

THE DARK SIDE OF OLYMPUS: RAPE CULTURE AND MALE DOMINANCE IN ANCIENT GREEK MYTHOLOGY

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Abstract

Ancient Greek mythology has long been revered for its timeless themes, iconic characters, and insights into human nature. However, beneath the surface of Olympian grandeur lies a darker reality: a culture of rape, exploitation, and male dominance. The myths that have shaped Western civilisation are rife with stories of gods and mortals who commit acts of sexual violence, often with impunity. From Zeus' serial abuses to Poseidon's predatory pursuits, the gods themselves perpetuate a culture of rape and entitlement. Mortal men follow suit, emulating the behaviours of their divine counterparts. Meanwhile, female characters are frequently reduced to objects of desire, victims of violence, or mere pawns in the games of men. This paper explores the complex web of cultural, historical, and literary factors that contributed to the normalisation of rape culture in ancient Greece. By examining the mythological narratives and historical contexts, this study will analyse the pervasive rape culture which influenced the power dynamics and societal norms that enabled male dominance in Greek mythology. Through this critical analysis, the dark side of Olympus sheds light on the shadowy corners of Greek mythology, revealing the ways in which mythological narratives reflect and reinforce harmful attitudes toward women, marginalised groups, and sexual violence. This paper employs philosophical analysis to explain how Greek mythology perpetuates harmful gender stereotypes and reinforces patriarchal attitudes, contributing to a culture of rape and male dominance.

Keywords: *Greek Mythology, Rape Culture, Patriarchal Attitude, Gender Stereotypes*

Introduction

In Greek mythology, rape was a common and complicated theme with different stories featuring forced intercourse, abduction and sexual violence. Though Greek myths reveal that it was not only women that got raped, men were also raped. The word ‘rape’ has been described in various ways contingent on the cultural constitution and the era under study. For instance, the modern understanding of the word rape is quite different from that of ancient Greece. For modern society, West (2016) describes rape as “non-consensual forced sex”. In other words, for a sexual act to be considered an act of rape, it requires the elements of non-consent and force, and as further suggested by West, rape also requires “utmost resistance on the part of the victim.

The Greeks did not have a word corresponding to rape; they used various verbal formulations to describe and conceptualise acts that are regarded as rape today, connecting the act with words such as *bia* (violence) and *hybris* (outrage, insult). Many scholars believe that by qualifying the events of the Greek literature as rape may “impose anachronistic concept on the evidence and obscure the understanding of both the original meaning of the text and of the Greek attitudes on the subject” (Harris, 2006). Deacy (2013) even calls into question whether it is viable to use the term ‘rape, while Harris argues that rape was not among the most discussed topics in ancient Greece and that the use of the term ‘rape’ when studying the ancient Greek sources “is misguided and anachronistic” (Harris, 1997). From this, it can be deduced that Harris is suggesting that the Greeks could not conceptualise the moral demerit and the cruelty of the act of rape as viewed in modern society. Rabinowitz (2011) explains that the lack of clarity of the definition of rape in ancient Greece could be viewed as “the ideological effect of the Greek effort to make rape less problematic by assimilating it to desire.” Herzog (2014) also suggests that “the vast number of verbal formulations available for describing rape in the literature can provide nuance and flexibility as well as ambiguity.” Based on these analyses, it can be assumed that the Greeks’ understanding of the word rape is quite different from the way it is understood today.

The representations of rape in the Greek myths and literature reveal that the Greeks understood the trauma felt by the victims of rape and sympathised with them. Their sympathy, however, did not reflect in their culture. It did not change their general attitudes towards

gender relations, which encouraged the masculine sexual aggression and made sexual violence against women an aspect of life and constructed an environment which trivialised the rape of women by connecting it with more attractive ideas, such as prowess, courage, power and lust (Cohen, 2010). This patriarchal society promotes rape culture. The term “rape culture” was first articulated in the 1970s by second-wave feminists in the United States, primarily applying to contemporary American culture as a whole (Purdy, 2004). Explaining rape culture, Burnett (2016) argues that rape culture “exists where rape and sexual assault are a normalised expectation and is recognised as contributing factors to such a culture hegemonic masculinity.” Another serious parameter of rape culture explained by Burnett is victim-blaming, that is, responsibility for the rape is not assigned to the perpetrator but to the victim. To come up with a safer conclusion as to whether the Greek myths normalised sexual violence, thereby promoting a rape culture, it is important to examine the myths of female subordination and rapes perpetrated by the Olympians, especially that of Zeus, the head of the Greek pantheon.

