

“people” from “pebbles” or whence our hardness; or the pious humans are transformed into trees, for which reason the trees are regarded as sacred).

The Flood Myth/Legend is an international migratory story attested also in Hebrew, Mesopotamian, and Indian tradition.

Suggested reading:

Gian Andrea Caduff. *Antike Sintflutsagen*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1986.

Alan Dundes, ed. *The Flood Myth*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988.

Joseph Fontenrose. “Philemon, Lot, and Lycaon.” *University of California Publications in Classical Philology* 13 (1945): 93–119.

James George Frazer. *Folk-Lore in the Old Testament: Studies in Comparative Religion, Legend, and Law*. London: Macmillan, 1919, 1:104–361.

William Hansen. *Ariadne’s Thread: A Guide to International Tales Found in Classical Literature*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2002, 219–222.

FOLK ETYMOLOGY

Popular, unscientific derivation of a word.

Popular etymologies, based upon the observation of superficial resemblances between words, underlie or play a role in many myths and legends in ways that are not apparent when the narratives are translated or retold in another language.

Thus a chance similarity between the Greek noun *aphros* (“foam”) and the first part of the divine name Aphroditê, which has no obvious meaning in Greek, can suggest that the goddess’s name may signify “Foam + (something),” an etymology that contributed to the strange myth according to which Aphroditê was born from foam. In the same way, a superficial resemblance between the Greek noun *myrmeke* (“ants”) and the ethnic substantive *Myrmidones* (Myrmidons, a term for inhabitants of Phthia) underlies the story according to which Zeus transformed certain ants into humans, the first Myrmidons.

When the sense of divine epithets became obscure over time, their original import having been forgotten, Greeks often reinterpreted them on the basis of their resemblance to familiar words. Hermes’s epithet Argeiphontes was taken to mean “Slayer of Argos” and connected with a myth in which Hermes slew a many-eyed monster named Argos, whom he had lulled to sleep. Athena’s obscure epithet Tritogeneia was understood variously, such as “Born by [the River] Triton.”

The attention of folk etymologists was not restricted to proper nouns. When the lonely survivors of the Great Deluge, Deukalion and Pyrrha, were instructed to cast stones behind them, those thrown by him became men and those thrown by her turned into women, wherefore (the narrative claims) humans are termed *laos* (“folk”), having originated from *laas* (“stones”). That is, humans are called “people” because they came from “pebbles.”