

MYTHOS - AN ASPECT OF BIOS

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The idea of mythology is an allegorical interpretation of historical events and natural phenomena. It is a part of the general scheme of philosophy. Myth is the rationalisation of the unknown, and for this reason it bears no relation to the absurd. With myth, man expressed his ignorance. So myth is the key to understanding civilisation. But myth can also be seen as the poetic expression of mankind and be valued as a source of information about human psychology.

The roots of myth lie in the human brain, where all feelings are found. They surface and circulate as oral tradition with many variations. The number of variations depends on the environment and the social cultural milieu. Very often they fulfill diverse social and spiritual needs and offer solutions to psychological problems; afterwards the myth, rich and diverse, becomes a creed and a consciousness to the people of the earth.

Finally, when the time is right, an ingenious individual collects and reforms this scattered material, establishing it as a united faith. He presents it to his contemporaries who gratefully accept this offer from such an exceptional person, tiring of the many uncertainties of faith, thus seeking the grand unification.

A doubt lingers on. As much as they seek and want to accept this reformed faith, they are nevertheless loath to discard their own creed which satisfied them for so long. Thus, for some time these two move in parallel. Along the way, elements of one impose themselves upon the other. The end-product is an amalgam of both a spreading-out in space and time in the wake of mankind which creates them.

The myth of the Muses and the myth of the Graces (Charites) illustrate this process. In dissecting the worship of the Muses one can discover its primordial roots: The Jungian Archetypes. Following its evolution, we will arrive at the end-product, which is the myth of the Hesiodian Theogony. According to Pausanias' recounts, two factors are chiefly responsible for the establishment of the worship of the Muses in the Helladic region and especially in Boeotia, the cradle of the tenets of the primal religion of Greece. Let us study them separately and try to discern cause and effect. We shall answer the following questions: who were the children of "Aloeos"? and why were they especially connected with the worship of the Muses?

The children of "Aloeos", according to Homer (E 385) and Pausanias concurs (in IX, 29) were Otos (from Otheo) and Ephialtes. They are two characters from Greek Mythology who move on many planes of the mind and simultaneously play roles on many levels. Legend has it that they tried to overthrow Zeus by piling Mt. Pelion upon Mt. Ossa, bringing them on a par with Mt. Olympus - i.e., they constituted a real threat to the established order. They believed that if they faced Zeus on equal terms, his downfall would be automatic.

It was the first time that Zeus faced a threat of this nature. Their second move was the establishment of two cities "Askron" and "Aloion". All their moves followed a strictly logical sequence. First of all, they shook the foundations of the Deities by a logical act. Secondly, having liberated man from the absurdity of Zeus, they created a new social order by founding cities. Thirdly, as narrated by Homer (E 385), they imprisoned Ares, the God of War. War is violence and therefore irrational. Moreover, cities are destroyed by war. War is concomitant to death. Whereas the development of human communities, such as cities, involves the evolution of certain elements of rationality totally opposite to war.

Finally, their last move, in full harmony with preceding ones, was the establishment of the worship of the Muses. The Muses here represent the awakening of human consciousness. Man thus attained a new hierarchical level in his spiritual evolution. The Muses are three - Melete, Mneme and Aoidos. Thus the Muses were introduced into the Helladic region as a triadic complex like Charites, Horae and Moirae. And as the Horae became four seasons from three and then twelve months, in a similar way the three Muses became nine; i.e., the three fundamental ones subdivide to nine jurisdictions such as:

Melete: Epic Poetry - Calliope History - Cleio Tragedy - Melpomene

Mneme: Serious Religious Verse - Polymnia Comedy or Bucolic Poetry - Thalia Astronomy - Urania

Aoidos: Dance - Terpsichore Erotic Poetry - Erato Lyric Poetry - Euterpe

The three primordial forms of the Muses represent three basic functions of the human intellect.

- Melete: Research.
- Mneme : Pattern storage and recognition mechanisms.

- Aoidos: Expression of emotional states.

