

1: Greek Myths - Volume 2

First published in and reissued in both single and two volume editions over the succeeding years, Graves' reader friendly take on the origins of the Greek myths is an entertaining trip back through the mists of time.

I chose the name Clytemnestra. When a couple of people mentioned that user name when they contacted me, I thought, you know, that I should really find out more about Clytemnestra before I couple her name with my own. Years later, I have this In the early days of Goodreads, I initially chose a user name for myself that was long-lived, historical, distinctive, and not often chosen by others. Years later, I have this lovely, dense paperback written by Robert Graves, poet, historian, novelist, memoirist. In it, Graves explains that the story of Clytemnestra's death at least is not fixed exactly, and is still disputed. Suffice it to say that she was killed, somehow, by her son Orestes, some say for good reason. However, I am more inclined than ever to couple her name with mine and may again one day, after learning what I have about her life in this book. Unless I am missing something, it appears Clytemnestra was married to Tantalus, King of Pisa, when Agamemnon killed him in battle and forcibly married Clytemnestra as war spoils. Clytemnestra bore Agamemnon one son, Orestes, and three daughters: Electra, Iphigeneia, and Chrysothemis. When Agamemnon set sail with Menelaus for Troy to bring Helen back after she left with Paris, winds whipped up by Artemis prevented them from getting to Troy, and so Agamemnon decided unilaterally to sacrifice Iphigeneia to appease Artemis. In the ten years Agamemnon was away, Clytemnestra had a sexual relationship with a man who also had a reason to hate Agamemnon, Aegisthus. Up to this time, Clytemnestra is entirely blameless. She slept with a man not her husband, but her current husband had killed her first husband, forced her into marriage, and was spreading his seed far and wide. It is said she would have been happy had Agamemnon never returned, but he did, and she beheaded him in the bath after pretending to welcome him home. Clytemnestra was unafraid of divine retribution, thinking her own acts retribution in themselves. So what of the children from the union of Clytemnestra and Agamemnon? Orestes was raised by his grandparents Tyndareus and Leda. When he learned Agamemnon had been killed and his body disrespected in burial, Orestes felt he had to avenge the death. At the same time, the Furies would not look kindly on matricide, so Orestes must defend himself against the Furies with a special bow of horn, which Apollo gave to Orestes. Clytemnestra did not recognize her son. After Orestes had killed Aegisthus, whom he had tricked into letting down his guard, Clytemnestra saw he was her son. Some versions say he beheaded her at her own home, some say he gave her over to a court of law and they convicted her to death. Why do I mistrust this version? Another version says that Electra entices Clytemnestra to visit her home with news that she bore a child to her peasant husband. This one actually breaks my heart. Clytemnestra forbade this, but allowed Aegisthus to force Electra to marry a Mycenaean peasant who was then afraid to consummate the marriage. In some viewpoints since this myth came into being, Chrysothemis was the pious and noble daughter according to the matrilineal law still golden in some parts of Greece at this time. Ignorant as I am, I must have picked up in various places the notion that Clytemnestra was perfectly within her rights to kill the philandering, murdering husband who left her. Call it matrilineal if you must, but at some point you must call a spade a spade. This is what the notes by Graves have to say: This is a crucial myth with numerous variants. Olympianism had been formed as a religion of compromise between the pre-Hellenic matriarchal principle and the Hellenic patriarchal principle; the divine family consisting, at first of six gods and six goddesses. Matrilinear inheritance was one of the axioms taken over from the pre-Hellenic religion. Since every king must necessarily be a foreigner, who ruled by virtue of his marriage to an heiress, royal princes learned to regard their mother as the main support of the kingdom, and matricide as an unthinkable crime. They were brought up on myths of the earlier religion, according to which the sacred king had always been betrayed by his goddess-wife, killed by his tanist, and avenged by his son; they knew the son never punished his adulterous mother, who had acted with the full authority of the goddess whom she served. Is this relevant to the world we live in today? It could very well be relevant. Matrilinear law has always made sense to me, not just because I am a woman. Graves tells us the Furies had always acted for the mother only: I may have, in ignorance,

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chosen the perfect avatar in Clytemnestra, situated as she is between a society who reveres and respects matrilineal rule and the struggle with a patrilineal line. Clytemnestra was not especially kind to the children she bore with Agamemnon, and this is regrettable. She intervened to prevent overt harm to her children several times; we must take this at least at face value.

2: The Greek Myths (Volume 2) PDF

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