
Head of a clay statue of Athena from the akroterion of a building, ca. 500-490 B.C. © National Archaeological Museum, Olympia.


Obverse of an Athenian silver tetradrachm, ca. 440-420 B.C. © Numismatic Museum, Athens.

Façade of the Ionic temple, the Erechtheion, on the Athenian Acropolis, last quarter of the 5th century B.C.


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The goddess Athena was one of the most important divinities of Mt. Olympus. She was primarily the protectress of ancient Athens, but of many other cities in all over Greece as well. She was worshiped with incriptions for harnessing nature (the bridge, the ship’s hull, the bonet, the plough’s wheel) and the musical instrument, the aulos. She was thought to have devised strategies for carrying out complicated tasks and strategems of war. She was characterised as a virgin goddess, self-sufficient and thus self-directed (according to the myth she neither married nor had erotic affairs). Maturity, responsibility and tolerance were likewise her characteristics. With her voice alone she could urge on the mighty that their concern was not the goddess of a hundred bulls were sacrificed in this great festival and there were athletic and artistic contests. The Parthenon frieze gives us an excellent picture of the procession and festival. In the rite of the Arrephoria, two little girls from well-known Athenian families carried the Arreta. The goddess was the protectress of ancient Athens, but of many other cities as well. In Athens, temples of Athena are found all over the ancient Greek world. In Phaleron there was a sanctuary of Athena Skiras, a sanctuary that was dedicated to Athena Skias, and another one at the Panaghia, the Mother of Christ. On the 15th of August, instead of the Panathenaia, the festival of Athena is celebrated.

In mythology, according to the Homeric hymn and Hesiod, Athena was the daughter of Zeus and Metis, the personification of wisdom, and her birth was supernatural. When Zeus learned that Metis was to give him a daughter, and then a son who would try to take his throne, he swallowed her. When the time came for the daughter, Athena, to be born, Zeus ordered Hephaistos to open her head with an axe. So it was, that in the presence of the Olympian gods, a fully armed Athena sprung from the head of Zeus with the wonder and pleasure of all. She took part in the Gigantomachy, the battle between the Gods and Giants. She was the protectress of ancient Athens, but of many other cities as well. In Athens, temples of Athena are found all over the ancient Greek world. In Phaleron there was a sanctuary of Athena Skiras, a sanctuary that was dedicated to Athena Skias, and another one at the Panaghia, the Mother of Christ. On the 15th of August, instead of the Panathenaia, the festival of Athena is celebrated.

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Athena's symbols were the owl (Athena noctua), the helmet, the aegis (apotropaic head of the Gorgon Medusa) worn on her aegis or as a device on her shield, her spear, the spindle and the olive. Very often she is shown in warrior attire. Athena's symbols were the owl (Athena noctua), the helmet, the aegis (apotropaic head of the Gorgon Medusa) worn on her aegis or as a device on her shield, her spear, the spindle and the olive. Very often she is shown in warrior attire.

Athena Roman Minerva

Herales in his labours, the Argonauts in their journey, Odyseus in his crafty plans, such as devising the “Trojan Horse”. They said that her first cult statues, her xoana (wooden statues), had been sent down from heaven. She raised Erichthonios, son of Hephaistos and Ge (earth), as her own child. Likewise in the islands, the temple of the Athenians in Delos, and another temple at Karthaia in Kea were dedicated to the goddess as well as the temple of Athena Lindia on the acropolis of Lindos in Rhodes. Three temples have been identified in the district of Laarti in Crete, in keraipoi, Ianos and on the Samarian promontory.

In Asia Minor, finally, there are three well-known temples at Priene, Assos and on the Pergamon acropolis.

Representations: The goddess Athena is found on many vases of the late archaic and classical periods. The two most splendid statues of the goddess on the Athenian Acropolis (the Parthenos and the Parnokos, both works of Pheidias) are known only in copies. Displayed in the Piraeus Museum is a bronze statue of Athena, a fine work of the 4th century B.C. The goddess was represented in the pediments of the Parthenon and her figure likewise appears on the Parthenon frieze, the frieze of the Siphnian Treasury at Delphi, in the pediment of the temple of Nea Pallas of the Athenian Acropolis, in Olympia in the metopes showing the “Labours of Herakles”, and in the frieze of the great altar of Zeus from Pergamum. Many other statues of the goddess are preserved as well, both ancient and modern.

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Magnificent temples were built for Athena in antiquity. Aside from the archaic temples that were destroyed by the Persians, three classical temples stood on the Athenian Acropolis: the Parthenon, the Erechtheion and the temple of Athena Nike. All three are preserved in relatively good condition. The exact form and location of the temples that were destroyed on the Athenian Acropolis in the 4th century is not clear. The best are the Panagia, the Mother of Christ. On the 15th of August, instead of the Panathenaia, the Dormition of the Virgin was now celebrated. Indeed the Parthenon was consecrated as the Church of the Virgin Mary and continued thus until the 15th century. The festival in honour of Athena, mainly in Athens and Attica, are well known. The most splendid was the Panathenic Festival held every year and celebrated with special splendour every four years as the Greg Panathenai. In a splendid procession, the people of Athens offered a peplos to the cow for the descent of the 15th of June. The worship of Athena was transferred to Phaleron where it was washed in the sea and then returned by torchlight. The Kaephyria, when the temple of the goddess was cleansed, was celebrated the day before the Panathenai. With sacrifices to Athena Phryne, the sons of the city, the goddess of the citizens who had entered manhood. The Chalkis (the word chalkos, metal) were celebrated by metalworkers and other craftsmen in honour of Athena Ergane (of crafts) and Hesphantias. Finally, the Olympeia, a festival of both Athena and Dionysos, celebrated the gathering of the hostest with a procession to the temple of Athena Sounias (old name of Salamis) at Phaleron. Festivals in honour of Athena were celebrated in cities all over Greece. In Boeotia, the Iliana (named for the month) at Korinna, in Delphi, festivals in honour of Athena Pronai (who stands before the temple). Other festivals in copies. Displayed in the Piraeus Museum is a bronze statue of Athena. Athena's symbols were the owl (Athena noctua), the helmet, the aegis (apotropaic head of the Gorgon Medusa) worn on her aegis or as a device on her shield, her spear, the spindle and the olive. Very often she is shown in warrior attire.

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White ground kylix with a representation of Apollo holding a lyre and making an offering. A crow observes the scene. ca. 480 B.C. © Archaeological Museum, Delphi.


The "Kassel Apollo", 1st-2nd century A.D. Roman marble copy of the Apollo Parnopios (ca. 450 B.C.), a bronze statue by Phidias that stood on the Athenian Acropolis. © Staatliche Museen, Kassel.

Modern copy (1992) of the Apollo Parnopios showing the ancient form of the statue, simulating bronze. The god holds a bow, arrow, and a grasshopper. © Staatliche Museen, Kassel.

Modern copy (1992) of the Apollo Parnopios showing the ancient form of the statue coloured as it might have been in antiquity. The god holds bow, arrow and laurel. © Staatliche Museen, Kassel.

The myth of Apollo and Daphne by L. Bernini, 1622-1624. © Villa Borghese, Roma.

View of the archaic poros temple of Apollo in the Agora of Corinth, 6th century B.C.

Head of Apollo from the east frieze of the Parthenon, ca. 440 B.C. © Acropolis Museum, Athens.
Roman Apollo

For the ancient Greeks, Apollo was a god of many facets. He was the personification of sunlight, the god of music, poetry, harmony, of magic. In his sphere, the study of healing and the diagnosis of illnesses, he was believed to carry out the desires of Zeus. He was the punisher of hubris, the protector of dynasty and order, and the colonists of cities. He was the healer of pain and the purifier of crime. He was also considered to be the most handsome of the Olympian gods, “the most beautiful of the immortals.”

