

Uranus noun

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Uranus (mythology)

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Uranus (/ˈjʊərənəs/ or /ˈjuːreɪnəs/; Ancient Greek Οὐρανός, *Ouranos* [oːranós] meaning "sky" or "heaven") was the primal Greek god personifying the sky. His equivalent in Roman mythology was Caelus. In Ancient Greek literature, Uranus or **Father Sky** was the son and husband of Gaia, Mother Earth. According to Hesiod's *Theogony*, Uranus was conceived by Gaia alone, but other sources cite Aether as his father.^[3] Uranus and Gaia were the parents of the first generation of Titans, and the ancestors of most of the Greek gods, but no cult addressed directly to Uranus survived into Classical times,^[4] and Uranus does not appear among the usual themes of Greek painted pottery. Elemental Earth, Sky and Styx might be joined, however, in a solemn invocation in Homeric epic.^[5]

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Uranus

Primordial God of the Sky



Aion-Uranus with Terra (Greek Gaia) on mosaic

Abode	Sky
Consort	Gaia
Parents	Gaia or Aether and Gaia or Aether and Hemera or Nyx ^[1]
Siblings	Pontus and The Ourea
Children	The Titans, The Cyclopes, Meliae, The Furies, The Gigantes, Hecatonchires and Aphrodite ^[2]
Roman equivalent	Caelus

Etymology

The most probable etymology is from the basic Proto-Greek form *(F)ορσανός (worsanos) derived from the noun *(F)ορσό- (*worso-*, Sanskrit: *varsā* "rain"). The relative Proto-Indo-European language root is **uers-* "to moisten, to drip" (Sanskrit: *varsati* "to rain"), which is connected with the Greek ουρόω (Latin: "urina", English: "urine", compare Sanskrit: *var* "water," Avestan *var* "rain", Lithuanian & Latvian *jura* "sea", Old English *wær* "sea," Old Norse *ver* "sea," Old Norse *ur* "drizzling rain")^[6] therefore Ouranos is the "rainmaker" or the "fertilizer". Another possible etymology is "the one standing high in order" (Sanskrit: *vars-man*: height, Lithuanian: *virus*: upper, highest seat). The identification with the Vedic Varuna, god of the sky and waters, is uncertain.^[7] It is also possible that the name is derived from the PIE root **wel* "to cover, enclose" (Varuna, Veles).^[8] or **wer* "to cover, shut".^[9]

Genealogy

Most Greeks considered Uranus to be primordial, and gave him no parentage, believing him to have been born from Chaos, the primal form of the universe. However, in *Theogony*, Hesiod claims Uranus to be the offspring of Gaia, the earth goddess.^[10] Alcman and Callimachus elaborate that Uranus was fathered by Aether, the god of heavenly light and the upper air.^[11] Under the influence of the philosophers, Cicero, in *De Natura Deorum* ("Concerning the Nature of the Gods"), claims that he was the offspring of the ancient gods Aether and Hemera, Air and Day. According to the Orphic Hymns, Uranus was the son of Nyx, the personification of night.

Creation myth

Greek mythology

In the Olympian creation myth, as Hesiod tells it in the *Theogony*,^[11] Uranus came every night to cover the earth and mate with Gaia, but he hated the children she bore him. Hesiod named their first six sons and six daughters the Titans, the three one-hundred-handed giants the Hekatonkheires, and the one-eyed giants the Cyclopes.

Uranus imprisoned Gaia's youngest children in Tartarus, deep within Earth, where they caused pain to Gaia. She shaped a great flint-bladed sickle and asked her sons to castrate Uranus. Only Cronus, youngest and most ambitious of the Titans, was willing: he ambushed his father and castrated him,

casting the severed testicles into the sea.

For this fearful deed, Uranus called his sons Titanes Theoi, or "Straining Gods."^[12] From the blood that spilled from Uranus onto the Earth came forth the Giants, the Erinyes (the avenging Furies), the Meliae (the ash-tree nymphs), and, according to some, the Telchines. From the genitals in the sea came forth Aphrodite.

