

1<sup>st</sup> Junior High School  
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Education and Culture DG

Lifelong Learning Programme

# MYTHS AND LEGENDS

## PART II

Greece-Norway-Italy  
Croatia-Romania





# Myths on the establishment of the Olympic Games

There are two main myths that describe the founding of the Olympics,  
both occurring in Olympia.

According to the first myth, *Oenomaos*, the son of Alxion or Ares, was ruling at the territory of the nearby Pisa. Oenomaos had received from Delphi an oracle stating that when his daughter would marry, he would die. So, he proclaimed that he would marry his daughter *Hippodameia* with the suitor that would defeat him in a chariot race, with the precondition that the suitor would carry his daughter in his chariot and he must defeat him. It was agreed that if the suitor lost the race, he would be killed by Oenomaos.

Oenomaos had already killed thirteen suitors, when *Pelops*, the son of Tantalos from Lydia, came to challenge him. With the help of Myrtilos, son of Hermes, who was the charioteer of Oenomaos, Pelops defeated Oenomaos. Pelops and Hippodameia, who were in love, had bribed Myrtilos to replace the axle of the king's chariot with one made of wax. In the course of the race, the axle melted and Oenomaos was thrown to his death in the crash. Later, Pelops killed Myrtilos and he cursed Pelop's whole generation in return.



*Pelops and Hippodameia*

So, Pelops married *Hippodameia*, became king of Pisa, annexed *Olympia* from the land of *Epeans*, restored the Games with great splendor and gave his name to the area. (*Pelops-Peloponnese*).

According to another myth, it was *Heracles*, the half-god son of *Zeus* who established the Games. *Heracles* was forced by goddess *Hera* to kill his children. In order to redeem his honour, he had to serve *King Euestheus*, his cousin, who commanded him to complete twelve labours.

When *King Aitolos* was forced to leave the Peloponnese, *Eleios* ruled the land of Epeans. From his name, the entire territory and its inhabitants took their new name, *Eleans*.

His son *Augeas*, who later became king, had so many cows and goats, that the soil could not be cultivated because of the dung of the animals. To solve the problem, he called *Heracles* and promised him a part of his land. When *Heracles* managed to clean the place by changing the flow of the rivers *Alpheus* and *Pineios*, *Augeas* refused to give him his reward.



*Heracles* then, with the help of *Argos*, *Thebes* and *Arcadia*, invaded and conquered *Elis*, punished the *Eleans* and he was about to invade their allies, *Pisa* and *Pylos*, but an oracle from *Delphi* stopped him. *Heracles* gave the throne to the eldest son of *Augeas*, *Phyleus*, in gratitude for his standing out against his father's injustice.

*Heracles* supposedly organized the *Olympic Games* to celebrate his completion of his fifth labour, the cleaning of the *Aegean Stables* in one day. By holding the festivities, he was thanking *Zeus* for his help in completing the labour.

adapted from: *Pausanias' Periegesis' (Description of Greece)*  
<http://www.pe04.com>  
<http://el.wikipedia.org>



# Centaur Pholos and The Forest of Pholoi

The forest of *Pholoi* is of crucial importance for the forestry resources of Ileia. It is considered the oldest European self-planted beech and oak forest and the biggest of the Balkans. Its name is connected with *Centaur Pholos*, the king of the Centaurs and Heracles' friend.



The myth of the Centaurs can be found in many parts of Greece. Ancient Greeks believed that the Centaurs were fierce, mean, aggressive and jealous. Furthermore, their strength was enormous. They could move blocks of stones, rocks and huge tree trunks which they flung to their enemies. But they also enjoyed wine and entertainment.

A second tribe of Centaurs also existed. These were thought to be direct descendants of the Olympic gods. They were joyful, righteous and full of knowledge and wisdom. They were people's friends, allies, protectors and advisors. Their main representative was Centaur Pholos, son of Silinus and Nymph Melia.

Centaur Pholos was a friend of Heracles and was appointed as a guardian of the storage jar that contained the Centaurs' wine. *God Dionysus* himself had offered them this wine and ordered them not to open it until Heracles' arrival.

