

Topic Page: [Cronus \(Greek deity\)](#)

Definition: **Cronus** from *The Macquarie Dictionary*

1.

Greek Mythology a Titan, son of Uranus and Gaea, who dethroned his father, and was dethroned by his own son Zeus. Saturn is his Roman counterpart.

Summary Article: **Cronus**

From *Dictionary of Classical Mythology*

The youngest and wildest of the TITANS, son of Uranus (Heaven) and GAIA (Earth), according to Hesiod's account of creation in his *Theogony*. Uranus, who hated all his children, forced them back inside Gaia's womb until, in agony, she appealed to her children for help. Only Cronus had the courage to do as she wished. Armed with a sickle of adamant he lay in wait for his father, and when Uranus next came to lie with Gaia, Cronus hacked off his genitals and flung them into the sea. He then released his brothers and sisters from inside their mother.

Uranus' power was gone and Cronus was now the king of the gods, but he soon became as brutal and tyrannical as his father, imprisoning his brothers the CYCLOPES and the HUNDRED-HANDERS in Tartarus and setting the monster CAMPE to guard them. He married his sister RHEA (1) who bore him five children, HESTIA, DEMETER, HERA, HADES (1) and POSEIDON, but because he had learnt from Gaia that he was destined to be overthrown by his own child, Cronus swallowed each baby whole as it was born. When Rhea was pregnant for the sixth time, and still suffering endless grief for all her lost children, she turned to her parents for help. On their advice she went to Crete, and there she gave birth to a son, ZEUS. She hid him safely, then handed over to Cronus (Fig. 148) a stone wrapped in swaddling clothes in place of the baby (487–91):

He took it in his hands and thrust it down into his stomach, the wretch; and he did not realise in his heart that in place of the stone his son was left behind, unconquered and untroubled, and that he would soon overcome him by force and might, and drive him from his power, himself to rule over the immortals.

Zeus was reared in secret, and when he grew to maturity, helped either by Gaia or METIS, he induced Cronus to swallow an emetic and disgorge the children he had devoured. First to be vomited up was the stone that had been substituted for the divine infant, and Zeus set it in the earth at Delphi as a wonder for mortals. It was still exhibited there in the second century AD, when Pausanias saw it (10.24.6). After the stone came Zeus' brothers and sisters. Aided by the freed Cyclopes and Hundred-handers, they fought together with Zeus against Cronus and those of his brother Titans who supported him (see TITANS). After a long and desperate struggle Cronus was defeated and deposed. Zeus, reigning in his place, imprisoned his father and the hostile Titans in the depths of TARTARUS. The Hundred-handers were appointed to guard them.

According to a different tradition, Cronus' rule was a blessed Golden Age in which men lived with carefree hearts like gods, without toil or grief, without even old age, and spent their lives constantly feasting on all the good things produced in abundance by the earth. (It is this aspect of Cronus that links him with his Roman counterpart, SATURN.) One tale tells how he fathered the Centaur CHEIRON on

PHILYRA, the daughter of Oceanus, transforming himself into a horse to mate with her so as to deceive the jealous Rhea. When Cronus no longer reigned in OLYMPUS, he became ruler of the Islands of the Blest (see ELYSIUM), where the souls of heroes honoured by the gods lived after death.

Both traditions about Cronus are reflected in the postclassical arts. Perhaps the best-known painting of the brutal Cronus is Goya's horrific *Saturn Devouring One of His Children* (c. 1821) in the Prado, Madrid. Then both strands of the myth are merged by Keats, writing about the Titans' defeat by the gods in his unfinished *Hyperion*: he portrays Cronus/Saturn as sympathetic and benign, but still has him end his existence in a gloomy Tartarus:

*Deep in the shady sadness of a vale
Far sunken from the healthy breath of morn,
Far from the fiery noon, and eve's one star,
Sat gray-hair'd Saturn, quiet as a stone,
Still as the silence round about his lair;
Forest on forest hung about his head
Like cloud on cloud. No stir of air was there,
Not so much life as on a summer's day
Robs not one light seed from the feather'd grass,
But where the dead leaf fell, there did it rest.*

By a confusion between Cronus' name and the Greek word for time, *chronos*, he is sometimes seen as Time personified and is depicted in art as Old Father Time, complete with scythe.

[Homer, *Iliad* 8.478–81, 14.203–4, 271–9; Hesiod, *Theogony* 137–8, 154–82, 453–506, 617–735, *Works and Days* 109–20, 169–73; Pindar, *Olympian* 2.68–77; Apollonius, *Argonautica* 2.1229–42; Apollodorus 1.1.3–1.2.1; Pausanias 5.7.6–10, 7.23.4, 8.2.2, 8.8.2–3, 8.36.2–3, 9.2.7, 9.41.6, 10.24.6.]

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