

אכלוס

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Ἀχελῷος Achelōios

أكيلوس

فوهة أكيلوس - ويكيبيديا، الموسوعة الحرة

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آكلوس

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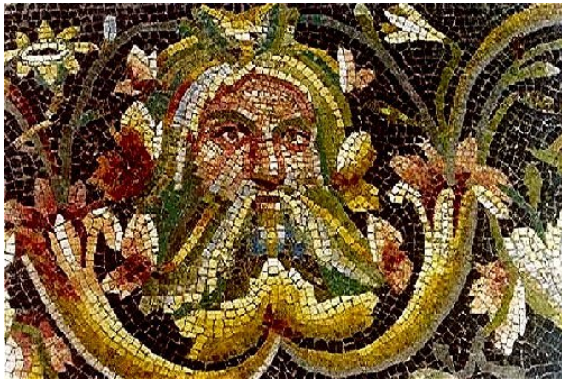
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Achelous

For other uses, see [Achelous \(disambiguation\)](#).

In Greek mythology, **Achelous** (/ækiˈloʊ.əs/; Ancient



Achelous was often reduced to a bearded mask, an inspiration for the medieval Green Man. Floor mosaic, Zeugma, Turkey.

Greek: Ἀχελῷος *Achelōios*) was the patron deity of the “silver-swirling”^[1] Achelous River, which is the largest river of Greece, and thus the chief of all river deities, every river having its own river spirit. His name is pre-Greek, its meaning unknown. The Greeks invented etymologies to associate it with Greek word roots (one such popular etymology translates the name as “he who washes away care”). However, these are etymologically unsound and of much later origin than the name itself.

1 Origin

Some Greek sources say that he was the son of Gaia and Oceanus;^[2] however, ancient Greeks generally believed with Hesiod^[3] that Tethys and Oceanus were the parents of all three thousand river gods. In the Renaissance, the improvisatory mythographer Natalis Comes made for his parents Gaia and Helios,^[4] Homer placed Achelous above all, the origin of all the world’s fresh water.^[5] By Roman times, Homer’s reference was interpreted as making Achelous “prince of rivers”.^[6]

Others derived the legends about Achelous from Egypt, and describe him as a second Nilus. But however this may be, he was from the earliest times considered to be a great divinity throughout Greece,^[7] and was invoked in prayers, sacrifices, on taking oaths, &c.,^[8] and the oracular Zeus at Dodona usually added to each oracle he gave, the command to offer sacrifices to Achelous.^[9] This wide extent of the worship of Achelous also accounts for his being regarded as the representative of sweet water in



Hercules and Achelous in a Roman wall painting from the Hall of the Augustales

general, that is, as the source of all nourishment.^{[10][11]}

2 Mythological tradition

Achelous was a suitor for Deianeira, daughter of Oeneus king of Calydon, but was defeated by Heracles, who wed her himself. Sophocles pictures a mortal woman’s terror at being courted by a chthonic river god:

'My suitor was the river Achelóús,
who took three forms to ask me of my father:
a rambling bull once, then a writhing snake
of gleaming colors, then again a man
with ox-like face: and from his beard’s dark
shadows
stream upon stream of water tumbled down.
Such was my suitor.' (Sophocles, *Trachiniae*,
tr. Robert Torrance)



bronze coin struck in Oiniadae 219-211 BC depicting river-god Achelous as man-faced bull on reverse



The rivalry of Hercules and the river-god Achelous is depicted in this plaque by Annibale Fontana.^[12] The Walters Art Museum.

The contest of Achelous with Heracles was represented on the throne of Amyclae,^[13] and in the treasury of the Megarans at Olympia there was a statue of him made by Dantas of cedarwood and gold.^[14] On several coins of Acarnania the god is represented as a bull with the head of an old man.^[15]

The sacred bull, the serpent and the Minotaur are all creatures associated with the Earth goddess Gaia. Achelous was most often depicted as a gray-haired old man or a vigorous bearded man in his prime, with a horned head and a serpent-like body. When he battled Heracles over the river nymph Deianeira, Achelous turned himself into a bull. Heracles tore off one of his horns and forced the god to surrender. Achelous had to trade the goat horn of Amalthea to get it back.^[16] Heracles gave it to the Naiads, who transformed it into the cornucopia. Achelous relates the bitter episode afterwards to Theseus in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*.^[17] Sophocles makes Deianeira relate these occurrences in a somewhat different manner.^[18]

The mouth of the Achelous river was the spot where Alcmaeon finally found peace from the Erinyes. Achelous offered him Callirhoe, his daughter, in marriage if Alcmaeon would retrieve the clothing and jewelry his mother Eriphyle had been wearing when she sent her husband Amphiaraus to his death. Alcmaeon had to retrieve

the clothes from King Phegeus, who sent his sons to kill Alcmaeon.