Heracles had been ordered by *King Eurestheus* to slay the *Erymanthean boar* which lived on Mount Erymanthos and destroyed the nearby areas. *Heracles*, on his way to Mount Erymanthos, stopped at *Pholos'* cave to get information about the boar.



Pholos offered *Heracles* his finest food in order to please him. When *Heracles* asked for some wine *Pholos* hesitated as he was afraid of the other *Centaurs'* reaction. Nevertheless, *Heracles* convinced him by claiming that god *Dionysos* himself had left it there for this specific occasion. So, *Pholos* opened the storage jar with the old wine and served him in a silver cup.

The aroma of the old wine quickly spread in the nearby creeks and woods. *Pholos'* fear was verified: the ground was shaking as the *Centaurs* were approaching the cave to grab the wine...The battle that followed was epic because the *Centaurs* not only had the speed of a horse and excessive strength, but also human logic and experience.

**H**eracles with his poisonous arrows, which had previously imbued in the blood of *Lernaia Hydra*, eliminated most of the *Centaurs*. Unfortunately, he hurt his friend Centaur *Chiron* by mistake...Although *Chiron* was the master of the healing arts, could not heal himself from the poison, and at the same time could not have a natural death since he was immortal. So, he asked *Zeus* to release him from his immortality and finally died in severe pain...

**T**hen, *Heracles* returned to the forest of *Pholoi* where he found his friend *Pholos* dying. *Pholos* was curious why the arrows caused so much death. So, he pulled one of the arrows from the body of a dead centaur. But the arrow slipped his hand and hit him in the foot, killing him instantly.

**A**lthough *Heracles* was devastated, he managed to bury *Pholos*. He named the forest after *Pholos* in order to honour him. Then, he set out to fulfill his fourth labour and kill the *Erymanthean boar*.

adapted from: <http://www.visitilia.gr>  
"Olympic Earth", Hellenic Ministry of Culture



# The Erymanthean Boar

*Hera*, being jealous of *Heracles*-the illegitimate son of *Zeus*, made him lose his senses and kill his children. When *Heracles* regained his senses and realized what he did, he went to the *Oracle of Delphi* where god *Apollo* advised him to be at *Eurestheus'* service, the King of *Argos*. *Eurestheus* assigned him 12 labours which he should accomplish with success so that *Heracles* could find redemption.

Goddess *Artemis* had given *Erymanthos* a huge boar as a gift which had been terrorizing and destroying the entire area. Even the *Centaurs* were annoyed by this wild beast and were unable to confront it.



*Eurestheus* assigned *Heracles* to catch and bring the boar alive to the city of *Argos*, being certain that *Heracles* would fail. But the hero visited his friend *Centaur Pholos* to get information about the wild beast.

In order only to catch it and not to kill it, he had to be dexterous; otherwise his labour wouldn't be accomplished.

Beyond *Eurestheus'* expectations, *Heracles* managed, by using a trick, to lead the beast inside the gorge of *Pholoi* which he had previously blocked up with a net. So, he caught the boar alive and carried it back to *Argos* on his shoulders. When *Eurestheus* saw *Heracles*, was so frightened of the boar that he hid inside a storage jar, begging *Heracles* to get rid of the beast. Three days later, *Eurestheus*, still trembling with fear, sent *Heracles* to clean the *Aegean Stables*.

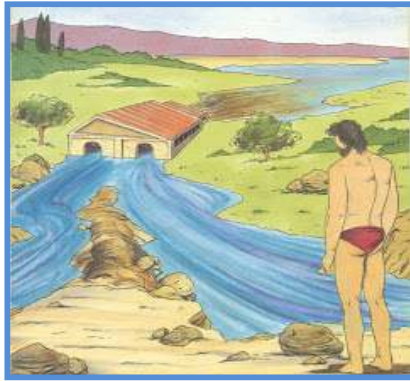
adapted from: <http://el.wikipedia.org>



# The Fifth Labour of Heracles

## The Cleaning of the Aegean Stables

The fifth *Labour of Heracles* was to clean the *Aegean Stables*. This assignment was intended to be both humiliating and impossible. These stables had not been cleaned for over 30 years, and over 1,000 cattle lived there. Eventually, the stink over the years was unbearable and the dung brought plague to the area.



