Poseidon, God of the Sea-Blue Mane

Poseidon, brother of Zeus, ruled the seas. Resplendent in his flowing beard, handsome as only a Greek god can be, he is typically shown lounging in the waves, often in the company of fish, and holding his signature trident, an attribute that makes him instantly recognizable. No wonder artists love him.

Most of the time, though, Poseidon is petulant, angry, anything but loveable. His ill feelings first arose when he sat down with his brothers Zeus and Hades to draw lots and divide the world. Poseidon won dominion over the sea, a vast empire. But the empire of Zeus was vaster still, and Poseidon never got over his resentment. His rancor poisoned his interactions with both deities and mortals, including the Greek warrior Odysseus, who blinded his cannibalistic son, Polyphemus; Poseidon’s malice fuels The Odyssey.

Easily provoked and altogether disagreeable, Poseidon was the god of earthquakes (Homer calls him the Earthshaker), the sovereign of the sudden squall, and he quarreled with everyone. Strangely enough, many of his disputes were over territory on land, where he was sure to fail. He competed with Athena for ownership of Athens, with Hera for the rulership of Argolis, with Zeus over Aegina, and with Dionysus over Naxos. He lost each contest.

Another failure, this one with far-reaching consequences, took place when he conspired with Hera, Athena, and other Olympians to overthrow Zeus. When their coup failed, Zeus punished Poseidon (and Apollo) in a terrible way: he forced them to work for a mortal, King Laomedon of Troy.

To complete their sentence, Poseidon and Apollo built a fortifying wall around the city. But Laomedon refused to pay for this service. He even threatened to slice off their ears and sell them into slavery. In response, Apollo sent a plague to Troy and Poseidon dispatched a voracious sea monster.

The monster was intent on destroying the kingdom. Laomedon knew that the only way to stop it was to sacrifice his daughter, Hesione, and he prepared to do that. Luck was with her: Heracles rescued the girl and killed the monster, which only fueled Poseidon’s anger. He became implacable in his animosity for all things Trojan—except the wall, of which he was rather proud.

Despite his unpleasant demeanor, there is one charming story about him. A love story, it began on the island of Naxos, where Poseidon saw the sea nymph Amphitrite dancing with her fifty sisters. He was infatuated. But his advances were so clumsy that she ran from him and hid in the ocean’s depths. Luckily, a dolphin volunteered to act as Poseidon’s ambassador. He presented the sea god’s case so engagingly that Amphitrite changed her mind and married him. Among their children: Triton, who was a man above and a fish below.
POSEIDON, EARTHSHAKER

Domain: the sea, earthquakes, horses.
Characteristics: wrathful.
Parents: Rhea and Kronos.
Roman Name: Neptune.
Lovers and Liaisons: Aethra, Alcyone, Celaeno, Demeter, Gaia, Halia, Libya, Medusa, Theophane, and others.
Wife: Amphitrite.
Children: Alcinous, Anteus, Arion, Cercyon, Charybdis, Chrysaor, Despoina, Halirrhothius, Lamia, Pegasus, Polyphemus, Theseus, Triton, and others.
Animal: dolphin, fish, horses, bulls.
Attributes: trident
Best representation in post-classical art: Paolo Veronese's Mars and Neptune.

Poseidon Hippios.
Lord of Horses (and Other Animals)

On vase paintings, Poseidon frequently appears in the presence of dolphins and fish. Yet his tie to creatures of the deep is minor compared to his connections with various quadrupeds, including the ram, the bull, and the horse.

The ram is associated with Poseidon because he turned into one during his pursuit of the nymph Theophane. As a result of that liaison, she gave birth to the ram with the golden fleece. His relationship to bulls was the usual one: they were sacrificed to him. Black bulls in particular were herded into the sea in his honor.

His deepest animal tie was with the horse. Horses were sacrificed to him (by drowning, among other methods); he gave horses as gifts; and he invented horsemanship. Pausanias says that, after Poseidon was born, Kronos wanted to swallow the baby but Rhea fooled him by handing him a foal instead. Other commentators report that Poseidon was the father of the first horse, which may have been conceived when the sea god fell asleep and inadvertently spilled his semen on a rock. Either that, or it trottled out of the earth when Poseidon struck his trident into the ground during his competition with Athena.

