

Multi-headed creatures in Greek art

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Typhon

Typhon or Typhaon or Typhoeus. A vast and terrifying monster, the final challenger to the power of Zeus, king of the gods. Typhon is said to have been a child of Hera alone, who was jealous when Zeus produced Athena from his head. So Hera prayed to Gaia (Earth) for a son stronger than Zeus, striking the earth with her hand, and Gaia heard and fulfilled her prayer. Hera in due course gave her monstrous offspring to be reared by the snake Python. But according to Hesiod, Typhon was the son of Tartarus and Gaia. He had on his shoulders a hundred fearsome snakeheads, all with black tongues flickering and eyes flashing fire, and these heads were able to imitate every conceivable sound - the bellow of a great bull, the roar of a lion, the baying of a pack of hounds, the hissing of serpents. He was born in the Corycian cave in Cilicia, in south-eastern Asia Minor north of Cyprus. He was taller than all the mountains and his head touched the stars. If he stretched out his arms, his one hand touched East and the other West, and instead of fingers he had a hundred snakes' heads. His mouth shot forth flames, his body was winged, and from the thighs down he was a mass of huge, coiling serpents. Typhon left behind him various monstrous offspring born of another monster, Echidna, most of them a bane to mankind. The volcano on Mount Etna is also his legacy, for there his anger pours forth in streams of fire as he struggles to free himself.

The battle of Zeus and Typhon:

In Hesiod's version of their battle Zeus simply set Typhon on fire with his shower of thunderbolts: the whole world shook in the fray, and Tartarus itself trembled. Then Zeus seized him and flung him down into the depths of Tartarus, where he joined the imprisoned Titans. There the captive became the father of all the winds that cause men harm, and that is why the word typhoon is derived from his name. It was also said that during their great struggle the other gods fled in terror to Egypt, where, to disguise themselves from Typhon, they assumed the shapes of animals: this was told in explanation of the animal forms with which the Egyptians invested many of their gods. The Greeks identified Typhon with Set, the monster which pursued Osiris. It was even supposed that Zeus accompanied this flight and disguised himself as a ram: this accounted for the cult of Zeus Ammon (Amun) in the shape of that animal.

Typhon in Art:

Typhon has won great popularity is not limited to a specific area in Greece; where extended appearance of Laconia in the south to Corinth, Attica and the settlement Khalkis city in southern Italy. Although he was not a god he did not have a great temple or rituals devotional has appeared on all kinds of arts of pottery and armor wars and even the sculptures in the temples. In ancient art Typhon tends, for practical reasons, to be depicted with a single human head, and a winged human torso attached at the waist to one or two great snakey coils.

DOI:10.12816/0036605