*Heracles* had to clean the stables within a day's time. However, *Heracles* succeeded in washing out the filth by rerouting the rivers *Alpheus* and *Pineios*. The stables were between these two rivers. So, *Heracles* dug two deep trenches from the rivers towards the stables and let the water wash out the dung.

*Augeas* was furious because he thought *Heracles* had deceived him. Furthermore, he had promised *Heracles* one tenth of his cattle if he cleaned the stables within a day. He refused to honour the agreement, and *Heracles* killed him. *Heracles* gave his kingdom to *Augeas'* son *Phyleus* who had been in exile for supporting *Heracles* against his father.

*Eurestheus* refused to acknowledge this labour because the river waters had done the work of cleaning the stables.

adapted from: <http://en.wikipedia.org>  
<http://www.sikyon.com>

According to the allegorical perception of the *Ancient Greeks*, the rivers were river- gods, sons of *Oceanus* and *Tithes*.

## The River Alpheus



According to the Greek mythology *Alpheus*, son of *Oceanus*, was worshipped as a god of fertility.

*Alpheus* fell in love with goddess *Artemis* whom he chased with passion throughout Greece. *Artemis* as well as her companionship, the twenty *Nymphs* that her father *Zeus* had given her, had sworn they will remain untouched.

When they arrived at *River Alpheus*, *Artemis* came up with the following trick. She picked up some white mud from the river banks and spread it on her face. Then she ordered her *Nymphs* to do the same. So, *Alpheus* couldn't recognise which one was the goddess among the twenty one women figures, and being ashamed he withdrew hunted by the *Nymphs*' mocking laughter.

According to another myth, he fell madly in love with *Arethoussa*, the nymph of springs and forests. Unfortunately, she did not like him. In order to avoid him, she left for *Ortygia*, an island near *Syracousses*, and was transformed by goddess *Artemis* into a spring.

*Alpheus*, desperate by her flight, transformed himself into a river, which flowed into the *Ionian Sea*, and passing from underneath the sea, it ended up in *Sicily* where it joined the spring of *Arethoussa*.

adapted from: "Olympic Earth", Hellenic Ministry of Culture  
<http://www.epitaliotes.gr>

# Neda

## The Nymph of the Water

The River Neda is the only river in Greece with a feminine name. It's one of the fewest rivers in Greece which offers an environment untouched by human activity. The river flows through a varied landscape of wooden hill slopes, waterfalls, plane-trees, oaks, fig-trees and thick vegetation. Narrow gorges, stone bridges, caves and deserted water mills excite the visitors' imagination.



Perhaps the most known myth is the one about the father of all gods *Cronus*, who used to swallow his children, fearing they would dethrone him. When his wife *Rhea* gave birth to her last child *Zeus*, she decided to save him. So, she entrusted him to the nymphs *Neda*, *Thissoa* and *Agno* and asked them to raise him. *Nymph Neda* changed into a river and her long braids became wonderful waterfalls, that have decorated the canyon ever since.



Nearby on the sacred *Mount Elaion* of the town of *Phigaleia* was a cave where people worshipped goddess *Melaina Demeter*. (*Melaina=black*)  
But why is she called *Melaina Demeter*?

According to another myth, it's in that same cave that *Demeter*, the goddess of agriculture, found refuge and hid in for a long time, dressed in black, mourning for the kidnapping of her daughter *Persephone*. The Olympian gods moved heaven and earth to find her because the soil was no longer fertile and people were dying of hunger. God *Pan*, who had gone hunting in the area, came across *Demeter* and said it to *Zeus*. Zeus sent the *Fates* to soothe her anger. They managed to convince her to come out to the light again.

The people of *Phigaleia*, to show their gratitude, made her a statue which was depicting a woman figure with the head of a horse, holding in one hand a dolphin and in the other one a dove.

*adapted from: "Olympic Earth"*  
*Hellenic Ministry of Culture*



# The River Ladon



According to mythology, *Ladon* was a dragon with a hundred heads.

