

Zeus' pain: did he experience a thunderclap headache?

A dor de Zeus: fora ele acometido por uma cefaleia em trovoada?

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ABSTRACT

Zeus is known as the king of the gods and god of the sky. His attributes are lightning and thunder and he is often depicted about to hurl them. According to Greek mythology, Zeus molested the titan Metis and decided to swallow her when she was pregnant, which resulted in an excruciating headache, only relieved after a craniotomy performed using Hephaestus' axe. The result of this procedure was the birth of Athena, Zeus' daughter. We conducted a combined analysis of some writings such as the classical mythological poem Theogony by Hesiod, and some other books that examine and retell myths and legends of ancient Greece, with medical papers on this topic, trying to characterize Zeus' headache. Would it be possible to fit Zeus' headache into the group of thunderclap headaches?

Keywords: Headache, Mythology, Secondary headache disorders, Ancient Greece

RESUMO

Zeus é conhecido como rei dos deuses e deus dos céus. Tem como atributos os raios e os trovões e é frequentemente representado prestes a lançá-los. De acordo com a mitologia grega, Zeus molestou a titã Métis e resolveu engoli-la grávida, o que resultou em uma cefaleia excruciante, apenas aliviada após uma craniotomia realizada por meio do machado de Hefesto. O fruto deste procedimento foi Atena, filha de Zeus. Realizamos uma análise combinada utilizando escritos mitológicos clássicos como o poema Teogonia de Hesíodo, além de outros livros sobre mitologia e artigos médicos que tratam deste tema, para tentar caracterizar a cefaleia de Zeus. Seria possível enquadrar a cefaleia de Zeus no grupo das cefaleias em trovoada?

Palavras-chave: Cefaleia, Mitologia, Transtornos de cefaleia secundários, Grécia Antiga

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According to Greek mythology, Zeus assumed the governance of Olympus after defeating the Titans, who were led by his father Cronos, in a battle that lasted ten years¹. Zeus sexually molested the Titan Métis, one of his first actions after taking over the Olympus. As an oracle announced that the son of this connection would dethrone Zeus, he swallowed Métis when she was about to give birth to their daughter Athena, fulfilling the prophecy that condemned children to imitate their parents^{1,2}. The king of the gods then had an excruciating headache, that was relieved by a craniotomy performed by Hephaestus with his ax (Figure 1). The result of this procedure was the birth of Athena, goddess of wisdom, born directly from the brain of Zeus^{2,3}.

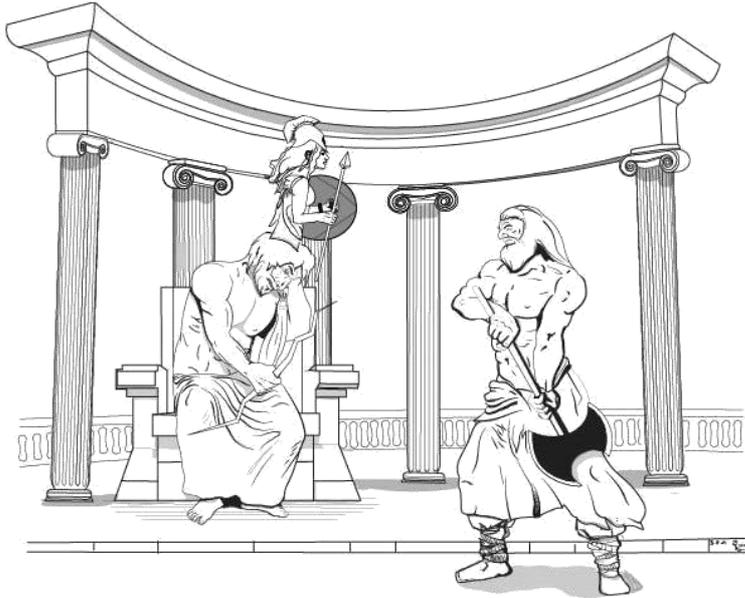


Figure 1: Illustration of Zeus with a severe headache that would only be relieved by a craniotomy performed by Hephaestus with his ax. According to Greek mythology, that would be how Athena, the warrior-goddess, was born. The figure was drawn by Giordano Santana Mazza.

The definition of the characteristics of Zeus' headache comes up against the interpretation of the authors and the difficulties in translating the original mythical writings. Brasiense et al. described Zeus' headache as a terrible experience characterized by progressive pain, attributed to an expansive intracranial process caused by Athena's growth³. Maranhão-Filho and Vincent described it as a continuous, intense and almost maddening headache⁴. Since we are not able to perform an anamnesis with Zeus, we conducted a combined analysis of some writings, trying to rescue the features of Zeus' headache.

Hesiodo, in Theogony, describes the moment when Zeus swallows Métis in this way¹:

Zeus, king of gods, made Metis his first wife, most knowledgeable of gods and immortal men.

But when she was about to bear Athena of gleaming eyes, then by a cunning he deceived her mind with coaxing words and put her down into his womb, in accord with the advice of Gaia and starry Ouranos.

Continuing, describes the birth of Athena¹:

From his own head he gave birth to owl-eyed Athena,
The awesome, battle-rousing, army-leading, untiring
Lady, whose pleasure is fighting and the metallic din of war.

Lord Byron in his work *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*⁵, mentions the birth of Athena, also known as Pallas Athena or

Pallas. In the work in question, Byron refers to the goddess Athena as Pallas and describes her birth as follows:

Can tyrants but by tyrants conquered be,
And Freedom find no champion and no child
Such as Columbia saw arise when she
Sprung forth a Pallas, armed and undefiled?
Or must such minds be nourished in the wild,
Deep in the unpruned forest, midst the roar
Of cataracts, were nursing nature smiled
On infant Washington? Has Earth no more
Such seeds within her breast, or Europe no such shore?

It is important to mention the possibility that Zeus' headache could be included in the thunderclap headache group, considering its onset and intensity, secondary to the imminent birth of Athena.

In a final allusion to the work Theogony, the relation of Zeus' moments of anger with lightning and thunder is mentioned¹:

And now Zeus no longer held back his strength.
His lungs seethed with anger and he revealed
All his power. He charged from the sky, hurtling
Down from Olympos in a flurry of lightning,
Hurling thunderbolts one after another, right on target,
From his massive hand, a whirlwind of holy flame.

Imagining Zeus' anger due to the discomfort caused by the headache, we assume that is quite possible that Athena's birth day was filled with thunder and lightning hurled by him. Could Zeus, the king of gods, the god of the sky, lightning and thunder have been affected by a thunderclap headache?

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST:

None.

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