Poseidon even turned into a horse when he slept with the Gorgon Medusa, who was still a beauty in those days. Stupidly, she and Poseidon had their rendezvous in a temple of Athena, who punished Medusa for her effrontery by turning her hair into a coiling mass of snakes. Not long afterwards, Perseus sliced off her head with a golden sword. As her blood spurted into the sea, it gave birth to two offspring, the fruit of her encounter with Poseidon: the warrior Chrysaor, who became the father of many monsters, and the winged horse Pegasus.

A more disturbing story concerns Poseidon’s sister Demeter. After Persephone was abducted, Demeter plunged into mourning. As she wandered around the world in search of her daughter, Poseidon began to lust after her. To avoid the insistent god, the grief-stricken mother turned into a mare and hid in the midst of a herd. Undeterred, Poseidon turned into a stallion and raped her. Demeter was furious. She soon gave birth to two children: a black-maned horse named Arion, who had the power of speech and right feet like those of a man, and a mysterious daughter called Despoina whose true, secret name could be spoken only within the Eleusinian Mysteries.
Poseidon, god of the sea and full-time macho man

Poseidon was god of the sea. He was also in charge of horses and earthquakes, and sometimes bulls. He caused storms and could also calm the waters if he so chose. His wife was Amphitrite, one of the 50 daughters of the river god Nereus—they had a daughter named Benthisicyne.

Why the sea god was also associated with horses is anybody’s guess. Some scholars have suggested that the worship of Poseidon arrived in Greece at the same time as horses. The Greeks sacrificed horses to him, especially stallions (Poseidon also had a reputation for extreme masculinity). The winged horse Pegasus was his offspring, emerging from the sea after Medusa’s blood fell on it. (See Chapter 6 for more about Pegasus.)

That’s his name, don’t wear it out

Poseidon’s epithet was Earth-shaker—appropriate for the patron of earthquakes. Other epithets for this god include Wave-dashing, Earthholding, Hippius (“Horsey”), Horse-tending, Nurturer, Overseer, Securer, Pelagius (“Oceanary”).

A fishy audience

Sailors and fishermen worshipped Poseidon, for obvious reasons. Many coastal towns named themselves Poseidonia after him and took him as their sponsor.

Ancients could identify statues and other artistic renditions of gods and goddesses by the things they wore or carried. For example, a middle-aged man with a thunderbolt was Zeus, but if he held a trident, he was Poseidon. A handsome young man with a crown of laurel leaves was Apollo; if he wore ivy, he was Dionysus.

But I wanted that city!

Poseidon once got into a bidding war with Athena over which god would get to be the protector of the city of Athens (which didn’t have a name yet). Poseidon promised horses and a spring of salt water flow from the hill of the Acropolis in the center of town. Athena promised them lots of olive trees. Now, horses don’t do well in countryside as rocky as the land around Athens, and a spring of salt water is not especially handy. On the other hand, olive trees are great; even before the invention of the martini, olives were incredibly useful, mainly for their oil. People burned it in lamps, made it into soap, conditioned their hair with it, and ate it (yummy, loaded with calories, and cheaper than meat). So Athena won, and today the capital of modern Greece (or Hellas as the Greeks call it) is “Athens,” not “Poseidonia.”

Not always a happy guy

Poseidon bore a grudge against the mortal hero Odysseus because Odysseus had blinded his son, the Cyclops Polyphemus (see Chapter 6). Another of his sons was the giant hunter Orion, whom Artemis killed. Orion the Hunter is now one of the most prominent constellations in the North American sky: The three bright stars of Orion’s belt are especially obvious, and their appearance in the sky means that winter is coming.
Surf and Turf: The Brothers of Zeus

Though not as powerful as their younger brother, Poseidon and Hades could claim to equal his status. For just as Zeus ruled the sky, Poseidon was lord of the seas and Hades the supreme authority in the dark Underworld.

Turf Wars

Poseidon, who won the right to rule the sea, was also the god of horses and of earthquakes. Poseidon's domain actually extended beyond the oceans to include freshwater rivers, even though the river gods were the sons of Oceanus and Tethys.

