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“The Chimera – sometimes called Chimaera - is one of the most ancient myths of Mediterranean lore. Its origins go back to a remote age when the power of thunder and lightning was seen as a living creature, the storm beast. It was depicted as winged lion; its roar was the origin of thunder, its mouth generated lightning, by spraying out fire and the fertilizing power of water. This storm lion was strictly associated with the mother goddess, called Inanna, both symbols of fertility. We don't know exactly how the beast was called in these ancient times, although it maybe that the world “Chimera” comes from a term meaning “the wrath of the Goddess” in the Accadian language.

With time, the myth evolved and changed in name and meaning. The ancient mother goddess ceased to be the Queen of all Gods, and her place was taken by male deities. Her sacred beast wasn't seen any more as a giver of fertilizing rain, but its fiery, igneous character was emphasized. It was at that time that the Chimera lost her wings; her ability to fly and her link to the sky. In place of the wings, there appeared the head of a lowly “young she-goat” (kimaira in classic Greek). The Chimera became an evil monster, to be slain by a shining hero: Bellerophon, who used his winged steed, Pegasus, to fly safely above the beast, killing her from above.

*In this form, the myth has been transmitted to us. The uncanny shape of the creature, the mystery about her origin, the puzzling aspects of her story, all have created the widespread concept that “Chimera” stands for something impossible, unreal, and non-existing. But the myth is still alive and changing in the minds of men. The storm beast is not dead; she is the thunder of hurricanes, the fire of volcanoes, the breath and the roar of a whole living planet.” **

Chimaera (Yanartash - "Burning Stone") as a landmark is located on top of a 300-meter high hill, about six kilometers away from ancient Olypos city, southwestern part of Turkey. Seeping gas from the ground causes flames which is believed have been burning for thousand years. Considered as eternal flames, it was believed that Chimaera was still hiding in the mountain after the attack of Bellerophon and the fire was evidence as her breathing.

According to a legend, “Eternal Fire” was a turning point for 12-km long marathon in holly days. Athletes were used to run from Olypos to Chimaera and come back. They had to carry a torch and lit it in the eternal flames in order to get a pass-proof. As a result, they had to run back into the city with a burning torch which is believed as one of the ancestors of “Olympic Fire”.

There is only one real fact everybody can agree about Chimaera landmark is that it had served to Lycians as an important sacred place for centuries. “Eternal Fire” changed its meaning but kept the secrecy even after the ancient times; ruins of an old Byzantine church can still be seen right next to the flames...

Tolga Özdemir
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* Original program note of Chimaera Ritual, written by Prof. Ugo Bardi, Universita` di Firenze, 2006