

Ancient Greek Mythology: The Myth of Sisyphus and Written Literature

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Abstract. *In Greek mythology, gods and heroes do not directly communicate with ordinary humans, and even romantic relationships are observed. They too belong to the category of beings that help their lovers and partners. Undoubtedly, this situation helped the ancient Greeks to understand themselves better through the gods, to better understand their personal desires and tendencies, their behavior, and also to evaluate their strength in a more appropriate way.*

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For anyone interested in the history of the culture, literature, and art of all peoples, as well as for specialists, it is essential to become familiar with the mythology of Ancient Greece and Ancient Rome. Since the Renaissance, artists, sculptors, and writers have continuously referred to the mythology of Ancient Greece and Rome when choosing plots for their creations. The impact of ancient culture on the development of European nations is immense. The Russian literary critic A.A. Neyhardt writes: "Greek-Roman mythology is so deeply embedded in Russian literature that someone unaware of mythological characters might find the lyrical or satirical content of A.S. Pushkin's poems (especially his early works) unclear. The same could be said about the poetry of G.R. Derzhavin, V.A. Zhukovsky, M.Yu. Lermontov, I.A. Krylov, and others."¹ Regarding Ancient Greek mythology, it can be said that, forming the foundation of European nations' common cultural heritage, it seems to have deeply influenced even the imagination and thinking style of modern individuals, including creators. For example, in European artistic literature, strong men are often compared to Hercules, and brave and powerful women to Amazons. Creators, such as painters, sculptors, and poets, are especially attracted to the clarity and artistic quality found in these mythological images. However, it cannot be said that the influence of ancient Greek culture on the formation of universal artistic thinking is high.

"The culture of the ancient world, including Greek mythology, had a great impact on the progress of world nations, art, and literature. But it is worth noting that Greek myths did not emerge from nowhere; they also drank from the well of Eastern mythology, particularly from Sumerian culture and mythology. Unfortunately, this historical fact has remained hidden until now. For example, some of the beings found in Greek mythology can be traced back to Sumerian literature."² Despite this, the influence of Greek mythology on the evolutionary process of modern human thinking is invaluable. The creation of myths was humanity's first step towards self-understanding through existence. Gradually, in various regions of Greece, myths about the fate of gods and heroes formed groups. The songs and legends performed by wandering minstrels were later transformed into written literature as time passed. The contribution of Homer in collecting these myths and legends is invaluable. His works "Iliad" and "Odyssey," along with Hesiod's "Theogony" and "Works and Days," as well as other sources that have not reached our time, took the form of epic poems. In particular, Ancient

¹ Кун Н.А. Қадимги юнон афсона ва ривоятлари. -- Самарқанд. "Зрафшон" нашриёти, 2005. 3-бет. (250 б)

² Қосимов А., Ҳамдамов У. Жаҳон адабиёти. – Тошкент: 2017. 32-бет

Greek authors—Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides—based their tragedies on these legends about gods, heroes, and other patrons. "The ancient Greeks were a dynamic, determined, and industrious people. Even though there were creatures threatening to harm or oppose humans, they sought to understand the real world. However, this quest for knowledge was dominated by an unquenchable thirst for knowledge, which overcame the fear of the unknown, the invisible dangers. The adventures of Odysseus, the Argonauts' quest for the golden fleece—these are all poetic expressions of the human desire to know as much as possible about the world they live in."³

In order to defend themselves against dreadful forces, the ancient Greeks, like other peoples, believed in the divinity of inanimate objects—stones, metals, trees—and went through a period of fetishism. Furthermore, in their customs and traditions, religious beliefs, and legends, they believed in the existence of spirits and worshipped them (animism), along with recognizing the presence of the most crude superstitions. However, the Greek people, when creating their gods, anthropomorphized them, attributing to them qualities like beauty, immortality, and supreme virtues. Thus, the gods of ancient Greece are distinguished by their human-like qualities—bravery, compassion, nobility. Yet, many of them are also evil—cruel, vengeful, merciless. For example, in the epic "Works and Days" by Hesiod, an ancient Greek poet who is sometimes considered even more important than Homer, some deities are portrayed as evil enemies of humankind, while others are portrayed as humanity's saviors. Prometheus, Dionysus, and Demeter, for instance, are depicted as friends of humanity, always ready to help.

Human life always ended in some form of death. The gods, however, were immortal and pursued their desires without limit. But neither the gods nor humans could change their fate, which was controlled by the Moirai (Fates). Therefore, the fate of the immortal gods and humans was seen as similar. In Greek mythology, gods and heroes did not communicate directly with ordinary people, and even romantic relationships were observed. They, too, belonged to the category of beings who help their lovers and partners. Undoubtedly, this allowed the ancient Greeks to understand themselves better through the gods, as it helped them understand their personal desires, behaviors, and to better evaluate their strength. The researcher's N. Rahmatullayev's ideas confirm this perspective. "In ancient times, mythological plots were organized and filled with socially-philosophical content, relevant for their time, and reinterpreted (as seen in the works of Hesiod, Homer, Aeschylus, Euripides, Sophocles, Virgil). Mythological characters and their heroism were altered to reflect the relationships of the time and the people." The ancient Greeks had a direct perception of all the complex events happening in their lives. Therefore, their mythological heroes also experienced human-like emotions during moments of despair or happiness. This confirms that mythology mirrored human nature. The fate of these mythological heroes, with their complex human lives, was full of conflict and struggle, with feelings of defeat or victory, suffering or joy. These heroes were like the ancient Greeks—simple, noble, yet ruthless in their treatment of enemies.

Greek mythology continues to captivate people today with its richness and complexity. In particular, myths related to the supreme god Zeus, such as the image of Prometheus, who was chained to the highest mountain in the Caucasus with his eyes constantly being pecked by an eagle, or Sisyphus, who was doomed to endlessly roll a stone up a mountain, continue to draw the interest of artists and scholars alike. In particular, the modern interpretations of the myth of Sisyphus have encouraged literary critics to explore mythopoetics more deeply. Interest is growing in studying the myths surrounding characters like Sisyphus and Zeus. Sisyphus, the son of Aeolus, the god of the winds, was the founder of the ancient city of Corinth, known as Ephrya in ancient times. In terms of cunning and intellect, no one in all of Greece was considered his equal. Due to this trait, Sisyphus accumulated enormous wealth, and his treasures became famous throughout the world. When the god of death, Thanatos, came to take him to the underworld, Sisyphus outwitted him and chained him up. As a result, death ceased to occur on earth, and no funeral rituals or sacrifices could be performed.

Zeus, disturbed by the disruption of the natural order on earth, sent Ares, the god of war, to free Thanatos and take Sisyphus's soul to the underworld. However, Sisyphus, having previously

³ Кун Н.А. Қадимги юнон афсона ва ривоятлари. -- Самарқанд. "Зрафшон" нашриёти, 2005. 4-бет.

instructed his wife not to bury him or make any sacrifices to the underworld gods, managed to delay his fate. Eventually, Sisyphus was sent back to the land of the living, where he rejoiced in his escape and held lavish feasts. Infuriated, Hades sent Thanatos again to retrieve his soul. This time, Sisyphus's soul was permanently taken to the underworld.

For all his deceit and lies, Sisyphus was condemned to an eternal punishment: the task of rolling a stone up a steep mountain, only for it to roll back down each time he reached the summit. No matter how hard he tried, he would never achieve his goal. According to Homer's myths, Sisyphus was considered one of the most selfish, evil, and cunning men among the Greeks, and these traits ultimately led to his harsh punishment. There are several versions of this myth, with the most widespread version included in Homer's "Iliad." In other versions, Sisyphus is punished for robbing travelers, while in others, he is condemned for revealing the secrets of the gods.

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