

Ancient civilizations



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ROME



GREECE



CHINA



EGYPT



China



Records of Myths

A number of works record ancient Chinese mythology in their settled forms. Most myths extant today are derived from their recording in these works.

Shan Hai Jing - Literally Mountain and Sea Scroll, the Shan Hai Jing describes the myths, witchcraft, and religion of ancient China in great detail and also has a record of the geography, sea and mountains, history, medicine, customs, and ethnicities in ancient times. It has been called an early encyclopedia of China.

Shui Jing Zhu - Literally Commentaries on the Water Scroll, this work began as commentaries on the briefer work of the Water Scroll, but became famous of its own accord because of its extensive record of geography, history, and associated legends.

HeVan Zhuan - Epic of Darkness Literally Epic of the Darkness, this is the only collection of legends in epic form preserved by a community of the Han nationality of China, namely, inhabitants of the Shennongjia mountain area in Hubei, containing accounts from the birth of Pangu till the historical era.





Myths and Legends

Great Flood

Shun passed his place as leader of the Huaxia tribe to Yu the Great. According to legend, the Yellow River was prone to flooding, and erupted in a huge flood in the time of Yao. Yu's father, Gun, was put in charge of flood control by Yao, but failed to alleviate the problem after 9 years. He was executed by Shun, and Yu took his father's place, and led the people in building canals and levees. After thirteen years of toil, flooding problems were solved under Yu's command. Shun enfeoffed Yu in the place of Xia, in present-day Wan County in Henan. On his death, Shun passed the leadership to Yu. The main source for the story of Yu and the Great Flood comes from *The Counsels of Yu the Great* in the Classic of History.

Because of his achievement in resolving the Great Flood, Yu, alone among the mythological rulers, is usually called "Yu the Great". Alternatively, he is called Emperor Yu, like his predecessors.



Xia Dynasty



Upon Yu's death, his position as leader was passed not to his deputy, but was inherited by his son Zi. Various sources differ as to the process by which Zi rose to this position. Most versions agree that during his lifetime, Yu had designated his deputy, Gaotao, to be his successor. When Gaotao died before him, Yu then selected Gaotao's son, Boyi as successor. One version then says that all the peoples who had submitted to Yu admired Zi more than Boyi, and Yu passed power to Zi instead. Another version holds that Boyi ceremoniously offered the position to Zi, who accepted, against convention, because he had the support of other leaders. A third version says that Zi killed Boyi and usurped his position as leader.

In any case, Zi's succession broke the previous convention of meritorious succession, and began what is traditionally regarded as the first dynasty in Chinese history.

The Xia Dynasty is considered at least semi-mythological. The Records of the Grand Historian and the Bamboo Annals record the names of 17 kings of the Xia Dynasty.

Shang Dynasty

Jie, the last king of the Xia Dynasty, is said to be a bloodthirsty despot. Tang of Shang, a tribal leader, revolted against Xia rule and eventually overthrew Jie and established the Shang Dynasty, based in Anyang. The Shang Dynasty ruled from 1766 BC to 1050 BC. It came to the end when the last despotic ruler, Zhou of Shang, was overthrown by the new Zhou Dynasty. The end of the Shang Dynasty and the establishment of the Zhou is the subject of the influential mythological fiction, Investiture of the Gods.

Unlike the preceding Xia Dynasty, there is clear archaeological evidence of a government centre at Yinxu in Anyang, and of an urban civilisation in the Shang Dynasty. However, the chronology of the first three dynasties remains an area of active research and controversy.





Religion and mythology

There has been extensive interaction between Chinese mythology and the major belief systems of Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism.

On the one hand, elements of pre-existing mythology were adapted into these belief systems as they developed (in the case of Taoism), or were assimilated into Chinese culture (in the case of Buddhism). On the other hand, elements from the teachings and beliefs of these systems became incorporated into Chinese mythology. For example, the Taoist belief of a spiritual paradise became incorporated into mythology, as the place where immortals and deities dwell.

Meanwhile, the myths of the benevolent rulers of the past, in the form of the Three August Ones and Five Emperors became a part of the Confucian political philosophy of Primitivism.