Goddess *Hera* had appointed him as a guardian of the *Golden Apples* in the land of *Atlas*. These golden fruit were guarded by *Hesperides*, that's why they were also called the *Golden Apples of Hesperides*, which *Heracles* took in deceit from *Atlas* in his eleventh labour.



In its waters goddess *Demeter* was swimming and on its banks goddess *Artemis* was hunting. Also, god *Pan*, half goat-half man, fell in love here with *Ladon's* daughter, the nymph *Syrigga*.

In order to help her, *Ladon* turned her into a cane so that she would be inconspicuous among the canes. Indeed, *Pan* couldn't find her and to console his grief he cut a cane which he turned into his famous flute.

It is also considered to be the place where *Leucippus*, son of King *Oinomaos* of *Pisa*, was murdered by *Daphne* and her servants, when they discovered, while they were swimming in the river, that he was a man and not a woman as he pretended to be.

*Leucippus* was desperately in love with the *Naiad Daphne* (laurel) but she systematically avoided the male company. So, he had to devise a trick in order to be close to her. He plaited his long hair into braids and dressed up as a woman. He then introduced himself to *Daphne* as the daughter of *Oinomaos* and begged her to go hunting together.

Eventually, a close friendship was formed between the two of them which soon aroused *Apollo's* envy. Because of her beauty, *Daphne* had attracted the attention and ardor of god *Apollo*. The god, eager for revenge, urged the young virgins to go swimming in the river where they persuaded the hesitant *Leucippus* to undress himself. When they realized that he was a man, they killed him with their arrows and daggers.

*Daphne* pleaded her mother *Gaia* (earth) to rescue her from *Apollo's* pursuit. So, *Gaia* swallowed her in the earth and that's how the laurel tree was created. According to another version of the myth, she pleaded her father, *Ladon* to turn her into a tree. *Apollo* cut the branches of the laurel tree and made the well-known laurel wreath which even, nowadays, crowns the winners.



adapted from:  
<http://rivertrekking.gr/peloponnisos/arkadia/potladonas.html>  
"Daphne-Pausanias' Roads"

# Kaifas Lake

The natural thermal springs and spas located in *Lake Kaifas* are known throughout the world. These unique spas, full of natural healing elements, attract a huge number of people here throughout the year, and are one of the highlights of the entire region.

According to myth, this is the place where *Centaur Chiron* came to wash himself and heal his wounds, after his battle against *Heracles*. *Heracles* had wounded him with his arrows, damp with the blood of *Lernaia Hydra*. Another version of that *Heracles* had *Centaur Nessos* to *Deaneira* cross the river *Acheloos*. In the middle of the *Centaur Nessos* tried to abduct *Deaneira*. *Heracles* river hurt him with arrows and *Nessos* from across the one of his resorted to this wound. That's how the Ancient Greeks explained the stench of the chloride, iodine and sulphurous underwater.



According to legend, the name *Kaifas* is said to derive from the homonymous priest of *Judea* who convicted *Jesus Christ*. As he was sailing to Rome, his ship encountered a storm and ran aground. The priest went to wash himself in a hot water spring. However, the curse he carried upon his body and soul for his role in Christ's suffering, made the waters stink from the odour of his soul.

The hot waters of these spas and springs flow through the cave of the



"*Nymphs of Anigrades*". According to *Pausanias* these were *Kalliapheia*, from whom the whole area was named after, *Pegaea* and *Iasis* to whom people attributed the curative properties of the waters. Before entering the cave those suffering from skin diseases had to pray and sacrifice to the *Nymphs* in order to find cure. This cave is also considered to be the place where

*Dardanos*, the ancestor of the *Trojans* were born.

adapted from: "Olympic Earth"  
Hellenic Ministry of Culture  
Encyclopaedian Dictionary "Helion"



# Arion

## and the Dolphin

The following is a story about *Arion's* life, a lyric poet from *Lesvos*, the first to compose a "*dithyramb*" as far as we know. This story, narrated by *Herodotus* in his "*Histories*", seems more like a fairytale.