Apollo was worshipped in Greece as early as Mycenaean times and his cult was connected with the Eastern civilizations. He was considered to represent the yearly renewal of nature and the life-giving Sun. This was an aspect later retained in his cult by farmers who worshipped him as Sitalkas (tiller of the soil), Parnopeios (who drove out grasshoppers). This was an aspect later retained in his cult by farmers who worshipped him as Sitalkas (tiller of the soil), Parnopeios (who drove out grasshoppers) and Sauroktonos (lizard slayer). By the end of the 8th century, one of the Homeric hymns gives most of the information we have about the ancient myths connected with the god.

According to myth, Apollo was the son of Zeus and Leto and his twin sister was Artemis. Hera, who was exceedingly jealous of Leto, did not allow her to reach earth to receive her anywhere for childbirth. The island of Delos, which up to that time had floated freely in the waters of the Aegean, became fixed in its place by the power of Zeus. He then gave birth to Leto at the foot of a palm tree next to the river Inopos. The myth says that brilliant youths and maidens conveined with his bow and arrow to offer him sacrifices, the god died and he descended into Tartarus. The Pythia was one of the four great panhellenic festivals and it was held every five years in July with enagismoi, liquid offerings to the dead. This entailed a great festival with a variety of spectacles and a procession from Sparta to the temple at Amyklai where a crow (a robe) was presented to the cult statue. Celebrated in Sparta too were the Kameis in honour of Apollo Kameios (named after the month).

The Pythia was the original of the great palm Tenothron, carried by Apollo on his trip to Delphi, where he was also worshipped as the god of the temple of Apollo Fanairios, of Apollo Phanaios (of the hidden)." The god had his temple too at the town of Karthaia in the island of Kea. In the island of Lesbos stood a temple of Apollo Nappaios (of the forests). Two temples were dedicated to the god in the island of Rhodes (Apollo Erethimos, the wrathful, and Apollo Pythias). In Crete we have the temple of Apollo Dioneos (a toponym), dated to 640 B.C., and Apollo Taraisos in the prefeecture of Chania. There are sanctuaries of the god also at the town of Gortyn, and an open-sky sanctuary in the Samaria Gorge. There are many representations of Apollo in ancient art. He is shown bearded, often nude and always beautiful. The best known statues of the god are those in the west pediment of the temple of Zeus at Olympia, in the friezes of the Parthenon and the Treasury of the Siphnians at Delphi.

The symbols of the god were the tripod, the kithara, the lyre, the bow and quiver (just as his sister Artemis) and the omphalos of Delphi, as the centre of the world. His special plants were the laurel (daphne) and the palm, and his favorite animals were the swan, the dolphin and the crow.
Statue of Ares seated in repose, known as the "Ares Ludovisi". Roman copy in marble of an original bronze statue attributed to the sculptor Skopas, ca. 330 B.C.
© Museo Nazionale Romano, Rome.

Exterior of a red-figured kylix with a representation of Ares and Aphrodite, ca. 520 B.C.
© Archaeological Museum, Tarquinia.

View of the area of the temple of Ares in the Ancient Agora of Athens.

Obverse of a silver drachm of Phalana in Thessaly, ca. 320 B.C.
© Numismatic Museum, Athens.

Statue of Ares seated in repose, known as the "Ares Ludovisi". Roman copy in marble of an original bronze statue attributed to the sculptor Skopas, ca. 330 B.C.
© Museo Nazionale Romano, Rome.

Mars at Rest, by D. Velasquez, ca. 1636-40.
© Museo Prado, Madrid.

Aphrodite, Eros and the Graces disarming Ares, by J. David, 1824.
© Musées Royaux d’Art et d’Histoire, Bruxelles.

Head of Ares from the area of the "Ares Ludovisi". © The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.
For the ancient Greeks, Ares was the god of war and warriors. He was the personification of pitiless struggle and for him war was an end in itself. Information about him is limited and comes mainly from Homer's Iliad and from the eighth Homeric hymn, which, however, appears to be considerably later than the others.

Mythology tells us that he was son of Zeus and Hera and that he took part in the Gigantomachy. Deimos (terror) and Phobos (fear) were his children and they followed him into battle. Children of Ares were also Eris (strife), the Keres (fates) and Enyo (the personification of war). With Aphrodite he had a daughter, the nymph Harmonia (harmony) who married Kadmos, the mythical founder of Thebes. For the Thebans, therefore, Ares was the first ancestor of their royal line. Ares had other children too: among them Diomedes, the mythical king of the Thracians, and the Amazons, an army of warlike females whose kingdom was believed to lie somewhere in the Caucasus or Scythia.

In the Odyssey we have a detailed narrative of a lively myth about Aphrodite who, while the wife of Hephaistos, had an affair with Ares. The two lovers were surprised by Hephaistos who threw a huge net around them and turned them over to the derision of the Olympian divinities.

From Athenian tradition comes the myth of Ares' trial for the murder of Halirrhothios, son of Poseidon. It was decided that the twelve Olympian gods would comprise the lawcourt responsible for trying murder cases. Since Ares murdered Halirrhothios because he caught him raping his daughter Alkippe, he was acquitted by the court. The trial occurred on a rocky hill near the Acropolis, which from then on was known as the Areopagus.

Another version of the myth says that in the time of Theseus, when the Amazons invaded Attica, they seized the rock, offered a sacrifice to their father, Ares, and then gave the rock his name.

Ares' nature explains why there was no special festival in his honour. Homer describes the character of the god in the Iliad. He is the archetypal warrior, strongly built and fleet of foot, who leaps maniacally into the battle fray, bellowing his war-cry as loudly as ten thousand men. The poet emphasises the difference between the warrior goddess Athena, who fights for a purpose, and Ares who was so bloodthirsty that even his father Zeus detested him. As Herodotos tells us, the ancient Greeks believed that Ares was worshipped also by barbarians, the Thracians and the Amazons, an army of warlike females whose kingdom was believed to lie somewhere in the Caucasus or Scythia.

Ares' epithets are recorded as Chalkeus (brazen), Brisarmatos (hard-pressing charioteer), Teichesiplektes (stormer of cities), Alloprosallos (fickle, like the wind blowing now hot, now cold), Aphneios (rich). In Lakonia he was worshipped as Theritas (meaning perhaps «fierce», although Pausanias in III.19.8 records also a tradition that the epithet came from Thero, said to have been his nurse) and Enyalios (from his daughter's name Enyo, who was the personification of war).

There was probably a sanctuary of Ares during the 5th century B.C. at Achaimi in Attica where there is some evidence for a cult of the god. In Augustus's time, the cult was transferred to the Athenian Agora where it was established in a Doric temple of the classical period, which in turn had been brought to the Agora from the sanctuary of Athena Pallenitis and reassembled. There Pausanias saw the statue of Ares next to those of Athena and Aphrodite. The temple, which thus housed three different cults, was perhaps better known as the temple of Ares. During the same period a temple of Mars Ultor (Ares the Avenger) was erected in Rome when Augustus overcame the murderers of Caesar. Sanctuaries of the god are known also at Philippo in Macedonia and Eleusina in the province of Lathis in Crete.

There are many representations of the god in vase painting and in sculpture. The Roman statue of Ares seated in repose, is similar to his figure on the Parthenon frieze. This famous statue, is known as the "Ares Ludovisi". It is a copy of a work attributed to the sculptor Skopas. Well known too is the statue known as "Ares Borghese" in the Louvre, a copy of a work attributed to the sculptor Alkamenes.

Ares' symbols are his weapons, his spear, his helmet and the torch. His sacred animal is the dog. Apple twigs decorated the animals sacrificed to Ares.
Bronze statue of Artemis, ca. 350 B.C., probably by the sculptor Euphranor. © Archaeological Museum, Piraeus.

Red-figure lekythos with a representation of Artemis accompanied by a deer with her bow and arrow, 480-470 B.C. © The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

Bronze statue of Artemis, ca. 350 B.C., probably by the sculptor Euphranor. © Archaeological Museum, Piraeus.


