. Myth gives it an unforgettable emotional dimension. 55

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effects no longer come from the usual causes. Myths are connected to a subliminal power source hot enough to melt down familiar images and ideas. Then they invite new connections and perspectives.

Myths give more than rational explanations. They can turn a scientific fact—like the changing of the seasons—into a touching story of a mother (Demeter, goddess of agriculture) who mourns the loss of her daughter (Persephone), condemned to spend part of



# THE KING AND HIS MYTH

**T**antalus. How are we to imagine this character who has inspired artists for thousands of years, whose image and name continue to be borrowed by physicists, geologists, bicycle teams, vintners, real estate developers, restaurateurs and Internet game designers worldwide? He is extremely old now, but still muscular. Despite his strength, he will never achieve what he desires. Condemned to eternal hunger and thirst, he reaches out for a pear on the tree above him. A slight wind blows it out of his reach.

John Barton's *TANTALUS*, from which the play script has been adapted, employs well-known characters from the most powerful stories of Greek literature: Achilles, Agamemnon, Iphigenia, Odysseus, Cassandra and many others. But Barton has fused and sculpted ancient legend and myth in unaccustomed ways, so the familiar terrain is transformed. Supply your knowledge of famous Greek heroines, if you will, but this Clytemnestra will wiggle out of the expectations you have for her. This Helen of Troy will surprise you.

Behind all these figures looms Tantalus, *pater familias* of the House of Atreus, a reminder of ancient and contemporary antagonisms, a larger than life presence who will not be confined to the past.

**G**reek legend describes Tantalus as a very wealthy king of Asia Minor who reigned in Phrygia or on Mount Sipylus in Lydia long before there was "history" in our sense of the word, long before there were written records of events, when only myth provided a link to the past. Tantalus may have been an actual king whose son, Pelops, gave his name to a major region of Greece, the Peloponnese. But Tantalus had more than human dimensions. He was known as a favorite of Zeus, the supreme lord of gods and men, and may have been his son. There are several versions of Tantalus' crime and punishment.

Tantalus was one of a very few mortals ever included in Zeus' by-invitation-only banquets on Mount Olympus, the home of the gods. At one such exclusive dinner, after carousing and enjoying the boisterous atmosphere, Tantalus spoiled his chances of ever being invited back again. He stashed away some of the ambrosia and nectar that gave the gods their endless lives. Then he tried to share the stolen food and drink with mankind, in order to give man immortality.

A variation on this theme took place at a similar Olympian feast where the gods were expansive and chatty, freely discussing their secrets in front of Tantalus. He went home and told those secrets to men and women.

In another version, Tantalus invited the gods to dine at his home. To test their wisdom, he killed Pelops, cut up his body and added the pieces of flesh to a stew. Then he served the dish and waited to see if any of the immortals would notice. No one ate except Demeter, who was so distracted by the death of her daughter, she absentmindedly nibbled a bit of Pelops' shoulder. When she realized what she had done, she was horrified and eventually replaced the shoulder with an ivory one.

This may have been an early version of the Tantalus tale, replaced by the "banquet" stories when later mythographers were offended by the suggestion of the gods' cannibalism. In the fifth century B.C., the poet Pindar gave a new twist to Pelops' temporary disappearance into the bubbling stew. He suggested that Poseidon fell in love with Pelops and carried him off to Olympus and that the story of the horrific feast was invented to cover for Pelops' absence.

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Tantalus' final crime was larceny complicated by perjury. Pandareus once stole Zeus' beloved golden dog and gave it to Tantalus for safe-keeping. When the theft was discovered, Tantalus refused to give the mastiff back, swearing that he had never seen or heard of it. Hermes, messenger of the gods, was put on the case, the dog was found and Zeus crushed Tantalus under Mount Sipylus, ruining his kingdom forever.

To make sure Tantalus didn't ever get out of line again, Zeus then threw him into a maximum security prison—Tartarus, the deepest

region of the world, beneath Hades. The darkness and mists and thick bronze walls of Tartarus insure that even fallen gods will never escape.

There Tantalus stands in a pool of water, bound to a tree laden with luscious fruit. Whenever he is thirsty, he bends to scoop up water, but it recedes from his hand. When he is hungry, Tantalus stretches out his arm to grasp a piece of fruit, but a breeze moves the tantalizing pomegranates, pears and apples away. Over his head, there is a huge rock, delicately balanced, poised to fall at any moment.

But it would be foolish to look for a single or simple explanation in the Tantalus story. Like all good myths, this legend presents an altered image of reality, showing us a non-literal world where everything is “as if.” It thrives on multiple meanings and paradox.

For millennia, Tantalus’ complexity has appealed to varied audiences, inspiring a tradition of interest from Homer to Pindar, Socrates, Euripides and Ovid to Hans Holbein the Younger, to John Barton and cyberspace gamescrafters. Whether you consider that real immortality or just a mythical reflection of it, Tantalus is far from dead. [↗](#)

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There are countless interpretations of this myth, which may have been one of the oldest of Greek folk legends. Tantalus has been seen as a symbol of overweening pride, as a friend of humankind for wanting to give man eternal life, and as the originator of an endless familial curse. Early historians connected his rule with a period of violent earthquakes that destroyed cities and villages in Asia Minor. Some mythologists claim that Tantalus’ invitations to Mount Olympus prove the transference of his cult from Asia Minor to Greece. One ancient scholar viewed Tantalus as a disgraced astrophysicist: the rock hanging over his head was a symbolic solar disc, Tantalus’ punishment for pointing out that the sun was just a lump of vaporous metal.

# TIME AND TANTALUS

**T**ANTALUS is twice removed from history. First, it exists in the present tense of theatre, where actors speak about issues of immediate concern to a contemporary audience. Second, it uses myth to distance itself from the reality of actual events, and myth exists in that ephemeral “once upon a time” when all the goddesses were strong, all the gods good-looking and all the demi-gods above average.

We will never know as much about Greece’s mythology as we do about her Neolithic pots and Neanderthal bones, which can be carbon-dated and put on timelines. Yet perhaps that is appropriate. It forces us to experience the stories, rather than categorize them, to fantasize as the ancients did when legend was a mode of belief, not a form of literature, when myth was not an entertainment but an important access route to the past.

But despite being rooted in myth, *TANTALUS* is also inextricably linked to history, since its myths were created and preserved to remember the past, and because historical figures passed along those myths to us. One way to appreciate the rich mixture of fact and fiction in *TANTALUS* (especially if you’ve momentarily forgotten when the Mycenaeans lived, who Agamemnon was or what Hesiod wrote) is to go on a brief mythological dig, uncovering several layers of history and legend.

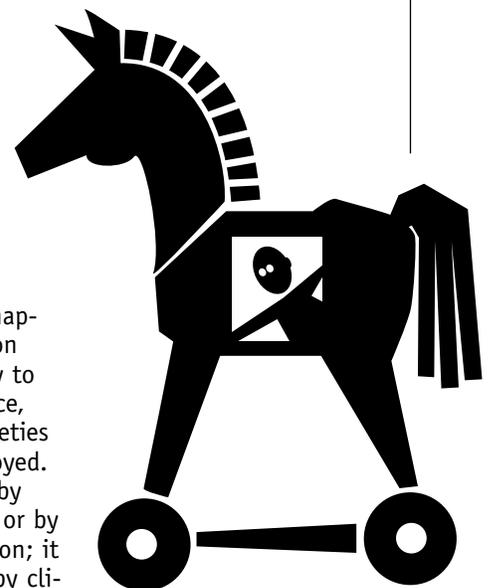
“Ancient Greece” is the term often used to describe the fifth and fourth centuries B.C., the time of Pericles, Socrates, Plato and Aristotle, the era when the great plays of Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides and Aristophanes were produced. By then the gods were all firmly in place on Olympus, *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* were formalized works, recognized as national treasures. Writing was no longer a novelty and history as we know it was beginning to be shaped by Herodotus and Thucydides. Myths still had power, but they were being questioned and challenged. In the grand historical scheme of things, the era was absolutely post-modern.

To accurately define “ancient,” you need to burrow back much farther, into the Bronze Age (3000 B.C. to 1200 B.C.). The earliest Greek historians were poets, bards who knew all the old stories—some about the gods and goddesses, some about heroes, some about war and revenge. They memorized large chunks of their material, improvised and invented as they performed. There is no tell-

ing exactly when during the Bronze Age this tradition of memorization and composition-in-performance began, but it flourished during the innovative, international period when the powerful city of Mycenae gave its name to an entire civilization, from about 1600 B.C. to 1200 B.C.

