

# Are Taurens Greek?

Είναι Taurens ελληνική; (Greek translation)



Source: provided courtesy of Blizzard Entertainment, Inc.

By

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In playing World of Warcraft, you begin to notice small nuances within the game that make you wonder what really inspired them. In my playing I noticed that the Tauren have two very different sources from which they take their influence. On the one hand, the obvious source is the Native American influence in the architecture, the art, and even in the names of the non-player characters. The second source is much more subtle and tucked away within the culture itself. The more I look I begin to see more of the Greek flavor within the Tauren. So I ask the question, "Is it legitimate to say that the Tauren have a Greek influence?"

In doing my research of the Tauren race it has been very clearly stated in the Trivia section on WoWWiki.Com "The tauren culture is based on a conglomeration of Native American tribes from the Southwest, Northwest, and Great Plains regions of the United States and Canada."<sup>1</sup> While I am not disputing the information provided by the website, I am making the argument that when looking at the Tauren race, both in a historical and cultural sense, that there are enough similarities between them and the Greek civilizations to make an equally legitimate correlation between them.

In this paper I will propose several key points that readers need to consider in order deciding if my claim is accurate. I will make a foundation for this argument in comparing the history of the Tauren and the Greeks; then I will move into some of the cultural aspects of the Tauren to complete my research.

## History

In creating a base from which to look at the similarities of two different groups of people, I felt it best to start with their individual histories. In looking at these histories, if we can find common ground that applies to both, we can then begin to make a racial synthesis. While every

race is by its own definition unique among others, in this situation we are dealing with a video game racial creation that draws its roots from real world civilizations. With that being said my intent in this section is to create a framework that shows the relation between the Tauren and the Greek civilization.

I will begin with the period of time after the “War of the Ancients”. The reason I chose this point in their history is because it represents a turning point for the Tauren. After years of being peaceful, roaming tribes, the Tauren were displaced by the constant attacks of the Centaurs. There is then a period of time that the Tauren will roam around the Barrens before they find help aid through the Orcs. With assistance from the Orcs, the Tauren drive off the centaurs and create their first city state on a large mesa called Thunder Bluff.

There are two key points here, first is the invasion and constant fighting with the Centaurs. If you trace back far enough, the Centaurs and the Tauren have a common ground point through the demigod Cenarius, Lord of the Forest. Cenarius is the father of the Centaurs and a teacher for the Tauren in the ways of druidism.<sup>2</sup> The reason for this being a key point is in how it relates to the Greeks.

Around 1100 BC the Mycenaean Age ended and the Dark Ages for Greece began. There are many different theories as to why the Mycenaean civilization fell apart. However, the one thing they all have in common is the resulting effect of the Dorian invasion, the Dorians being a tribe from northern Greece.<sup>3</sup> The fall of the Mycenaean civilization threw Greece into its own form of the Dark Ages. It was at this point that the people of Greece would form small tribes; some of which were sedentary, others were nomadic.<sup>4</sup>

Here we have our first correlation between the Tauren and the Greek. With the Tauren, you have the dominant race in Mulgore, which was invaded by the Centaurs, and then roamed the Barrens in tribal groups. In Greek history, you have the dominant civilization of the Mycenaean, which was invaded by the Dorians, and then fractures apart into tribal groups. In both cases, the invading group is a previously known entity who shares a form of common ground. Now, I will not say that these two timelines are perfect in every way, nor will I say that both situations are exact; I am only stating that there is enough of a common theme at this time between both the Tauren and the Greek to start a framework moving towards a legitimate correlation.

The second key point of note is the creation of the first Tauren city on Thunder Bluff. This is the first recorded city for the Tauren in which all tribes are welcome, and it is led by the Chieftain, Cairne Bloodhoof. “Over time the scattered Tauren tribes united under Cairne's rule.”<sup>5</sup> This is significant because it shows a historic change in Tauren culture, where you have tribal groups evolving into a city-state.

Similarly, towards the end of the Dark Ages and the beginning of the Archaic Period, the Greeks entered into their first city-state or “polis”. “In their earliest stages, they were ruled by a **basileus**, or hereditary king.”<sup>6</sup> This becomes our second point of interest as the newly created city on Thunder Bluff is also ruled by one Chieftain with several advisors. Here we have both the Tauren and the Greeks creating a city, for the means of safety in numbers, and the start of a new political era for both cultures.

At this point we have the foundation for which to build our framework with. Both the Tauren and the Greek have faced similar turning points in their history. While they are not the

exact copies of each other, there are already enough similarities to reinforce the idea that there may be more Greek influence in the Tauren than first thought.