The learned Alexandrian poet Callimachus^[13] reported that the bloodied sickle had been buried in the earth at Zancle in Sicily, but the Romanized Greek traveller Pausanias was informed that the sickle had been thrown into the sea from the cape near Bolina, not far from Argyra on the coast of Achaëa, whereas the historian Timaeus located the sickle at Corcyra;^[14] Corcyrans claimed to be descendants of the wholly legendary Phaeacia visited by Odysseus, and by circa 500 BCE one Greek mythographer, Acusilaus, was claiming that the Phaeacians had sprung from the very blood of Uranus' castration.^[15]

After Uranus was deposed, Cronus re-imprisoned the Hekatonkheires and Cyclopes in Tartarus. Uranus and Gaia then prophesied that Cronus in turn was destined to be overthrown by his own son, and so the Titan attempted to avoid this fate by devouring his young. Zeus, through deception by his mother Rhea, avoided this fate.

These ancient myths of distant origins were not expressed in cults among the Hellenes.^[16] The function of Uranus was as the vanquished god of an elder time, before real time began.

After his castration, the Sky came no more to cover the Earth at night, but held to its place, and "the original begetting came to an end" (Kerényi). Uranus was scarcely regarded as anthropomorphic, aside from the genitalia in the castration myth. He was simply the sky, which was conceived by the ancients as an overarching dome or roof of bronze, held in place (or turned on an axis) by the Titan Atlas. In formulaic expressions in the Homeric poems *ouranos* is sometimes an alternative to Olympus as the collective home of the gods; an obvious occurrence would be the moment in *Iliad* 1.495, when Thetis rises from the sea to plead with Zeus: "and early in the morning she rose up to greet Ouranos-and-Olympus and she found the son of Kronos ..."

William Sale remarks that "... 'Olympus' is almost always used of [the home of the Olympian gods], but *ouranos* often refers to the natural sky above us without any suggestion that the gods, collectively live there".^[17] Sale concluded that the earlier seat of the gods was the actual Mount Olympus, from which the epic tradition by the time of Homer had transported them to the sky, *ouranos*. By the sixth century, when a "heavenly Aphrodite" (Urania) was to be distinguished from the "common Aphrodite of the people", *ouranos* signifies purely the celestial sphere itself.

Hurrian mythology

The Greek creation myth is similar to the Hurrian creation myth. In Hurrian religion Anu is the sky god. His son Kumarbis bit off his genitals and spat out three deities, one of whom, Teshub, later deposed Kumarbis.^[18] In Sumerian mythology and later for Assyrians and Babylonians, Anu is the sky god and represented law and order.

It is possible that Uranus was originally an Indo-European god, to be identified with the Vedic *Váruṇa*, the supreme keeper of order who later became the god of oceans and rivers, as suggested by Georges Dumézil,^[19] following hints in Émile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (1912).^[20] Another of Dumézil's theories is that the Iranian supreme God Ahura Mazda is a development of the Indo-Iranian **vouruna*-**mitra*.^[21] Therefore this divinity has also the qualities of Mitra, which is the god of the falling rain.^[22]

Uranus and *Váruṇa*

Uranus is connected with the night sky, and *Váruṇa* is the god of the sky and the celestial ocean, which is connected with the Milky Way. His daughter Lakshmi is said to have arisen from an ocean of milk, a myth similar to the myth of Aphrodite.

Georges Dumézil made a cautious case for the identity of Uranus and Vedic *Váruṇa* at the earliest Indo-European cultural level.^[23] Dumézil's identification of mythic elements shared by the two figures, relying to a great extent on linguistic interpretation, but not positing a common origin, was taken up by Robert Graves and others. The identification of the name *Ouranos* with the Hindu *Váruṇa*, based in part on a posited PIE root **-ūer* with a sense of "binding"—ancient king god *Váruṇa* binds the wicked, ancient king god Uranus binds the Cyclopes—is widely rejected by those who find the most probable etymology is from Proto-Greek **(F)orsanóǵ* (*worsanos*) from a PIE root **ers* "to moisten, to drip" (referring to the rain).

Vedic Indra is linked with Zeus grandson of Uranus, but according to Vedic myths Indra & *Váruṇa* were brothers so it is possible that Indra is the grand-uncle of Zeus and not his counterpart.

Cultural context of flint

The detail of the sickle's being flint rather than bronze or even iron was retained by Greek mythographers (though neglected by Roman ones). Knapped flints as cutting edges were set in wooden or bone sickles in the late Neolithic, before the onset of the Bronze Age. Such sickles may have survived latest in ritual contexts where metal was taboo, but the detail, which was retained by classical Greeks, suggests the antiquity of the mytheme.

