

Mermaid Folklore

Folklore: The traditional beliefs, legends and customs held by a group of people that are passed down through the generations.

Mermaids appear in the folklore of many cultures worldwide, they are said to be aquatic creatures with the head and upper body of a female human and the tail of a fish. Sailors from all over the world have long reported seeing and being enchanted by these mysterious creatures.

The most famous mermaid story was written in 1836 by the Danish author Hans Christian Andersen, it is called 'The Little Mermaid'. The story tells us of a young mermaid's dream to live on land with the humans and the sacrifice she makes to do so. You may be familiar with the film version of the same name released in 1990 by Walt Disney. The protagonist in this story is kind natured and friendly, however mermaids in folklore do not tend to have such positive personality traits.

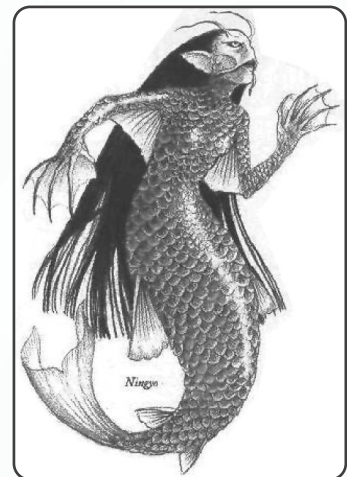
Tales of mermaids in different cultures

Japanese Mermaids

Japanese mermaids are known as 'ningyo' which translates into English as "human fish". The first recorded account of mermaids in Japan dates all the way back to the year 619, during the reign of Empress Suiko. Stories suggest that one was allegedly captured in Japanese waters and brought before the court of the Empress herself. The creature was supposedly kept in a makeshift tank for the Queen's visitors to marvel over.

Ningyo bear a closer resemblance to fish than they do to humans. Their human-like features, range from a grotesque and deformed face on a fish's body, to an entire human torso with long, bony fingers and sharp claws with a fish like lower body.

Eating the flesh of a ningyo is believed to grant everlasting life and youth and because of this they are the subject of many folk tales. It is believed that ningyo can place a powerful curse on humans who try to wound or capture them. Some legends tell of entire towns that were swallowed by earthquakes or tidal waves after a foolish fisherman brought home a ningyo in one of his catches.



British Mermaids

Tales of mermaids form a large part of sea legend, especially round the coastal areas of Britain such as Cornwall, and the Northern Isles of Scotland. A sighting was thought to be a bad omen that foretold storms and rough seas ahead.



The descriptions of mermaid sightings were remarkably similar all around Britain. Generally, their upper body was that of a beautiful woman with long hair, and the lower half of their body from the waist down, was that of a fish. In many of the classic descriptions, mermaids are to be found sitting on a rock just off the shore, combing their hair, singing sweetly and admiring their beauty in a hand mirror. Their beautiful singing brings men into their clutches and the unfortunate victims are either drowned, spirited to their world, or eaten in the depths of the sea.

African Mermaids

Mami Wata is the term most used to refer to a mermaid entity in African culture, the name translates to “Mother Water” who is believed to be a water spirit or goddess.

Mami Wata spirits are usually female and are described as being beautiful, with the head and torso of a human and a fish's tail. She has flowing black hair and an angelic gaze used to entrap or bewilder those who see her. A snake usually accompanies her. In some African regions, over the course of time the Mami Wata's image has shifted from a mermaid to that of a snake woman.



There are many stories surrounding Mami Wata. Some tell of the spirit abducting her followers or random people whilst they are swimming or boating in order to bring them to her realm, which may be underwater, in the spirit world, or both. Should she allow them to leave, the abductees usually return in dry clothing and with a new spiritual understanding. These people often grow wealthier, more attractive and more tolerant after their encounter.

In contrast to the positivity that surrounds her, Mami Wata is also blamed for all sorts of misfortune. In Cameroon, for example, Mami Wata is blamed for causing the strong

undertow that kills many swimmers each year along the coast. She is also blamed for incurable illnesses and even minor ailments including headaches.

Mami Wata worship is diverse, groups of people may gather in her name, but the spirit is much more prone to interacting with followers on a one-on-one basis. There are many priests and mediums in Africa who believe to be specifically born and initiated to her. In Nigeria, devotees typically wear red and white clothing, as these colors represent Mami Wata's dual nature. Red represents such qualities as death, destruction, heat, being male, physicality, and power. In contrast, white symbolises death, beauty, creation, being female, new life, spirituality, translucence, water, and wealth.

What is a Medium? A medium is somebody with psychic abilities who is able to interact with spirits and communicate messages between spirits and the living.

Greek Mermaids

In ancient Greek mythology, mermaids were sea nymphs. These supernatural beings lived beneath the sea but would occasionally come ashore. Mermaids were believed to be the 3000 daughters of Triton, the son of the Greek gods Poseidon and Amphitrite. The 3000 brothers of the mermaids were called the Tritons, or mermen. Mermaids were described as being mysterious, young and beautiful with long, flowing hair and sad deep eyes. They possessed fins and a spreading, forked tail.



Mermaids were believed to have wondrous vocal powers that could cause death to the listener. In some Greek myths mermaids were believed to sing to sailors and enchant them, distracting them from their work and causing them to walk off the deck or run their ships into land. Mermaids were also accredited with the supernatural powers and ability to raise and calm storms. In other Greek myths and legends they were depicted as kindly creatures who would help men who were in trouble at sea.

What are nymphs in Greek mythology? They are nature spirits who appear as beautiful young women.

