

THE NYMPHS OF GREEK MYTHOLOGY



The Nymphs (nymphai) were minor nature goddesses which populated the earth. Although they were ranked below the gods, they were still summoned to attend the assemblies of the gods on Olympus.

The Nymphs presided over various natural phenomena--from springs, to clouds, trees, caverns, meadows, and beaches. They were responsible for the care of the plants and animals of their domain and as such were closely associated with the Olympian gods of nature such as Hermes, Dionysus, Artemis, Poseidon and Demeter.

The male counterparts of the nymphs were the Satyrs, Panes, Potamoi and Tritons.

THE CLASSES OF NYMPH

ANTHUSAE (Anthousai) Nymphs of flowers. They were probably the same as the Leimenides, a type of Oceanid.

AURAE (Aurai) The nymphs of the cooling breezes. They were daughters of the wind-god Boreas, or Okeanos, the earth-encircling fresh-water stream.

BACCHAE The Bacchic nymphs, companions of Dionysus. They were also known as Thyiades.

BUCOLAE (Boukolai) Bucolic or rustic nymphs. Another name for the Epimelides.

CRENAEAE (Krenaiai) Naiad nymphs of wells and fountains.

DRYADS (Dryades) The nymphs of trees and forests. Some of them had their life force bound to that of a specific tree, usually the loftiest in a forest, or one in a sacred grove of the gods. Dryads of mountain pines were known as Oreads, those of ash-trees were called Meliae, Hamadryads were of the oaks, and Meliades of fruit-trees.

EPIMELIDES (or Epimeliades) Nymphs of highland pasture, the protectresses of sheep-flocks. They were perhaps numbered amongst the Oceanids.

HALIAE (Haliai) Nymphs of the sea, the sands, and the rocky shores. They had the schools of fish, and other sea creatures in their keeping. The most famous of them were the fifty Nereids.

HAMADRYADS (Hamadryad) Oak-tree Dryads whose life force was bound to that of a particular tree.

HELEIONOMAE (Heleionomai) Naiad nymphs of fresh-water marshes and wetlands.

LAMPADES Torch-bearing nymphs of the underworld. They probably belonged to the train of the goddesses of the Eleusinian Mysteries, Persephone and Hecate.

LEIMENIDES Nymphs of the water-meadows--pastures thick with lush grass and flowers. They were probably a type of Oceanid nymph.

LIMNATIDES Naiad nymphs of lakes.

MAENADS (Mainades) The frenzied nymphs of the train of Dionysus. Another name for Thyiads.

MELIADES Another name for Epimelides.

MELIAE (Meliai) Nymphs of honey, bees and honeydew (manna). They were also Dryads of the mountain ash.

MELISSAE (Melissai) Honey nymphs, another name for the Meliae.

NAIADS (Naiades) Nymphs of the sources of fresh-water: springs, fountains, streams, rivers, and lakes. They were usually called daughters of Okeanos and the River-Gods.

NEPHELAЕ (Nephelai) Nymphs of the clouds. They were usually numbered amongst the Oceanids.

NEREIDS (Nereides) Fifty Haliad sea-nymphs.

NYMPHS (Nymphai) Minor goddesses or spirits (daimonaissai) of nature. Many of the classes overlapped: for example, the Dryad nymph of a tree growing by a spring was also often the Naiad of the fountain.

OCEANIDS (Okeanides) Nymphs who presided over the sources of fresh water--both earthly, the streams and fountains, and heavenly, moist breezes and rain-clouds. They were daughters of Oceanus--the earth-encircling, fresh-water stream--and sisters of the River-Gods.

OREADS (Oreïades) Nymphs of the mountains. They were Dryad nymphs, whose life force was closely tied to that of a lofty mountain pine or fir.

PEGAEAE (Pegaiiai) Naiad nymphs of springs.

POTAMEIDES Nymphs of the rivers. They were a type of Naiad.

THYIADS (Thyiades) Wild, orgiastic nymphs of the train of the god Dionysus. They were also known as Maenads, Bacchae and Bacchantes. The Thyiad troupe consisted of a mixture of Dryad and Naiad nymphs.