The sanctuary of Artemis at Brauron, The Stoa of the Bears, ca. 400 B.C.

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Head of Artemis from the east frieze of the Parthenon, ca. 440 B.C. © Acropolis Museum, Athens.

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Bronze statue of Artemis, ca. 350 B.C., probably by the sculptor Euphranor. © Archaeological Museum, Piraeus.


Head of Artemis from the east frieze of the Parthenon, ca. 440 B.C. © Acropolis Museum, Athens.
Artemis was worshipped in ancient Greece as the goddess of wild nature, of forests, mountains, springs and wild animals. Like Athena and Hestia, according to mythology, she never married. She was the archetypical solitary, free and independent young woman who lived close to the natural world. The ancient Greeks believed that she protected the fruits of the earth, the young, as well as women in childbirth; that she was accompanied by Nymphs and Charites (graces) and had virginal beauty. Artemis tells us that Artemis was the daughter of Zeus and Leto, in the island of Delos. In different parts of Greece and she was of course, as nurse of living beings connected with the great goddess of the earth’s fertility whose worship was widely known in Asia Minor. Her largest sanctuary was in Ephesos. She was connected with the great goddess of the earth’s fertility whose worship was worshipped in various ways in different places. In Attica she was connected with childbirth and the raising of children. As Locheia (she who presides over childbirth) and Eileithyia (she who comes in the hour of need, hence as women in childbirth; that she was occupied with the hunt that she was accompanied by Nymphs and Charites (graces) and had virginal beauty. In Arcadia, in the wilds of Mt. Eurymanthos and Mt. Teygetos, she was supposed to have hunted wild animals with bow and arrow. She was called Koryphas (leader) and Kalkisto (spotted, from a nymphs that were dedicated to the goddess Artemis are known through the ancient sources and from monuments that have survived or been discovered in excavations. At Athens, as already noted, there was an important sanctuary of Artemis Brauronia on the Athenian Acropolis and next to the fissa river stood the Ionic temple of Artemis Agrotera. At Piraeus there was the sanctuary of Artemis Mounichia. Preserved at Brauron are a large part of the classical stoa of the sanctuary and the foundations of a temple of the late 6th century B.C. Remains of the sanctuary of Artemis Tauropolos in the Demos of Hale Asopou have been discovered at Louzos in Attica. Preserved at Besivos are the foundations of a temple of Artemis Propeidai and foundations of a temple has been revealed at Aulis too. At Aetolia, at Calydon, there is a sanctuary of Artemis Laphria with remains of a temple of the beginning of the archaic period. In Peloponnesos, equally early is the temple found recently at Ano Mazaraki in Achaia. Remains of a temple of the 4th century, in very bad condition, have been found at the sanctuary of Asklepios at Epidauros. At Locris there was a temple of Artemis at Martenia, a sanctuary and temple of Artemis Kourothoros. At Sparta, the sanctuary of Artemis Orthea is known in its Roman form with a little shrine and a theatrical layout. A temple also stood at ancient Messene. In northern Greece, Thassos and Philippoi too had temples sacred to the goddess and Artemis Tauropolos had a sanctuary at Amphipolis. At the Delion in Paros she had a little Doric shrine and at Delos yet another temple. In addition, there was a temple of Artemis at Myrina in Lemnos. In Corfu stood the great pseudo-pentastyle temple known; from its pedimental decoration, as the “Gorgon Temple” with whom Artemis is associated. At Brauron was worshipped at Elis in Crete. We have many representations of the goddess on pottery and in sculpture. In classical times Artemis was always depicted dressed in multi-folded garments. Her bronze statue from Corinth is an example of a goddess to whom Artemis is associated. Artemis Birtomartos was worshipped at Elisundra in Crete. Symbols of the goddess were the bow and quiver, the crescent moon, deer, hunting dogs, the bull and the bear. Frequently she is associated with the cypress.
The “Aphrodite Louomene” as a miniature work of art (H. 8,5 cm.) of rock crystal, 1st century B.C. © J.P. Getty Museum, Los Angeles.

The “Aphrodite Louomene”, ca. 100 B.C. Roman copy of a work by the sculptor Doidalses. © Archaeological Museum, Rhodes.

The “Aphrodite Louomene” as a miniature figure decorating the head of a gold pin, 3rd century B.C. © Benaki Museum, Athens.

Attic white-ground pyxis with a scene showing Aphrodite talking with her son, Eros, ca. 440 B.C. © The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

Open-air sanctuary of Aphrodite at Daphni, with niches cut in the rock-face for dedications.

Attic white-ground pyxis with a scene showing Aphrodite talking with her son, Eros, ca. 440 B.C. © The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

Reverse of a gold stater of Salamis in Cyprus. Aphrodite is shown crowned and wearing earrings and a necklace. 381-332 B.C. © Greek private collection.

Detail from the painting “The Birth of Aphrodite” by S. Botticelli, ca. 1483. © Uffizi Gallery, Florence.

Aphrodite

Head of the goddess from the group of “Aphrodite, Pan and Eros” ca. 100 B.C. Found in Delos. © National Archaeological Museum, Athens.

Aphrodite was the goddess of beauty and love. Her importance to the ancient Greeks, however, did not end there, for she embodied the great forces of nature that perpetuate life in the world, the forces that unite sky and earth to create the gifts of nature, plants and animals. In Plato's Symposium and in late classical times, a clear distinction is made between Aphrodite Ourania (of the heavens), who represented pure love and protected family and fertility, and Aphrodite Pandemos (of all the deme, thus everybody), who protected free relationships and physical love.

These late rationalisations do not diminish the complexity and contradictions with which Aphrodite is portrayed in Greek mythology. According to one version she was the daughter of Ouranos (of the heavens), who represented pure love and protected family and fertility, and Aphrodite Pandemos (of all the deme, thus everybody), who protected free relationships and physical love.

According to another version, she was the daughter of Ouranos (sky). When Kronos cut off the sexual organs of his father Ouranos and threw them into the sea of Paphos in Cyprus, Aphrodite was born of the sea-foam as Aphroessa (from the foam of the sea), Pontogenes (sea-born) or Apanassa (from the sea of Paphos). According to Hesiod, she was the wife of Ares by whom she gave birth to Eros, Himeros, Phobos (fear) and Deimos (terror). She was connected also with Poseidon, with whom she bore Enyo (a hero) and Rhodos (who gave her name to the island). With Dionysos she bore Priapos (symbol of fertility) and with Hermes, Hermaphroditos. She caused various mortal women to fall in love with calamitous results, such as Medea with Jason, Ariadne with Theseus, Helen with Paris. In the Trojan War she sided with the Trojans, showing favour to Paris who had awarded the Apple of Discord, considering her to be more beautiful than Athena and Hera. Aphrodite herself was known to have fallen in love with mortals, including Adonis, Phaon (a hero from Lesbos), Praxitheos and Anthis, with whom she bore Aeneas, hero of the Trojan War and founder of cities. In the myth of Adonis, who remained half the year in Hades and the other half with the goddess, scholars see a symbolic revival of nature each spring.

In addition to the epithets already mentioned, Aphrodite has yet others: Pasiphae (who appears to all), Pasiphaea, Pontia (cast up by the sea), Eunike (of the sea) and Thalassae (as protectress of sea-farers), Paphia (the Paphian) Kytheria (of the Kytheria) and Euphrosyne because gods were sacrificed to her in honour.

Little is known about the cult and festivals of Aphrodite. Aromatic oils and the burning of incense, however, are known to have been important. In the sanctuary of Aphrodite in the Gardens at Athens, an inscription was found pertaining to the festival of Eros, her son.

There are literary references to many sanctuaries of Aphrodite, especially in the islands and in Asia Minor. In Athens, the goddess had sanctuaries, perhaps open-air, such as the sanctuaries of Aphrodite in the Gardens on the north slope of the Acropolis and of Aphrodite Helygomethe in the Ancient Agora. Another sanctuary lay beside the Sacred Way at Daphni. Little niches in the rock face that held offerings can still be seen today. There was a temple, now destroyed, on the north slope of the Kolonos Agenios hill overlooking the Ancient Agora.

The goddess was worshipped at Thespiae in Boiotia as Aphrodite Melaina and, according to Pausanias, there was an open-air sanctuary of the goddess in Thesei. In the Peloponnese, on Acrathostis she was worshipped as Aphrodite Akrasia (of the heights). Open-air sanctuaries existed perhaps as well at Sicyon and Hermione. Epidaurus had a temple sacred to the goddess, and there was a sanctuary of Aphrodite Erinyke in Arcadia. The sanctuary of Aphrodite Ourania (of the heavens) in the island of Kythera was well known.

Rhodes and Kos in the Dodecanese, as well as Melos in the Cyclades, had their sanctuaries too. At Mola in Lesbos there was a temple sacred to the goddess and Lemnos and Samos each had their sanctuaries. She was worshipped likewise in Crete, where she had sanctuaries at Axios in the territory of Rethymnon and, with Hermes, at Syrne Villani. In Cyprus at Amathus remains of her temple have been found and at Paphos, a sanctuary of Roman times. Finally, a large and splendid temple was dedicated to the goddess at Aphrodissia in Asia Minor.

Of the many statues of Aphrodite, the best known are the "Aphrodite of Melos", today in the Louvre, the Knidia of Praxiteles, her statue in the east pediment of the Parthenon and the Rhodian "Aphrodite Louomene" (batheing) by the sculptor Diokrates. To these may be added the relief of the goddess on the "Ludovisi Throne" in Rome.

The symbols of Aphrodite were doves, goose and her favorite flower, the rose. She is depicted with richly embroidered garments – woven and sewn by the Charites and the Hours – or she is represented nude, especially in the later works of art. She is often shown emerging from an open shell or accompanied by her son Eros who holds a bow.
Head of Demeter from the big dedicatory relief of Eleusis, 440-430 B.C. © National Archaeological Museum, Athens.

Head of Persephone from the big dedicatory relief of Eleusis, 440-430 B.C. © National Archaeological Museum, Athens.

Obverse of a silver tetradrachm of Agathokles of Syracuse, with the head of Persephone, ca. 310-301 B.C. © Numismatic Museum, Athens.

Obverse of a silver statère of the Delphic Amphiktyony, with the head of Demeter, ca. 336 B.C. © Numismatic Museum, Athens.

Red-figured crater with a scene showing Demeter welcoming her daughter who is being led by Hermes to the Upper World. Hekate lights the way with her torches, pointing out the road, ca. 460 B.C. © The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

Red-figured crater with a scene showing Demeter and Kore, ca. 480 B.C. © Archaeological Museum, Eleusis.

Demeter and Kore from the east pediment of the Parthenon, ca. 438-432 B.C. © British Museum, London.

Obverse of a silver tetradrachm of Agathokles of Syracuse, with the head of Persephone, ca. 310-301 B.C. © Numismatic Museum, Athens.

Obverse of a silver statère of the Delphic Amphiktyony, with the head of Demeter, ca. 336 B.C. © Numismatic Museum, Athens.

The temple of Demeter at Sange in Naxos, ca. 530 B.C. It stood in an agricultural part of the island and had the characteristic Telesterion form.

The temple of Demeter at Sange in Naxos, ca. 530 B.C. © City Art Gallery, Leeds.

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The temple of Demeter at Sange in Naxos, ca. 530 B.C. © City Art Gallery, Leeds.
Demeter & Kore

Roman Ceres and Persephone

Demeter was the goddess of cultivated fields, protectress of agriculture and grain. She taught mankind to cultivate the earth and she was closer to mortals than any other deity. Under certain circumstances of initiation, she even offered them the prospect of a happy life after death. The personality of Demeter was defined also by her relationship with her daughter. She is the mother of Persephone. Queen of the Underworld, with whom she forms a divine pair, a conception that surpasses mythology and becomes basic for comprehending the symbolism of this mystery cult in antiquity.

As might be expected, these unique characteristics of Demeter have become the subject of extensive study by scholars. The divine couple, Mother-Daughter, was already in evidence in prehistoric times. The festival of the Thesmophoria, a celebration of fertility in which only women participated, appears to go back to very ancient rural rites. At the end of June, on the 12th of the month Skirophorion, in the celebration of fertility in which only women participated, appears to go back to very ancient rural rites. At the end of June, on the 12th of the month Skirophorion, in the festival of the Thesmophoria, offerings were thrown into chasms in the rocks: pigs “for the productivity of plants”, these offerings were known as thesma, (things that had been stowed away or laid down). Four months later, at the end of October in the festival of the Thesmophoria, when the thesma had decayed, the women withdrew them and took them to altars. Each farmer received a small portion which he mixed with the grain to be planted in order to ensure a rich crop.

The symbols of Demeter are the torch (which was carried by initiates during the Eleusinian Mysteries), her sceptre and ears of wheat. When Demeter and Kore are shown together, Kore holds the torches as a popular theme.

In the Eleusinia, the greatest mystery festival of ancient religion, the priests were all men and the emphasis was on the idea of life after death and the initiated participated in a ceremony that was carried out in strict secrecy within a closed area, the Telesteron. It is not by chance that the cult of Demeter outlived all the other cults in antiquity, persisting to the end of Roman times.

The return of Kore from the Underworld, accompanied by Hermes, was a popular theme.

The most important sanctuary of Demeter was the one in Eleusis, dominated by the Telesteron. Second was the Eleusinion on the north side of the Athenian Acropolis on the Parthenon Way; yet another sanctuary at the Acropolis was that of Demeter Chloia slightly to the west. Corinth too had a sanctuary of Demeter and Kore. At Hermione and at Sparta, there were temples of Demeter Chthonia (of the Underworld) in which both mother and daughter were worshipped as the same divinity.

There were Thesmophoria sanctuaries where the special cult was held, in Peira, Delos and in Samos at Pythagoreion. At Sangri in Naxos are the ruins of a large Telesteron-like building that probably belonged to Demeter. Sanctuaries of the goddess are also recorded in Thassos and in Crete, at Knossos and at Myrtia, in the prefecture of Chania.

In Homer, the two goddesses have separate cults since it is mainly Demeter that belongs to the Olympian company of gods. In addition to Eleusinia, Dino, Cephtryia and Kabireia (all connected with her cults in specific places), the epithets of Demeter include Thesmophoros, Megaliara, Megaloliamos (who brings much bread and quantities of grain). Karpphora, Sao, Imali (abundance). The word demetriana (cereals) in modern Greek is derived from the name of the goddess.

As a result of the Ephesus temporary exhibition, the Hall of the Ephesus Museum Kit “The Twelve Olympian Gods” ñ ISBN: 960-214-504-8

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Representations of Demeter and Kore occur frequently in sculpture and vase painting. The two goddesses are often shown together with Triptolemos. The two reliefs from Eleusis are well known as is also the vase painting. The two goddesses are often shown together with Triptolemos. The two reliefs from Eleusis are well known as is also the vase painting.
Bronze statuette of Zeus, ca. 450 B.C. The god is shown hurling his thunderbolt. © National Archaeological Museum, Athens.

Red-figured amphora with a representation of Zeus holding a thunderbolt and an eagle, ca. 480 B.C. © Musée du Louvre, Paris.

Obverse of a silver didrachm of Elis, showing the head of Zeus crowned with laurel, ca. 360 B.C. © Numismatic Museum, Athens.

Reverse of a silver tetradrachm of Ptolemy I. Zeus is represented enthroned, with his eagle and his thunderbolt, 305 B.C. © Numismatic Museum, Athens.

View of the temple of Zeus Olympios in Athens, as it was finished by the emperor Hadrian in A.D. 132. It was the largest temple in Greece of the Corinthian order, octastyle, dipteral with 104 columns.

Head of Zeus from Mylasa in Asia Minor, ca. 350-340 B.C. It is thought to have been inspired by the gold and ivory statue of Zeus at Olympia by Pheidias. © Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

George Washington as Zeus. Colossal marble statue (H. 3.35 m) by Horace Greenough. The throne, himation, and symbols lend majesty to a classicist work of 1840. © Smithsonian Museum, Washington D.C.

Bronze head of Zeus from Olympia, 520-510 B.C. The eyes of the god were inlaid. © National Archaeological Museum, Athens.
Zeus

Roman Jupiter

Zeus, for the ancient Greeks, was father of the gods and of mankind. He was the main deity who knew and saw all, the lord of the heavens and master of atmospheric phenomena. In addition to the power he wielded, he was characterised by justice and ethical perfection: he rewarded excellence and punished evil. He knew what the future held and he could pronounce oracles (as at his oracle at Dodone) or send Diomachia (partant-bearing omens). For the ancient Greeks he was Hypothalamos (the high thundering god) who hurled from on high his thunderbolts. He was Stathmos (stormy) he caused damaging storms. It was believed that he punished those who did not listen to his orders. Yet he was Xenios (hospitalable) who protected the act of hospitality.

Homer tells us that this supreme god was the father of gods and of men. According to Hesiod, Theogony, he was the brother of Poseidon and of Plouton, god of the Underworld, the husband of Hera and father of the other Olympian divinities. The Titans Kronos and Rhea were his parents.

According to Hesiod’s Theogony, he was the brother of Poseidon and of Plouton, god of the Underworld, the husband of Hera and father of the other Olympian divinities. The Titans Kronos and Rhea were his parents. According to my myth Kronos, knowing that Zeus would one day dethrone him, decided to swallow him, but Hera tricked him by giving him a stone wrapped up in a bundle instead of the real baby, which she hid in Crete. Amaltheia, a goat, fed the baby Zeus with her milk and the Kouretes drowned out the sounds of the infant’s cries by beating their bronze shields. After the Gigantomachy and the Titanomachy, Zeus was enthroned but also standing to hurl his thunderbolt. The famous bronze enthroned but also standing to hurl his thunderbolt. The famous bronze

Hera was the wife of Zeus and their sacred marriage was the archetype of mortal marriages. Their children were Hephaestos, Ares, Eileithyia and Hebe. Mythology tells of Zeus’ erotic affairs with goddesses, nymphs and mortal women: with Metis, goddess of wisdom and discretion, he had a daughter, the goddess Athena. Demeter bore him Persephone. With Leto he produced Apollo and Artemis, with Semele Dionysos, with Maia Hermes, with Akmene Heralikes, with Danae Perseus and with Theti Achilles. The myth of Europe, the daughter of Okeanos (ocean), is well known. Zeus, in the form of a bull, carried her off to Crete, thus giving her name to all Europe. Theuster and universal presence of Zeus was expressed also by his many metamorphoses.

The cult of Zeus is very early and there is evidence for its existence throughout Greece and the Greek colonies. In Athens a number of festivals were held in his honour: the Diosa in early spring, the Dipollia, after the harvest, held on the Acropolis (where there was a sanctuary of Zeus Polileus), the Pompaea at the beginning of winter and the Deseerata with a procession of thanks and with contests. In contests in Zeus sanctuaries in Zeus, in many parts of Greece, there were religious processions accompanied by prayers for rain: the citizens of Demetrias made sacrifices to Zeus Airais (Zeus who lives in the mountains) on the heights of Mt. Pelion. Similar sacrifices are known in the sanctuary of Zeus Lykaios in Arcadia, on Mt. Apes in Corinthia and in Crete. The cults of Zeus at Olympia and at Nemea were of panhellenic character. Both sanctuaries were where athletic contests were held in his honour that were of special significance for the ancient Greeks. Participation in the games was in essence an offering to the god just as were sacrifices and gifts. The god shared in the victory and fame, offering panhellenic recognition. The sanctuary of Dodone was especially important. It was visited by many who came to consult the oracle and receive advice from the priests who interpreted the whispering of the leaves of the venerable oak trees that were sacred to the god.

His epithets were many and reflect his special features: Hypatos (the highest), Megalo (the greatest), Aristeo (the best), Polies (protector of the city), Eliumetos (the deliverer), Herkenios (protector of the house), Soter (saviour), Ktisios (protector of property), Melichios (the friendly [suspiciously]), Horkios (invoked at an oath, god who watches over fulfillment of oath), Athetaios (eternal), Iklarios (sender of cool meltemi winds), Euanemos (giver of fair winds), Alexikakos (who wards off mischief), Genethlios (protector of family as tutelary god), Patroos (ancestral divinity, also protector of patrimony), Panellenios (of all the Greeks) or Hellaneios (as in Aigina), Horkeios (who watches over the fulfillment of oaths), Philios (of friendship) and others.

The oldest temples of Zeus were those built by the tyrants during the 6th century B.C., such as the gigantic temple at Agraiac in Sicily (known as the “Temple of the Giants”) and the first Olympieion of Athens, a Doric temple on the site of the present temple, which was not finished until Hadrian’s time. Zeus had also other temples in Athens on the Acropolis, dedicated to Zeus Polies, and in the Ancient Agora where he was worshipped as Zeus Agerios. There was a sanctuary of Zeus Meilichios at Zeus in Piraeus. An important temple of Zeus stood at Stratios in Akarnania. The sanctuaries of Zeus did not always include temples. In very early times worship appears to have taken place in the open air, of main importance being the altar. The altar at Olympia was grand, with a huge cone of sacrificed remains and ashes. The temple at Olympia was famous in antiquity not only for its magnificent architecture but also because it held the chryselephantine cult statue of the god, a work of Phidias and one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. In the Peloponnesian too, at Nemea there was an important temple of the 4th century, relatively well preserved today. Another temple is known at Aigeira in Achia. In addition, there were sanctuaries of the god on Mt. Lykeion in Arcadia. In Epeiros, Dodone was the location of the very famous sanctuary and oracle. There were other temples at Rhodotops in Ioannina and in north Greece, at Philippoi, and Chalkero near Kavala. In Crete there was an important divinity with the temple of Zeus Daitios at Palaiokastro and a sanctuary at Elounda in Lasithi and he was worshipped in the Idaion Cave as well.

In ancient art Zeus is always portrayed as dignified, bearded, usually enthroned but sometimes standing to hurl his thunderbolts. The famous bronze head from Olympia, now in the National Archaeological Museum of Athens, is a splendid and imposing work of art. The symbols of Zeus, which we see in many works of ancient art, are the thunderbolts, his sceptre, oak leaves and the eagle.
Relief of Dionysos shown reposing on a rock with Ariadne. Detail on the gilded bronze crater from Derwenti, ca. 350 B.C. © Archaeological Museum, Thessalonike.

Interior of a red-figured kylix with a scene of Dionysos in a state of sacred inebriation. The god is playing the barbiton and he is accompanied by two Satyrs playing the krotala, ca. 480 B.C. © Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris.

Obverse of a silver tetradrachm of Mende in Macedonia. Dionysos is shown reclining backwards on a donkey and holding a kantharos, ca. 425 B.C. © Numismatic Museum, Athens.

Marble altar from the sanctuary of Dionysos in Athens. It is decorated with masks, rosettes, and garlands of leaves and fruit from ivy and grapevines, ca. 100 B.C.

View of the sanctuary of Dionysos on the south slope of the Acropolis; the theatre of Dionysos is directly connected with the temples of the god to the south.

The young Dionysos crowned with vine leaves and clusters of grapes, by M. Caravaggio, ca. 1606. © Uffizi Gallery, Florence.

Head of Dionysos, thought to be inspired by an original of the 4th century B.C. © National Archaeological Museum, Athens.

Dionysos from the east pediment of the Parthenon, 438-432 B.C. © British Museum, London.
Roman Bacchus

Dionysos was the god of vineyards, of wine, of ecstatic dance. The fertility and productivity of the earth also lay in his domain. To describe precisely his special character is difficult; he appears to have embodied also a sense of the powers of the subconscious, which were expressed by ecstasy, inebriation and enthusiasm that surpassed logic. It is characteristic that he was able to transmit mania, inspired frenzy, as much to his opponents as to his followers. To his followers mania, with wine and dance, provided a happy solution to sadness; to those who rejected him, it came as incurable madness.

According to the Greek myth, Dionysos was born of the union of Zeus and Semele, daughter of Kadmos, the king of Thebes. She asked him to appear before her in all his godly grandeur, and when he did so, in his face the name appears on the Linear B tablets. Yet the Greeks of classical times considered the illogical, maniacal element of the personality of the god as the fact that Homer virtually ignores him) no longer holds, since the name Dionysos and Ariadne. The ancient myths tell also about the attack on the god by Tyrrhenian pirates and how brutal Dionysos could be toward those who were against him. The theory that the cult of Dionysos arrived late in Greece (based on the fact that Homer virtually ignores him) is no longer held, since the name Dionysos is known. The god is frequently portrayed on mosaic floors.

The kat’ Agrous (rural) Dionysia were celebrated in the middle of winter. The farmers gathered in thiasoi (a company of strange beings). Satyrs and Silens, Nymphs and Maenads, women dedicated to the god. In Attica he was received by Karianos on the northern slopes of Mt. Pentelikon and the god taught him how to grow vines and how to make wine.

The ancient myths tell also about the attack on the god by Thracian pirates and how he changed them into dolphins. They tell us too about his marriage with Ariadne who had been abandonned by Theseus in Naxos. Born from this marriage were Dionysos (wine-drinker), Euanthe (blooming, flowery) and Staphylos (bunch of grapes). It was believed that he managed to bring his mother Semele up from the Underworld.

The cult of Dionysos retained its original character on Mt. Parnassos where, early in December, the orga (orgiastic dances) were celebrated by women only, Maenads or Thiasoi, members of the Thiasos that was born with Dionysos. In his face the name appears on the Linear B tablets. Yet the Greeks of classical times considered the illogical, maniacal element of the personality of the god as something foreign to their outlook. The cathedral village of Delphi and his cult there. The tale of Pentheus, king of Thebes, who was torn to pieces by the Bacchi because he refused to allow them to enter the cult of the god, shows how brutal Dionysos could be toward those who were against him.

The cult of Dionysos is one of the most significant cults of ancient Greece. It is the only cult in which the god and his retainers are numerous on pottery. Notable is the depiction of Dionysos and Ariadne on the famous bronze, silver and gold Derveni crater. There were also temples in Eretria, Old Ephesos and at Asa in the island of Naxos. There was also a large altar to the god in the island of Kea. An exceedingly ancient sanctuary is recorded on the acropolis at Athens (where the cult was much older) and on a pillar covered with ivy leaves. There were also temples in Eretria, Old Ephesos and at Asa in the island of Naxos. There was also a large altar to the god in the island of Kea. In northern Greece there were sanctuaries in the island of Thasos, Mt. Parnassos, Mt. Pelion and other parts. More important and larger temples were to be found in Asia Minor at Pergamon and at Aias, the temple of the great architect Hermogenes. In earlier art, Dionysos is represented as bearded. Preserved in Naxos is an early colossal statue of the god, unfinished and still lying in the ancient quarry. Later on he appears as a beardless youth. He is usually accompanied by the goat, the donkey and the panther. Animals were the goat, the donkey and the panther.

The known ekklesiastikoi of Dionysos are Dimetor and Dissitokos (twice born), Metophos (High-born), Pyrgimos (fire-born), Lasso (who dips his sorrows), Lainos (of the wine-press), Iakchos and especially Bacchus. From this epithet come the Bacchi-Mainadai and the verb baccheuo (to celebrate with Bacchic or frenzied revelry).

The festival of the Lenaios, with the ecstatic dances of the Maenads, was held at the sanctuary of Dionysos Lenaios, its location still unknown. It is a worth noting that there were Dionysian parades and ceremonies. These were guilds of citizens who honoured Dionysos, as in Piraeus, Tanagra, Rhodes and Teos in Asia. There were also guilds of “artisans in the entourage of Dionysos”, actors and people connected with the theatre.

The known epithets of Dionysos are Director and Chiosokrates (wise born), Metophos (high-born), Pyrgimos (fire-born), Lasso (who dips his sorrows), Lainos (of the wine-press), Iakchos and especially Bacchus. From this epithet come the Bacchi-Mainadai and the verb baccheuo (to celebrate with Bacchic or frenzied revelry).

To Dionysos we owe, directly or indirectly, the theatres as architecture, that were built throughout the Greek world from the 5th century B.C. on. On the south slope of the Athenian Acropolis stood the sanctuary of Dionysos with a theatre, and two temples, an elder and a newer one. In Athens too was the sanctuary of Dionysos in Lirina (in the marshes). Mt. Pentekilion had its sanctuary too, in what was then the Demos of Ikaros. Other sanctuaries were at Thortios, at Eleutherai and in the island of Kea. An exceedingly ancient sanctuary is recorded on the acropolis at Athens (where the cult was much older) and on a pillar covered with ivy leaves. There were also temples in Eretria, Old Ephesos and at Asa in the island of Naxos. There was also a large altar to the god in the island of Kea. In northern Greece there were sanctuaries in the island of Thasos and Mt. Parnassos. More important and larger temples were to be found in Asia Minor at Pergamon and at Aias, the temple of the great architect Hermogenes. In earlier art, Dionysos is represented as bearded. Preserved in Naxos is an early colossal statue of the god, unfinished and still lying in the ancient quarry. Later on he appears as a beardless youth. He is dressed, as a rule, in long tunic and usually wears a crown of ivy. Representations of citrons and grapes are frequent on mosaic floors. The symbols of the god were the thyrsos (a staff wound round with vines and ending in a pine cone), a drinking vessel known as a kantharos, the ivy vine, grape vines, theatre masks and the phallos as a symbol of fertility. His special animals were the goat, the donkey and the panther.
The Hermes by Praxiteles, ca. 330 B.C. He is holding the baby Dionysos in his arms. © Archaeological Museum, Olympia.

Red-figured amphora with a representation of Hermes. He wears winged sandals, holds the kerykeion and has scales for weighing the souls of the dead, late 5th century B.C. © Musée du Louvre, Paris.

View of the sanctuary of Hermes Akakesios in the Agora of Megalopolis in Arcadia. © Photograph Pedro Olalla.


The first Greek postage stamp, 1861. Hermes, god of communications, is the symbol of the Greek Postal Service.

Reverse of a silver didrachm of Pheneos in Arcadia. The god is holding his kerykeion and little Arkas, ca. 370 B.C. © Numismatic Museum, Athens.


Head of Hermes from a Hermaic stele. Roman copy of the 1st century A.D. The original (ca. 430 B.C.) by the sculptor Alkamenes, stood next to the Propylaia of the Acropolis. © Acropolis Museum, Athens.

The Hermes by Praxiteles, ca. 330 B.C. He is holding the baby Dionysos in his arms. © Archaeological Museum, Olympia.

Head of the statue of Hermes by Praxiteles, ca. 330 B.C. © Archaeological Museum, Olympia.

Hermes had various capacities according to the ancient Greeks, who believed that his sphere included the divine realm of Mt. Olympus, the world of mankind and Hades, the Underworld. He was the god of perpetual motion, of communication, of exchange—including that of trade—, of roads, of good luck. He was the messenger who carried out the commands of Zeus as well. In a strange way, while he protected commercial gain, he was the caretaker of grazing herds of goats and sheep, cattle, horses and mules. Later on, he became the friendly god who showed the dead the way down to the World of Shades. He also protected music and athletic games and he was known as Logios, a connoisseur of clear expression.

According to mythology, Hermes was the son of Zeus and Maia, the daughter of Atlas. Thus he was the brother of Apollo with whom he had close ties. The Homeric hymn tells us that he was born on Mt. Kyllene in Arcadia and that as an infant one day old, he stole fifty head of cattle from Apollo in Pieria. These he drove—making them march backwards—into a cave in Pylos, giving them up only after Zeus, on Zeus' orders, he killed the many-eyed Argos who, on Hera's instigation, had kept Io hostage. As his father's herald he was known as Trochis (messenger, runner) and he was known as Chytroi (pot-feast), was dedicated to him as protector of the dead. His cult was panhellenic and its roots lay in the Mycenaean world. In Athens, the third day of the Anthesteria (festival of flowers), a sanctuary of Hermes was celebrated, and Hermes Odios, guardian of roads and travellers. Square pillars with his portrait head on top (Hermaic stelai) were set up at crossroads, gateways and house entrances. Hermes indeed played an important part in many of the ancient myths. As Psychopompas he helped Persephone to return from Hades. He helped Hecate in her descent to Hades in order to catch Kerberos, the three-headed dog who guarded the entrance to Hades. He played a similar role in the tale of Orpheus and Eurydice. As Oneiropompas (bringer of dreams) and Hegetor (guide), Hermes gave mortals peaceful sleep and dreams.

Hermes' epithets were relatively numerous. He was called Atropontes because, on Zeus' orders, he killed the many-eyed Argos who, on Hera's instigation, had kept Io hostage. As his father's herald he was known as Trachis (messenger, runner) and Diox Kerux (herald of Zeus). He was Sykoped (sharp sighted). As protector of herds, Nomios (the pastoral god), Agrotor (the country god), Tyreuter (from the cheese market), Kerdoos (of gain), Kerdemporos (of success in trade), Empelios (god of commerce). For his guile, his inventiveness and his thefts he was known as Phlegethos (the thief), Phlegeton Aor (chief of thieves), Klepsiphron (dissembler) and Polytopos (crafty). The epithets Pompaios (escort of the souls of the dead) and Psychopompas (guide of the souls of the dead) have to do with his responsibilities to the Underworld.

Relatively few sanctuaries of Hermes are known. In north Greece there were sanctuaries of Hermes at Philippi, Drama, and, as we have noted, in the islands of Imbros and Samothrace; likewise in the Peloponnesse at Megalopolis and on Mt. Lykaion. There was a sanctuary of Hermes Chantodotos (giver of favour) in the island of Samos and he was also worshipped with Aphrodite in the Herasion of Samos. In the precinct of Rethyston in Crete, two open-air sanctuaries in caves are known, one of Hermes Kranios in Patoos, the other of Hermes Talios in Meldoni. In Crete too, at Syme Villanou there was a very early sanctuary of Aphrodite and Hermes Kedrites (juniper or cedar divinity).

Iconographically, as seen on the Hermic stelai and in vase painting of the 6th and 5th centuries B.C., Hermes is always depicted with thick hair and a beard. Later on he is shown as a beardless youth, often nude, carrying his symbols. Much admired in antiquity was his statue in Tanagra as Moschophoros (carrying a calf), a work by the sculptor Kalokas. The Hermes by Praxiteles and the "Hermes of Andros" were also famous. On the façade of the large Macedonian tomb of the Leukadians, Hermes is depicted as Psychopompas.

Hermes' symbols are the kerykeion, his winged sandals and pala (felt cap), his purse and the traveller's wide brimmed hat, the petasos. He is sometimes accompanied by nymphs and the goat-legged Pan. He is associated with the cedar tree and the ram.
Relief showing Hera in a scene from the Olympian Myth that decorated the frieze of the Siphnian Treasury, ca. 525 B.C. © Archaeological Museum, Delphi.

Interior of a white-ground kylix with a representation of Hera. The goddess is depicted in luxurious clothing, wearing a diadem and holding her scepter, ca. 470-460 B.C. © Staatliche Antikensammlungen, Munich.

The temple of Hera at Olympia, ca. 468-460 B.C. © British Museum, London.

Head of a statue of Hera from her sanctuary at Argos, ca. 420 B.C. © National Archaeological Museum, Athens.

Dionysos of a silver drachm of Argos with the head of Hera wearing a polos decorated with palmettes, earrings and a necklace, ca. 370-350 B.C. © Numismatic Museum, Athens.

Obverse of a silver drachm of Argos with the head of Hera wearing a polos decorated with palmettes, earrings and a necklace, ca. 370-350 B.C. © Numismatic Museum, Athens.

Relief representing Zeus and Hera from the east frieze of the Parthenon, ca. 440 B.C. © British Museum, London.

Hera and Argos. Hera is decorating the tail of the peacock with Argos’ eyes, by P.P. Rubens, ca. 1611. © Wallraf-Richartz Museum, Cologne.

Hera and Argos. Hera is decorating the tail of the peacock with Argos’ eyes, by P.P. Rubens, ca. 1611. © Wallraf-Richartz Museum, Cologne.

Hera
Roman Juno

In archaic and classical Greece, Hera was worshipped as the supreme goddess, wife of Zeus, queen of the heavens, protectress of marriage, family and women. She had many of the powerful qualities of her husband: she was connected with the phenomena of the sky, she had divine inspiration, pride and gentleness. Scholars believe that her cult was very early in the Greek world. It was well established in Mycenaean times at Argos, Sparta and Mycenae and her cult existed also in the colonies of Magna Graecia.

Hera

Mythology tells us that Hera was the daughter of Kronos and Rhea, who had divine inspiration, pride and gentleness. Connected with the phenomena of the sky, she was the protector of the sky. In every place, however, her temples are clearly earlier than those of Zeus. Olympia provided a good example. Clay models of temples found show that at least as early as geometric and early archaic times there were temples dedicated to the goddess.

In antiquity, sacrifices to Hera were usually made before a wedding. Every four years important festivals were held at her sanctuary, the Heraion, in Olympia that included the presentation of a peplos (in which the xoanon of the goddess was arrayed) and running races for maidens. At the Heraion at Argos too, contests and sacrifices were held in her honour: there was a great procession symbolising the sacred marriage ceremony with Zeus. It went to the Heraion with the priestess of Hera in a chariot drawn by white heifers. Maidens, married women and armed youths accompanied the procession and the wedding continued with the goddess participating. In the Great Daidala, the fourteen xoana from the Lesser Daidala of the years between with a chariot, followed by one hundred cows for sacrifice. In yet another festival at Argos, known as the Aspis (the shield), Hera was worshipped as a war goddess.

The Goddess's Main Sanctuaries

The goddess's main sanctuaries, which also contained important temples, are located in the island of Samos, in Argos and in Olympia. There was also a Heraion in Delos. Plataia had a splendid sanctuary with a temple containing a famous statue of Hera by Praxiteles. From the beginning of the archaic period, Hera was worshipped as Akraia and Limenia (of the harbour) in Perachora, west of Loutraki. There was a temple also in Hyrtakina in the prefecture of Chania in Crete. The best preserved of the architectural monuments dedicated to Hera are two temples in South Italy at Poseidonia (Paestum), near Naples.

In ancient art, Hera is always portrayed attired, dignified and with her symbols. Nothing remains, unfortunately, of the great chryselephantine cult statue, a work of Polykleitos; that was in the Heraion at Argos. We have only Pausanias' description. The goddess was depicted as enthroned and crowned. She held a sceptre with a cuckoo on top and in her other hand a pomegranate. Other important statues have come to light in Samos and at Olympia. Well-preserved reliefs portraying the goddess are found on the friezes of the Parthenon and the Siphnian Treasury in Delphi.

Symbols of the goddess are the pomegranate, signifying fertility and cornucopia, the sceptre (in earlier works of art), the palos (a tall crown) and the diadem. Her sacred animal is the cow; sacred to her also are the mountains, peaks), Chrysothronos (with a throne of gold), Sebaste (venerable), Teleia (perfect), Kyriarchos (dominant), Boppe (with large eyes like a bovid), Leukolenos (white-armed), Gamelios (of weddings), Nymphoionne and Zugia (paternity of marriage).

Elsewhere, other festivals in Hera's honour were held in Arcadia, in the cities of Euboea, in a sanctuary outside of Krosisos in Crete and in the Greek colonies of Magna Graecia.
Lamp fragment with a representation of Hephaistos. 3rd century B.C. This god holds a torch and wears a pilos and exomis. © Ancient Agora Museum, Athens.

Interior of a red-figured kylix, ca. 480 B.C. Hephaistos is depicted making the arms of Achilles. Thetis receives them. © Staatliche Museen, Antikensammlung, Berlin.


Relief representing Hephaistos and Athena from the west facade of the Parthenon, ca. 440 B.C. © British Museum, London.


Relief representing Hephaistos and Athena from the west facade of the Parthenon, ca. 440 B.C. © British Museum, London.


The temple of Hephaistos in the Ancient Agora of Athens, the so-called “Theseion”, ca. 449-444 B.C. This is the best preserved ancient temple in Greece.

Lamp fragment with a representation of Hephaistos. 3rd century B.C. This god holds a torch and wears a pilos and exomis. © Ancient Agora Museum, Athens.


Head of Hephaistos. Roman copy probably of a cult statue by the sculptor Alkamenes that was once at the so-called “Theseion” in Athens. © Vatican Museums, Rome.

Hephaistos was the god of fire, both on earth and in the heavens. He was the tamer of fire and he forged objects of metal. Mythology portrays him as the god of creative works, sculpture, modelling, metal-working, the forging of armour. He was a goldsmith and patron of artisans. In the Homeric epics his work is greatly admired and described in detail. His cult in classical Athens bespeaks the love and admiration of the inhabitants for fine works of metal and ceramic, in the making of which fire was the indispensable element.

Clearly he was viewed by the ancient Greeks not only as an Olympian divinity but also, since he was lame, as an individual with “special needs”, to put it in modern terms, who developed an inventive mind and great skill with his hands.

Mythology tells us that Hephaistos was the son of Zeus and Hera, while according to Hesiod, Hera conceived him on her own. He was lame from birth and Hera therefore threw him into the sea where he was saved by Thetis and Eurynome, marine divinities. Other myths say that Zeus hurled him from Mt. Olympus to the island of Lemnos where he was rescued by the mythical inhabitants of the island, the semi-barbarian Sintians. To appease his mother, after nine years he sent her a throne of gold. When she sat on it, however, she was trapped by an invisible net that the god had placed there. So Hephaistos was summoned to Mt. Olympus, but his return was only possible after Dionysos managed to make him drunk. The lame and awkward god is associated with other myths as well. He assisted in the birth of Athena by opening the head of Zeus with his axe; out of clay he fashioned Pandora, wife of Epimetheus, with the help of Kratos and Bia (strength and force) he pinned the Titan Prometheus to a peak in the Caucasos. He also revealed the faithlessness of his wife Aphrodite to the Olympian divinities by means of the invisible net again.

The Homeric epics tell us about the god’s numerous magnificent creations, the Hephaistoteukta (creations wrought by Hephaistos): the thrones of Zeus and of Hera, the chariot of Helios (sun), the golden cuirasses of Herakles and of Diomedes, Ariadne’s crown, Harmonia’s necklace, Apollo’s arrows, the wine craters (large wine cups) of Dionysos, the arms of Achilles, especially his famous shield, and also the bronze palaces of the gods on Mt. Olympus. We learn about the bronze giant Talos and the two gold servants–automatons (the robots of antiquity) that served the lame god.

Festivals in honour of Hephaistos were held at various places. In Lemnos, for nine days all fires were kept extinguished. The Hephaisteia or Chalkeia in Athens were celebrated with sacrifices and torch-races. At Athens he was honoured at an altar together with the Titan Prometheus, who was a mythological parallel to the god; these were the "fire-bearers" who had introduced fire and its uses to mankind.

Hephaistos’ epithets are Chalkeus (smith), Kyllopodion (club-footed) and Amphigyees (lame in both legs).

The most important temple of Hephaistos was the so-called "Theseion" in the Athenian Agora, still well preserved. Worshiped there together with Hephaistos was Athena, likewise protectress of artisans and handicrafts, as Hephaistia and as Ergane. Another temple of Hephaistos is mentioned as being in Lemnos.

In art, Hephaistos is represented as robust, always bearded, clad in an exomis (tunic exposing one shoulder) or short chiton, bare-footed or wearing boots, sometimes with a cap such as worn by the artisans. His cult statue in the Hephaisteion ("Theseion") was a splendid work by Alkamenes. Hephaistos is depicted in relief in the friezes of the Parthenon and of the Siphnian Treasury at Delphi. He appears also in many mythological scenes on pottery of the 6th and 5th centuries B.C.

Symbols of the god are the hammer, the smith’s tongs, the double axe and his cane. He is frequently shown mounted on a donkey.

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Reverse of a silver tetradrachm of Demetrios Poliorketes of Macedonia, showing Poseidon hurling the trident, ca. 301-295 B.C. © Numismatic Museum, Athens.

Obverse of a silver tetradrachm of Antigonos Doson of Macedonia, depicting the head of Poseidon crowned with seaweed, ca. 227 B.C. © Numismatic Museum, Athens.

Sardonyx cameo with a representation of the contest of Athena and Poseidon for the right to be protector of Athens, 2nd century A.C. © Archaeological Museum, Naples.

Poseidon

Bronze statue, known as the “Poseidon of Artemision”, ca. 460-450 B.C. © National Archaeological Museum, Athens.

The temple of Poseidon at Sounion, ca. 444-440 B.C. © Neue Pinakothek, Munich.


Saronic vase with a depiction of the contest of Athena and Poseidon, ca. 400 B.C. © Archaeological Museum, Pella.

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Saronic vase with a depiction of the contest of Athena and Poseidon, ca. 400 B.C. © Archaeological Museum, Pella.
In the eyes of the ancient Greeks, Poseidon was the son of Kronos and Rhea. His realm extended even to the depths of the earth, for it was he who caused earthquakes and made the earth stable in relation to the sea. His name is written on the Linear B tablets of Pylos and thus it is clear that he was worshipped as early as Mycenean times.

According to mythology, Poseidon was the son of Kronos and Rhea. Zeus himself refers to him as “most august and best of the gods”. With Amphitrite, he lived in a golden palace in the depths of the sea. Zeus himself refers to him as “most august and best of the gods”. With Amphitrite, he lived in a golden palace in the depths of the sea. Poseidon was the son of Kronos and Rhea. His realm was his trident, with which he stirred the waters of the sea, his horses, dolphins and various beasts of the sea who followed in his train. Sacred to the god were seaweed and the pine tree.

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In the world of art, Poseidon is always represented as bearded. It is not easy to distinguish him from Zeus if his symbols are not shown. This is the case with the large bronze statue, a splendid work of classical art, found at the Artemision and now in the Archaeological Museum of Athens. The statue known as the “Poseidon of Melos”, in the Archaeological Museum of Athens, is well known. Poseidon appears on the Parthenon frieze and on monumental altars, one at Monodendri south of Miletos, the other at Mylea, in the sanctuary known as the Panionion. Poseidon's symbols are his trident, with which he stirred the waters of the sea, his horses, dolphins and various beasts of the sea who followed in his train. Sacred to the god were seaweed and the pine tree.