Once upon a time a poet from *Lesvos* named *Arion* heard that in *Sicily* there was going to be a great music contest. So, he immediately left for the island where all the well-known poets and musicians had gathered from every part of Greece.

But *Arion* beat them all. Everybody was enchanted by his songs, even his opponents. He sang about spring and love, heroism and enthusiasm and made them feel for a moment all the dreams and nostalgia of his heart. His song earned him the gold wreath of victory. When he decided to leave, they provided him with a ship of his own and wished him, with eyes full of tears, joy and happiness.

*Arion*, touched by their gesture, stood at the stern of the ship watching the golden land fading in the horizon. Suddenly he realized that the sailors were staring at him with eyes full of hatred.

— What do you want? he asked.

— We want a lot of things! And first of all to throw you into the sea. One of them yelled.



- Why? What have I done to you? He asked. If money is what you need I have plenty of gold and jewellery. It's yours. It's of no worth to me. But if I lose my life, what will you gain from it?
- If we spare your life you will give us away at the first port we will arrive at and send us all to our death, one of them said fiercely.
- That's true, everyone screamed. Jump by your own will, singer, or we will throw you in the water with our own hands.

*Arion*, revolted by their envy, gazed at the calm endless sea. He knew deep in his heart that he was going to die and that it would be the last time he would ever see nature again. Then, he begged them to do him one last favour, to let him sing before dying. He took his harp and stood at the prow of the ship and sang a hymn to *god Apollo*. His song was the best song he had ever sung. He sang about his desires, his joy and pain of never seeing the sea again.

The air filled with his sweet melody and every part of the ship started shaking by his song. Then *Arion* threw himself into the sea to meet his fate. His song still echoed in the air as if thousand of voices were mourning for his loss.

The sailors were so frightened that they left the haunted place in a hurry.

*Arion* for a moment saw the deep endless blue of the sea surrounding him and a thought crossed his mind: If only he saw the sun and sea for one more time...

While he was struggling to swim, he felt something pushing him onto the surface. Feeling dizzy, he looked around and saw the sea full of dolphins. He realized that he was sitting upon the black smooth back of a huge dolphin, *Apollo's* sacred animal. After a while, the dolphin brought him ashore at *Cape Taenarum*. Finally the poet arrived in *Corinth*, his homeland. There he narrated everything to *King Periandros* but unfortunately he did not believe him and doubted his story.



When the sailors arrived in *Corinth*, the King called them and inquired if they had any news from *Arion*. When they replied that he was safe in *Sicily*, *Arion* appeared before them. They were struck with amazement and were no longer able to deny what they had done. Thus, *King Periandros* saw that *Arion* was telling the truth and immediately ordered the sailors' execution.

# Pandora

**P**andora (Greek, Πανδώρα, derived from πᾶς "all" and δῶρον "gift", thus "all-gifted" or "all-giving") is an archetypal figure in Greek Mythology, the first mortal woman and according to *Hesiod* the cause of all human sufferings. More specifically, in *Hesiod's "Works and Days"* it is stated that Zeus created her to punish *Prometheus* for stealing fire and giving it to humanity.

**W**hen Zeus realised what *Prometheus* had done, commanded *Hephaestus* to mould from earth a creature that would look like an immortal goddess but would have the voice and the strength of a human. Each god helped create her by giving her unique gifts. *Athena* taught her needlework and weaving. *Aphrodite* made her graceful and desirable while Zeus, as *Hesiod* relates, ordered *Hermes* to give her a shameful mind and deceitful nature. He also gave her the power of speech and taught her lies and crafty words. She was also given the charismas of the *Charites* and *Persuasion*. Finally, *Hermes* gave this woman a name: *Pandora* - "All-gifted" - "because all the *Olympians* gave her a gift".