Gods and Mortals: Perpetrators of Rape

Myths are regarded as traditional stories that are passed from one generation to the next as part of a particular people’s cultural legacy through oral tradition. The word ‘myth’ has been described in various ways by scholars. For instance, Harris and Platzner (2001) consider myths as “the first creations of the human mind formed out of a profound need to provide an allegorical explanation for all the phenomena of life. Ancient Greek myths are divided into two categories; some of the tales are often characterised as “divine myths”, these stories deal with creation, the birth of the gods and the relations between divinity and humanity. While others are related to deeds of mortal heroes and heroines, serving as models of courage worthy of emulation to humans as well as examples of wrongdoing to be avoided (Harris and Platzner, 2001). These fascinating stories taught moral truth and served as a form of education and entertainment to people. In addition, the Greek myth helped the ancient Greeks to understand the world and provided answers to some life’s philosophical questions in connection with existence, life after death, such as, “Who made the world?” and “What happens to man after death?”

According to Robson, Greek myths were also read as exemplified allegories of the existing social norms and expectations. It was also used to justify their traditional rites and customs (Robson, 1997). For the Greeks, myths were not only components of religion, but they also played the role of prehistory, providing traditions about their “supposed ancestors in the distant past” (Harris and Platzner, 2001). Greek myth was an epoch in which gods interacted freely and openly with human beings. The gods and goddesses also had sexual relations with human lovers, siring many of the greatest heroes and heroines, including Perseus, Heracles, Achilles, Aeneas, and Helen, just to mention a few. Greek myths were part of their history, and as such, they were taken seriously (Bremmer, 1997).

Generally, myths at times are symbolic and metaphorical, for instance, in Greek myths, rape represented the struggle between chaos and order or the power of the gods. Exploring Greek myths from feminism perspective, modern interpretations portray and highlight the exploitation and objectification of women. The majority of Greek myths about goddesses and women focus on their relations with males. Hesiod’s *Theogony* shows how Greek mythology perpetuates harmful gender stereotypes, reinforcing patriarchal attitudes. Hesiod provides a chronological record of divine unions and the subjugation of women by their male counterparts. From the inception of the gods, Uranus (Heaven) oppressed Gaia (Earth) by hiding all her children as soon as they were born. Gaia, out of frustration and desire to have her children, implored her son, Cronus, to castrate their father, an action that led to the release of the hidden children (*Theogony*, 115-187).

The oppression did not end with Gaia. Ironically, Cronus, who castrated his oppressive father, out of fear of being overthrown by his children, swallowed his children as soon as they were born. His wife, Rhea, frustrated like her mother, devised a means of keeping one of the children, a son named Zeus, away from the father. As soon as Zeus was of age, he forcefully overthrew his father and ruled over the gods. Zeus, wanting to prevent history from repeating itself, married several wives, starting with Metis. Hesiod’s *Theogony* claims that Zeus swallowed Metis, his first wife, to enable him to bear Athena himself from his head. With this, Zeus was able to keep mother and daughter under his control. Apart from Metis, Zeus had other wives, namely: Themis, Mnemosyne, Eurynome, and Demeter, with Hera being the last one (*Theogony*, 891-928). Despite having several wives, Zeus

still had many momentary relationships with both goddesses and mortal women. From a critical analysis of the gods' attitudes toward their female counterparts, Lefkowitz (1986: 211) asserts that "a patriarchal order is established, with both women and children kept subordinate, though with particular rights and responsibilities."

There is a long list of all Greek mythological rape victims. Concerning these myths and sexual assaults, Zeitlin (1986) writes:

We must also remember that Greek culture is one that already finds the mythic a problematic category when confronted with other modes of apprehending reality. After all, the status of mythic stories of abduction and rape of women as founding events in human culture (such as the abduction of Helen as the cause of the Trojan War) or as acts committed by the very gods who are worshiped as religious powers prove to puzzle, embarrass and scandalise the sensibilities of the Greek themselves as soon as a sceptical or ethical eye is trained on these narratives.