It was toward the end of the Mycenaean Era that the Trojan War occurred—if it occurred. The blend of sophistication and brutality of that era is described in two of the important legends woven into *TANTALUS*: The Trojan Saga, which recounts the events that led up to and followed the Trojan War; and the Mycenaean Saga, which tells the story of the House of Atreus, whose great king Agamemnon led the Greeks against Troy.

Something extraordinary happened in the Aegean region about 1200 B.C. From Troy to the western coast of Greece, huge palaces and the societies they sheltered were destroyed. It may have been caused by invasion from the outside or by internal unrest and rebellion; it may have been triggered by cli-



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matic change or pirates upsetting trade routes. It may have been a combination of

all these factors. Whatever the cause, the effect on thriving civilization was disastrous. Life went on, but the palaces were never rebuilt. Large areas of the Peloponnese were completely depopulated. The early form of writing known as Linear B disappeared. It had been used primarily to record administrative details, and without the palaces and

their endless jars of olive oil, it was not needed. The Bronze Age ended and the Dark Ages began.

Yet it may have been this very disaster that provided the impetus for the Greeks to seriously “recall” their history, to record the past so that it would never be lost. In addition to whatever stories they may have previously enjoyed—about hunting or love, the harvest or a recently departed loved one—one can imagine the Greeks of that period being especially interested in hearing the story of their history. Their poets obliged, weaving a record of the glorious exploits of the Greeks’ forefathers, creating legends and sagas that established a common source of pride for all.

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In the late eighth or early seventh century B.C., the poet Homer inherited some of those ancient ballads and legends and added to them, inventing and perfecting his two great works, *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*. *The Iliad*, believed to have been created between 725 and 675 B.C., may originally have told the whole story of the Trojan War. The version we have recounts only a part. *The Odyssey*, which tells of Odysseus’ difficult and long return home after that war, is thought to have been completed slightly after *The Iliad* and is particularly intriguing for the audiences of *TANTALUS*, as it contains history’s first existing reference to King Tantalus.

The tradition that nourished Homer inspired other poets, too. One of our major links to the Homeric Age is the Epic Cycle, which John Barton has used as an important source for *TANTALUS*. Only prose summaries and a few quotations from the Epic Cycle exist now, but the titles and fragments that remain suggest a fascination with adventure, particularly with the Trojan War and its aftermath.

Greece’s second early poet, Hesiod (700 B.C.), created two famous works, both of which are reflected in *TANTALUS*. His *Theogony* offers the first recorded Greek explanation of the formation of the universe and the first genealogy of its gods. In his *Works and Days*, Hesiod tells the tale of the Five Ages of Man, which is mentioned in *TANTALUS*. It was an old myth, inherited from the Near East, describing a glorious Golden Age, which was followed by the Silver, Bronze and Iron Ages, each one bringing new miseries for men. Yet just before the Iron Age, Hesiod inserted an era—the Age of Heroes—when a “better and more just” race fought at Thebes and Troy. This sweet interlude seems to have been designed to endow the past with glory, to underscore the importance of historic legends.

After Homer and Hesiod came a vital, aesthetically rich era during which many men and women throughout Greece wrote, particularly poetry. From the verses of the Athenian legislator Solon to the love lyrics of Sappho, Greeks reflected the economic, political and artistic flowering of the Greek city-state.

As the sixth century blended into the fifth, writing (which was known but not widely used in Homer’s time) became more common, Pindar’s long “Tenth Ode” was composed in 498 B.C., Aeschylus’ tragedies were staged. And the rest, as they say in Greece, is *istoria*. **55**

# THE CHARACTERS OF THE CYCLE

**T**ANTALUS is comprised of many people, including a chorus, soldiers and war kings, a soothsayer and the famous Greek leader Odysseus. But the primary action of the cycle involves three families: the House of Tantalus, the Royal House of Troy and the House of Peleus. The following is an introduction to some of the members of those families.

## I. THE HOUSE OF TANTALUS

### **Agamemnon**

"That man is Atreus' son, Agamemnon, lord of empires, both a mighty king and a strong spearman, too, and he used to be my kinsman." This is how Helen of Troy identified the noble Agamemnon in Homer's *Iliad*. A great-grandson of Tantalus, Agamemnon was the king of Mycenae and the supreme commander of the Greek forces in their war against Troy. Before that war, Agamemnon offended the goddess Artemis by killing a stag in her sacred grove. In return, she refused to let the winds blow the warships to Troy unless Agamemnon sacrificed one of his daughters. Agamemnon complied, sacrificing Iphigenia.

### **Aegisthus**

Aegisthus was the youngest son of Thyestes, who quarreled with his brother Atreus over the rule of Mycenae. The brothers committed crimes against one another until Aegisthus murdered Atreus. The hatred between Atreus and Thyestes carried on into the next generation, among the cousins Aegisthus, Agamemnon and Menelaus.

### **Clytemnestra**

The mortals Leda and Tyndareus had several children. One of them was Clytemnestra, whose first husband and children were killed by Agamemnon. He then married her himself and together he and Clytemnestra had several more children, including Iphigenia, Electra, Chrysothemis and Orestes. While Agamemnon was fighting the war in Troy, Clytemnestra and Aegisthus became lovers. When Agamemnon returned from Troy, they murdered him.

### **Electra**

Electra was consumed with hatred for her mother, Clytemnestra, after the murder of her father, Agamemnon. In the post-Agamemnon regime in Mycenae, when she was no longer treated as a princess but as a slave, Electra urged Orestes to return to Mycenae to kill

Clytemnestra and Aegisthus. She was married to Pylades, Orestes' best friend.

### **Erigone**

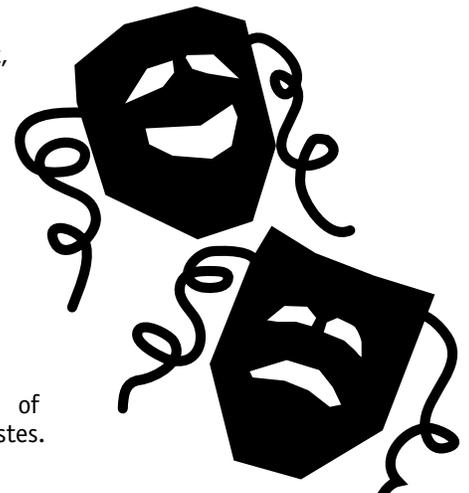
The daughter of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus, Erigone and her brother Aletes took over the rule of Mycenae after the death of their parents. According to one myth, Erigone married Orestes after his wife, Hermione, left him.

### **Helen**

Helen and Clytemnestra were both daughters of Leda, but Helen's father was the mightiest immortal, Zeus, while Tyndareus became her father in matters of earthly import. Helen was the most beautiful woman in the world and when she reached marriageable age she had countless suitors, including the most powerful princes in Greece, from whom Tyndareus chose Menelaus. Helen and Menelaus had a daughter, Hermione, who was nine years old when Helen was abducted by the Trojan prince Paris and taken to Troy.

### **Hermione**

Hermione was raised by her aunt, Clytemnestra, while Helen was in captivity and Menelaus was fighting to win Helen's return. Before the Trojan War, Menelaus had pledged Hermione's hand in marriage to Orestes, but while he was away fighting in that war, Menelaus betrothed Hermione to Achilles' son, Neoptolemus. The union produced no children. Tisamenus was the child of Hermione's later marriage to Orestes.



A great-grandson of Tantalus, Agamemnon was the king of Mycenae and the supreme commander of the Greek forces in their war against Troy.

### **Iphigenia**

Agamemnon's and Clytemnestra's daughter, Iphigenia was sacrificed at Aulis in order for the winds to blow, allowing the Greek ships to sail to Troy.

### **Menelaus**

When Menelaus and his brother Agamemnon were exiled from Mycenae by Aegisthus, they sought refuge in Sparta. King Tyndareus wel-

comed them and they wed his two daughters, Helen and Clytemnestra, respectively. Menelaus was eventually given control of Sparta where he and Helen lived in luxury and peace until Paris abducted Helen.

**Orestes**

Orestes was a child when his father left to fight the Trojan War. After Agamemnon's murder, Orestes was sent away for his own protection. Years later, Orestes returned to Mycenae at the urging of his sister, Electra, to avenge the assassination of his father. Orestes went mad after killing his mother and was cured of his madness only after a trial in Athens.

**Tyndareus**

The king of Sparta and a great hero, Tyndareus was the father of Castor, Pollux, Clytemnestra and Helen and also raised Menelaus and Agamemnon after their father's murder.

