

Cosmogony and Theogony:
Greek Myths of the Creation

From very early times the Greeks were interested in the beginnings of things, the genesis of the world and the origins of their gods. This interest was expressed first in myths and later by philosophy. The Greek-speaking people coming comparatively late to the Mediterranean lands through a long series of migrations starting in the third millennium B.C., found on their arrival, divinities and attendant mythologies of diverse ethnic populations from the manifold strata of the Bronze and Stone Ages. Even among the invading Greeks there was diversity enough of religious beliefs which further added to the great but confusing pantheon of deities and cults. By the time of Homer (c. 750 B.C.) the Olympians, with Zeus as their leader, had become the dominant gods of the Greeks. Within Homer's epics are a number of tales which tell of struggles and intrigues among the Olympians - these tales indicate that Zeus had considerable competition from other deities in his bid to have and hold his power.

Two names stand out among those who wrote on the subject of origins of the world, they are Orpheus and Hesiod. Of the two, Hesiod (c. 700 B.C.), the crusty old bard of Ascra in Baeotia is the most important since his mythical account of the generation of the gods, The Theogony, is the earliest, the most detailed, and the most influential. Hesiod proceeds to give an orderly development to the generations of gods, culminating with the establishment of Zeus and the Olympians as the source of all that is good in life. To the anthropomorphic mind of the early Greeks, it was natural for the creation of the world to take place as a series of conceptions and procreations; that was the only way creation could be imagined in Hesiod's time. Stripped of its mythological disguise, genealogy easily becomes natural philosophy.

The Birth of the Universe

Chaos comes into being first, then broad bosomed Gaea (Earth), dark Tartarus deep in the depths of the ground and Eros (Love). From Chaos came forth Erebus (Darkness) and Nyx (Night): and from the union of Nyx and Erebus were born Aether (Light) and Hemera (Day). Gaea (Earth) gave birth to Uranus (Heavens), Ourea (Mountains) and Pontus (Sea). Thus Hesiod fashions not only the physical outlines of the world, but living quarters for his divine inhabitants which includes even a subterranean kind of punishment area (jail), Tartarus, especially for recalcitrant deities who must be restrained or kept out of circulation. Tartarus as a Hell or kind of penal institution for human souls is a later development in mythology.

The Birth of the Titans

Earth-Heaven

Titans

1. Oceanus
2. Coeus
3. Crius
4. Hyperion
5. Iapetus
6. Theta
7. Rhea
8. Themis
9. Mnemosyne
10. Phoebe
11. Tethys
12. Cronus

Cyclopes (One eye)

1. Brontes (thunder)
2. Steropes (lightning)
3. Arges (flash)

Hecatoncheires

1. Cottus
2. Briareus
3. Gyes

(The Hecatoncheires are the hundred-handed giants, terrible monsters who acted as Zeus' secret weapon - often depicted as something like a monstrous octopus.)

At the persuasion of Earth, Cronus attacks his father Uranus with a jagged sickle - castrating him. The blood of Uranus which falls upon earth becomes the Furies: Alecto, Megera, and Tisiphone. The castrated members that fell into the sea created a great swirling foam which ultimately produced Aphrodite who was accompanied on her journey to the assembly of the Gods by Eros and Desire.

The scene of creation now shifts to Pontus (sea) and his descendants. Pontus mates with Earth and produces three sons and two daughters.

Pontus-Earth

Nereus
(The Kindly Old
Man of the Sea)

Thaumas
(Wondrous)

Phorcys
(Monster)

Ceto
(Sea-
Monster
Woman)

Eurybia
(Mighty)

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^{Nereus}
Nereus and Doris (an Oceanid) become the parents of the Nereids - the nymphs of the sea. There are some fifty or more of these and the following examples show how descriptive they are of the sea.

Speo (Cave), Eulimene (Good Harbour), Halia (Salty), and Cyno (Wavy). Included in this list are the sea nymphs Thetis, Galatea, and Amphitrite.

Thaumas, like his brother, Nereus takes an Oceanid for a wife and their three daughters are in some ways related to strong winds. The fourth Inis is more descriptive of peace after a storm.

Thaumas-Electra (an Oceanid)

Iris
Swift gold winged
Iris the goddess
spirit of the
rainbow.

