

12 REVIEW OF MEDICAL LITERATURE Greek and Rome History and mythology in medical literature

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If one reviews the medical literature it is full of terms related to Greek and Roman history and literature. Hundreds of times one might have heard, read, talked or written one particular term but may be unaware of its Greek or Roman origin or relation. Actually some of the terms are very interesting to learn if not taught by now.

Every one knows that there are eight cervical vertebrae. The very first vertebra is known as Atlas. **Atlas** in Greek mythology, son of one of the TITANS, famous for his strength. He refused hospitality to PERSEUS, who using the head of MEDUSA, turned him into stone. He became the Atlas mountains, forced to support the heavens for ever. Every one must have seen the picture of Atlas carrying the whole universe on his back. Similarly Atlas vertebrae carry the weight of the whole head and brain.

Since the 16th century, pictures of Atlas and his burden have been used as decoration on maps. Accordingly, the word Atlas is used for a book of maps. Similarly every one is familiar with the term tendo **Achilles** a very tough tendon attached to the gastrocnemius – soleus muscle. Its strength and toughness has given the term Achilles to the Greatest Greek warrior in the TROJAN WAR the hero of Homer's ILLIAD. When he was an infant, his mother Thetis tried to protect Achilles by bathing him in the magical river Styx to make him immortal, but the heel by which she held him remained vulnerable. During the siege of Troy, he returned to slay the Trojan hero Hector, whose corpse he dragged in the dust behind his chariot. Later, Achilles was fatally wounded in the heel by an arrow from the brother of Hector Paris. The phrase 'Achilles' heel' is sometimes used to describe a strong person's one significant weakness. Aphrodite (AFER-ree-dye-tee) (Roman name Venus) Greek goddess of love and beauty, the mother of Eros and Aeneas. In the JUDGMENT OF PARIS, Paris chose Aphrodite as the most beautiful goddess, over Hera and Athena. Aphrodite was believed to have been born out of the foam of the sea, and is often pictured rising from the water, notably in the painting Birth of Venus by Sandro BOTTICELLI. Morphine is a very popular narcotic analgesic drug. The word is derived from **Morpheus** the God of sleep and dreams in Greek and Roman mythology. When a person takes the said drug that person is in the arms of Morpheus' i.e. is asleep. The term Pandora's box is sometimes used in surgery when the diagnosis of an intra-abdominal condition is mysterious. The surgeon had to perform laparotomy to diagnose and treat the condition. Though such incidences are now rare because of the wide availability of ultrasonography, CT and MRI scanning. The phrase 'a Pandora's box' means any source of great suffering or trouble, often unsuspected at first. It is said that the PROMETHEUS' theft of fire, Zeus sent Pandora's box to earth with a box containing a few blessings, but many more evils, such as war and sickness. When she opened the box the evils flew out, to plague mankind; only hope remained. In sexology terms Aphrodisiacs & Erogenous zones derived from Aphrodite and Eros. Aphrodite (Roman name Venus) a Greek goddess of love and beauty, the mother of Eros and Aeneas. In the JUDGMENT OF PARIS, Paris chose Aphrodite as the most beautiful goddess, over Hera and Athena. Aphrodite was believed to have been born out of the foam of the sea, and is often pictured rising from the water, notably in the painting Birth of Venus by Sandro BOTTICELLI. Eros the Greek and Roman god of love, and son of Aphrodite associated with all beautiful things. Eros was both playful and cruel, and he fired arrows that produced physical desire in his victims. The word psychiatry and psychology is derived from the term Psyche. Psyche is a beautiful girl in Roman mythology. Venus was so jealous of her beauty that she ordered her son Cupid to make Psyche fall in love with some one ugly. But

cupid himself fell in love with psyche; he visited her every night in the dark and ordered her never to try to see him. One night psyche lit a lamp to look at cupid whilst he was asleep but he awoke and fled. While psyche searched for him, venus treated her cruelly and set her many harsh tasks. Eventually Jupiter made psyche immortal, and she and cupid were married. So these emotional events of the story made a terms dealing emotions i.e. psychiatry and psychology. The term nymphomania is derived from Nymphs. Nymphs young and beautiful female spirits of nature in classical mythology who lived in forests, caves, seas, rivers and springs. They liked dancing and music and were companions of the SATYRS. Any young beautiful or seductive women may be referred to as a nymph. In psychology the term the personality 'narcissism ' suggest the excessive admiration of oneself. The word is derived from Narcissus a Beautiful youth in Greek mythology who fall in love with his own reflection. Because he was unable to tear himself away from the image, he wasted away and turned into the narcissus tree & flower.

Source: Illustrated Dictionary of sciences