

Works and Days

Come here, you Muses of PIERIA,¹ who give glory
through your song. Sing a hymn to Zeus, who is our
father, great Zeus, through whom men become either
famous or unknown, celebrated or decried.

For easily Zeus, who thunders on high, who lives
in high mansions, makes men strong, or easily brings
strong men down; easily he lessens the distinguished
and enhances the obscure; easily he straightens the crooked
and dries up the proud.

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Hear me now, watching and seeing,
and make true judgments that abide by justice, and I will
speak truth to Persês. For not only one kind of Strife
is on the earth, but there are two:² The one you may
praise, once you encountered her; the other is worthy
of blame. In nature they are entirely different.

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The one
encourages war and evil battle, wretched; no man loves her,
but by necessity, through the will of the deathless ones,
they honor the oppressive Strife. But the other Strife dark
Night begot first, and Zeus, the son of Kronos, who sits
on high, dwelling in the upper sky, placed her in the roots
of earth: She is far better for men. She rouses even the shiftless
to accomplishment. For when a man who is not working
sees another who has grown rich, who is eager to plow

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1. *Pieria*: A region of southeastern Macedonia, north of MOUNT OLYMPOS, named after a primordial tribe who once lived there. There seems to have been a shrine to the Muses in Pieria.

12. *are two*: In *Theogony* line 183, Hesiod refers to a single Strife (*Eris*), the child of Night (*Nyx*).

and to plant and to place his house in order, this neighbor
works to rival his neighbor who hastens to wealth. This Strife
25 is good for mortals. So the ceramicist is angered by the ceramicist,
and the carpenter by the carpenter, and the beggar envies the beggar;
and the singer, the singer.

O Persês, lay these things up in your heart,
so that the evil Strife does not hold your heart back from labor
as you gawk and obsess with quarrels in the agora. For he has
30 little concern with quarrels and things that take place in the agora,
he who holds in his house the abundant and ripe sustenance
of the things that the earth bears, the grain of Demeter.³² When you
have plenty of that, you can engage in quarrels and conflict
for the sake of another's possessions—you will have no second
35 chance to do this.³³

But without further ado let us settle our dispute
with straight judgments that come from Zeus, the best ones.
For we have already divided our estate, but you carried off
much more, greatly feeding the pride of the bribe-devouring
elders, who wish to make this their judgment—the fools!
40 Nor do they know how much more the half is than the whole,
nor how great an advantage is in mallow and the asphodel.³⁴

For the gods have hidden sustenance from men, or you might
easily work enough in one day to provide you for an entire year even
without working. Quickly you would put up your rudder in the smoke,³⁵
45 and the work of oxen and the tireless mules would come to an end.

32. *Demeter*: The goddess of the wheat harvest.

33. *to do this*: Apparently to act without the quarrel between Hesiod and Persês being settled, but the Greek is obscure.

41. . . . *asphodel*: "Better the half than the whole" is a proverb meaning that it is better to have little gained justly than much gained unjustly. Mallow and asphodel are flowering plants that grow in the Mediterranean, traditionally the cheap food of the poor.

44. . . . *in the smoke*: A part of the annual cycle was the marketing of grain across the sea. Tools not being used were stored above the fireplace, so the rudder is put "up in the smoke" once the need for overseas travel is suspended.

For Zeus hid it when he was angered in his heart because wily
 Prometheus deceived him. For this reason he devised painful sorrows
 for mankind—he hid away fire. Then the noble son of Iapetos stole
 it again for humankind from Zeus the Counselor, hiding it from Zeus,
 who delights in the thunderbolt, in a hollow fennel stalk. 50

In anger Zeus

the cloud-gatherer spoke to him: “O son of Iapetos, who surpass
 all in cunning, you rejoice because you have stolen fire, because
 you have deceived my mind, but you have contrived for yourself
 and for men to come a gigantic evil. I will give them in retribution
 for the fire an evil in which all will take delight in their spirit while 55
 embracing their own evil.”

So he spoke. And the father of men and gods
 laughed out loud. He ordered the famed Hephaistos immediately
 to mix earth with water and to place inside the voice and strength
 of a human being, and to make the lovely desirable shape of a young
 girl with a face like the immortal goddesses. And he commanded Athena 60
 to teach her crafts, how to weave elaborately embroidered cloth,
 and he ordered golden Aphrodite to pour out on her head charm that
 inspires cruel desire, and care that devours the limbs. And he urged
 Hermes the messenger, the killer of Argos,⁶ to put in her the mind
 of a bitch and a scheming nature. 65

So he spoke. And they obeyed King
 Zeus, the son of Kronos. Straightaway the clever Lame God made her
 from earth in the image of a modest young girl, following the plans
 of the son of Kronos. And the goddess glancing-eyed Athena gave
 her a girdle and ornaments, and the goddess Graces and queenly
 Persuasion placed on her skin golden necklaces, and the Hours 70

50. . . . *fennel stalk*: For the story of Prometheus’ deception of Zeus at the division of meats
 in sacrifice, see *Theogony* lines 452–456.