Zeus, the king of the gods, is a fascinating and compelling character in Greek mythology, yet highly flawed; his sexual assaults, and those of the other gods, on both immortal and mortal, convey the dark side of Olympus. The Greek mythology presents Zeus as a serial rapist; Keuls (1985) refers to Zeus as "master rapist." There is a long list of goddesses and women raped by him. Hesiod, in his *Theogony*, claims that the first goddess Zeus fell in love with was Metis. However, after hearing Gaia's prophecy that Metis would bear a child who would overthrow him just as he had overthrown his father, Cronus. Zeus tricked Metis into transforming into a fly, and then swallowed her. Metis was already pregnant with Athena at this period, and the child continued to grow inside Zeus' head. While this cannot typically be considered as a rape narratives in the English sense which means forced sex, however, Zeus' actions against Metis involve coercion, deception and violation of her autonomy which fits well with the Latin word from which the term 'rape' derives, *rapere* which means to snatch, to grab, to carry off (Lewis and Short, 1969). Metis was not the only victim of Zeus' exploits and abductions.

Zeus often transformed himself or his victims into different forms he deemed fit in order to get a lot of women, both goddesses and mortals. The following are some notable examples that

demonstrate a pattern of behaviour by Zeus that involved coercion, deception, exploitation and rape, including some of his wives:

- ❖ Hera was the most famous of Zeus' wives; she was the principal wife and the queen of heaven. She was an Olympian like Zeus from the same parents- Cronus and Rhea, making them siblings. However, before becoming the queen of the gods, she was raped by Zeus, who transformed himself into a sparrow and took advantage of Hera's love for animals. Earlier, Hera had rejected the advances of her brother to become his wife. Zeus, after turning himself into a sparrow, flew through the storm and landed, freezing, at Hera's foot. Out of the goodness of her heart, Hera took the sparrow inside and warmed it up between her breasts, unaware that it was Zeus. Zeus transformed himself back into his original form and raped his sister. Out of shame and embarrassment, Hera agreed to marry Zeus and became the queen of Olympus.
- ❖ Another goddess raped by Zeus was Leto. In Greek mythology, Leto was the daughter of the Titans Coeus and Phoebe. Her narrative is deeply intertwined with Zeus. Their union resulted in the birth of two significant Olympian deities: Artemis, the virgin goddess of the hunt, and Apollo, the god of music, prophecy, and the sun.
- ❖ In Greek mythology, Callisto was a beautiful nymph. She was a devoted follower of Artemis, the goddess of hunting, and had taken a vow of chastity. Zeus was captivated by her beauty. To approach her, he disguised himself as Artemis. Under this guise, Zeus seduced and raped Callisto. When she became pregnant, her condition was eventually discovered by Artemis. As a result, Callisto was banished from Artemis's group. Hera, Zeus's wife, ever jealous of her husband's infidelities, transformed Callisto into a bear.
- ❖ Mnemosyne, the goddess of memory (and the inventor of both single words and language), was seduced by Zeus in the guise of a shepherd. They had sex for nine straight nights; after over a year had passed, she gave birth to the nine Muses at once, at the foot of Mount Olympus.

- ❖ Europa was a Phoenician princess abducted by Zeus in the form of a bull. Zeus took her to Crete, where he raped her. This act led to the birth of Minos, the legendary king of Crete.
- ❖ Leda was seduced by Zeus in the form of a swan, resulting in the birth of Helen of Troy, whose beauty later sparked the Trojan War.

These are just a few tales of Zeus's escapades recorded by the ancient Greek literature, thereby offering a window into the culture and beliefs of the time. One of the most significant works that delved in detail into the adventures and lineage of Greek gods, including Zeus, is Hesiod's *Theogony*. Hesiod presents a detailed account of the pantheon, with a notable reverence for Zeus. Despite highlighting the god's numerous liaisons, there is no hint of censure in Hesiod's portrayal. This lack of judgment on Zeus's questionable treatment of women mirrors the patriarchal structure of ancient Greece, where male authority was celebrated, and women were expected to accept their roles without contest. This paper does not aim to level criticisms at Zeus's liaisons; rather, it intends to highlight his and other gods' audacious behaviour toward women in Greek mythology.