**II. THE ROYAL HOUSE OF TROY**

**Andromache**

Andromache lived in Troy with her husband, the Trojan prince Hector, and their son, Astyanax. By the end of the Trojan War, her father, seven brothers and her husband had all been killed by the Greek warrior Achilles. At the end of that war, Achilles' son, Neoptolemus, killed Astyanax and took Andromache as a war prize. Andromache returned with Neoptolemus to Epirus, where he was king. She had three more sons, one of whom, Molossus, appears in *TANTALUS*.

**Cassandra**

Daughter of Priam and Hecuba, Cassandra had been given the gift of prophecy by Apollo, who adored her. She spurned him though, so the offended god modified her gift: she would still be able to prophecy accurately, but no one would believe her. She told the Trojans not to take the Trojan Horse within their city's walls, but she was ignored. After the Trojan War, Cassandra was taken to Mycenae by Agamemnon and was murdered there by a jealous Clytemnestra.

**Hecuba**

Queen of Troy and wife of Priam, Hecuba had many children, some say as many as 50. Just before her son Paris was born, she is said to have had a strange dream of a torch rising from her breast, setting fire to all of Troy. By the end of the Trojan War, all of Hecuba's

children had been killed and she herself was awarded to Odysseus as a war trophy.

**Helenus**

Helenus, the son of Priam, was—like Cassandra—blessed with the gift of prophecy. He fought valiantly alongside Hector in the first part of the Trojan War although later he helped the Greeks by predicting the conditions under which they could take Troy.

**Hesione**

Laomedon, Priam's father, once promised the hero Heracles two immortal, snow-white horses as a reward for saving Hesione, Laomedon's daughter. But as soon as she was safe, Laomedon reneged on the promise. Several years later, Heracles came back to Troy with an expedition to topple the city. He abducted Hesione and took her back to Greece with him.

**Ilione**

A daughter of Priam and Hecuba, Ilione was married to Polymestor, King of Thrace.

**Paris**

The son of Hecuba and Priam, Paris was the judge in a beauty contest among the goddesses Aphrodite, Hera and Athena, hence the name "The Judgment of Paris." When Aphrodite bribed him with the love of Helen of Sparta, the most beautiful woman in the world, Paris chose Aphrodite and took Helen to Troy. Learning that his sister Polyxena and the Greek warrior Achilles were lovers, Paris ambushed Achilles and killed him with the aid of Apollo.

**Polyxena**

The youngest daughter of Priam and Hecuba. Achilles fell deeply in love with Polyxena while in Troy. Knowing that the couple planned to meet secretly at the shrine of Apollo Thymbria, Paris spied on them and shot Achilles in his one vulnerable place, the heel. After the fall of Troy, Achilles' son, Neoptolemus, held Polyxena responsible for his father's death and sacrificed her on Achilles' grave.

**Priam**

Priam was the great king of Troy during the Trojan War, although by the time of the siege he was too elderly to take part in the fighting. To Priam, the abduction of Helen was a lawful deed, done to procure the return of his sister Hesione, who had been abducted and taken to Greece. Helen was to be held hos-

tage until Hesione was returned, but Hesione died before reaching home.

### III. THE HOUSE OF PELEUS

#### ***Achilles***

Achilles was the child of the sea nymph Thetis and the mortal Peleus. When Achilles was an infant, Thetis tried everything to make him immortal, including dipping him in the river Styx, whose waters could make one invulnerable. But Thetis failed to realize that the heel by which she held Achilles was not touched by the magical waters and thus remained vulnerable. When the Trojan War broke out, Achilles was sent to the island of Scyros and kept in hiding, but when Odysseus found him, Achilles went to Troy. Achilles was a passionate warrior known for his strength and valor. He was the greatest soldier to fight on the side of the Greeks in the Trojan War and both sides knew that the Greeks could not win without his assistance.

#### ***Neoptolemus***

Achilles' son, who was also known as Pyrrhus, Neoptolemus played a major role in the Trojan War, fighting valiantly as his father had done. Following the death of Achilles, the prophet Helenus revealed that Troy would never be taken unless Neoptolemus fought for the Greeks. Although Neoptolemus was married to Hermione, after the sack of Troy he took Andromache as his war prize and raised three children with her.

#### ***Thetis***

Thetis was an immortal divinity of the sea, a Nereid raised by Hera. She was once desired by Zeus, but because it had been prophesied that any child born to Thetis would be greater than its father, the god quickly changed his mind and she was given in marriage to the mortal Peleus. Being a sea nymph and thus able to change her shape, Thetis almost outran Peleus, transforming herself into a bird, a tree, fire, water and finally a cuttlefish. But Peleus eventually caught Thetis and married her in a ceremony wherein the Muses sang and all the Olympian gods were in attendance.

#### ***Peleus***

Peleus was the King of Phthia in Thessaly. He was an adventurer, continually breaking laws, being banished or pursued by angry women. He participated in the Calydonian Boar Hunt, the adventures of the Argonauts and the

expedition of Heracles against Troy. In the midst of these experiences, Peleus married Thetis. At their wedding feast, Eris (the goddess of Discord) threw down a golden apple, setting in motion the events leading up to the Trojan War.

### OTHERS

#### ***Calchas***

Calchas was a soothsayer of Mycenae, endowed by Apollo with the ability to read the past, present and future and to interpret the flight of birds. Calchas insisted that Achilles be part of the Greek army and that Iphigenia be sacrificed in order for the winds to blow the ships to Troy.

#### ***Odysseus***

Born on the island of Ithaca, Odysseus was associated with wisdom and diplomacy but also with cunning and trickery. It was Odysseus who suggested that the war kings be made to swear an oath of allegiance at Helen's betrothal to Menelaus. In gratitude for this good counsel, Tyndareus rewarded Odysseus with marriage to Penelope. Although Odysseus had many adventures before the Trojan War, his long and dangerous return from that war is the most famous, as it is the subject of Homer's *Odyssey*.

#### ***Palamedes***

After the abduction of Helen, Palamedes was an ambassador sent to Troy to settle the dispute peacefully; at the start of the war, Palamedes went to Ithaca to convince Odysseus to accompany the Greeks to Troy. Palamedes was credited with many inventions, including numbers, coinage, the order of the letters in the alphabet and the game of dice.