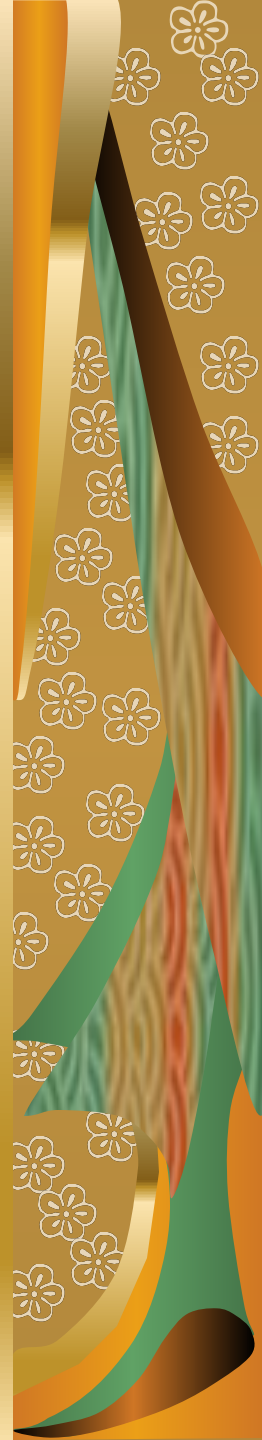




Chinese art has varied throughout its ancient history, divided into periods by the ruling dynasties of China and changing technology. Different forms of art have been influenced by great philosophers, teachers, religious figures and even political leaders. Chinese art encompasses fine arts, folk arts and performance arts.



Egypt





Ancient Egypt was a civilization in northern East Africa concentrated along the middle to lower reaches of the Nile River that reached its greatest extent in the second millennium BC during the New Kingdom. It stretched from the Nile Delta in the north to as far south as Jebel Barkal, located at the Fourth Cataract of the Nile in modern-day Sudan. The fluid geographic range of ancient Egypt also included, at different times, areas of the southern Levant the Eastern Desert and the Red Sea coastline, the Sinai Peninsula, and the oases of the Western desert.





Literature

Writing first appears associated with kingship, labels and tags for items found in royal tombs. This developed by the Old Kingdom into the tomb autobiography, such as those of Harkhuf and Wen.

Architecture

The architecture of ancient Egypt includes some of the most famous structures in the world, such as the Great Pyramids of Giza, Abu Simbel and the temples at Thebes. All major building projects were organized and funded by the state, whose purpose was not only to provide functional religious, military, and funerary structures but to reinforce the power and reputation of the pharaoh and ensure his legacy for all time. The ancient Egyptians were skilled builders with expert knowledge of basic surveying and construction techniques. Using simple but effective measuring ropes, plum bobs, and sighting instruments, architects could build large stone structures with accuracy and precision.

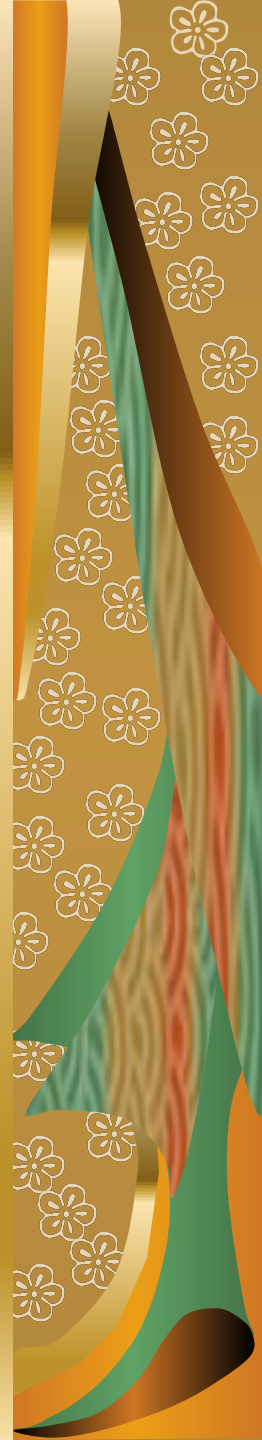




The ancient Egyptians produced art that was made for functional purposes rather than as a form of pure creative expression. Artists adhered to artistic forms that were developed during the Old Kingdom for more than 3500 years, following a strict set of principles that resisted foreign influence and internal change. Their artistic canon, characterized by the flat projection of figures with no effort to indicate spatial depth, combined with simple lines, shapes, and flat areas of color, created a sense of order and balance within a composition. Because of the rigid rule that governed its highly stylized and symbolic appearance, ancient Egyptian art served its political and religious purposes with precision and clarity.



