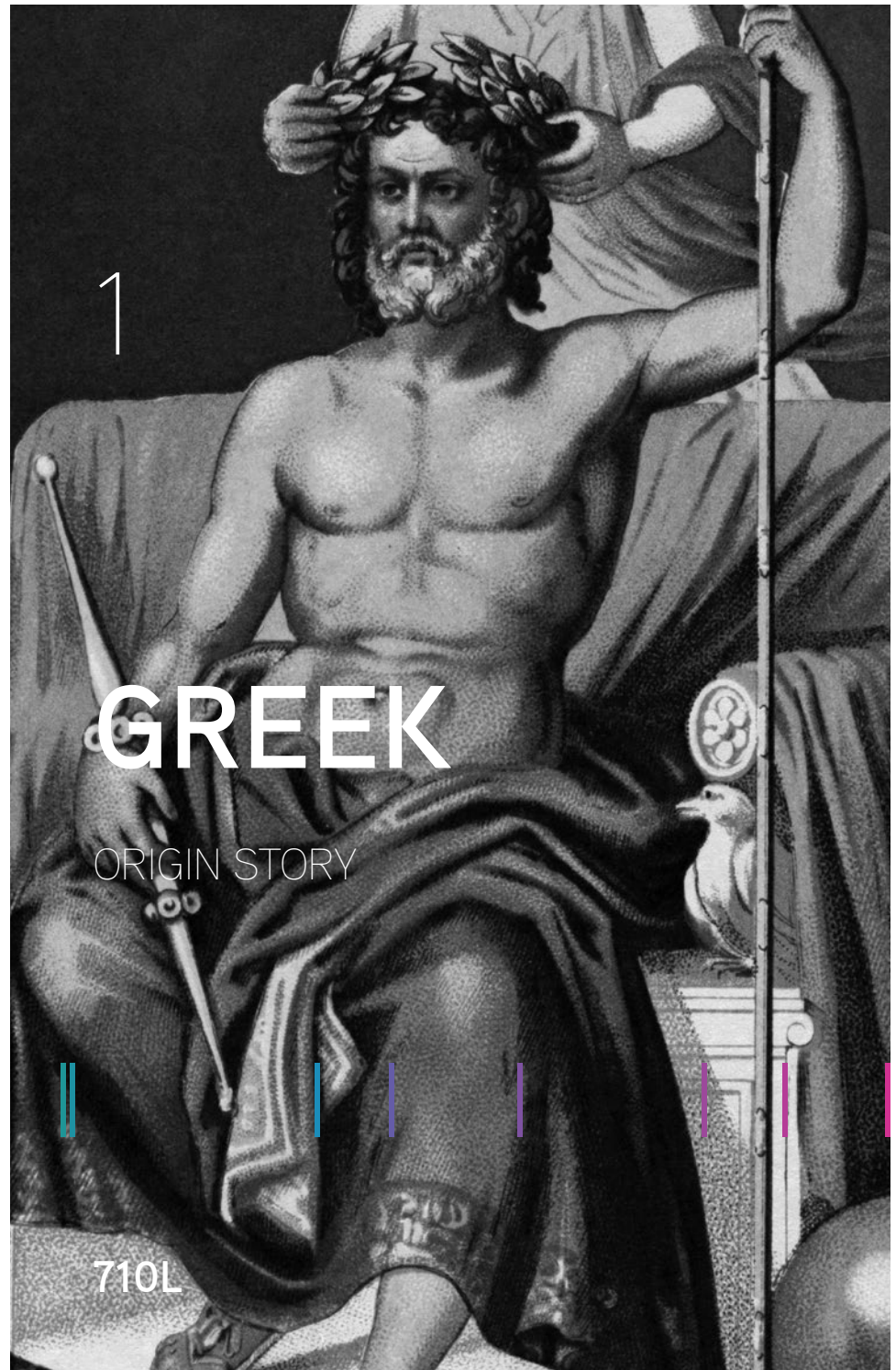1

GREEK

ORIGIN STORY

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GREEK

THE TITANS AND
THE GODS OF OLYMPUS

By Cynthia Stokes Brown, adapted by Newsela

This origin story comes from some of the earliest Greek writings that have survived.

We know the Greek origin story from some of the earliest Greek writing that has survived. This account comes from the poet Hesiod. He is thought to have been active sometime between 750 and 650 BCE. Hesiod worked around the time that the poet Homer composed The Iliad *and* The Odyssey.

Items found by archaeologists support the creation story recorded by Hesiod. Pottery from the eighth century BCE shows the gods and goddesses he describes. Hesiod's story centers on Pandora. She was the first woman created by the gods. In Hesiod's telling, Pandora is the cause of much trouble. But, before this, Pandora — whose name means "gift giver" — was known as a kindly Earth goddess.

In the beginning there was nothing. There was just Chaos. Out of this emerged Gaia (the Earth) and other gods — Eros (love), the Abyss (part of the underworld), and the Erebus (the unknowable place where death dwells). Gaia gave birth to Uranus (the Sky) on her own. Then, Uranus fertilized her.

Gaia and Uranus were parents of the first Titans. There were six males: Coeus, Crius, Cronus, Hyperion, Iapetus, and Oceanus. And six females were born: Mnemosyne, Phoebe, Rhea, Theia, Themis, and Tethys. Gaia and Uranus then decided that no more Titans were to be born.

Cronus (time) cut off his father's genitals and threw them into the sea. From the water rose Aphrodite, goddess of love and beauty. Cronus became the ruler of the gods with his sister-wife, Rhea. The other Titans became his court.

Because Cronus had betrayed his father, he feared that his children would do the same. So each time Rhea gave birth, Cronus snatched up the child and ate it. Rhea hated this. So she tricked him by hiding one child, Zeus. She wrapped a stone in a baby's blanket so that Cronus ate the stone instead of the baby.

When Zeus was grown, he fed his father a poison. It caused Cronus to vomit, throwing up Rhea's other children and the stone. Zeus then challenged Cronus to war for the kingship of the gods. At last Zeus and his siblings, the Olympians, won. The Titans became imprisoned in the Abyss.

Zeus was troubled by the same worries as his father. It had been foretold that his first wife, Metis, would give birth to a god greater than he. Fearing this, he tricked her into turning herself into a fly. Then he swallowed her.

But she was already pregnant with Athena. Inside Zeus's stomach they both made him miserable. Then Athena, the goddess of wisdom, civilization and justice, burst from his head — fully grown and dressed for war. Zeus was able to fight off all challenges to his power. He remained the ruler of Mount Olympus, the home of the gods.

One son of the Titans, Prometheus, did not fight with fellow Titans against Zeus. Therefore, he was spared from the Abyss. Instead, he was given the task of creating man. Prometheus shaped man out of mud. Then Athena breathed life into the clay figure. Prometheus made man stand upright as the gods did. Going against the gods, Prometheus gave fire to man.

By giving man fire, Prometheus tricked Zeus. To punish him, Zeus created Pandora, the first woman. She possessed stunning beauty and wealth. Yet she had the heart and tongue of a liar. He also gave Pandora a box she was commanded never to open. Eventually, however, her curiosity got the best of her. She opened the box to release all kinds of evil, diseases, and sorrows. Yet, she also released hope, which lay at the bottom of the box.

Sources

www.greekmythology.com

David Leeming and Margaret Leeming, *A Dictionary of Creation Myths*
(New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 221.

Image credits

An illustration of Zeus crowned by Victory
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