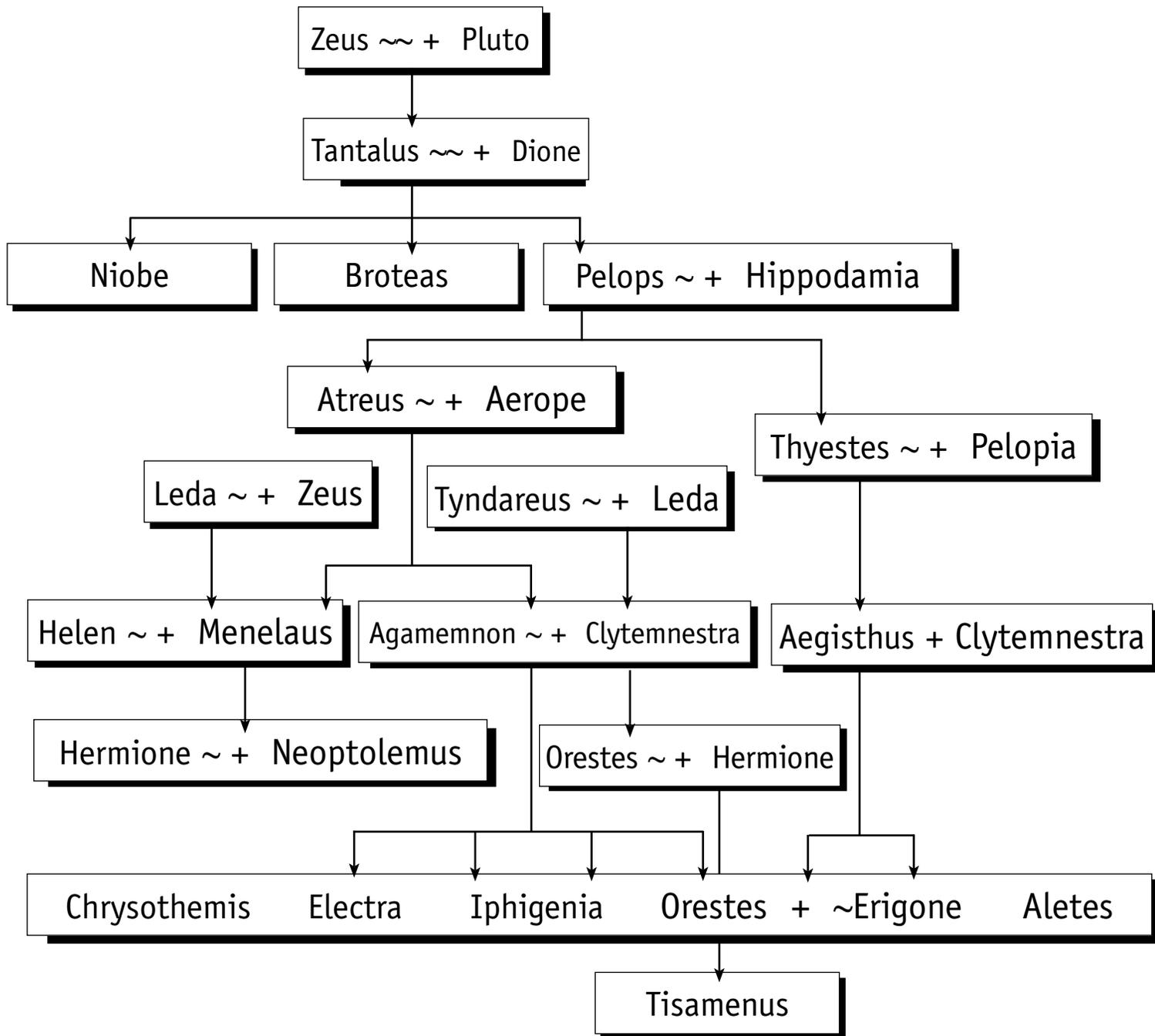
#### ***Polymestor***

Polymestor was the King of Thrace who was asked by Hecuba and Priam to harbor and protect their youngest son, Polydorus.

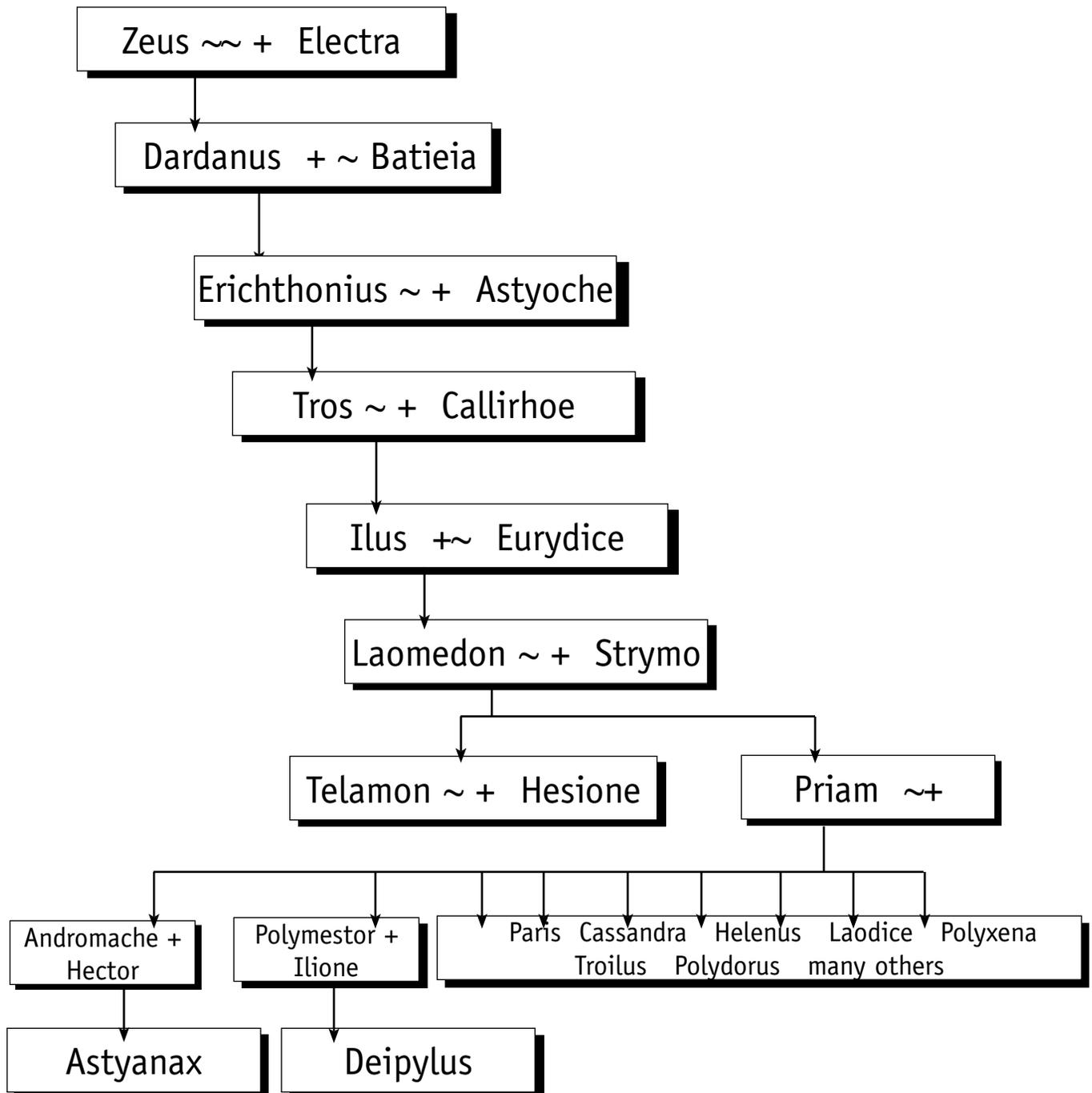
#### ***Telephus***

A native of Mysia, where the Greeks landed on their first effort to sail to Troy, Telephus met the invaders and was wounded by Achilles' lance. On the Greeks' second sailing, Telephus went to meet them and asked to be healed; it had been predicted that his leg would get better only if touched by Achilles' weapon. Achilles took some of the rust from his lance and healed Telephus, who then led the Greeks to Troy. 𐀀𐀁

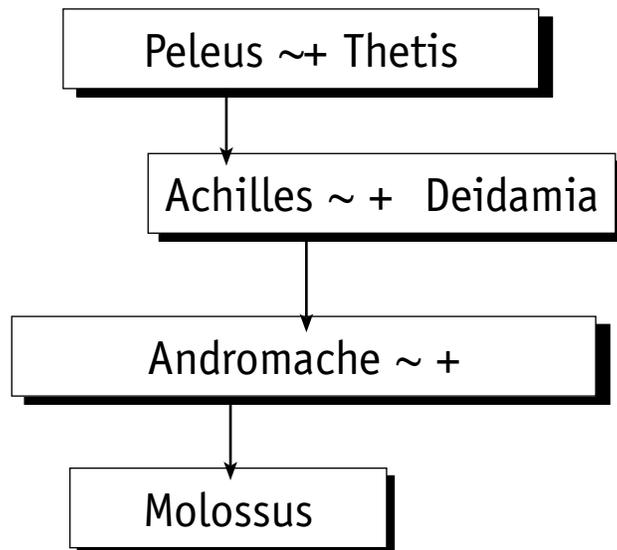
# THE HOUSE OF TANTALUS



# THE ROYAL HOUSE OF TROY



# THE HOUSE OF PELEUS



# CREATION MYTHS TACKLE LIFE'S MYSTERIES

Only cultures located near volcanoes house their gods within volcanoes. Myths speak to communities. Their local flavors and concerns are strong.

But in spite of deep differences in focus and detail, there are remarkable similarities in the myths of some very dissimilar ancient civilizations, particularly in their creation stories. These myths tackle the greatest mysteries, the cosmic "who, what, where, when and why," as they deal with the origin of the universe and of the gods, the birth and destiny of mankind.

Many early creation myths are tales about love and attraction between the earth and heavens. In Egypt, the sky goddess Nut and the earth god Geb are said to have coupled in the first age of the world, creating the gods who would teach mankind how to survive and flourish. A Sumerian text from around 2000 B.C. tells of the great mountain whose summit is the Heaven and whose base is the mother goddess Earth. In New Zealand, an old Maori legend tells of Rangi Nui, the Sky, who lay upon the Earth so closely that their offspring could not escape.

Greece also had her heaven-and-earth myths, which are reflected in *TANTALUS*. There is the story of Eurynome, the goddess of Everything, who divided the sea from the sky. Eurynome danced on the waves as she mated with the serpent Orphion and created the great World Egg. When the egg hatched, it contained the universe. There is another Primordial Egg myth, in which Night laid a silver egg that split into two halves: the earth and sky. Out of the egg stepped Eros, who then set the heavens in motion and inspired mankind with a delight in love, providing for the continuity of the species. And there is the myth of Chaos, first presented in Hesiod's *Theogony*. Out of Chaos came Gaia (Earth) who gave birth to Uranus (The Sky). Together the Earth and the Sky produced the twelve Titans, gods and goddesses of the dawn, sun, moon and ocean, spirits of the rivers and streams.