## Culture

At this point I will move on to looking at several variables within the culture of the Tauren and the Greek. The reasons for this are to compare the actual lifestyle, political structure, and city design of the two races, and seeing if there are similarities. By taking this step I can solidify my framework for the idea that there is in fact a correlation between these two groups.

Before gaining acceptance by the elders in Thunder Bluff a Tauren must go thru a rite of passage for the Earthmother. This rite has three different phases, the Rite of Strength, the Rite of Vision, and the Rite of Wisdom. The Rite of Strength was a test in which you had to kill enemies of the tribe and bring back 8 belts as proof. In the Rite of Vision, you have to collect four items to create the Water of the Seers. Upon drinking it, should you be found worthy, you were granted a vision (a ghost wolf) that guided you to Seer Wiserunner. The final test is the Rite of Wisdom, were you will travel to speak to an ancestor to receive a blessing.

At the end of all these steps, you have become a full member of the city as seen in Figure 1. After this period of education your training continues with more hunts. You must continue to prove your worth to your people by hunting and tracking, which are core skills of the Tauren culture itself.

**Figure 1** Source: World of Warcraft provided courtesy of Blizzard Entertainment, Inc.



Similarly in Greek society, especially the Spartan state (at this point let me say NOT the movie 300 based on a comic book Spartan), people also had a military education. “The goal of **education in Sparta**, an authoritarian, military city-state, was to produce soldier-citizens. In ancient Sparta, the purpose of education was to produce a well-drilled, well-disciplined marching army. Spartans believed in a life of discipline, self-denial, and simplicity. They were very loyal to the state of Sparta.”<sup>7</sup> At the end of this education the men of Sparta would be placed in the Army until age 60, at which time they were allowed to retire and live with their families.

Both cultures draw on the martial arts to test and produce soldier citizens. The full rights and privileges of citizenship were not awarded until these tests have been passed. Both cultures then require you to prove your loyalty through continued service.

Another part of education that can be seen in Thunder Bluff is writing. As you go thru a building to get to the rope bridge that leads to the Spirit Rise, you see some scrolls hanging from the ceiling. (Figure 2) These symbols look like Greek symbols either in upper and lower case forms.



**Figure 2** Source: World of Warcraft provided courtesy of Blizzard Entertainment, Inc.

- Starting with the scroll in the middle, on the left side, moving down:  $\varsigma$   $\Delta$   $\Sigma$  (small letter final sigma, delta, sigma)
- Right side of the middle:  $\upsilon$  (on its side)  $\kappa$  (backwards)  $\lambda$  (small letter upsilon with psili, small letter kappa, small letter lamda)

Also on several shields throughout the city you have the Ω symbol (capital letter omega) as seen in Figure 3.



**Figure 3 Source: World of Warcraft provided courtesy of Blizzard Entertainment, Inc.**

When looking at the politics of Thunder Bluff, you find an Oligarchy form of rulership. “There are but a few tribes who disagree about the direction their new nation should take, but all agree that Cairne is the wisest and best suited to lead them toward the future. Helping the mighty Cairne in the duties of ruling his race are the Archdruid Hamuul Runetotem and the elder crone Magatha Grimtotem.”<sup>8</sup> In the case of the Tauren you have a Chieftain, who is recognized by a council of chiefs, and who is advised by his two trusted Councilors.

In ancient Greek politics you also had an oligarchy. However, much like the Tauren there was usually one main person in control. “The oligarchs were formed from a select group of the wealthiest citizens of the state, who had most of the powers usually given to a monarch.

Although these powers were dispersed amongst them, the oligarchic power was notably totalitarian.”<sup>9</sup>

Here we can see some similarity between the Tauren and the Greeks. The two groups in question both had a form of council that had a single person primarily in charge. Their particular names differ from chieftain to senator but the roles remain the same.

As an aside in cultural politics, you also note gender equality in both cultures. In walking around the city of Thunder Bluff, you can't help but notice that both male and female are equally shown throughout the city. Both have merchant shops of various sorts and both are seen as soldiers and guards. In this society women have the same rights and freedoms of men. This is rare as you go back in history with the exception of a few cultures such as the Spartans in Greece. Women went thru a similar education as men with martial training. Should they pass a final test similar to men, they were citizens of Sparta. This allotted them many of the freedoms that women in other cultures would not have for well over several thousand years later.

## Discussion

I have gone over some strongest points that help to suggest that Tauren do have some influence from the Greek. I will say that, in doing my research there is a ton of information that all over the place that credits the Native American culture. However, as I stated earlier, my point here was not to dismiss the Native American influence, but to make a legitimate claim that there is some correlation between the Tauren and the Greeks.

I found a place in history for the Greeks that matched that of the Tauren. In depth research will also state that it was not solely the invasion of the Dorians that caused the

Mycenaean empire to collapse, but the financial problems as well. This does differ from the Tauren as their history has no comment on any form of economical environment, only the invading Centaurs. Also, almost every civilization in the world at one point or another has started as tribal groups. In some cases I think I got lucky that the Greeks had a second point in time in which they went back to tribal society before moving into their polis.

I also learned a great deal about Spartan culture, which was unique even within the Greek culture. The Tauren actually do share a fair amount with the Spartans as far as martial training and education. However the Tauren are not a fully militaristic nation, they still maintain their roots in shamanism and druidism. There is no real show of either of these two religions anywhere in the Greek society short of the gods representing different aspects of nature such as fire, the sea, lightning, etc.

I made sure to stay clear of the Minotaur description because I felt that it was more of a crutch than a help. Yes they are modeled after the Minotaur of old, but that is the only obvious mark they have. I wanted this paper to show more subtle things, minor influences that you wouldn't look at first hand or think about until someone points them out. I think this is a stronger point to make than pointing at a bull and saying "Look, a bull!"

I only found a few minor correlations between the education in Sparta and the Tauren training, but I think that is more the fact that we really never see what comes before you start the game. What is life like before a player enters in and starts playing an adult Tauren? This is a limitation when dealing with cultures in game because so much of a culture can be seen in how children are taught and raised. You get first-hand some of the politics and basic teachings from the education given to the young as they grow and mature.

I feel another limitation that I faced is the lack of history for Tauren. While some websites do a great job of putting things together, there are a lot of holes in what happened here and there, or what was going on when things were happening. With Greek history you ask a question and you get 8 pages worth of an answer because of everything else going on at that time. Making a correlation between that and a game is a little difficult because people who really go back and look at things will go “well this was a very small part of the Greeks were doing so it doesn’t have much relevance to the Tauren”. While this is completely unavoidable, I did make a point to specifically pull on “key points” to try and move past this and make a correlation.

I do feel that the points I made were very strong in influencing future research. There is enough material for someone who would like to go more in depth to move forward and dig to their hearts content. They could do more research on education or even mythology. For example, you can look at the Forsaken in the city and say “Hey, the Greeks believed that Hades was underground and that’s where the dead go. Well, the Forsaken are basically dead and they are underground in the Spirit Rise”. Or, you could look at Mount Olympus and the fact the Thunder Bluff is built on top of a mountain.

I think this information is of use not only to the Role-Players in game, but to people who enjoy the story of World of Warcraft. When you look at the Tauren you always think, “Okay, their Indians like in the old west.” But, when someone points out the Greek in them you can think, “I’m making a 400lb Spartan beast of war!” I think Blizzard designers would get a good kick out of this particular correlation, and maybe even look to implement a little more influence if they see it fitting. Most of all I think this gives my readers another chance to say, “Don’t judge

a book by its cover”. Sometimes the most fun in looking at something is digging a little to see what really lies under the surface.

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<sup>1</sup> “Tauren” *WoWiki*. April 26, 2010 <http://www.wowwiki.com/Tauren>

<sup>2</sup> “Tauren” *WoWiki*. April 26, 2010 <http://www.wowwiki.com/Tauren>

<sup>3</sup> The Dorians, Ancient Greek Civilizations, EMuseum. Minnesota State University Mankato, 30 May, 2010 <http://www.mnsu.edu/emuseum/prehistory/aegean/theculturesofgreece/dorians.html>

<sup>4</sup> “The Archaic Period” *Ancient Greece* 2008 <http://www.ancientgreece.com/s/ArchaicPeriod/>

<sup>5</sup> “Tauren” *WoWiki*. April 26, 2010 <http://www.wowwiki.com/Tauren>

<sup>6</sup> Hooker, Richard. (1999) *Polis City State*. Washington State University, 30 May, 2010 <http://www.wsu.edu:8080/~dee/GLOSSARY/POLIS.HTM>

<sup>7</sup> Education in Ancient Greece. Greek Index. 30 May, 2010 [http://www.greeceindex.com/greece-education/greek\\_education\\_ancient\\_greece.html](http://www.greeceindex.com/greece-education/greek_education_ancient_greece.html)

<sup>8</sup> “Tauren” *WoWiki*. April 26, 2010 <http://www.wowwiki.com/Tauren>

<sup>9</sup> “Tauren” *WoWiki* April 26, 2010 <http://www.wowwiki.com/Tauren>