While Zeus may be considered the most prolific perpetrator of rape in Greek mythology, myths also reveal the other gods who seduced, exploited and raped both goddesses and women, including incest. For instance, Poseidon, the god of the sea, pursued and raped his sister, Demeter, even after she changed into a horse to escape him. Poseidon, however, transformed himself into a horse and raped her, resulting in her giving birth to Despoina and Arion. Poseidon was also responsible for the rape of Medusa in Athena's temple. Other incidents involved Hermes, the trickster, who raped Apemosyne after luring her into a trap. Hades also abducted Persephone and took her to the underworld as his queen. Ares raped Alcippe, the daughter of Mars, and Apollo raped Dryope. The question at this point is: why did Zeus and all these Olympian gods get away with many of the atrocities they committed?

Zeus and other gods imposed their will on their victims without any constraints. The women they exploited accepted their destinies, including repercussions and learned to live with their shame. While Zeus often faced little direct consequence for his

affairs, the women he was involved with and their offspring were not always as fortunate. Many faced the wrath of Hera, Zeus's wife, who was depicted as fiercely jealous. However, the numerous escapades of the gods, Zeus' in particular, were without significant personal repercussions, which can be understood from several perspectives: for one, Zeus, as the king of the gods and the ruler of Mount Olympus, held the highest position of power and authority in the Greek pantheon. This supremacy gave him considerable freedom in his actions. With his actions, as Pomeroy (2015) argues, Zeus established a "patriarchal government on Olympus to introduce a moral order and culture."

Cultural and Historical Contexts of Rape in Greek Mythology

Rape is a prevalent theme in Greek mythology, often involving gods, heroes, and mortals. To understand this phenomenon, it is important to consider the cultural and historical context of sexuality in ancient Greece. The ancient Greeks viewed their myths as a moral guide which taught moral lessons and shaped societal values. However, the normalisation of rape in these myths can be seen as a reflection and reinforcement of existing cultural attitudes. The Greek mythology fostered a double standard of morality, which validated the pattern of human behaviour which was sanctioned by the actions of the gods. For instance, while the ancient Greeks required their wives to be totally faithful, the husbands were at liberty to amuse themselves with other women outside the home who were not married to them (Walcot, 1984). This attitude promoted a male-centred worldview of patriarchal and male-dominated society.

Adebowale and Akinboye (2017) posit that ancient Greek society was deeply patriarchal, with men holding significant power and authority. This male-dominated worldview often justifies and normalises acts of violence against women, as reflected in several of their myths. The gods as role models, particularly Zeus, were frequently depicted as rapists, reinforcing the idea that sexual violence was acceptable, even divine. Harrison (1922) rightly described the story of Athena's birth from Zeus's head as 'a desperate theological expedient to rid her of her matriarchal conditions. This divine sanction further desensitised society to the gravity of such acts, shaping the cultural norms. The birth of many heroes, such as Heracles and Perseus, served as a glorification of divine rape. This

glorification of sexual violence as a source of heroic lineage further normalised and justified such acts.

The female characters in Greek mythology are often portrayed as passive victims, lacking agency and control over their own lives (Graves, 1955). This is the representation of ancient Greek society, where a woman's life was incorporated into the *oikos* (household) headed by her *kyrios* (male guardian). The guardian, whoever he may be— father, husband, son— “was expected to protect and to take responsibility for her overall welfare” (Adebowale & Akinboye, 2017). Victims of sexual assault in ancient Greece may have faced social ostracism and shame, further discouraging them from speaking out. In recent decades, feminist scholars have critically examined these myths, highlighting the problematic aspects of sexual violence and challenging traditional interpretations. By analysing these myths through a feminist lens, scholars have shed light on the underlying power dynamics and the ways in which these narratives contribute to harmful gender stereotypes. It is important to note that while rape was prevalent in Greek mythology, it does not represent the views of all individuals within that culture. There were likely diverse opinions and reactions to these stories, even in antiquity. However, the pervasive theme of sexual violence in these myths reflects and reinforces the patriarchal values of ancient Greek society. The interpretation of rape in Greek mythology has evolved significantly over time, reflecting changing societal values and perspectives.