Yet Uranus was a cruel father who hid his children under the earth just after they were born. Gaia and one of her sons, Cronos, plotted together to overthrow him, a myth almost identical to an earlier Hittite myth. Uranus' reign ends with his castration, but that violent scene is immediately followed by the lyrical creation of Aphrodite, the goddess of love. As the poet Hesiod tells it in his

*Theogony*: "First she was brought to holy Cythera, and then from there she came to sea-girt Cyprus. And she emerged a dread and beautiful goddess and grass rose under her slender feet."

Together Cronos and his sister Rhea (the new representatives of the Sky and Earth) gave birth to six of the most powerful and durable goddesses and gods: Hestia, Demeter, Hera, Hades, Poseidon and Zeus. But Cronos was as bad a father as Uranus had been, swallowing his children as soon as they were born. So Rhea tricked him, bearing her last child (Zeus) on the island of Crete, where his father could not find him. When Zeus grew up, he came back to release his brothers and sisters, battled alongside them against Cronos and the Titans for ten years, won the war, killed the monster Typhon and took control of the universe.

Although Zeus was supreme, he had some problems of internal policy to work out with his brothers. The gods cast lots for their realms and Zeus took the sky as his primary abode, though retaining the right to go up and down the celestial ladder to visit earth, particularly to seduce unwitting—and sometimes witting—human beings. Poseidon's lot was the ocean and Hades got the Underworld.

Hera was Zeus' third and last wife, the



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mother of his children Hephaestus and Ares. Zeus had once been married to Metis, but when he heard that Metis would bear a child greater than its father, he swallowed her. One day, Zeus had a terrible headache, begged Hephaestus to split open his skull and out sprang Metis' child, Athena, in full armor,

issuing a war cry. Leto bore Zeus two children, Artemis and Apollo. Zeus also mated with Maia, the mother of Hermes, and with Semele, the mother of Dionysus. Some myths call Aphrodite the daughter of Zeus by Dione, a goddess of the first generation, who was also said to be Tantalus' wife.

Thus the basic structure of the immortals was in place, composed of Zeus' siblings and children: Zeus (Jupiter to the Romans), Hades (Pluto), Poseidon (Neptune), Hestia (Vestra), Demeter (Ceres), Hera (Juno), Aphrodite (Venus), Athena (Minerva), Hermes (Mercury), Dionysus (Bacchus), Hephaestus (Vulcan), Ares (Mars), Artemis (Diana) and Apollo (who had no separate Roman name).

This list was reduced to the twelve who have remained to this day by keeping Hades in the Underworld and by letting Hestia spin off into sub-Olympian status. Hestia was a very early, elemental deity. As the representative of hearth and family, she was always tremendously important but remained a low-profile goddess; there are almost no myths attached to her. She was eventually replaced on Olympus by the more flamboyant Dionysus, that lively god of wine and abandon, who arrived in Greece late but stayed long. 55

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# THE OLYMPIANS

The world of Greek mythology is full of demigods, heroes, cyclops, giants, river nymphs (not to be confused with ocean nymphs or Mediterranean sea nymphs), centaurs, satyrs and other zoologically impossible creatures, some of whom can fly, change shape, perform magic or even return to the living from the land of the dead. But even the cleverest, most powerful mythological being is subject to the gods who dwell on Olympus. Envisioned as having human form and characteristics, the Olympian deities are larger than life: their wisdom is greater than ours, their passions more intense, their thoughts grander than human thoughts. Even their failings and shortcomings seem extraordinarily touching. Ichor, a substance clearer than blood, flows in their veins. They eat only ambrosia and drink only nectar, a heavenly diet that assures them immortality. Here are some details regarding those most holy ones, the Olympian gods and goddesses.

## Aphrodite

The goddess associated with love and sexuality, Aphrodite is known for her temper as well as for her more seductive gifts. She punishes mortals and immortals alike for not honoring her sufficiently and Aphrodite's curses are notoriously destructive. She was one of the three goddesses involved in the Judgment of Paris, the contest that led up to the abduction of Helen and to the Trojan War. As the poet Lucian tells it in his *Dialogues of the Gods*, Aphrodite's power in that instance was absolute. The Trojan prince Paris had no alternative but to adore Helen and Helen had no choice but to respond, once Aphrodite got in gear:

**Aphrodite:** "...it will be up to me to manage how she will fall in love and follow you home."

**Paris:** "This is the very thing that seems so incredible to me, that she would want to leave her husband and sail away with a foreigner she doesn't know."

**Aphrodite:** "Don't fret about it....Love will insinuate himself completely into her very being and compel the woman to love you. Desire will make you desirable and irresistible by suffusing you with the very essence of his being...."

**Paris:** "It is not in the least clear to me how this will all turn out, Aphrodite. But I am already in love with Helen. I seem to see her now....I'm returning home holding the woman in my arms! I am very upset that I am not doing all this right now." <sup>1</sup>

Because Paris chose Aphrodite to win the contest, the goddess favored the Trojans throughout the Trojan War. Aphrodite was married to Hephaestus, the god of fire, although she had many amorous liaisons. Aphrodite's most highly publicized affair involved Ares, the god of war, with whom Hephaestus discovered her *in flagrante delicto*. Aphrodite's other lovers included the beautiful youth Adonis and the mortal Anchises, father of the famous Trojan warrior Aeneas. Aphrodite and Ares had several children, including Eros (Love), Deimos (Terror) and Phobos (Fear). Aphrodite's plants are the myrtle and rose; she can be recognized by the scepter or mirror she holds and by the doves that draw her chariot. She is also known by the names Cypris, Cythera and Venus.

## Apollo

Apollo is the god of music and poetry, of nature, medicine and prophecy. Always shown holding a cithara or lyre or a bow, he also answers to the names Phoebus Apollo, the Far Shooter and the Pythian. The son of Leto and Zeus, Apollo and his twin sister Artemis were born on the island of Delos. When he was very young, Apollo went to Delphi



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and slew a dragon called Python, which was terrorizing the country. Apollo founded the Pythian Games to commemorate the death of the monster and took possession of the oracle at Delphi. Although he is often associated with the rational view of life, Apollo is one of the most complex gods, full of contradictory elements. He is capable of tremendous wrath and revenge: it was Apollo who helped Artemis massacre the children of Niobe and sent a plague to devastate the Greek army during the Trojan War. But Apollo also brings enlightenment and purification, particularly to those who seek help in his sanctuary at

Delphi. Apollo is closely allied to the Muses and is known to inspire poets as well as soothsayers. Always portrayed as a handsome youth with long, curly hair, he is associated with the wolf, the hind and the crow, the swan and the dolphin. His sacred plant is the bay laurel, whose leaves were chewed by the Pythia (the priestess of Apollo) as she uttered her prophecies. Apollo's loves were many and varied: he adored Daphne and Hyacinthus, Cassandra, Helenus and Coronis. His children include Asclepius, the god of healing, and Pythagoras. Apollo eventually was worshipped by members of the Orphic religion.

#### **Ares**

Ares, a.k.a. Mars to the Romans, is the god of war. The child of Zeus and Hera, he is gigantic, his battle cry can be heard for miles, he delights in combat and slaughter. The demons Fear and Terror are his constant companions and he is occasionally accompanied by his daughters, the Amazons, and the goddess Eris (Strife). The dog and the vulture are associated with Ares, who is usually pictured as virile and handsome, carrying a spear, sword or shield, wearing a helmet and armor. Ares is a lover as well as a fighter. Eos, the dawn, is his mistress. He and Aphrodite were an amorous pair until Aphrodite's husband, Hephaestus, put an end to the affair. Ares also loved mortal women and had many children by them, but most of his descendants were evil and violent by nature. One of his sons, Oenomaus, was linked to the Tantalus story. Oenomaus refused to give permission for his daughter to marry, slaying 13 of her suitors until Tantalus' son, Pelops, came along and outwitted Oenomaus with Ares' help. Despite his appetite for war, Ares does not always win. His brute force is not a match for the wisdom and strength of Athena or Heracles: Ares was wounded twice while fighting against the Greeks in the Trojan War. Ares' brutality is taken seriously, but he is usually considered malevolent and destructive, not worthy of respect. As Zeus says, "No more, you lying, two-faced...no more sidling up to me, whining here before me. You—I hate you most of all the Olympian gods. Always dear to your heart, strife, yes, and battles, the bloody grind of war."<sup>2</sup>