GREECE



There are no fixed or universally agreed upon dates for the beginning or the end of the ancient Greek period. In common usage it refers to all Greek history before the Roman Empire. The historical line starts with Greek Dark Ages (1100-800 BC). In this period artists use geometrical schemes such as squares, circles and lines to decorate amphora and other pottery. The archaic period (800-480 BC) represents those years when the artists made larger free-standing sculptures in stiff, hieratic poses with the dreamlike "archaic smile".





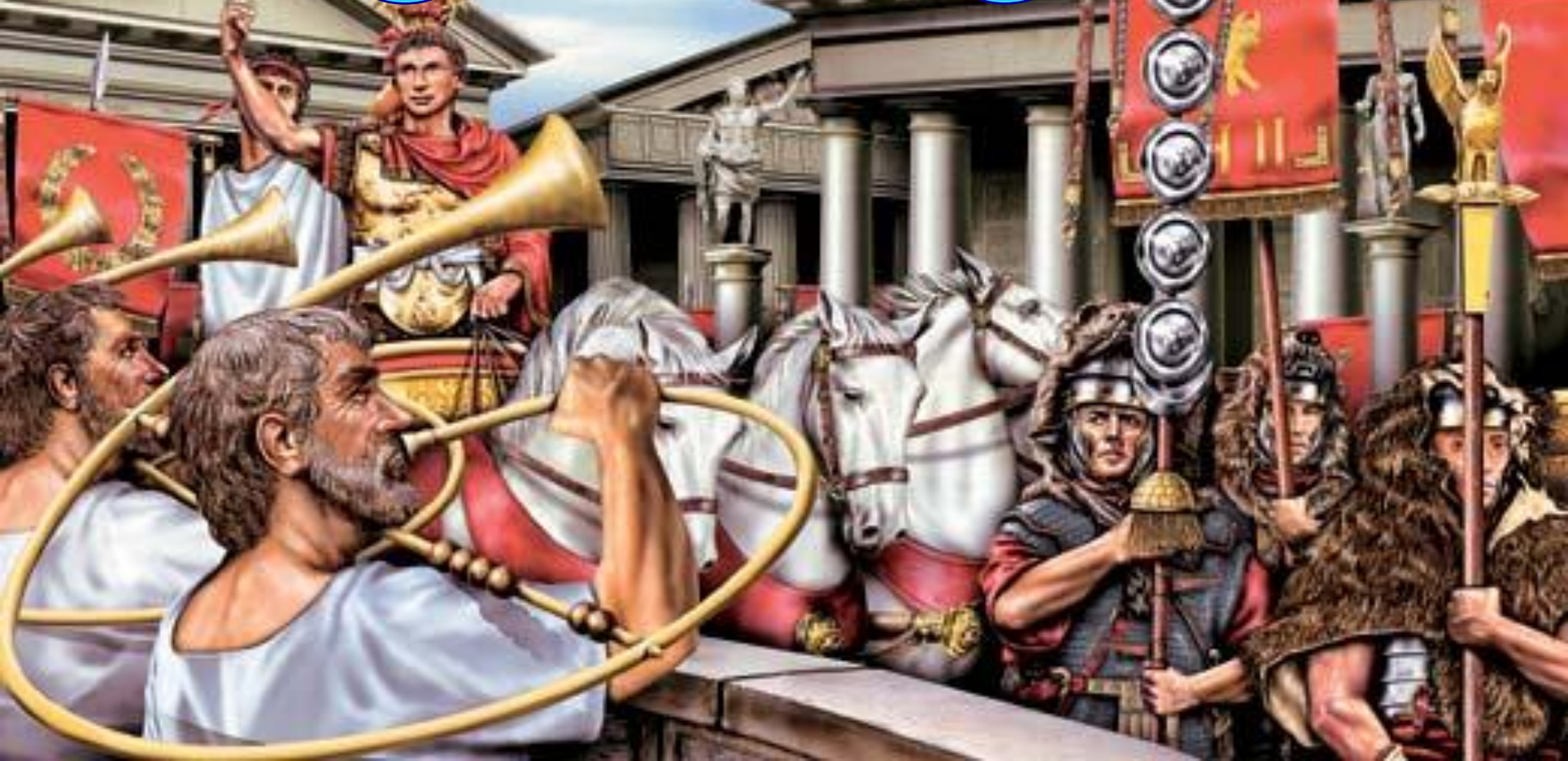
RELIGION AND MYTHOLOGY
GREEK MYTHOLOGY CONSISTS OF STORIES BELONGING TO THE ANCIENT GREEKS CONCERNING THEIR GODS AND HEROES, THE NATURE OF THE WORLD AND THE ORIGINS AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THEIR RELIGIOUS PRACTICES. THE MAIN GREEK GODS WERE THE TWELVE OLYMPIANS, ZEUS, HIS WIFE HERA, POSEIDON, ARES, HERMES, HEPHAESTUS, APHRODITE, ATHENA, AGOG, ARTEMIS, DEMETER, AND HESTIA. OTHER IMPORTANT DEITIES INCLUDED HEBE, HELIOS, HADES, DIONYSUS, PERSEPHONE AND HERACLES (A DEMI-GOD), ZEUS PARENTS WERE KRONOS AND RHEA WHO ALSO WERE THE PARENTS OF POSEIDON, HADES, HERA, HESTIA, AND DEMETER.