Feminist scholars such as Pomeroy (2015) and Morse (2018) have critically examined Greek myths, highlighting the patriarchal structures and gender inequalities that underpinned these narratives. They have exposed the harmful consequences of sexual violence and challenged traditional interpretations that often romanticise or justify such acts. For example, Psychoanalytic theories have been applied to Greek myths to explore the underlying psychological motivations of characters and the societal implications of their actions. One psychoanalytic interpretation of rape in Greek mythology by Sigmund Freud (1925) focuses on the concept of the Oedipus complex, a Freudian theory that posits a child's unconscious desire for the opposite-sex parent and hostility towards the same-sex parent. In the context of mythology, this can be seen in the numerous instances of gods raping mortal women, often resulting in divine offspring. This could be interpreted as a projection of the oedipal

desire onto a larger, god-like figure, representing a fantasy of power and possession. Another psychoanalytic perspective highlights the role of power dynamics and the objectification of women in these myths. Rape is often portrayed as a tool for asserting dominance and control, reflecting patriarchal societal structures where women were seen as property or objects to be possessed. This interpretation aligns with feminist critiques of rape culture, which emphasise the systemic nature of sexual violence (Caldwell, 1989).

Analysing the act of rape in line with these Greek words—*bia* (violence) and *hybris* (outrage, insult)—and from a legal perspective, rape was considered as an insult against the property and the authority of the male *kyrios* (guardian) of the female victim and not against the victim. In this case, the female consent or point of view was of no consequence. Although sexually violated women had access to the legal system, they had to go through their *kyrioi*, who decided over the issue according to their personal interests as to whether they would employ the available judicial system or self-help remedies (Koutsopetrou, 2019). Representations of rape in Greek myths and literature reflect that the Greeks understood the trauma experienced by sexual violence victims and sympathised with them. However, this sympathy is not an indication of the Greeks' general attitudes towards gender relations, which extolled masculine sexual aggression and the female sexual passiveness, making sexual violence against women an aspect of life and creating an environment which trivialised sexual violence against women by connecting it with more attractive ideas such as prowess, courage, power and lust.

However, it is important to note that the Greeks made distinctions among the acts of rape that are not made today and connected the wrong of the crime with the male and family honour, the shame and the status and not with the raped woman herself (Harris, 2006). Although the Greek historical context is completely different from today's and some scholars opine that there is no topic of rape in ancient Greece, this work makes use of this modern term to investigate the representations of such acts in the law and several expressions of the ancient Greek "popular culture", mainly mythology, to discuss the concept of sexual violence. Using such an open-minded approach of the past with a bold reading of "rape narratives" in the Greek sources can reveal whether the "different" ancient Greek attitudes towards sexual violence, (rape included), have

been carried over to here and now, have subconsciously become a part of the modern reality and at the end of the day seem more familiar than different (Koutsopetrou, 2019). Burkert (1985) opines that the actions of gods in myths do not always align with human morals. Gods often operate on a different set of principles, reflective of their immortality, omnipotence, and essential nature in shaping the world and its events.

Female Agency and Silence in Greek Mythology

Greek mythology presents a multifaceted image of women, oscillating between agency and victimhood. While some narratives showcase women as powerful figures, many others depict them as passive victims of male violence, particularly sexual assault. This dynamic reflects the intricate interplay of patriarchal structures and individual agency within ancient Greek society. While some female characters exhibit agency, it is often constrained by societal norms and divine intervention. For instance, in the myth of Persephone, while her abduction by Hades is often interpreted as rape, some scholars argue that her eventual return to the underworld each year signifies a degree of agency (Hornblowers et al, 2012). However, this agency is limited by her divine status and the cyclical nature of the myth. The myth of Medusa also highlights the consequences of male violence against women; she tried to avert it by turning into a monstrous figure, but to no avail. Her ability to petrify men can be seen as a form of agency, albeit a tragic one (Morse, 2018). The pervasive theme of female silence and victimisation in Greek mythology has had a lasting impact on cultural attitudes towards sexual violence. By normalising and even glorifying male aggression and female passivity, these myths contribute to a culture that often blames victims and minimises the severity of sexual assault.

More frequently, female characters in Greek mythology are depicted as passive victims, their voices silenced or marginalised (Lefkowitz, 1986). This silence can be attributed to several factors, such as patriarchal structures. Ancient Greek society was deeply patriarchal, with men holding significant power over women. This power imbalance often left women with little recourse to resist or protest sexual violence. Many rapes in Greek mythology are perpetrated by gods, who are seen as beyond human law and morality. This divine sanction can further silence victims, as they may feel powerless to challenge the actions of the gods. Many times, victims

of sexual assault in ancient Greece may have faced social ostracism and shame that further discouraged them from speaking out.

Greek mythology is riddled with narratives of rape, often involving powerful male figures and helpless female victims. However, a closer examination reveals complexities within these stories, showcasing instances of female agency and resistance, even in the face of overwhelming force. One prominent example is the myth of Persephone and Hades. While Persephone is abducted and forced into marriage, she eventually negotiates a compromise, allowing her to spend part of the year in the underworld and part above ground. This demonstrates a degree of agency, as she actively seeks to shape her own fate within the constraints of her situation. It is important to note that interpretations of female agency and silence in Greek mythology can vary depending on cultural and historical context. Some scholars argue that even seemingly passive characters can be read as subverting patriarchal norms through their silence or actions. Others emphasise the limitations imposed on women within the mythological framework.

Philosophical Analysis of Rape in Greek Mythology

In Greek mythology, rape is a pervasive theme, often depicted as a demonstration of power and control by the gods and mortal men. Philosophically, this phenomenon can be analysed through various lenses, such as power dynamics and social hierarchy, objectification and commodification of women, symbolism and metaphor and violence and the human condition. Rape in Greek mythology frequently involves gods and goddesses, and mortal women, highlighting the power imbalance between deities and mortals, which can be considered as a manifestation of human violence and the darker aspects of human nature (Gravdal, 1991). This dynamic reinforces the social hierarchy of ancient Greece, where those in positions of power, including men and gods, held control over those subordinate to them. The portrayal of rape in Greek mythology often reduces women to mere objects, stripping them of agency and autonomy (Lefkowitz, 1986). This objectification reflects a broader societal attitude toward women, viewing them as commodities to be possessed and controlled. This theme speaks to the complexities of human behaviour and the capacity for cruelty and violence. Rape in Greek mythology can also be interpreted symbolically, representing

the destruction of innocence, the disruption of social order, or the consequences of hubris (Campbell & Moyers, 1988). This symbolic resonance adds depth and complexity to the myths, inviting philosophical reflection on the human condition.

The philosophical analysis of rape in Greek mythology reveals a complex web of themes and motifs that reflect the societal attitudes, power dynamics, and human experiences of ancient Greece. By examining these myths through various philosophical lenses, we can gain a deeper understanding of the human condition and the ongoing relevance of these ancient stories in Greek society, particularly in the classical period. While it is inaccurate to label the entire culture as a 'rape culture,' certain aspects of their societal norms, myths, and legal systems reveal a troubling tolerance for sexual assault, particularly against women.

Greek mythology is rife with instances of rape, often perpetrated by gods upon mortals or even other gods. These acts of sexual violence are frequently justified or ignored within the narrative, raising profound philosophical questions about power, consent, and the nature of divinity. One interpretation is that rape in mythology reflects the patriarchal power structures of Greek society. Gods, as the ultimate authority figures, could act with impunity, their actions seen as inevitable and even beneficial. This perspective highlights the objectification of women and the normalisation of male dominance (Lefkowitz, 1986). Another interpretation suggests that rape in mythology serves as a cautionary tale, demonstrating the consequences of hubris and the abuse of power (Davidson, 2007). The victims of these acts often suffer greatly, highlighting the moral implications of such violence. This view emphasises the importance of respecting boundaries and the potential for divine retribution.

Some notable ancient Greek philosophers like Xenophanes, Socrates and Plato criticised the Greek mythology as contained in Homer and Hesiod. Xenophanes of Colophon, a pre-Socratic philosopher, was a vocal critic of the anthropomorphic depictions of the gods prevalent in Greek mythology. Anthropomorphism, the attribution of human characteristics to non-human entities, was a common feature of ancient Greek religion. The gods, according to Homer and Hesiod, were portrayed as having human-like bodies, emotions, and behaviours, often engaging in activities such as fighting, love affairs, stealing, adultery and rape.

Xenophanes rejected this anthropomorphic view of the Greek gods, arguing that the gods were not like humans at all. Instead, he proposed a conception of a single, all-powerful, and perfect god who was unlike anything in the mortal world. This god was not limited by human form or characteristics (Kirk & Raven, 1957). Xenophanes believed that the anthropomorphic depictions of the gods were simply projections of human desires and limitations onto the divine. One of Xenophanes' most famous criticisms of anthropomorphism, according to Leshner (1992), is his assertion that if horses could paint, they would depict their gods as horses. This analogy highlights the subjective nature of religious beliefs and the tendency of humans to create gods in their own image. Xenophanes argues that different cultures have different gods, each reflecting the values and customs of that particular society. Xenophanes' critique of anthropomorphism had a significant impact on the development of Western thought. His critical thinking also influenced later philosophers such as Socrates and Plato.

Plato, in his work *The Republic*, famously argues for the censorship and even banning of certain forms of poetry. His reasons are multifaceted and stem from his philosophical views on the nature of reality, knowledge, and the ideal society. Plato argues that some of these myths are mere imitations, which do not reflect the truth. Plato's theory of forms posits that the physical world is merely a shadow of the true, ideal forms. Poetry, according to him, is an imitation of an imitation, further distancing us from the ultimate truth, and this distance from reality can lead to a distorted understanding of the world and a weakening of our pursuit of knowledge. Plato was concerned about the corruptive influence of some poetry. To Plato, certain poetry, particularly tragic poetry, can depict immoral or unethical behaviour in a way that can make it seem attractive or justified. He feared that exposure to such content could corrupt the minds of young people and lead them down a path of vice.

Plato's *Republic* contains extensive criticisms of poetry and its potential negative impacts on society. In Book II, Plato discusses the importance of education for the Guardians and the need to carefully curate the stories and myths they are exposed to. He criticises poets like Homer for portraying the gods in ways that could be seen as immoral or inconsistent. In Book III, Plato elaborates on the censorship of poetry, arguing that certain types of poetry can

corrupt the minds of the young and undermine the authority of the Guardians. While Book X contains the most extensive critique of poetry, here, Plato argues that poetry is a form of imitation that distances us from the true forms, appeals to emotions rather than reason, and can promote immoral behaviour. In *Ion*, Plato argues that poets are not truly wise but rather inspired by the gods, thereby suggesting that poetry lacks a rational foundation and can be misleading.

Conclusion

The prevalence of rape in Greek mythology reflects a complex and troubling aspect of ancient Greek society. While it is vital to avoid projecting modern views of consent and victimhood onto the past, the myths reveal a societal tolerance for sexual violence, particularly against women. The normalisation of rape in mythology, where gods and heroes often act as perpetrators, likely contributed to a broader cultural acceptance of such acts. This is further evidenced by the legal system's focus on protecting the honour of the victim's male guardian rather than addressing the harm done to the woman herself. However, it is important to note that not all voices in ancient Greece condoned sexual violence. Some tragedies, like those of Euripides, explored the trauma and suffering caused by rape. Additionally, there were likely individual acts of resistance and defiance against these societal norms. Zeus's numerous affairs can be seen as symbolic representations of his vast influence, virility, and omnipresence rather than literal accounts. Some scholars believe that the stories of Zeus's dalliances were metaphorical, representing the merging of different cultures or the imposition of one culture over another. In these interpretations, the women represent lands or regions "conquered" by the influence of the primary Greek culture. Ancient Greek society was predominantly patriarchal. Men, especially those of high status, often had relationships outside of their primary marriages. In mythological narratives, these societal norms were amplified. It highlights the importance of challenging harmful cultural norms and advocating for the rights and dignity of all individuals, regardless of gender.

The myths of ancient Greece, as preserved and passed down through the centuries, reveal a disturbing prevalence of rape culture and male domination. The frequent depiction of female characters as victims of rape, coercion, and exploitation, coupled with the normalisation of these acts by the gods themselves, underscores a

deeply ingrained patriarchal ideology. Furthermore, the myths often perpetuate a culture of victim-blaming, where female characters are held responsible and punished for their own victimisation. A good example was the case of Hera transforming Callisto into a bear after she was raped by Zeus.

In light of the description of rape in Greek myths and literature as well as the ambivalence of the definition, Greek myth could be understood as an attempt to normalise sexual violence and rape against women in ancient Greece. Also, the hidden warnings in various myths, which insinuated that women were unsafe away from home and their male *kyrioi* (guardians), were indirect instructions of conduct that deliberately terrified the ancient women to follow acceptable patterns of behaviour. The evidence presented in this study supports the argument that ancient Greek culture displays key features consistent with rape culture.

Notes on Contributor

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