#### **Artemis**

As soon as Artemis was born, she assisted her mother with the birth of her twin brother, Apollo. The beautiful, chaste goddess of childbirth, Artemis has connections to an ancient Asian fertility goddess, but she pro-

fects nature more than she celebrates its procreation. Always seen with a bow and quiver of arrows, Artemis is interested in nothing so much as the hunt; she is sacred to the Amazons, huntress warriors who live their lives entirely apart from men. She is the goddess of animals and often is accompanied by a fawn. Known to the Romans as Diana, Artemis is associated with the wilder areas of Greece and sometimes is pictured as the personification of the moon. Like her brother, Artemis is capable of great anger and vengeful action. She killed the huntsman Orion, the six daughters of Niobe and the wood-nymph Callisto as well as giants and monsters. Artemis sent the famous wild boar of Calydon to terrorize the countryside because someone forgot to sacrifice to her. It is to Artemis that Agamemnon must sacrifice his daughter in *TANTALUS*, to appease the goddess after he killed a stag in her sacred grove. Yet, as the Homeric Hymn to Artemis suggests, even this fierce goddess has a kinder, gentler side: "...when the arrow-pouring goddess...has taken her pleasure and delighted her mind, after slacking the well-taut bow, she comes to the great house of her dear brother, Phoebus Apollo...to set up a beautiful dance of the Muses and the Graces. There she hangs her resilient bow and her arrows, and wearing her graceful jewelry, she is their leader in the dance."<sup>3</sup>

#### **Athena**

"I begin to sing of Pallas Athena, the glorious goddess, gray-eyed, resourceful, of implacable heart. This bashful maiden is a mighty defender of cities..." So begins the Homeric Hymn to Athena, goddess of wisdom, the arts, political skill, military prowess and handicrafts. Zeus' favorite daughter, Athena is responsible for many endeavors, from winning battles to spinning and weaving to taming horses and inventing the war chariot. She can be recognized by the spear she carries, by her helmet and aegis (a breastplate or shield made of goat skin) or by the owl that accompanies her. She is particularly honored for having introduced the olive to Greece and an olive tree is often shown with her. Athena is always pictured as tall and stately, a majestic and proud figure. She is the daughter of Zeus and Metis, whom Zeus swallowed when it was predicted that the child she was about to bear would be greater than his father. When Zeus was struck by a terrible headache, Athena sprang from his forehead fully grown and in complete battle dress. Known to the Romans as Minerva, she is also called Pallas (Virgin) Athena and is often

accompanied by the winged figure of victory (Nike), symbolizing Athena's own role as victor in war. Athena supported the Greeks during the Trojan War and helped Odysseus return to Ithaca after the conflict. Many temples throughout Greece were dedicated to Athena and she was the protector of many small towns, as well as of Athens. Although she never married, Athena had affection for and loyalty to many men and heroes: Heracles, Perseus, Telemachus and Odysseus, among others. She is the representative of mercy and is said to have created the law court of the Areopagus, establishing a new rule of justice to replace the ancient rule of vendetta and revenge.

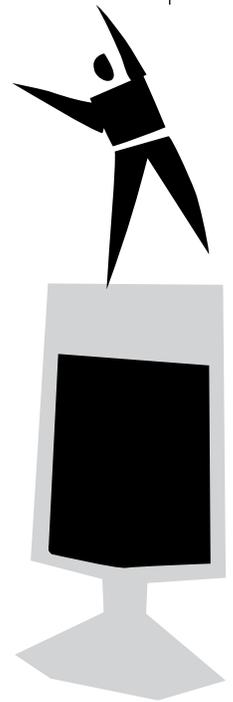
### **Demeter**

Demeter is one of the oldest deities, the goddess of agriculture. Known to the Latin world as Ceres, she is often pictured with stalks of grain or ears of corn, with a poppy or narcissus, a serpent or a torch. As a vegetation goddess, she is sometimes seen with fruit, especially figs or beans. She and Zeus had a daughter named Persephone, who was abducted and carried off to the Underworld by Hades. Demeter was so anguished by her loss and grief that she punished the earth for swallowing her child. Barley was sown but would not sprout. The human race was faced with famine when Demeter left Mount Olympus, retiring to her temple in Eleusis until she was allowed to see her daughter again. Finally Zeus sent Hermes down to the Underworld to negotiate a deal with Hades; Zeus allowed Persephone to live part of the year with her mother and another part with her husband. As soon as Persephone was restored to her, Demeter returned to live on Olympus and made the crops grow again. Demeter eventually became the focus of a cult center at Eleusis, the location of an important religion, the Eleusinian Mysteries. The bird associated with her is the crane.

### **Dionysus**

Dionysus is the god of intoxication, of physical and spiritual ecstasy and release. Introduced into Greece rather late in comparison with the other gods and goddesses, Dionysus—also known as Zagreus, Bromius and Bacchus—was the son of Semele, an early earth goddess, and Zeus. When Semele was killed by a trick of Zeus' jealous wife, Dionysus was born from the thigh of his father. He was thereafter raised by mountain nymphs in a land far from Greece near a legendary mountain called Nysa, hence the name

"Dio-nysus." The boy grew up playing with leopards and tigers and he taught himself how to make wine out of the grapes that grew on sunny Mount Nysa. When he was a young man, Dionysus traveled through Egypt, Syria, India and Thrace, spreading his message of exultation and mystical redemption. A god of vegetation, particularly of the grape and of wine, Dionysus' religion involves possession, an uninhibited celebration of sexuality, a joyful expression of the soul through music and dance. The initiates of the Dionysiac religion include: Bacchae or maenads, mortal women who are possessed by Dionysus' spirit; their male equivalents, satyrs, who are part human, part goat and part horse; Dionysus' wise old tutor, Silenus; and the sileni, who are often older, more lecherous versions of the satyrs. On his triumphant return to Greece, in a chariot drawn by panthers and surrounded by a retinue of jubilant believers, Dionysus introduced his revels—Bacchanalia—to the countryside. Dionysus can destroy as easily as he creates. While those who listen to him prosper, those who do not are driven mad or killed; his conquest of the world was done by force as well as through enchantment. Dionysus' iconography usually includes grape vines and ivy



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leaves, a thyrsos (fennel stalk or staff wrapped in ivy) and a drinking vessel. The orgiastic Bacchanalia were banned by the Roman Senate in 186 B.C., but the mysteries of Dionysus had energy and influence in the Mediterranean region long after they were officially outlawed.

### **Hades**

When Zeus and his brothers drew lots for their kingdoms, Hades got the Underworld, which is also called Hades. The Underworld is described in various ways in different eras by Greek poets. It is sometimes pictured as being nearby, sometimes far, but it always includes several regions: great sinners, like Tantalus, suffer in the prison of Tartarus;

much of Hades is a vast, sunless kingdom where departed souls—tiny, winged reproductions of the dead—flutter about. The Elysian Fields, a realm of bliss without snow or rain, are for great heroes. There are five rivers in the Underworld, including the Styx, which incoming souls must cross to get into the afterlife. The Styx is guarded by the ferryman Charon, who escorts new arrivals to the

There is no hellfire in the Underworld and punishment exists for only a handful of sinners (Tantalus, Sisyphus, Tityus, Ixion) who are foolish enough to try to outwit the gods or rape the great goddesses.

Underworld. Cerberus, the vicious dog with three heads, guards the entrance to Hades. The Furies (Erinyes) dwell in the realm of the Underworld, as does Hecate. Also referred to as Dis and The Invisible One, Hades is recognizable by the scepter and cornucopia always pictured with him, the latter being a symbol of the fertility of the earth. Although he rules over the realm of departed souls, Hades is not associated with evil. There is no hellfire in the Underworld and punishment exists for only a handful of sinners (Tantalus, Sisyphus, Tityus, Ixion) who are foolish enough to try to outwit the gods or rape the great goddesses. Hades' name is often not spoken out loud, to protect against his anger being aroused. The Roman world knew him as Pluto, "the Rich," a name meant to conjure up images of the agricultural and mineral wealth stored in the earth. Although he does not dwell on Mount Olympus, because he is Zeus' brother Hades is still considered one of the Olympians.

#### **Hephaestus**

An inventor, craftsman and cupbearer to the gods, Hephaestus is one of the most innovative and imaginative deities. Known to the Romans as Vulcan, Hephaestus is the god of fire, the master of metals and metallurgy. He is referred to as "The Smith" and seen with an axe or tongs. Hephaestus is often linked to Athena, because they are both associated with wisdom, civilization, and the perfection of the world's arts and crafts. He is sometimes said to have split Zeus' skull with his axe to allow Athena to be born from her

father's forehead. Hephaestus was especially worshipped in areas of high volcanic activity; his workshop was thought to be within the volcano and his forge was pictured as the source of erupting smoke and fire.