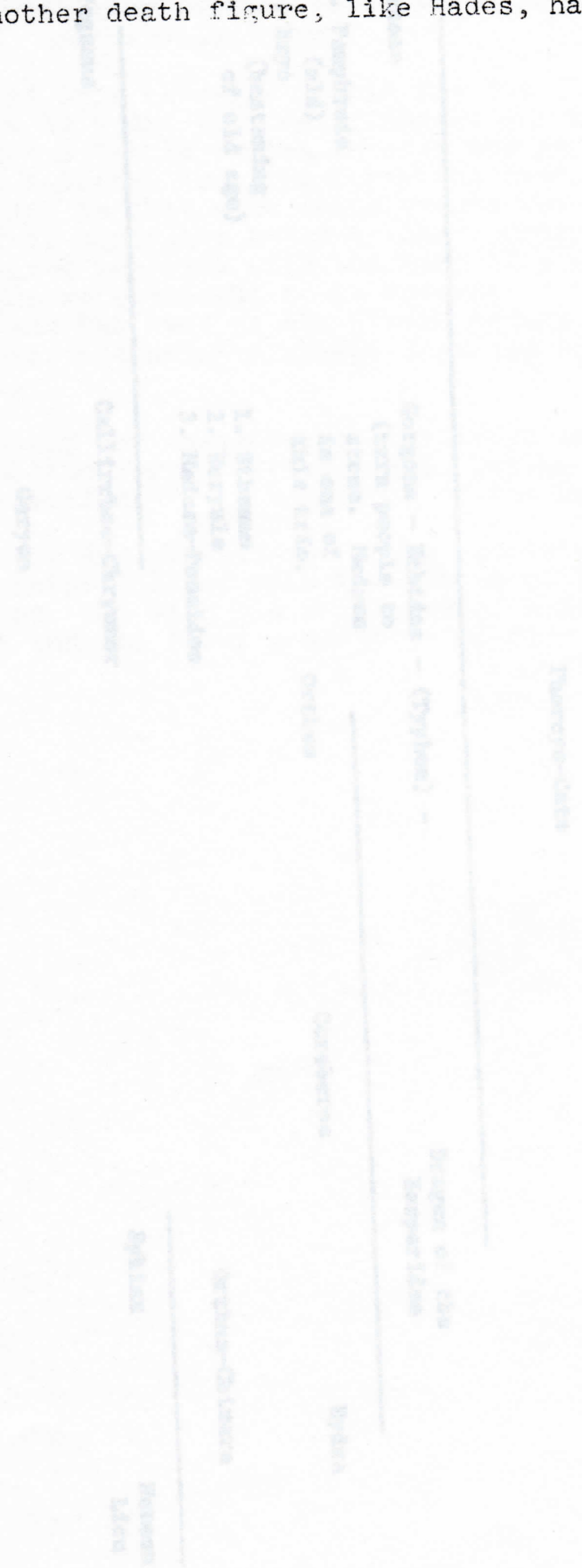
- Harpies
1. Aello
(Storm wind)
 2. Ocypete
(Swift wind)
 3. Celaeno
(dark)

Collectively the three sisters are referred to as the Harpies (Snatchers) However, they are also closely identified in several myth tales to "wind", "spirit", and "soul" - a relationship which gives rise to the view that originally the Harpies were also considered souls of the dead - which also gave rise to the notion that the souls of the dead can snatch the souls of living.

Phorcys, styled an Old Man of the Sea - or Monster of the Sea, mates with his sea-monster sister Ceto and begets a host of monstrous creatures. On the principles of like begetting like these in turn produce several generations of other monsters. In genealogical form, these are the generations of strange creatures whom we meet again and again in the adventures of such heroes as : Odysseus, Heracles, Perseus, and Bellerophon.

The remaining descendants of Phorcys and Ceto bear little resemblance to human beings: rather they are a mixture of monstrous animals and hideous hybrids. Cereberos and Orthus are of the canine species. Cereberos is a flesh eating creature - he guards the doors of the gods of the lower world - he is obviously representative of the more grim aspects of death.