Planet Uranus



The Mutilation of Uranus by Saturn: fresco by Giorgio Vasari and Cristofano Gherardi, c. 1560 (Sala di Cosimo I, Palazzo Vecchio)

The ancient Greeks and Romans knew of only five 'wandering stars' (Greek: *πλανήται*, *planētai*): Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn. Following the discovery of a sixth planet in the 18th century, the name *Uranus* was chosen as the logical addition to the series: for Mars (*Ares* in Greek) was the son of Jupiter, Jupiter (*Zeus* in Greek) the son of Saturn, and Saturn (Cronus in Greek) the son of Uranus. What is anomalous is that, while the others take Roman names, *Uranus* is a name derived from Greek in contrast to the Roman Caelus.

Consorts and children

All the offspring of Uranus are fathered upon Gaia, save Aphrodite and the Erinyes, born when Cronus castrated him and cast his severed genitalia into the sea (*Thalassa*).

1. Cyclopes, one-eyed giants

1. Brontes
2. Steropes
3. Arges

2. Hekatonkheires, hundred-handed, fifty-headed giants

1. Briares
2. Cottus
3. Gyges

3. Titans, the elder gods

1. Coeus
2. Crius
3. Cronus
4. Oceanus
5. Hyperion
6. Iapetus
7. Mnemosyne
8. Phoebe
9. Rhea
10. Tethys
11. Theia
12. Themis

4. Erinyes

1. Alecto
2. Megaera
3. Tisiphone

5. Gigantes, the giants

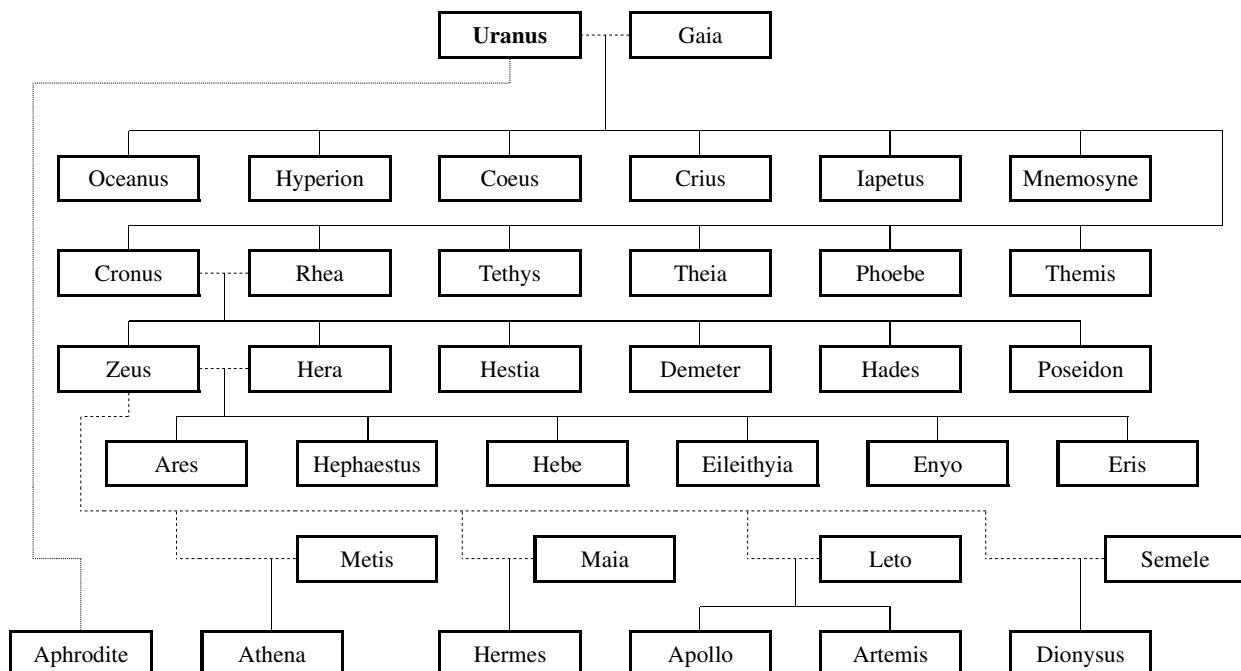
1. Alcyoneus
2. Athos
3. Clytias
4. Enceladus
5. Echion