Hephaestus is lame as the result of a fall from the top of Mount Olympus, cast down by either his mother (Hera) or his father (Zeus). Hephaestus was brought back to Olympus by Dionysus, who made Hephaestus drunk and led him home on a donkey. Known as the creator of beautiful things, Hephaestus made Achilles' armor, helped in the creation of Pandora and manufactured attendants for himself. They were the first robots, intelligent creatures made of gold and silver, whose mechanical brains allowed them to walk and talk. Hephaestus is capable of anger and revenge. When he realized that his wife Aphrodite was having a love affair with Ares, he fashioned a device to catch them, an invisible net of fine metal that dropped over the amorous pair as they lay in bed. Yet Hephaestus is primarily a lover of peace. According to Homer's *Iliad*, he was even able to establish peace between Zeus and Hera during a particularly bad marital squabble.

#### **Hera**

The wife and sister of Zeus, Hera is the patroness of women, marriage and the family. Known as Juno to the Romans, Hera is important as Zeus' wife, but she has little mythology associated with herself apart from her role as queen of Olympus. Although the wedding of Zeus and Hera was a glorious event, the alliance that followed was tempestuous. Zeus and Hera quarreled constantly over his infidelities, and he once punished her severely by hanging her from Mount Olympus with an anvil fastened to each foot. The Homeric Hymn to Hera describes her as the "golden-throated...queen of the gods, unexcelled in beauty, sister and glorious wife of loud-thundering Zeus. All the gods on lofty Olympus reverence her and honor her...." Homer usually compliments her by calling her "ox-eyed" and "white-armed." Her children with Zeus include Hephaestus, Ares, Hebe and Eilithyia. Ixion once tried to rape Hera; Zeus punished him by sending him to Tartarus and tying him to a burning, continually rotating wheel. There was an important temple erected to Hera at Argos and it became a major center for her worship. The iconographic symbols pictured with her are peacocks, lilies and pomegranates.

#### **Hermes**

Hermes is a clever rogue, a trickster, a cunning liar. Maia lay with Zeus in the dead of night and when she gave birth to Hermes it was dawn. He leapt out of his cradle and by midday had fashioned a lyre out of some reeds stretched tightly across the shell of a tortoise. In the evening he stole the cattle of Apollo. The theft became a major concern on Mount Olympus and caused Zeus to act as judge; the matter was finally resolved when Hermes gave his lyre to Apollo. Known to the Latin world as Mercury, Hermes is the messenger of the gods and is sent on many missions to earth by Zeus. He is the guide of travelers and one of his most important functions is to convey the souls of the departed to the Underworld. He is usually seen carrying a winged staff and wearing a broad-brimmed, winged cap and boots with wings. The Homeric Hymn to Hermes tells us that Zeus made this son "lord of all birds of good omen, fierce-eyed lions, boars with gleaming tusks, dogs and every flock and herd that the wide earth nourishes." Like his brother Apollo, Hermes is always pictured as boyish and handsome and he has many love affairs. Hermes is often named as the father of the god Pan. His love for Aphrodite is famous mainly because of their child, a youth who was half-man and half-woman, his dual nature reflected in the blend of his parents' names: Hermaphroditus. Hermes often functions as the protector of gods and heroes as well as the interpreter of divine will. He played an important role in getting the Trojan War under way since it was he who escorted Aphrodite, Athena and Hera to Mount Ida for the fateful Judgment of Paris.

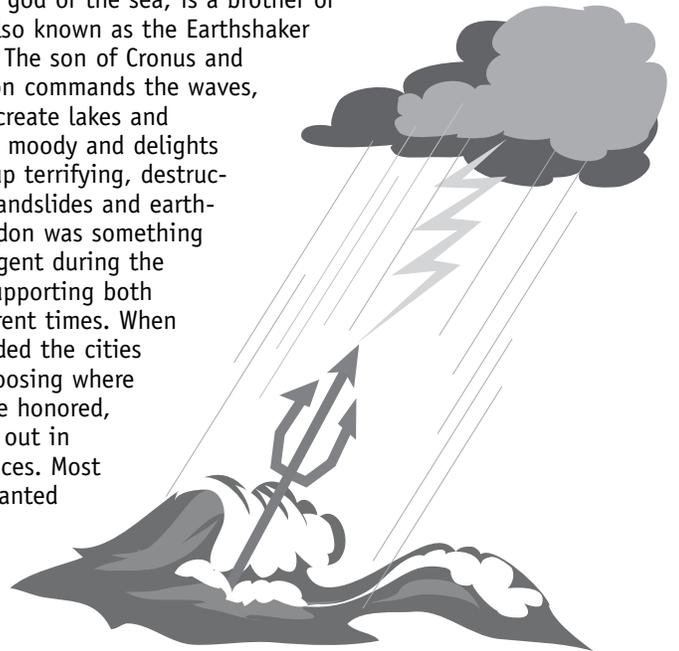
### **Hestia**

"Hestia, you who tend the sacred dwelling of the far-shooting lord, Apollo...from your tresses flowing oil ever drips down. Come to this house! Come in gentle spirit with resourceful Zeus and grant grace to my song!" (from the Homeric Hymn to Hestia). The goddess of the family fireside—her name literally means "hearth"—Hestia was an important early deity to the Greeks. But she is rarely seen in any form of art and whatever myths were originally associated with her have been lost over time. In many respects she is like the earliest gods, who represented abstract spirits of nature before they became fully anthropomorphic and took on realistic human attributes. The eldest daughter of Cronus and Rhea and the sister of Hera and Zeus, Hestia is always found on Olympus, unlike the other gods and goddesses who travel extensively. Known to the Roman world as Vesta, Hestia

never married although she was wooed by Poseidon and Apollo. Zeus ordered that Hestia be honored in all the temples of the gods and in every household. Although she was eventually replaced by Dionysus in the formal roster of gods residing on Olympus, Hestia remains a revered member of the Olympian family.

### **Poseidon**

Poseidon, the god of the sea, is a brother of Zeus and is also known as the Earthshaker and Neptune. The son of Cronus and Rhea, Poseidon commands the waves, but also can create lakes and springs. He is moody and delights in whipping up terrifying, destructive storms, landslides and earthquakes. Poseidon was something of a double agent during the Trojan War, supporting both sides at different times. When the gods divided the cities of Greece, choosing where each would be honored, Poseidon lost out in several instances. Most notably, he wanted to be the patron god of Athens, arguing he had



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earned a special role in the city because he thrust his trident into the rocky ground of the Acropolis and caused sea water to spring from the earth. Yet Athena, who planted an olive tree, was the ultimate winner in the contest. The furious Poseidon caused a flood in revenge. Poseidon's wife is Amphitrite, who bore him no heirs. But he had many children by his mistresses. Like the children of Ares, Poseidon's offspring were often malicious: the Cyclops Polyphemus, the giant Chrysaor, the bandit Sciron. Some say he was the father of Pegasus, the winged horse. His lust for Demeter produced a daughter whose name is never spoken. In addition to his tri-

dent, Poseidon is recognizable by his chariot, which is surrounded by fish and dolphins and is drawn by half-horse, half-serpent sea creatures.

### **Zeus**

The lord of men and of the gods, Zeus is the supreme commander on Olympus, although he shares power with his brothers Poseidon and Hades. Zeus is the son of Rhea and Cronus, who devoured all of his other children. When Rhea gave birth to Zeus, she went to Crete where the nymph Amalthea raised the baby until he returned to liberate his brothers and sisters and to defeat the monster Typhon. Zeus is a complex figure, an amalgamation of

By the time Homer composed his epics, Zeus had expanded his realm and evolved into a singular, all-powerful deity, a focal point for order in the moral and judicial realms.

sky gods inherited from other cultures. By the time Homer composed his epics, Zeus had expanded his realm and evolved into a singular, all-powerful deity, a focal point for order in the moral and judicial realms. Zeus insists on virtue and justice, he punishes those who break his laws. He has responsibility for making sure that promises are honored, that social and royal hierarchies are respected, that the rules of honoring one's host are obeyed. He acts as judge in disputes between gods and heroes. He can purify murderers of their sin, distribute good and evil to men and control the actions of the other gods. Yet even Zeus is subject to the Moirae (the Fates). Zeus is an imperfect, all too human god: he can be tricked, as he was by Prometheus, and distracted from affairs of

state by affairs of the heart. Zeus is capable of changing his shape: he became a swan to seduce Leda and a bull to make Europa fall in love with him. He is quixotic and can be wrathful, kind, vengeful or tender. But he is always regal, proud and amorous. His manifold romantic alliances with goddesses, nymphs and mortal women peopled the earth with countless offspring, a fact that has less to do with Zeus' sexual omnipotence or delight in debauchery than it does with the nature of polytheism and the mingling of myth and history.