Orthus appears to be one of the demonic dogs of the lower world also. His master is Geryon-a three-headed or three-bodied monster whose home is in the far west at the edge of the world - a common residence of death. Geryon, another death figure, like Hades, has his own hell-hound.



Pegasus

- 1. Pegasus (old)
- 2. Karye (wrestling of old age)

Callirrhoe-Chrysaor

- 1. Stheno
- 2. Euryle
- 3. Medusa-Poseidon

Geryon

Cerberus

Gorgons - Echidna - (Typhon) -

(turn people to stone. Medusa is one of this trio.)

Orthus

Cerberus

Dragon of the Hesperides

Hydra

Orthus-Chimera

Sphinx

**Hydra
Lion**

Phorcys-Ceto

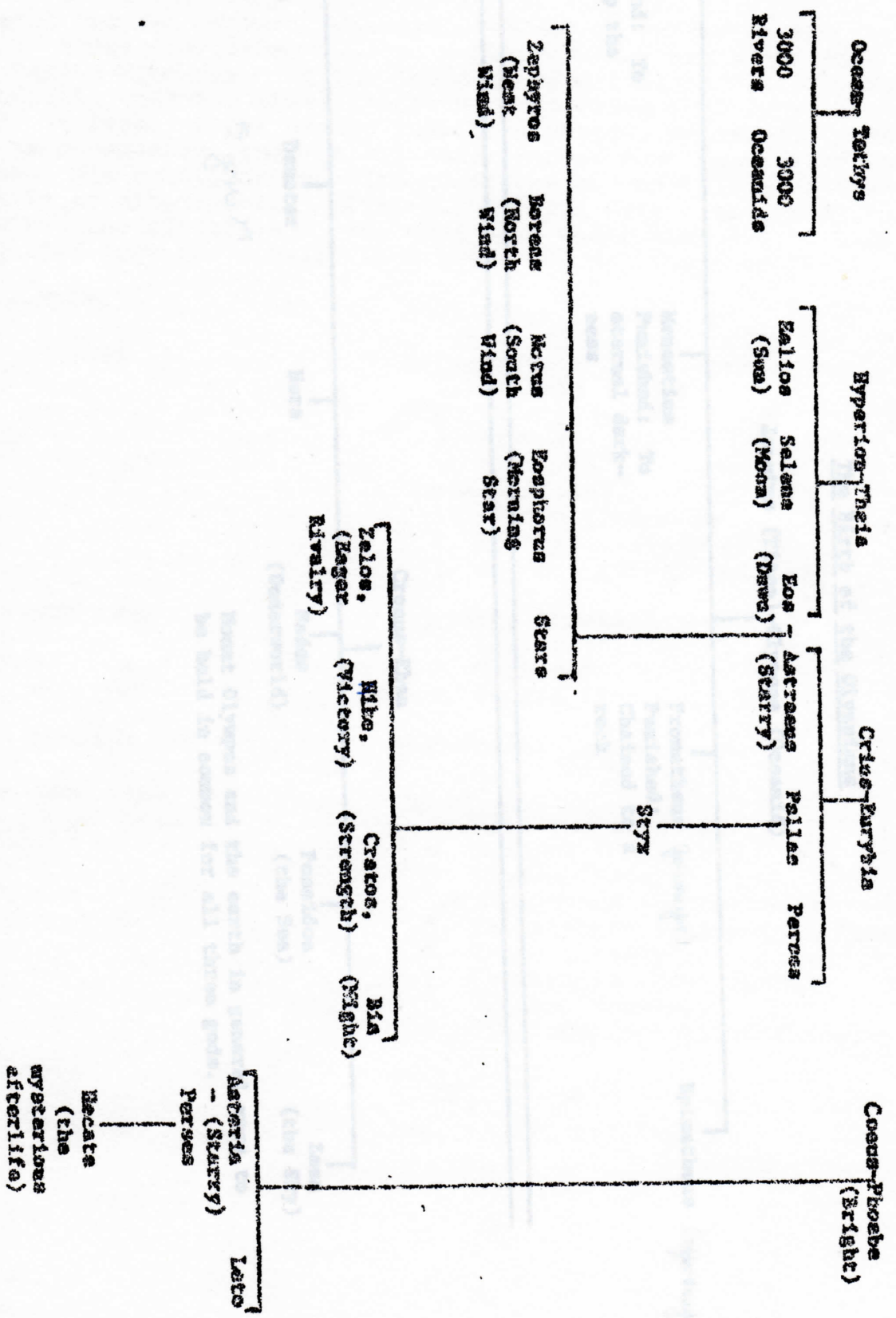
In the reptile family there is Echidna and her equally unattractive spouse Typhon. Echidna is half-human, half-snake, an awful thing, which ate raw flesh -- Typhon (Typhaon, Typhoeus) is described as a fearful dragon with many serpent heads which breathed fire and emitted sounds of "unspeakable terror".