**T**hen Zeus told *Hermes* to give *Epimetheus* (*Prometheus* brother) *Pandora* as a gift. *Prometheus* had already been severely punished. He was bound to a rock, where each day an eagle, the emblem of Zeus, was sent to feed on his liver, only to have it grow back to be eaten again the next day. He feared further reprisals, so he warned his brother not to accept any gifts from Zeus. But *Epimetheus* did not listen; he accepted *Pandora* with her dowry in a large storage jar (*pithos*). That jar contained all the evils of humanity: burdensome toil, diseases that bring death to men and myriad other pains. Till then, humanity had never encountered the menace of death and old age.

**P**andora removed the lid from the jar out of curiosity or intentionally, releasing its contents and scattered to humanity all sufferings and diseases. Only *Hope* was left inside the unbreakable jar by the will of Zeus. *Hope* is imprisoned at the bottom of the jar, in the minds and souls of humans. *Hope's* retention in the jar is comforting, and we are to be thankful for this antidote to hardships and sorrows.



# Alcyone

In Greek mythology *Alcyone* or *Halcyone* was a semi-goddess, sometimes regarded as one of the *Pleiades*. She was the daughter of *Aeolus*, the god of the *Winds*. She was married to the King of *Trachis* *Ceyx*, son of *Eosphorus*, the *Morning Star*. They were much in love and even the gods envied them not only for their natural beauty but also the profound love they had for each other. But, they often used to call each other "*Zeus*" and "*Hera*".



This aroused *Zeus'* wrath, who waited for the proper time to take vengeance and punish the happy couple for their audacity to compare themselves to the gods.

One day, *Ceyx* still mourning for his brother's death, decided to consult the *Oracle of Apollo* in *Ionia*, as he was worried about some ominous signs he had noticed.

When *Alcyone* heard this, she got worried and tried to restrain him from his journey to *Ionia* as she had a bad feeling about it. She reminded him of the strong fierce winds that even her father *Aeolus* couldn't sometimes control. But *Ceyx* remained obstinate to her entreaties.

*Zeus* seized the opportunity to punish the couple for their sacrilege. While *Ceyx's* ship was heading for *Ionia*, *Zeus* threw his thunderbolt and caused a fierce hurricane. Huge waves were battering the ship, which soon started to

sink. *Ceyx* then realized that these were the last hours of his life and his only thoughts were for *Alcyone*. He prayed to gods to allow his body to be washed ashore, so that *Alcyone* could find and bury him. As *Ceyx* was leaving his last breath, his father *Eosphorus* was watching helplessly, hiding his face in the clouds, unable to leave the sky and save his son.

Time passed and *Alcyone*, unaware of her husband's loss, prayed to goddess *Hera* to protect *Ceyx* and provide him with a safe return home. *Hera* was touched by her prayers and felt pity for *Alcyone*, as she had already been aware of *Ceyx's* death. So, she sent her messenger *Iris* to *Hypnos*, the god of *Sleep* to seek his help. He, in return, assigned his son *Morpheus*, the god of *Dreams*, to send *Alcyone* a vision revealing the sad truth about *Ceyx's* death at sea.

A few minutes later *Morpheus* appeared at *Alcyone's* bedside, as the apparition of *Ceyx*. Filled with sorrow, he recounted the gloomy details of his shipwreck and death. *Alcyone* woke up in tears and when she realised that she was all alone in her room, she cried out begging *Ceyx* to wait for her.

At daybreak, she rushed desperately to the shore and stood alone on the sand. While she was gazing at the sea, she saw something floating on the water. Recognizing the lifeless body of her beloved husband *Ceyx*, *Alcyone* threw herself into the sea.

The gods on *Mount Olympus* were deeply affected by the tragic fate of *Alcyone* and *Cyex*. *Zeus*, filled with remorse and in order to redeem himself for his hasty and harsh judgment, transformed the couple into kingfishers.

Thus, the expression "*Halcyon Days*" originates from this beautiful myth of *Alcyone* and *Ceyx*. God *Aeolus*, for two weeks every January, calms down the winds and the waves so that *Alcyone* can safely make her nest and lay her eggs. Hence, the phrase "*Halcyon Days*" means a period of peace and tranquility.

adapted from:  
<http://el.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alcyone>  
<http://www.medeaslair.net/ceyx.html>  
<http://www.greeka.com/greece-myths/alcyone-ceyx.htm>



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