Descent from Zeus was claimed by many families—including the house of Tantalus and the House of Troy—as proof of the importance of their lines. In addition to the Olympian gods and goddesses who are siblings or children of Zeus, he is the father of the Horae (Peace, Discipline and Justice), the Moirae (the Fates), the Graces and the Muses. Known to the Roman world as Jupiter or Jove, Zeus is recognizable by the lightning bolt and scepter he holds and by the eagle perched near him. [\[5\]](#)

1. As quoted in Mark Morford and Robert J. Lenardon, *Classical Mythology*. New York: Addison Wesley Longman, Inc. 1999, p. 354.

2. Homer. *The Iliad*, Trans. Robert Fagles. New York and London: Penguin Putnam, Inc., 1998, Book 5, l. 1028-1032.

3. All quotes from The Homeric Hymns from *The Homeric Hymns*, Trans. Apostolos N. Athanassakis. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976.

# AT THE TIME OF THE TROJAN WAR



**ATHENS** Great city-state of Greece where the arts and sciences flourished and where democracy was born.

**AULIS** Seaport in Boeotia, where the Greek forces met before their expedition to Troy.

**CRETE** One of the largest islands in the Mediterranean Sea, said to be the birthplace of Zeus.

**LYDIA** Mount Sipylus in Lydia is usually called the home of King Tantalus. Another tradition located his kingdom in Phrygia.

**MOUNT OLYMPUS** Home of the dynasty of Olympian gods, ruled by Zeus.

**MOUNT PARNASSUS** A mountain near Delphi where Apollo was said to preside over his Muses.

**MYCENAE** A great palace city of the Bronze Age in Greece, believed to have been the royal home of Agamemnon and his queen, Clytemnestra.

**MYSIA** An area on the northwest coast of Asia Minor where the Greek forces landed by mistake on their first expedition against Troy.

**PHTHIA** Home of King Peleus, father of Achilles.

**SPARTA** Home of Menelaus and his wife Helen, until she was abducted by Paris and taken to Troy.

**THRACE** A wild area north of Greece, liberated by Dionysus on his wanderings throughout the world, Thrace was ruled by King Polymestor.

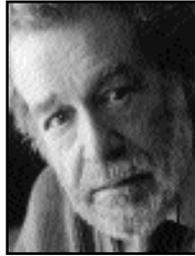
**TROY** A great coastal city in Asia Minor, sacked by the Greeks during the Trojan War in an effort to retrieve the Spartan queen, Helen.

# THE MOVERS AND SHAPERS

The staff for *TANTALUS* was selected from among today's greatest theatrical talents working all around the world.

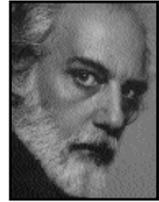
## JOHN BARTON AUTHOR

Playwright, director and advisor to the Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC), adaptor of *The Wars of the Roses*, *The Hollow Crown* and *The Greeks*, who spent 20 years developing *TANTALUS*, the epic ten play cycle which has recently been published, and from which the playing script has been adapted.



## DIONYSIS FOTOPoulos SCENIC AND COSTUME DESIGNER

Internationally known for his work in cinema and theatre, he designed sets and costumes for Sir Peter Hall's *Lysistrata* and Hall's unified staging of *Oedipus Rex/Oedipus at Colonus* in both London and Athens.



## SIR PETER HALL DIRECTOR

Theatre and opera director. Founder (1960) and Director of the RSC, later to become Artistic Director of Glyndebourne (1984-90) and Director of the Royal National Theatre (1973-88). He formed the Peter Hall Company in 1988.



## SUMIO YOSHII LIGHTING DESIGNER

Japan's leading lighting designer for opera and dramatic and musical theatre and an internationally-respected author and theatre consultant who has had a major impact on theatre architecture.



## MICK SANDS COMPOSER AND MUSICAL DIRECTOR

Irish musician, composer and conductor whose compositions for the theatre include work with the Royal National Theatre of Great Britain, the New Zealand Festival, The Gate Theatre, Edinburgh's Royal Lyceum and others.



## EDWARD HALL DIRECTOR

Has directed *Twelfth Night*, *Henry V* and *Comedy of Errors* for his own company, *Propellor*, *Sacred Heart* at the Royal Court and *Two Gentlemen of Verona* for the RSC. This year he directs *Henry V* for the RSC at Stratford.



## DONALD MCKAYLE CHOREOGRAPHER

Winner of both a Tony and an Emmy Award with seven Tony nominations. He has choreographed seven Broadway shows, feature films and television specials. McKayle's ballets are standard fare in companies across the globe.



## ANTHONY POWELL ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR AND TOUR DIRECTOR

A 13-year DCTC actor and director, he most recently staged *The Beauty Queen of Leenane*. He was a member of John Houseman's Acting Company and has appeared in regional and off-Broadway theatre.



## DONOVAN MARLEY PRODUCER

Appointed Artistic Director of the Denver Center Theatre Company in 1983, he has led the Tony Award-winning company to national prominence and international acclaim.



## COLIN TEEVAN ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR & PRODUCTION DRAMATURG

Playwright and translator whose works have been done at The Gate Theatre, London, often by Mick Gordon and Sir Peter Hall. His new play, *The Walls*, opens in the Royal National Theatre next year.



## ADRIAN NOBLE PRODUCER

One of the world's foremost classical theatre directors, who has been associated with the Royal Shakespeare Company since 1980. He was appointed its Artistic Director in 1991.



# TANTALUS RESOURCE GUIDE

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You don't need to be familiar with everyone from Achilles to Zeus in order to understand *TANTALUS*.

The plays speak clearly for themselves.

But if you're interested in finding out more about Greek mythology or history or what harp players looked like in the third millennium B.C.,

here's an introductory guide to books and Internet sites.

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**Greek\_World/Intro.html**  
University of Pennsylvania's Museum exhibition material.

Argos:  
**http://argos.evansville.edu/**  
Search engine for ancient history.

Classical Myth: **http://web.uvic.ca/grs/bowman/myth/**  
Good section on Olympian gods and detailed time chart.

Classics and Mediterranean Archaeology:  
**http://rome.classics.lsa.umich.edu/**  
Comprehensive list of Internet resources.

Classics Archive:  
**http://classics.mit.edu/**  
Extensive resource: 441 works of classical literature, searches, trivia questions, etc.

**http://lcweb.loc.gov/global/classics/claslink.html**  
Library of Congress.

Internet Resources for Classical Studies: **http://www.Indiana.edu/~kglowack/internet.html**  
Mythology, art and archaeology.

Metropolitan Museum:  
**http://www.metmuseum.org/collections/index.asp**  
From New York's Metropolitan Museum: Greek art from Neolithic times onward.

National Museum of Greece:  
**http://www.culture.gr/2/21/214/21405m/e21405m1.html**  
Greece's most famous national treasures: Prehistoric items, sculpture, vases, bronzes, etc.

Perseus Project:  
**http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/**  
Extensive resource with over 380 annotated texts, Lookup Tool, more than 30,000 images, etc.

And for your children, don't miss  
Ingri and Edgar D'Aulaire.  
*Book of Greek Myths*. New York:  
Bantam, Doubleday, Dell, 1962.

### INFORMATIONAL WEB SITES

Ancient City of Athens:  
**http://www.indiana.edu/~kglowack/athens**  
Photo archive of archaeological and architectural remains.

Ancient Greek Virtual Tour:  
**http://atschool.eduweb.co.uk/allsouls/bm/ag1.html**  
From the British Museum:  
Greek art

through the ages. Designed for children, but of interest to all.

Ancient Greek World: **http://www.museum.upenn.edu/**

Didaskalia:  
**http://didaskalia.berkeley.edu**  
Journal and information on theater in 5th c. B.C. and classics in performance today.

Diotima:  
**http://www.uky.edu/ArtsSciences/Classics/gender.html**  
Women and gender in the ancient world.

Electronic Resources for Classicists: **http://www.tlg.uci.edu/~tlg/index/resources.html**  
Archives, bibliographies, extensive links to classics departments.  
Greek and Latin Classics: