

Sunflower: *Helianthus annuus*

The name "sunflower" originates from the Greek *helios* meaning "sun" and *anthos* meaning "flower," since these flowers always turn towards the sun. *Annuus* means annual. Sunflowers actually come from Central and South America, not Greece, and were grown more for their usefulness than their beauty. In South America, the natives of the ancient Inca empire worshipped a giant sunflower as a sacred image of their sun-god.

Legend tells that the Greek sun-god Helios was drowned by his uncles, the Titans, and then raised to the sky, where he became the sun. He was beloved by a mortal named Clytie, who died of her love for him. Clytie was "rooted" in her grief, and thus followed Helios' daily journey through the sky.

The sunflower's turning as it follows the sun symbolizes deep loyalty and constancy. It is said that if a girl puts three sunflower seeds down her back, she will marry the first boy she meets. The Chinese hold the sunflower as a symbol of longevity. Incan priestesses wore large sunflower disks made of gold on their garments. Sunflower seeds were a sacred food to the Plains Indians in the prairie regions of North America. They placed bowls filled with sunflower seeds on the graves of their dead to nourish them on the long journey to the afterlife.

(from: <http://www.schnucksfloral.com/about-flowers.html?arg1=sunflower>)

Helios



While the Greeks considered Apollo to be the god of solar light, the sun itself was personified by a special divinity, Helios. The cult of Helios was very ancient and practiced in many parts of Greece, especially on the island of Rhodes where a colossal statue of Helios stood 30 meters high, and ships in full sail could pass between the god's legs. Helios was represented with a crown of sun-rays, a spear in his left hand, and a flaming torch held aloft in his right. In 224 BC an earthquake destroyed the statue and it was sold for scrap in 653 AD.

Legend has it that Helios was drowned in the ocean by the Titans who were his uncles. He was then raised to the sky where he became the luminous sun. Every morning Helios emerged from the east, dressed in a sparkling gauze and wearing a golden helmet, riding in a golden chariot drawn by winged steeds which were dazzling white and breathed forth flame from their nostrils. As god of light, Helios saw everything and knew everything.

(from <http://www.hermeticmagick.com/content/deities/helios.html>)