

RELIGION AND MYTHOLOGY

The ancient Greeks had dozens of different gods and goddesses, each in charge of a different aspect of life or death, as well as many figures who were spirits, and some who were half-gods. Although the Greeks were very religious, they didn't follow a strict set of rules, as modern religions often do. People worshipped the gods they found most useful.

MYTHS AND LEGENDS

Myths were an important part of ancient Greek religion. Many myths were tales of the lives of the gods and their dealings with humans. Others were stories which explained natural phenomena, such as why day turned into night, why the seasons changed, or how the world began. Now, many of these ideas would be explained scientifically.

THE CREATION

According to legend, before anything existed, there was a nothingness called Chaos. Out of this dark and empty state, Gaea, Mother Earth, slowly emerged to form the world. She gave birth to Uranus, the sky.



This is a carving of Gaea, mother earth goddess



Aphrodite - the goddess of love

THE FAMILY OF GIANTS

Gaea and Uranus married and had many children. The most important were the Titans, who looked like humans but were vast in size. They were the first gods and goddesses.

Uranus banished some of his children to the Underworld, a dark, gloomy place under the Earth. Gaea was furious, and encouraged the Titans to rise up against him. Led by Cronos, they attacked and overthrew their father.

THE BIRTH OF ZEUS

Cronos then became King of the Titans. He married his sister Rhea and they had five children. Before the children were born, Cronos was warned that one of them would kill him. So he snatched and swallowed each baby at birth. Then, when Rhea was giving birth to her sixth baby, Zeus, she tricked Cronos by giving him a stone wrapped in clothes instead of the baby. So, Zeus survived.

THE REVENGE OF ZEUS

When he was fully grown, Zeus visited his parents in disguise, and slipped a potion into Cronos's drink. This made him cough up all the babies he had swallowed: his two sons, Poseidon and Pluto, and his daughters: Hera, Hestia and Demeter.



INTERNET LINK

For links to websites where you can try online games and quizzes about Greek gods and find out more about them, go to www.usborne-quicklinks.com

This photograph shows the summit of Mount Olympus, in Greece, where the gods were supposed to live.