Mythmakers often depicted Poseidon as gruff and quick to anger. He sometimes resented the greater dominion of Zeus. Perhaps for this reason, Poseidon lived not in Olympus, but in an underwater palace off the eastern coast of Greece.

His subordinate position to Zeus made him sensitive about his other rights. Poseidon got into more arguments over city patronage than any other Olympian. He contested the patronage of Argos with Hera and the patronage of Corinth with Hestia. Poseidon lost both disputes and had to content himself with the patronage of various islands and seaports.

The most famous of these disputes was the fight over Athens with Athena. Poseidon claimed the land by plunging his trident into the ground of the Acropolis and creating a salt-water spring. But Athena later planted the first olive tree beside this well and claimed the city as her own. Poseidon immediately challenged her to combat, but Zeus intervened and put the matter before a divine tribunal. Wishing to remain neutral and above the fray, Zeus did not vote. That left four other gods, all of whom voted for Poseidon. (Hades, as was his custom, did not attend the Olympian hearing.) The five goddesses, however, all sided with Athena, giving her the right to the land by virtue of her greater gift to the city.

In a fury, Poseidon flooded the Attic plain. The Athenians adopted several measures to appease Poseidon's wrath. The city denied the women of Athens the right to vote. It ended the practice of men carrying Poseidon as their patron god. And all Athenians continued to honor both Poseidon and Athena on the Acropolis.

Beastly Couplings, Beastly Children

Poseidon courted Amphitrite, one of the Nereids (daughters of Nereus, the Old Man of the Sea). Yet Amphitrite scorned the god's advances and fled to the Atlas Mountains. Poseidon refused to give up and sent messengers after her to plead his case. One of these, Delphinus, argued so persuasively for his master that he broke down Amphitrite's resistance. She agreed to marry Poseidon. (The god later showed his gratitude by placing his messenger's image in the sky as a constellation: the Dolphin.)

Like his brother Zeus, however, Poseidon was not exactly the poster boy for fidelity. He too had numerous affairs with goddesses, nymphs, and mortals. Like most sea gods, Poseidon had the power to transform his shape, and often did so in order to complete a seduction:

- He appeared to the maiden Medusa as a bird. Unfortunately, he chose as the setting for this seduction one of Athena's temples. The enraged goddess punished Medusa by turning her into a Gorgon (see Chapter 10).
- To mate with Theophane, whom he had changed into a ewe in order to hide her from her many suitors, he transformed himself into a ram.
- When Demeter, overwhelmed by the loss of her daughter Persephone, attempted to escape her brother's attentions by changing herself into a mare, Poseidon was not fooled. He changed himself into a stallion and mated with her in an Arcadian pasture.

Poseidon also mated in the shape of a dolphin and a bull. These many transformations had a powerful influence on his offspring, too:

- Medusa's children were the winged horse Pegasus and the giant warrior Chrysaor.
- His union with Theophane produced the famous Golden-Fleeced ram (see Chapter 14).
- Demeter had two children by him: the nymph Despoina and a wild and remarkable horse named Arion.
- Many of his children were giants, including Chrysaor, the Cyclops Polyphemus, and the trouble-making brothers Otus and Ephialtes.

As a father, Poseidon was very protective, not only toward his three children by Amphitrite, but toward the children of his many mistresses, too. Poseidon made his son Cycnus invulnerable to weapons. He helped Theseus prove his parentage in a bragging contest with King Minos of Crete (see Chapter 15). And he avenged the blinding of Polyphemus by tormenting Odysseus for 10 years (see Chapter 18).
After Cronos was deposed, the three sons threw dice for his empire. Zeus, the youngest, won and chose the sky. Poseidon smiled to himself because the sky was empty, and he knew that the impulsive Zeus had chosen it because it looked so high. And now, he, Poseidon, could choose as he would have done if he had won. He chose the sea. He had always wanted it; it is the best place for adventures and secrets and makes claim on land and sky. Hades, who was always unlucky, had to take the underworld. The earth was held as a commonwealth and left to the goddesses to manage.

Poseidon left Olympus and came to his kingdom. He immediately set about building a huge underwater palace with a great pearl and coral throne. He needed a queen and chose Thetis, a beautiful Nereid, or water nymph. But it was prophesied that any son born to Thetis would be greater than his father, so Poseidon decided to try elsewhere. The prophecy came true. The son of Thetis was Achilles.

Poseidon chose another Nereid named Amphitrite. But like his brother Zeus, he was a great traveler and had hundreds of children in different places. He was a very difficult god, changeful and quarrelsome. He did bear grudges; but he could be pleased, and then his smile was radiant. He liked jokes and thought up very curious forms for his creatures. He liked to startle nymphs with monsters, and concocted the octopus, the squid, the sea-poly or jellyfish, the swordfish, blowfish, sea cow, and many others. Once, trying to appease Amphitrite’s jealous rage, he thought up the dolphin and gave it to her as a gift.

He was greedy and aggressive, always trying to add to his kingdom. Once he claimed Attica as his own and stabbed his trident into the hillside where the Acropolis still stands, and a spring of salt water spouted. Now, the people of Athens did not want to belong to the kingdom of the sea. They were afraid of Poseidon, who had a habit of seizing all the youth of a town when he was in the mood. So they prayed to be put under the protection of another god. Athene heard their prayers. She came down and planted an olive tree by the side of the spring. Poseidon was enraged. His face darkened, and he roared with fury, raising a storm. A fishing fleet was blown off the sea and never came to port. He challenged Athene to
single combat and threatened to stir up a tidal wave to break over the city if she refused. She accepted. But Zeus heard the sound of this quarreling and came down and decreed a truce. Then all the gods sat in council to hear the rival claims. After hearing both Athene and Poseidon, they voted to award the city to Athene because her olive tree was the better gift. After that, Athenians had to be very careful when they went to sea, and were often unfortunate in their naval battles.

Poseidon was very fond of Demeter and pursued her hotly whenever he thought about it. He cornered her finally one hot afternoon in a mountain pass, and demanded that she love him. She didn't know what to do—he was so huge, so implacable, so persistent.

Finally Demeter said, "Give me a gift. You have made creatures for the sea; now make me a land animal. But a beautiful one, the most beautiful ever seen."

She thought she was safe, because she believed he could make only monsters. She was amazed when he made her a horse, and gasped with delight when she saw it. And Poseidon was so struck by his handiwork that he swiftly made a herd of horses that began to gallop about the meadow, tossing their heads, flinging their tails, kicking up their back legs, and neighing joyously. And he was so fascinated by the horses that he forgot all about Demeter and leaped on one and rode off. Later he made another herd of green ones for his undersea stables. But Demeter kept the first herd; from that all the horses in the world have descended.

Another story says it took Poseidon a full week to make the horse. During that time he made and cast aside many other creatures that didn't come out right. But he simply threw them away without killing them, and they made their way into the world. From them have come the camel, the hippopotamus, the giraffe, the donkey, and the zebra.

In another story, Demeter turned herself into a mare to escape Poseidon. But he immediately changed himself into a stallion, galloped after her, and caught her. From this courtship came a wild horse, Arion, and the nymph named Despoena.

Demeter was also a moon goddess. And all through mythology there is a connection between horse and moon and sea. The she-horse is given a sea-name, "mare"; the moon swings the tides, the waves have white manes, the dripping horses stamp on the beach, and their hooves leave moon-shaped marks. An old, old thing that has not entirely disappeared.
Poseidon and Pegasus

Poseidon was the god of the sea and the brother of Zeus and Hades. He had control over all the sea monsters and could calm storms by riding over the sea in his golden chariot that was pulled by a team of white horses. He could also cause earthquakes by striking the ground with his trident. His many offspring included giants and monsters, as well as mortals and the winged horse, Pegasus.

The mother of Pegasus was Medusa, one of the Gorgons. She met Poseidon in one of Athena’s temples. This angered Athena so much that she turned Medusa’s hair into snakes and made her and her two sisters into monsters who would turn into stone any mortal who looked at their faces. Later, Athena helped Perseus, the mortal son of Zeus and Danae, to kill Medusa by giving him a polished shield in which he could see Medusa’s reflection while keeping his back turned to her. Athena also gave Perseus a crystal sword with which he could cut off Medusa’s head. When he did this, Medusa’s blood spilled on the ground and Pegasus sprang out of it.

Unlike his mother, Pegasus was good-natured and obedient, doing as he was told by either Athena or Poseidon. When the mortal Bellerophon was sent to kill the fire-breathing monster known as the Chimera, Pegasus was sent to help him. Bellerophon climbed onto his back and Pegasus flew with him far enough from the Chimera for its fire not to burn them, but close enough for Bellerophon to plunge his spear down the Chimera’s throat.

Unfortunately, Bellerophon enjoyed flying on Pegasus so much that he decided to use him to fly to the gods’ home on Mount Olympus. As no mortal was allowed to go there without an invitation, Bellerophon’s action made the gods very angry. Zeus decided to punish him by sending a fly to bite Pegasus under his tail. Pegasus went wild with the pain and, as he reared up, Bellerophon was thrown from his back and went crashing back to earth. Pegasus himself became one of Zeus’s servants and eventually turned into a group of stars shining in the night sky.
Poseidon, God of the Oceans

Poseidon received the oceans as his portion when the victorious Olympians divided the universe among themselves. The stories about him reflect the respect, love and fear that the sea inspired in the Mediterranean world.

The sea was of great importance to the Greeks and Romans, because it was one of their principal means of transport and communication. Sea travel, however, was fraught with danger, so both cultures perceived Poseidon as a dangerous and often dark god. He was so significant that in some parts of the Mediterranean he was regarded as equal to Zeus. Myths arose drawing parallels between the stories of their births, explaining that Poseidon had also been protected by his mother,
Rhea, as a newborn baby. Although Cronus, her partner, swallowed all of their children as they emerged from the womb, Rhea gave Cronus a rock to swallow in Zeus's place; some versions of the myth relate that she gave Cronus a foal to devour instead of Poseidon.

The myths about Poseidon and the rites of his worship reflect his fearsome power. On the one hand, he had more authority than any other god except Zeus, and controlled not only the oceans but all the rivers, streams and fountains of the world. He was a god of great beauty and was often shown standing in a chariot made of a shell drawn by winged horses, holding aloft his three-pronged trident. In his magnificent palace under the sea, he was attended by dolphins and fish, and by the Nereids, fifty nymphs who lived on the seashore in caves or grottoes.

The darker side of Poseidon was represented by stories of his dangerous temper and jealous behaviour. Soon after the defeat of the Titans, he decided that he had been unfairly treated by Zeus and attempted to stage a rebellion. The conspiracy was discovered and, as punishment, Poseidon was made to build the walls of Troy. Homer tells how he could cross the world in just three strides, causing the mountains to tremble; he was also the god of earthquakes and, in some accounts, of volcanoes.

Poseidon was often in conflict with the other gods. He became involved in a dispute with Apollo over control of the isthmus of Corinth: this was ultimately divided between the two gods. But his most famous quarrel was with Athena, Zeus's favourite daughter, with whom he contested the patronage of Athens (see page 71). He found himself in opposition with her again during the ten-year-long Trojan War, when she supported the Greeks and he the Trojans.

His worship could have declined under the Romans, who knew him as Neptune, because they were less dependent on seafaring than the Greeks. However, he was also linked with horses, which were important to the Roman military. Poseidon's association with horses may stem from an older, lost tradition in which he was not purely a marine god; his role as generator of earthquakes and volcanoes may also be related to this tradition. In many stories, he either created horses or made them appear, and in one tale he assumed the shape of a horse to seduce his sister Demeter, who was disguised as a mare. Their offspring was Arion, a horse with two human feet who could run extraordinarily fast.

Both the Greeks and the Romans honoured Poseidon (Neptune) with major annual festivals: the Isthmian Games at Corinth and the Consualia in Rome. At this latter festival horses, saddled and decorated with flowers, were led through the city streets to Neptune's temple in the Forum. His sacrificial animals were bulls and horses.

Poseidon was regarded as being as lustful as his brother Zeus, and many of the myths about him are related to his sexual conquests. He was married to Amphitrite, even though she had taken a vow of celibacy. They had one son, Triton, who became a powerful sea god himself. Despite his marriage Poseidon was, like Zeus, continually engaged in amorous escapades. He often appeared to the objects of his desire in different forms. For example, after he rescued the princess Theophane, who was distressed because she was pursued by too many suitors, he turned her into a ewe and himself into a ram, seducing her in that shape. Their child was a golden sheep with the power of flight. The purpose of the legendary voyage of Jason and the Argonauts was to bring back the golden fleece of this beast to Greece.
Poseidon’s Ocean Kingdom

To be ruler of the seas and everything that lives in them should make even the most ambitious god contented, for there is magic and beauty in the mysterious depths not found elsewhere. As god of the sea, Poseidon could not merely enjoy his strange world, he could also harness at will the power of tempests, sending great waves to lash against the rocky shores of Greece, upsetting fishing boats and sending even the larger sailing ships flying before the wind for shelter.

When Zeus, Hades and Poseidon deposed their father Cronus, they divided the earth, the sea and the sky between them. Poseidon drew the kingdom of the oceans as his share. He was not the only god of the seas, for others had ruled there from earlier times. They seem to have been more good-natured and less jealous than the later gods, for they accepted Poseidon’s domination quite happily. Oceanus, son of the Titan Uranus, was the creator of the world’s waters. He took the form of a vast, endless river encircling the earth; his children were the oceans, seas, and also the lakes, rivers and small streams of the land. The sun god Helios used Oceanus to return each day to the east after driving his chariot across the sky.

Another sea god was Nereus, a kindly old man of the sea who helped sailors in distress. He is chiefly known as the father of fifty daughters, the nereids, beautiful sea nymphs who appear in many of the Greek legends as wives of both gods and men.

At first, Poseidon was content in his ocean kingdom. Off Aegae, on the coast of Euboea, some days voyage south of Athens, he built a magnificent palace on the sea bed. It was adorned with white turrets and great arched doorways encrusted with corals and shells, while on the walls of the throne room and council chambers were fine paintings of sea monsters of all kinds. In the stables was a golden chariot, drawn by white horses with golden manes and hooves. In this Poseidon would ride forth, carrying the three-pronged trident with which he had once threatened Cronus, and by which he is known.

Poseidon wished at first to marry the nereid Thetis, but he abandoned her when he learned there was a prophecy that her first-born son would grow up to be greater than his father. Such an idea was not one which a proud god like Poseidon could accept and he married instead another of Nereus’s daughters, Amphitrite.

Amphitrite bore Poseidon three sons, but in spite of this, they were not happy together. Poseidon was unfaithful to his wife and treated her in a rough, unkindly way. Above all, there was his burning
ambition, which took him far from home for many months on end.

It was not long before Poseidon became discontented with his kingdom and his power over the waves. He wanted to rule the land as well, and soon turned his greedy eyes on the province of Attica, which included the great city of Athens itself. To stake his claim on it, he drove his trident into the flat, rocky top of the Acropolis, causing a spring of sea-water to gush out from the spot.

At that time the whole of Attica was under the protection of the goddess Athene, a daughter of Zeus, and therefore Poseidon's own niece. She could not allow such an invasion of her territory and to establish her own claim peacefully, she planted an olive tree beside the spring. It took root at once and was soon putting out new shoots and small, grey-green leaves. But the sea god only laughed at Athene.

'Only if you vanquish me in combat will I give up what I have claimed,' he told her. He knew, of course, that he was far stronger than Athene and that she would stand no chance in a struggle. Athene knew it too, but she agreed to fight.

However, the ever-watchful Zeus decided that he could not allow the combat to take place, and he brought the two immortals together to argue their cases before a tribunal of the gods. The gods and goddesses assembled in equal numbers to decide whether Athene or Poseidon had given Athens the more useful gift: the gods sided with Poseidon, the goddesses with Athene. Zeus, as judge, had to stand aside from the argument and was not allowed to vote: so the goddesses prevailed by one vote and Athens was restored to Athene's care.

White with anger at being thwarted, Poseidon called up the seas to flood the land where Athene lived, sending huge waves crashing over the buildings of her own city, destroying her temple and the houses, farms and villages of her people. From that time, Athene went to live in Athens, taking it into her special protection.

Even after he had destroyed her home, Poseidon did not forgive Athene, nor was his ambition in any way curbed. He next tried to seize the city of Troezen from her, but Zeus once more intervened and ruled that they must share the produce of the city. Unsatisfied, Poseidon tried unsuccessfully to take the island of Aegina from Zeus himself, and the island of Naxos from Zeus's son Dionysus. Finally, he laid claim to some land which belonged to Hera. This time Zeus could not make Poseidon even begin to see reason.

'It has been proved time and again that the gods are against me,' Poseidon argued when his brother suggested that the gods should once more sit in judgement to decide his claim.

'The river gods are fair men,' said Zeus after a while. 'Will you stand by what they say?'

Poseidon shrugged his massive shoulders. 'I suppose we can try,' he said grudgingly. He hoped that they would not dare to go against one who commanded waters so much more mighty than theirs. However, Inachus, Asterion and Cephissus, the three river gods, were not afraid to give judgement in Hera's favour. Once more Poseidon flew into a towering rage.

This time, instead of flooding the land, he caused the rivers in which the gods lived to dry up, turning them into dusty, stony pathways and standing the gods and river nymphs on the withered banks. Only when the winter rains came did the rivers flow again, and every summer since that time, they shrink and dwindle away.

All the animals of the ocean owed allegiance to Poseidon, from the great whales to the smallest coral fish. There were also less familiar creatures. The nereids could sometimes be seen playing in the waves around their grotto home with strange beings called Tritons. These had scaly bodies and fins, and were half man, half fish. They took their name from Poseidon's son Triton, who was himself half a man and half a fish. Though they played gently enough with the nereids, they could be fierce creatures and had sharp teeth and hands with great hooked claws. Sometimes they left the sea to invade the land, spreading terror wherever they went.

Proteus, son of Oceanus, was Poseidon's herdsman and guardian of his seals. Each day they would sleep around him on a wide, flat-topped rock while the midday sun shone down and waves lapped lazily at the shore. It was at this time that those who wished to know what the future held came to consult him, for he had the gift of prophecy. Before Proteus would speak, however, the questioner had to catch him, for Proteus had a thousand forms, and would turn himself into anything he liked when a stranger appeared. It might be a dragon or a lion, or any fabulous beast. Only if the stranger showed he was not afraid, would Proteus become himself again and look into the strange world of the future.
Poseidon was the Greek god of the seas and water; Neptune was the Roman equivalent.

Cronus had three sons—Zeus, Hades, and Poseidon—who overthrew their father and divided the world between them. Poseidon became the ruler of the sea, a role he performed with considerable violence. The sea god’s rages were terrifying, especially when he stirred up the waves with his magic trident, a gift from the Cyclopes. Poseidon also caused earthquakes. He lived beneath the Aegean Sea in a palace, from which he rode out in a chariot pulled by majestic seahorses. On one occasion, Poseidon dared to challenge Zeus’ supremacy. With the aid of the goddesses Hera and Athena, Poseidon planned to bind up Zeus, but was thwarted by the hundred-armed monster Brareus, whom Zeus summoned from Tartarus for his protection.

Most of Poseidon’s children inherited their father’s violent temperament. His son Polyphemus, a Cyclops, was notorious for eating some of Odysseus’ followers. The Greek leader managed to escape only by blinding Polyphemus with the heated end of a stake, an injury for which Poseidon found it hard to forgive Odysseus.

**Enemy of the Trojans**

In the works of the epic poet Homer, Poseidon is the implacable foe of the Trojans.

This hostility arose from the dishonesty of the Trojan king, Laomendion, father of Priam. The king had agreed to give Apollo and Poseidon a sum of money for building the walls of Troy, but, when the task was completed, he refused to pay them. Although Apollo was content to send a plague on the Trojans in punishment, Poseidon was not satisfied until Troy had been sacked by the Greeks.

Neptune, Poseidon’s Roman counterpart, was a less important god, probably because the sea was not as significant to the Romans as it was to the Greeks.