HEART OF EVERYDAY LIFE IN ANCIENT GREECE. GREEKS REGARDED MYTHOLOGY AS A PART OF THEIR HISTORY. THEY USED MYTH TO EXPLAIN NATURAL PHENOMENA, CULTURAL VARIATIONS, TRADITIONAL ENMITIES AND FRIENDSHIPS. IT WAS A SOURCE OF PRIDE TO BE ABLE TO TRACE ONE'S LEADERS' DESCENT FROM A MYTHOLOGICAL HERO OR A GOD.



Rome



THE **ARCHITECTURE OF ANCIENT ROME** ADOPTED THE EXTERNAL LANGUAGE OF CLASSICAL GREEK ARCHITECTURE FOR THEIR OWN PURPOSES, WHICH WERE SO DIFFERENT FROM GREEK BUILDINGS AS TO CREATE A NEW ARCHITECTURAL STYLE.

CERTAINLY, THE ROMANS ABSORBED GREEK INFLUENCE IN MANY ASPECTS CLOSELY RELATED TO ARCHITECTURE, FOR EXAMPLE IN THE INTRODUCTION AND USE OF THE TRICLINIUM IN ROMAN VILLAS AS A PLACE AND MANNER OF DINING. BUT AT THIS POINT SO TOO SHOULD WE NOTE ROMAN INDEBTEDNESS TO THEIR ETRUSCAN NEIGHBOURS AND FOREFATHERS WHO SUPPLIED THEM WITH A WEALTH OF KNOWLEDGE ESSENTIAL FOR THEIR FUTURE ARCHITECTURAL SOLUTIONS, FOR EXAMPLE IN TERMS OF HYDRAULICS AND IN THE CONSTRUCTION OF ARCHES.

ADOPTING THIS BROADER VIEW OF ARCHITECTURE WE CAN SEE THAT SOCIAL ELEMENTS SUCH AS WEALTH AND HIGH POPULATION DENSITIES IN CITIES FORCED THE ANCIENT ROMANS TO DISCOVER NEW (ARCHITECTURAL) SOLUTIONS OF THEIR OWN. FOR EXAMPLE, THE USE OF VAULTS AND ARCHES TOGETHER WITH A SOUND KNOWLEDGE OF BUILDING MATERIALS ENABLED THEM TO ACHIEVE UNPRECEDENTED SUCCESSES IN THE CONSTRUCTION OF IMPOSING STRUCTURES FOR PUBLIC







ART, MUSIC AND LITERATURE

Roman painting styles show Greek influences, and surviving examples are primarily frescoes used to adorn the walls and ceilings of country villas, though Roman literature includes mentions of paintings on wood, ivory, and other materials. Several examples of Roman painting have been found at Pompeii, and from these art historians divide the history of Roman painting into four periods. The first style of Roman painting was practiced from the early 2nd century BC to the early- or mid-1st century BC. It was mainly composed of imitations of marble and masonry, though sometimes including depictions of mythological characters. The second style of Roman painting began during the early 1st century BC, and attempted to realistically depict three-dimensional architectural features and landscapes. The third style occurred during the reign of Augustus (27 BC - 14 AD), and rejected the realism of the second style in favor of simple ornamentation. The fourth style, which began in the 1st century AD, depicted scenes from mythology, while retaining architectural details and abstract patterns.