The institution of the worship of the Muses by the Aloades has a clearly allegoric character. The Aloades, sons of the King of Corinth "Alous" and Earth, are not Olympian Gods. From the Mother (Ge) they have an innate attachment to everything terrestrial. The Aloades are mankind's allies in its struggle not for biological survival but for knowledge and logic. They are the Prometheuses who don't steal from the Gods to offer to mankind, but do something more provocative; they neutralise the effect of Zeus and Ares on mankind for a short time and liberate it from tyranny of the gods. The Aloades assist man by helping the Muses to develop man's rational powers and thus to liberate himself. We find ourselves in the early stage of humanity with logic, not shining, but just dawning. Our heroes, through the consistent actions, assist mankind in bringing to the surface this glimmer of logic.

They symbolise man during prehistory and early antiquity. We suggest this interpretation for the first of the Muses' myths. But as humanity evolves, the myth of the Muses follows in its footsteps. Furthermore, Pausania recounts, the myth enters a new phase. Hesiod calls them Pieries. But let us take a look at the relationship between the three Aloadian Muses and the nine Pierians. According to Pausania, Pieros the Macedonian was king of Pieria, a region between Thessaly and Macedonia near the Mouth of Penios. He had nine daughters. The interest focuses on the common traits between the Muses and the daughters. Firstly, their same number and talents were so uncommon that the nine daughters wished to compete with the Muses. Naturally they paid for their audacity; the nine Muses transformed them into birds.

The nine Muses symbolise the spiritual forces latent in the nine daughters. The nine mortals recognising their capabilities, wished to realise them and for that they were punished. One sees a tentative but conscious competition of spiritual forces between mortals and Gods, but man, for his audacity, is crushed by the divine.

The complex of the three Graces, on the other hand, was derived from the impersonal meaning of the word "Charis" (grace) and only later, in different parts of Greece, was it subdivided into either two or three separate roles. Grace is the supreme need of the human soul that we call "beauty". And most importantly, grace is not the personification of beauty nor does it derive from beauty. Grace itself is an internal need, whose result is the expression of beauty.

But here we are obliged to make a sharp distinction between beauty and natural harmony. Harmony is the order that reigns in the external world. It is the expression of a natural law. But the innate harmony in nature is a fait accompli. It is a cognition made already from pre-Homeric times. Man defied this fact, since he could not explain it.

It is very characteristic that Apollo, the God of Harmony and Light, was the natural escort. All the pluralistic systems of deities, Muses, Nymphs, etc., are attached to Apollo (Hes. Theog. 93...) and thus their symbolism is laid bare. Human logic and human spiritual capabilities become consciously subordinated to the Divine. Hesiod's pen immortalised this transcendence of the human spirit.

Thus, the myths develop their historical dimension. As such they have a purely Greek character, value and place in the Pantheon of the Greek Religion where there are strict hierarchies. First the twelve Gods and Goddesses, then some less important Gods and Goddesses, third, groups of young virgins with special names and personal histories, next the anonymous crowd of thousands of smaller deities, and last, the half-human, half-god personalities, heroes, nymphs, kings and queens who played a great role in the prehistory and history of Greece.

The three Graces and the nine Muses occupy a very distinguished place in the category of Helladic group deities. The three Graces originate from beauty, a universal human value, and the nine Muses from social order. Beauty sparked the curiosity to understand natural harmony and order. This curiosity remained unsatisfied and brought forth the myth in a specific setting.

The pertinent question at this point is "Does myth have a future, or will it fade with antiquity?" The answer is that they do have a future because mythology's roots run deep into prehistoric times. Its historic development is to be found in the past, and does not disappear when logic and rationality replace ignorance. Their history and life continue throughout all the ages. It is the case of the hero with a thousand faces.

It is necessary for humanity to understand that through various symbols the same redemption is revealed. Man has to know and control the world in which he lives and to know himself, with a hunger for immortality. As Ernest Becker pointed out, man has always sacrificed life for more life. For this "more life", the myth is needed.

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