64. *killer of Argos*: The Greek is *Argeiphontēs* (ar-je-i-**fon**-tez), an obscure and ancient
 epithet usually interpreted as referring to a myth in which Hermes killed Argos, a
 many-eyed monster who guarded the princess Io; but the actual meaning is unknown.

with beautiful locks crowned her with spring flowers.^o Pallas Athena fitted all the ornaments to her body. And in her breast the messenger, the killer of Argos, fashioned lies and wheedling words and a thievish nature through the will of loud-thundering Zeus. And the messenger
75 of the gods placed in her a voice, and he named the woman Pandora, because all who live on OLYMPOS had given her a gift, an evil for men who devour grain.^o

When he had accomplished his savage and desperate deception, the father sent the famous killer of Argos, the swift messenger of the gods, to take it to Epimetheus as a gift. And Epimetheus did not
80 remember how Prometheus had told him never to accept a gift from Olympian Zeus but to send it back, unless some evil befall humankind. But only after he had taken it, when he already had the evil, did he understand. Before this the tribes of men lived on the earth separate and apart
85 from evil and apart from harsh labor and grievous sickness, which brings death upon men; for in misery men soon grow old.

But the woman took off the great lid of the jar with her hands and scattered its contents abroad, and she devised terrible pains for humankind. Hope alone remained within in the unbreakable house beneath the lip of the jar, and did not fly out the door.^o Before that she stopped the lid of the jar through
90 the will of Zeus who carries the goatskin fetish, the gatherer of clouds. But ten thousand woes roam through humankind; for the earth is filled

71. . . . *spring flowers*: The “Lame God” is Hephaistos. The Graces (*Charites*) are spirits that bestow beauty and feminine charm. Persuasion (*Peitho*) is a personification of the power to persuade a lover. The Hours (*Horai*) bring to fulfillment the fruits of the earth and the beauty of women. All often accompany the great goddess Aphrodite.

77. . . . *grain*: Hesiod takes Pandora as meaning “all-gifted,” but probably it is an early name for the Earth mother meaning “she who gives all.”

89. . . . *out the door*: The Greek for “jar” is *pitbos*, a large storage jar, but through a mistranslation by the Dutch scholar Erasmus (1466–1536) it has popularly been called a box. The story is odd because evils have been let out into the world, but Hope remains confined in the jar. Still, Hesiod’s meaning must be that in the midst of misfortune there is hope that evil can be overcome.



Figure 14. Pandora born from the earth, crowned and veiled, with hands upraised. Above her flies an Eros indicating her power of sexual attraction. The figure beside her is either Hephaistos with his sculptor's hammer or Epimetheus, who receives her as a bride as he tills the earth, smashing the clods with a hammer. Zeus stands to the far left, holding a royal scepter and wearing an olive wreath, and beside him is Hermes with the herald's wand of snakes entwined on a staff, winged helmet, and winged boots. Athenian red-figure painting, ca. 450 B.C. Ashmolean Museum, Oxford.

with evil things, and the sea is filled. Sickness afflicts humans in the day,
and at night sickness courses through mortals, of their own accord
bringing evils in silence, because Zeus the Counselor took away their voice.

95 Thus there is no way at all to escape the mind of Zeus.

If you wish,

I will tell another story, correctly and with skill, and you should lay
it up in your heart—how gods and mortal humans have a common origin.
First of all, the deathless ones, who have their homes on Mount Olympus,
fashioned a Golden Race of mortal humans.⁹⁹ These lived in the time
100 of Kronos, when he was king in the sky. They lived like gods, without
a care in their hearts, far away from pain and suffering. Nor was there
terrible old age, but always they were the same in their feet and their hands,
delighting in festivities away from every evil. They died as if overcome
by sleep. All things noble were with them. The rich earth bore them
105 its fruit abundantly and unstinting all by itself. They lived off their fields
as they pleased, in peace, with many good things, rich in flocks, friends
to the blessed gods.

But after the earth covered over this race,
they are called noble spirits upon the earth through the will of great
Zeus, defenders from evil, guardians of mortal humans, who watch over
110 judgments and wicked deeds, coursing everywhere over the earth, clothed
in a mist, giving out wealth; for they received this kingly honor as well.
Then after this those who have their homes on Olympus made a second
race, of silver, far worse, not like the Golden Race in appearance or mind.
A child was raised by his doting mother for one hundred years—a complete
115 fool, gamboling in his own house! But when they came to maturity
and reached the full measure of youth, they lived for just a short while,
suffering pains through their foolishness. For the Silver Race were not able
to keep away from stupid violence against one another, nor did they wish
to cherish the deathless gods, nor perform sacrifice on the sacred altars
120 of the blessed ones, as is right for human beings in every community.

99. . . . *humans*: The “deathless ones” here are the Titans, not the later Olympian gods: Olympus is the throne of divine sovereignty.