

CONTENTS

Acknowledgements	9
Introduction	11
1. Australian and Maori Mythology	15
Aboriginal Australian Mythology	
Maori Mythology	
2. Sumerian Mythology	37
Who Were the Sumerians?	
In the Very Beginning	
Gods and Heroes	
3. Egyptian Mythology	51
Who Were the Egyptians?	
Gods and Goddesses	

4. Chinese Mythology	67
Ancient China	
Animals and Creatures	
5. American Indian Mythology	85
Who Were the American Indians?	
Spirits and Rituals	
Myths of the Plains	
6. South and Central American Mythology	103
The Mayans	
The Aztecs	
The Incas	
7. Greek Mythology	127
Who Were the Greeks?	
Gods and Goddesses	
Heroes, Heroines and Monsters	
8. Roman Mythology	169
Who Were the Romans?	
The Origins of Rome: Pick a Story	
Signs of the Zodiac	
Heroes and Heroines	

9. Norse Mythology	193
Who Were the Norse People?	
The Nine Worlds	
Gods and Goddesses	
Selected Bibliography	215
Index	217

ABORIGINAL AUSTRALIAN MYTHOLOGY

Although colonized by the British just 225 years ago, Australia's indigenous civilization dates back approximately 70,000 years, and the myths within that culture some 10,000 years. Many of the stories were rooted in the geological features that lay nearby to the tribes that told them. Although the myths were not committed to writing during that period, specific local phenomena described in some stories place those myths within that time frame. It is nothing short of a miracle that the same tales have been passed down from generation to generation, and it is purely by word of mouth the stories survive to be told today.

A colossal landmass, indigenous Australia contained an extraordinary array of roughly 400 distinct tribes, with their own unique language and belief systems. As such, cataloguing just one mythology will barely scratch the surface, so we will instead dip into some of the most fascinating stories from across the whole continent.

Dreamtime

Aboriginal Australian mythology references three main realms – human, land and the sacred realm. During the creation of the world, before human life came into being, there existed an era known as Dreamtime. Following creation, Australian Aboriginals believed people lived simultaneously in both the physical world and in Dreamtime, suggesting that in life and in death an element of each of us resides in the eternal Dreamtime. To better understand and influence the current environment, tribes would sing and pray to the Dreamtime incarnation of whichever person, animal, object or other for which they needed help understanding; for example, appealing to the Dreamtime crocodile to help in controlling the real-life version of the same animal.

The legends of Dreamtime are used as aetiological myths and moral lessons, transposing their lessons onto the lives of their storytellers, and, as such, they remain an important part of Aboriginal culture. Covering such a vast expanse of land, it is understandable that the Dreamtime myths vary from one tribe to the next, and so an individual set of myths becomes very much a part of each clan's identity.

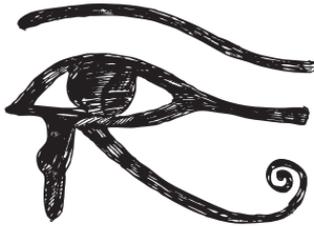
The Rainbow Serpent

Despite the staggering array of belief systems across Australia, one character makes more than one appearance: the Rainbow Serpent. The stories – and names – attributed to her vary, but she is generally associated with water, and therefore life itself. In many stories, she ends up devouring people but also bringing traditions and customs to the people of Australia. The Rainbow Serpent is used as a creation story, as well as an explanation for laws, customs and the totemic tribal culture across Australia.

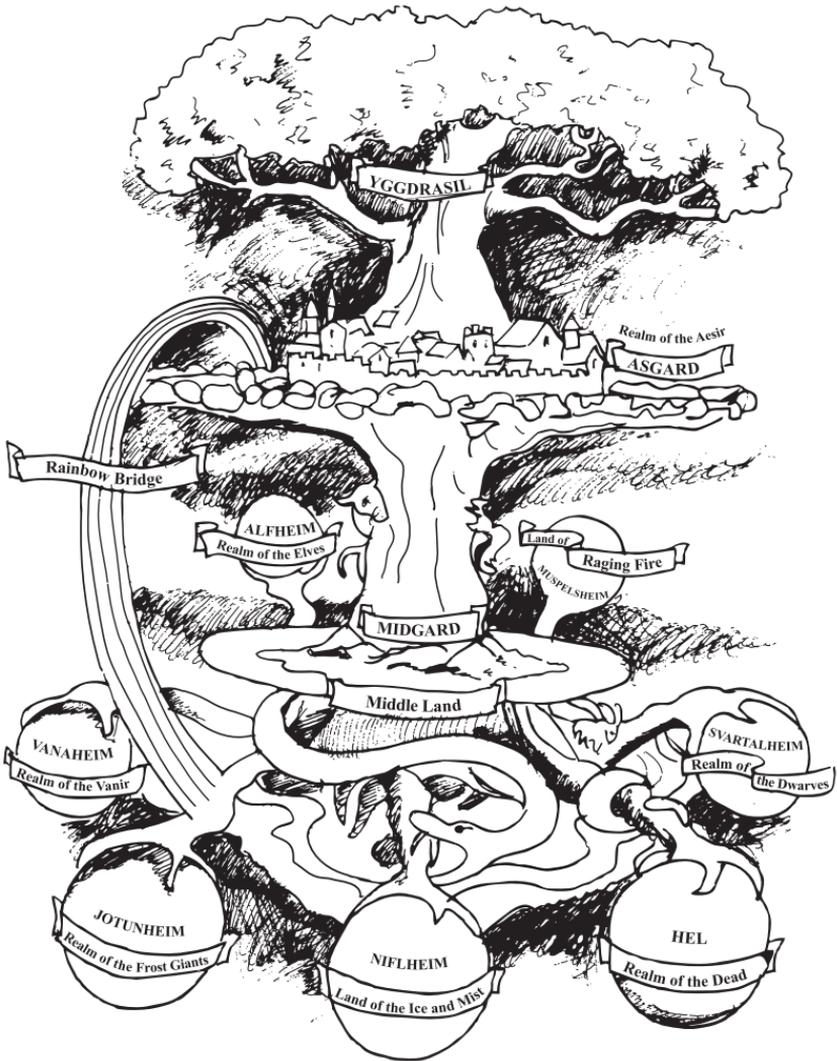
During Dreamtime, at the very dawn of time, as the serpent travelled across the length and breadth of Australia, the markings of her wandering created the valleys, rivers and creeks. Eventually, she called forward the frogs, which emerged from the earth with heavy bellies full of water. The Rainbow Serpent tickled their stomachs and the water poured out across the world, filling the rivers and lakes. From this all other life – both plant and animal – emerged. The kangaroo, emu, snake, birds and other animals then followed the Rainbow Serpent as she moved across the land, with each animal helping to retain the ecological balance by hunting only for its own kind.

Horus

The falcon-headed Horus was god of the sky, seen as a protector and a symbol of power, as well as the god of hunting and war. One of the most enduring symbols of Egyptian mythology is the Eye of Horus, which was used as an emblem for protection and guidance in jewellery and sculpture, as well as painted onto the bows of ships. Horus' eyes were said to resemble the sun (personified in the sun god Ra) and the moon (personified in the moon god Thoth). All-seeing eyes are important symbols not only for the Egyptians; similar icons are present in the Christian Eye of Providence, on the back of the US dollar bill and – of course – in the Eye of Sauron in *The Lord of the Rings*.



The Eye of Horus



The Basis of the Norse Religion