6. Meliae, the ash-tree nymphs

7. Aphrodite (according to Hesiod)

Genealogy of the Olympians in Greek mythology

Genealogy of the Olympians in Greek mythology



Notes

- ^a ^b "Uranus : Greek protogenos god of the sky ; mythology ; pictures : Ouranos" (<http://www.theoi.com/Protogenos/Ouranos.html>). Theoi.com.
- [^] See Hesiod, *Theogony* 188, but in Homer's *Iliad* (5.370), Aphrodite is the daughter of Zeus (mythology) and Dione.
- [^] "AETHER: Greek protogenos god of upper air & light ; mythology : AETHER" (<http://www.theoi.com/Protogenos/Aither.html>). Theoi.com.
- [^] "We did not regard them as being in any way worthy of worship," Karl Kerényi, speaking for the ancient Greeks, said of the Titans (Kerényi, *The Gods of the Greeks*, 1951:20); "with the single exception, perhaps, of Cronos; and with the exception, also, of Helios."
- [^] As at *Iliad* xv.36f and *Odyssey* v.184f.
- [^] urine Online Etymology Dictionary (<http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=urine>)
- [^] Username=\data\ie\frisk+\&first=4441 Frisk.Griechisches Etymologisches Woerterbuch Ouranos (<http://www.ieed.nl/cgi-bin/response.cgi?root=leiden&morpho=0&base>)
- [^] *The American heritage dictionary*: PIE roots *wel
- [^] wer Online Etymology Dictionary (<http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?search=weir&searchmode=none>)
- [^] Hesiod, *Theogony* 126 ff. (<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0130%3Acard%3D104>),
- [^] Hesiod, *Theogony* 133 ff. (<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0130%3Acard%3D104>),
- [^] Modern etymology suggests that the linguistic origin of Τίτανας lies on the pre-Greek level.
- [^] Callimachus, *Aitia* ("On Origins"), from book II, fragment 43, discussed by Robin Lane Fox, *Travelling Heroes In the Epic Age of Homer* 2008, p. 270ff; Fox notes that Zancle was founded in the 8th century.
- [^] Reported by the scholiast on Apollonius of Rhodes' *Argonautica*, 4.984, noted in Fox 2008, p. 274 note 36.
- [^] Acusilaus, in *FrGH* vol. 2, fragment 4, noted by Fox, p. 274, note 37
- [^] Kerényi 1951, p. 20.
- [^] Sale, William Merritt (1984). "Homeric Olympus and its formulae". *American Journal of Philology* **105** (1): 1–28 [p. 3]. JSTOR 294622 (<https://www.jstor.org/stable/294622>).
- [^] Guterbock, Hans Gustav. "Hittite Religion" in *Forgotten Religions including some Primitive Religions*" ed. Vergilius Firm. NY Philadelphia Library 1950: 88f,103f.
- [^] Dumézil, *Ouranós-Várūna: étude de mythologie comparée indo-européenne*, 1934.
- [^] The Durkheim connection was noted by Arnaldo Momigliano, "Georges Dumézil and the Trifunctional Approach to Roman Civilization", *History and Theory*, 1984; a link between Uranus and Varuna was suggested as early as 1824 by Albrecht Weber, *Modern investigations on ancient India: A lecture delivered in Berlin March 4, 1824*, 1857.
- [^] Dumézil, G. (1940,1948). *Mitra Varuna Essai Sur Deux Representati*. Paris: Gallimard, 1948.
Dumézil, G., tr. Coltman, D. (1940, 1988) *Mitra-Varuna: an essay on two Indo-European representations of sovereignty*. New York: Zone Books.
- [^] According to Dumézil Varuna is the god of "masses of water", while falling rain is rather related to Mitra.
- [^] Dumézil, *Ouranós-Várūna: Étude de mythologie comparée indo-européenne* (Paris: Maisonneuve 1934).

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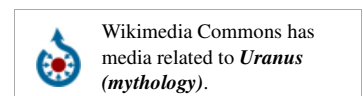
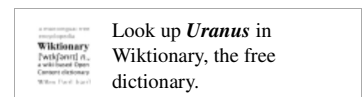
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External links

- Theoi Project, Ouranos (<http://www.theoi.com/Protogenos/Ouranos.html>) references to Uranus in classical literature
- Greek Mythology Link, Uranus (<http://www.maicar.com/GML/Uranus.html>) summary of Uranus myth

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