The offspring of this terrible couple are equally monstrous and terrifying - there is Hydra (the water snake) who brings forth the Chimaera (she-goat) a triple bodied monster who breathes fire. The Chimaera mates with Orthus to bring forth the Sphinx (Strangler or Choker). The Sphinx is that same death figure who is challenged by Oedipus in Part I of Sophocles great trilogy, Oedipus Tyrannus. Represented as a winged creature with the head of a woman and the body of a lion, Sphinxes were thought to be present at battles and to carry off young men. Like the head of the Gorgan Medusa, the representation of a Sphinx on tombs and on shields was designed to terrify people and frighten them away.

In Vergil's Aeneid the descendants of Phorcys and Ceto, as well as the evil sons and daughters of black night, became hideous phantasms in the poet's conception of the vestibule of the Underworld.

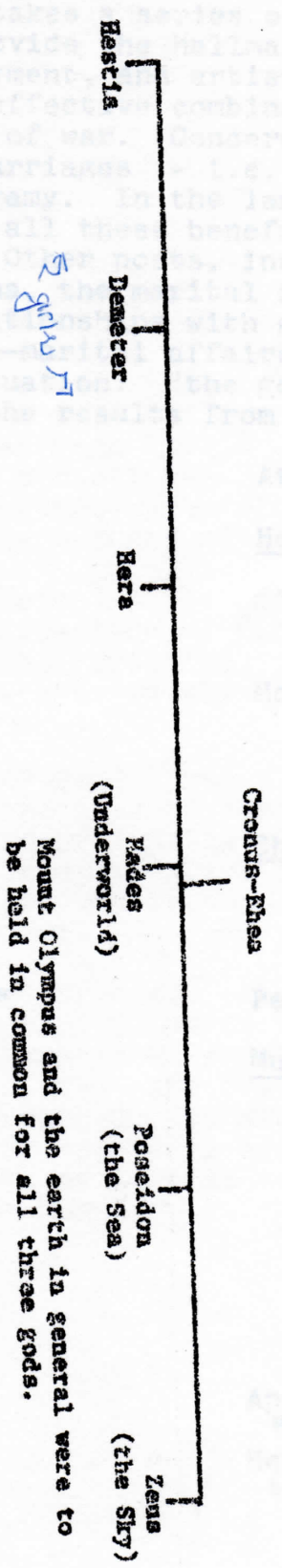
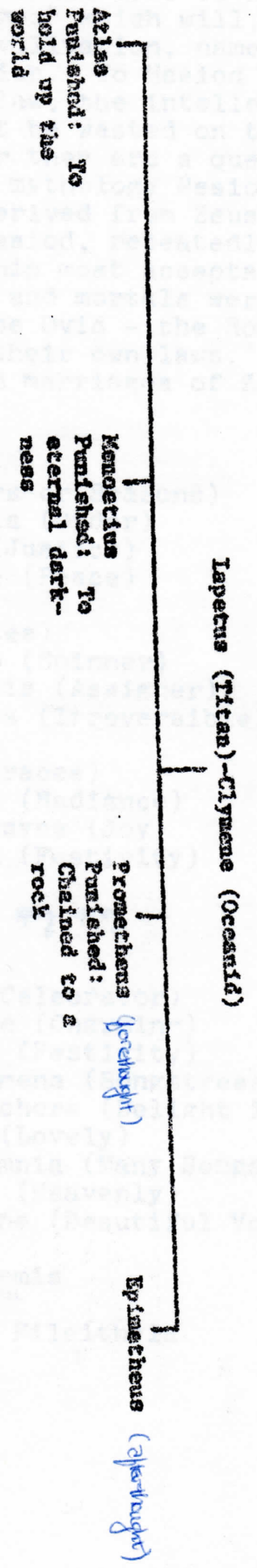
With this bizarre and extravagant phase completed, creation proceeds along more natural lines with the mating of the Titans, mostly with their own kind, and with the begetting of a large number of nature divinities and the first generation of Olympian deities.

The Birth of Nature Divinities



The Birth of the Olympians

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After assigning spheres of influence in the universe to his brother gods, Zeus undertakes a series of "marriages" which will, through his dispensation, provide the hallmarks of civilization, namely peace, good government, enjoyment, and artistic creation. To Hesiod a civilized state means the effective combination of law, the intellectual pursuits and even the art of war. Concern need not be wasted on the moral question of these "marriages" - i.e. - whether they are a question of polygamy versus monogamy. In the language of mythology Hesiod merely means to indicate that all these benefits are derived from Zeus, they are the "seed" of Zeus. Other poets, including Hesiod, repeatedly refer to the gods as monogamous, the marital relationship most acceptable to the Greeks. His relationships with goddesses and mortals were viewed tolerantly as extra-marital affairs. Perhaps Ovid - the Roman Poet best described the situation: "the gods have their own laws." Here follows, in tabular form the results from the seven marriages of Zeus.

--Metis

Athena

---Themis

Horae (Hours or Seasons)

1. Eunomia (Order)
2. Dike (Justice)
3. Eirene (Peace)

Moerae (Fates)

1. Clotho (Spinner)
2. Lachesis (Assigner)
3. Atropos (Irreversible)

---Eurynome

Charites (Graces)

1. Aglaia (Radiance)
2. Euphrosyne (Joy)
3. Thalia (Festivity)

---Demeter *sister*

Persephone *spring*

---Mnemosyne

of good memory

Muses

1. Clio (Celebrator)
2. Euterpe (Charming)
3. Thalia (Festivity)
4. Melpomene (Songstress)
5. Terpsichore (Delight in Dance)
6. Erato (Lovely)
7. Polyhymnia (Many Songs)
8. Urania (Heavenly)
9. Calliope (Beautiful Voice)

---Leto

Apollo, Artemis

---Hera *sister*

Hebe, Ares, Eileithyia

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The first of Zeus' brides was the Oceanis Metis (Wisdom). It was a marriage full of impending danger for Zeus. He was warned that from this union might come an offspring so exceedingly clever and mighty that he would be over-thrown, as in his own case his strength overcame that of his father Cronus and that Cronus, too, had overcome his father Uranus. Being thus well reminded of past events Zeus heeded the warning by deliberately beguiling Metis when she was in child labour and swallowing her whole, "so that the goddess might point out to him both good and evil." So filled is he with the wisdom of Metis that he gives birth to Athena from his head, (the 'seat' of wisdom). Athena, it is alleged by several poets of the time, sprang fully armed from Zeus' head uttering a great war cry. Thus Zeus was no longer subject to the same cycle of succession that afflicted his father and grandfather. Earlier Prometheus had stubbornly withheld the secret that Zeus would be overthrown also by a child mothered by Thetis, so Zeus by-passed this threat by marrying Thetis off to a mortal*. By swallowing Metis Zeus took within himself the qualities for which Metis was justly famed - famed - wisdom and good counseling. Athena, therefore, combines the qualities of Metis and the military attributes of her invincible father.

The Horae (Hours). The offspring of this marriage to Themis are fittingly personifications of the seasons of the year and therefore connected with growth, fertility, and the fruits of the earth. They have beneficent powers and are always invited to weddings and births of gods and heroes.

The Moerae (Fates). The fates under the government of Zeus are subordinated to the laws of justice, as personified by the two gods, i.e., Zeus the god of justice and Themis goddess of righteousness. With Dike as a sister they are also the just administrators of human fortunes. Even as good fortune will fall upon the just, so evil will fall upon the unjust.