The Banquet of Achelous (ca. 1615), by Rubens

Ovid in his *Metamorphoses* provided a descriptive interlude when Theseus is the guest of Achelous, waiting for the river's raging flood to subside: "He entered the dark building, made of spongy pumice, and rough tuff. The floor was moist with soft moss, and the ceiling banded with freshwater mussel and oyster shells."^[19] In sixteenth-century Italy, an aspect of the revival of Antiquity was the desire to recreate Classical spaces as extensions of the revived villa. Ovid's description of the cave of Achelous provided some specific inspiration to patrons in France as well as Italy for the Mannerist garden grotto, with its cool dampness, tuff vaulting and shellwork walls. The banquet served by Ovid's Achelous offered a prototype for Italian midday feasts in the fountain-cooled shade of garden grottoes.

At the mouth of the Achelous River lie the Echinades Islands. According to Ovid's pretty myth-making in the same *Metamorphoses* episode, the Echinades Islands were once five nymphs. Unfortunately for them, they forgot to honor Achelous in their festivities, and the god was so angry about this slight that he turned them into the islands.

Achelous was sometimes the father of the Sirens by Terpsichore, or in a later version, they are from the blood he shed where Heracles broke off his horn.^[20]

In another mythic context, the Achelous was said to be formed by the tears of Niobe, who fled to Mount Sipylus after the deaths of her husband and children.

In Hellenistic and Roman contexts, the river god was often reduced to a mask and used decoratively as an emblem of water, "his uncut hair wreathed with reeds".^[21] The feature survived in Romanesque carved details and flowered during the Middle Ages as one of the Classical prototypes of the Green Man.

3 Achelous and the River Achelous

The origin of the river Achelous is thus described by Servius:

When Achelous on one occasion had lost his daughters, the Sirens, and in his grief invoked his mother Gaea, she received him to her bosom, and on the spot where she received him, she caused the river bearing his name to gush forth.^[22]

Other accounts about the origin of the river and its name are given by Stephanus of Byzantium, Strabo,^[23] and Plutarch.^[24] Strabo proposes a very ingenious interpretation of the legends about Achelous, all of which according to him arose from the nature of the river itself. It resembled a bull's voice in the noise of the water; its windings and its reaches gave rise to the story about his forming himself into a serpent and about his horns; the formation of islands at the mouth of the river requires no explanation. His conquest by Heracles lastly refers to the embankments by which Heracles confined the river to its bed and thus gained large tracts of land for cultivation, which are expressed by the horn of plenty.^{[25][26]}

4 References

4.1 Notes

- [1] Hesiod, *Theogony* 337f.
- [2] Alcaeus, fragmentary quote
- [3] Hesiod, *Theogony* 340
- [4] Smith, *Dictionary of Greek and Roman Biography and Mythology*, s.v. "Achelous", referencing Natalis Comes, vii. 2
- [5] Homer, *Iliad* 21,194: "...it is not possible to fight Zeus, son of Kronos. Not powerful Akheloios matches his strength against Zeus..."
- [6] Pausanias, 8.38.10, remembering the line in Homer.
- [7] Homer, *Iliad* xxi. 194
- [8] Ephorus, quoted in Macrobius v. 18
- [9] Ephorus, *l.c.*
- [10] Virgil, *Georgics* i. 9
- [11] Schmitz, Leonhard (1867). "Achelous". In Smith, William. *Dictionary of Greek and Roman Biography and Mythology* 1. Boston, MA. pp. 8–9.
- [12] "Plaque with Hercules and Achelous". The Walters Art Museum.
- [13] Pausanias iii. 18. § 9
- [14] Pausanias vi. 19. § 9
- [15] Comp. Philostr. *Imag.* n. 4
- [16] *Bibliotheca* i. 8. § 1, ii. 7. § 5
- [17] Ovid, *Metamorphoses* ix, 1-88
- [18] Sophocles, *The Trachiniae* 9, &c.
- [19] Ovid, *Metamorphoses* VIII, 547ff
- [20] Kerenyi 1951:56; Georg Kaibel, *Comitorum Graecorum Fragmenta* (Berlin) 1899, noted in Kerenyi: 1959:199.
- [21] Ovid, *Metamorphoses* ix.
- [22] Servius, *ad Virg. Georg.* i. 9; *Aen.* viii. 300
- [23] Strabo, x. p. 450
- [24] Plutarch, *De Flum.* 22
- [25] Strabo, x. p. 458
- [26] Compare Voss, *Mytholog. Briefe*, lxxii

4.2 Other sources

- Andrews, Tamra. *A Dictionary of Nature Myths*, 1998. ISBN 0-19-513677-2
- Kerenyi, Karl. *The Heroes of the Greeks*. New York and London: Thames and Hudson, 1959.
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5 External links

- "Achelous". *Encyclopædia Britannica* (11th ed.). 1911.
- Theoi Project - Potamos Akheloios
- "Achelous". *New International Encyclopedia*. 1905.

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