



ODYSSEY OF THE GODS

By **Erich von Däniken**

“**F**irst the gods, they who dwell on the heights of Olympus, brought forth a golden race of much-discoursing men...”

The above quote is translated from a German translation of Hesiod’s *Theogony* of 1817. Professor Voss translated the Greek to read ‘they who dwell on the heights of Olympus’. In newer versions of the same passage, we find a slightly different slant: ‘... [gods] dwelling in heavenly houses’.

Let me put these two translations, separated by only 150 years, alongside each other so that you can compare them and draw your conclusions:

1817: First the gods, they who dwell on the heights of Olympus, brought forth a golden race of much-discoursing men. These were ruled by Chronos, at that time reigning in heaven. And they lived like the gods, their souls continually cared for...

1970: Deathless gods dwelling in heavenly houses first created the golden race of frail human beings. That was at the time of Chronos, when he was still king in the heavens. And they lived like gods, having no worry in their hearts...

The ancient Greek some of us may have toiled over at school is not sufficient to judge which version is more accurate. Although the general drift of both translations is broadly the same, there is a fundamental difference between ‘heights of Olympus’ and ‘heavenly houses’, and between ‘ruled by Chronos’ and ‘at the time of Chronos’. What will the translation sound like in the year 2100? And what was the original sense and meaning in Hesiod’s time?

His account goes on: after the ‘golden race’ the gods created a second, lesser race, a ‘silver race’. This race was still created by the same gods, those who ‘dwell in the heights of Olympus’, or, perhaps, ‘dwell in heavenly houses’. This ‘silver race’ was of a lower order than the golden race, both in form and out look, and was made up of ‘softies’, whose mothers pampered them.

After this came: ‘... a third race of noisy people’. These were of ‘great strength and force’, and ‘from their shoulders grew huge limbs’. This race is supposed to have been obdurate and

obstinate, and its agricultural tools were made of metal. But this race too was a disappointment apparently, and so Chronos created a fourth as well: that of the heroes or half-gods.

We modern people, according to Hesiod, belong to the fifth race, the iron race. We are a mixture of 'good and evil', and experience joy and pain. But when things degenerate to such a extent that children no longer resemble their fathers, hosts no longer welcome their guests, and brothers no longer love one another, then our race too will be destroyed in the name of Zeus.

Hesiod gives a vivid, detailed description, including all the finer points of the weapons involved, of the battle between the gods and the Titans. Although the latter had been created by the gods themselves, they had to vanish from the face of the earth. A terrible struggle broke out, in which even father god Zeus got involved, hurling from the skies great exploding bolts of lightning, missiles which made the seas boil, burned whole regions and brought the earth to its trembling knees. Hesiod uses many pages to describe the slaughter, but I will quote only a short excerpt from the 1817 translation:

'Up above too, the Titans consolidated their squadrons ... loudly did the earth quake, and the dome of heaven boomed ... and straight from heaven and from Olympus rushed in the Thunderer, with a flash of lightning. Blow fell upon blow, with rumbling and flashing of fire ... holy flames intertwined ... the fertile sprouting earth flamed up and the great forests collapsed in the fury of fire... then the holy winds caught fire too, so that the eyes of even the strongest were blinded ... as if the domed heaven descended close to the earth, the loudest, most thunderous noise vented itself ... the gods stormed in to the fray, the winds blew wildly and whirled up dust and destruction ... then Zeus sent his sublime missile ...and awful clamor arose...'

Such a battle was not waged with earthly means. Something very similar, but with even more dreadful weapons, is described in the Indian epic The Mahabharata. There, too, different races of gods do battle with each other:

'The unknown weapon is radiant lightning, a frightful messenger of death, which turns to ashes all who belong to the Vrishni and the Andhaka. The bodies consumed by fire were unrecognizable. Those who escaped with their lives lost their hair and their nails. Clay pots broke without cause, the birds turned white. In a short while food became poisonous. The lightning fell to earth and became fine dust.'

And what did Gilgamesh say, when his friend Enkidu died in great pain after encountering the divine monster Chumbaba? 'Was it perhaps the poisonous breath of the heavenly beast which struck you?'

The Mahabharata versions available in German are all edited and shortened. Since I can't read Sanskrit, I have to refer mainly to the many volume versions in English. The similarities with Hesiod are too compelling to be simply overlooked. It was as if the elements had been set free. The sun turned in circles, and burning from the weapon's heat, the world staggered in flames. Elephants were singed by fire and ran wildly to and fro ... the water grew hot, the beasts died ... the thundering of the flames made the trees crash one after the other as in a forest fire.. Horses and chariots burst into flames ... thousands of chariots were destroyed, then a deep silence fell ... a terrible sight met the gaze. The corpses of the fallen were disfigured by the awful heat ... never before have we seen such a dreadful weapon, never before have we heard of such a weapon.

This is also the place to mention another cross-reference to Gilgamesh: 'The heavens cried out, the earth screamed out in reply. Lightning lit up, a fire flamed upwards, death rained down. The brightness vanished, the fire was extinguished. All that had been struck by the lightning turned to ashes.'

All these weapons of mass destruction—whether described by Hesiod, or in The Mahabharata, or the Epic of Gilgamesh—were used in times before written history began. If these battles of the gods had occurred in an 'historical epoch', we would have precise accounts with dates. Since this is clearly not the case, they must either have taken place in prehistoric times—or in the imagination. I do understand the point of view of scholars who made their commentaries on these ancient Writings before 1945. But since the end of the Second World War, since Hiroshima and Nagasaki, we ought to be a bit wiser. We now know what 'gods' are capable of.