The Charites (Graces). Having bestowed wisdom, law and order on the universe now considered to be both civilized and regulated, Zeus, mating with the Oceanid Eurynome brings into existence the radiant goddess of happiness, joy, and festivities - the Graces. They are the goddesses of vegetation, who make the ground productive and cause joy and delight in the hearts of men and women. The Graces often accompany Aphrodite, goddess of Love as personal attendants. They are also associated with the Muses.

*Peleus

The Muses

Clio:	History:	Wears a wreath and carries a scroll.
Euterpe:	Music:	Carries a flute (or reed pipe).
Thalia:	Comedy and Pastoral poetry:	Comic mask, carries a shepherd's staff, or sometimes a wreath of ivy.
Melpomene:	Tragedy:	Tragic mask, vine leaves twisted about the body and wears cothurnus (special shoes worn by tragic actors).
Terpsichore:	Dance:	She carries a lyre (4 string harp) and plectrum.
Erato:	Lyric poetry:	Carries a lyre.
Polyhymnia:	Sacred songs and hymns:	She is always veiled and thoughtful.
Urania:	Astronomy:	She carries a globe to represent the vast dome of the sky.
Calliope:	Epic poetry:	She carries a tablet and stylus.

Mnemosyne the Titaness was visited on nine successive nights by Zeus. In due time she gave birth to the nine muses. Here is a clear picture of allegory; by the divine help of a beneficent Zeus, Mnemosyne, i.e. memory, produces the arts and intellectual pursuits.

infant into his own person to bring it ultimately to birth. (He places the foetus inside a pocket or pouch he cuts into his own leg.) Another association with a mortal woman Alcmena begets the greatest hero of Greek mythology, Hercules. (Hercules) Hercules at the end of his mortal life is deified and ascends to Olympus. There the gods bestow on him Hebe who rejuvenates the spirit of Hercules making him youthful and powerful even among gods.

The Conclusion of Theogony

Now that the amenities and tranquility of life had been introduced into the world Hesiod rapidly brings his generation of the gods to a close. The succeeding marriages and relationships produce the second generation of Olympians. Mating with Leto, his sixth wife, Zeus becomes the father of Apollo and Artemis. His seventh and final wife is Hera. Three children are born to Zeus and Hera: Hebe, the cup-bearer of the gods; Ares, the god of war, and Eileithyia (also Ilithyia) the goddess of childbirth.

Hebe is representative of the spirit of youth and has powers of rejuvenation: Ares perhaps represents the more tempestuous and martial aspects of his mother who is also called upon to protect cities especially the cities of Argos. Perhaps, too, Ares may be a reflection of the domestic quarrelling and squabbling which was all too frequent in the lives of Zeus and Hera. Zeus often finds his son in irritation accusing him ungraciously of having inherited his mother's uncontrollable temper.

There seems to be nothing but antagonism between the divine couple which is whipped into a fury by Hera's constant jealousy of Zeus' having brought Athena into existence in the most unusual manner, (right out of his head). In retaliation Hera gave birth to Hephaestus "without union with Zeus." However Hera did not accomplish the same kind of perfection as Zeus did in creating Athena. Hephaestus is a cripple and is ugly - he became a craftsman and was known as "the smith of the gods." Hesiod completes his generation of gods by citing the marriages of the two other Olympians - Poseidon and Hades.

Poseidon - Amphitrite (she is a Nereid)
Their son is Triton.

Hades - robs the world of the living of Persephone, goddess of spring, for six months out of every year.

Aphrodite marries Ares and they have three children:

Phobus (Fear)

Deimos (Panic)

Harmonia (Harmony) *(who will become the wife of Cadmus)*

Zeus takes a consort Maia, whose name means mother or nurse, and the child of this union is Hermes (the messenger of the gods). Zeus' relation with the mortal woman, Semele, produces ultimately the last admission to the ranks of the Olympians, Dionysus. Semele (Cadmus' daughter) dies before her child-labour is complete and Zeus takes the unborn infant into his own person to bring it ultimately to birth. (He places the foetus inside a pocket or pouch he cuts into his own leg.) Another association with a mortal woman Alcmena begets the greatest hero of Greek mythology, Heracles. (Hercules) Heracles at the end of his mortal life is apotheosized and ascends to Olympus. There the gods bestow on him Hebe who rejuvenates the spirit of Heracles making him youthful and powerful even among gods.