

GREEK & ROMAN DEITIES

Adonis: Mortal son of Myrrha by her father Cinryas. Noted for his youth and beauty. Gored to death by a wild boar, mourned by his lover Aphrodite, who caused an anemone flower to spring up from his blood. Commemorated in annual mourning rituals, in which he was symbolised by a young lettuce plant, a symbol of impotence. In an alternate myth, he was the lover of both Aphrodite and Persephone, in an annual cycle like Persephone's own.

Aesculapios: Son of Apollo. Physician and healer. Father of Hygeia, Iaso, and other healing deities.

Aphrodite: (Rom. Venus): Olympian Goddess of love, daughter of Zeus and the Titaness Dione. She possessed a magic girdle that made her irresistible, and she renewed her virginity in the sea at Paphos. Married to Hephaestus, she had many lovers, the most notable of which was Ares, by whom she became the mother of Deimos (Terror), Phobos (Fear), and Harmonia. Her other lovers included Hermes (by whom she bore Hermaphroditus), Poseidon, and Dionysos.

Apollo: (Rom. Apollo) Olympian Sun god, son of Zeus and Leto, twin brother of Artemis. Musician and healer. In later times, god of the Delphic oracle.

Arachne: Born mortal, a superb weaver who outdid Athene in a weaving contest and was turned into a spider by the goddess.

Ares: (cf. Rom. Mars) Olympian God of war, son of Zeus and Hera. His sister was Eris, goddess of discord. Universally hated by the Greeks, and by his fellow gods, except for Eris, Aphrodite, and Hades. Mars (originally a god of agriculture) was better loved by the Romans.

Artemis: (Rom. Diana) Olympian Moon goddess, twin sister of Apollo. Virgin and huntress; the crescent moon is her bow. Bear goddess and patroness of little girls. Goddess of childbirth, because minutes after her own birth, she assisted her mother in delivery of her brother Apollo.

Athene: (Rom. Minerva) Born from Zeus' forehead after he swallowed her mother Metis. Olympian Virgin goddess of military strategy, of law, of arts and culture. Often portrayed holding winged Nike, goddess of victory.

Cloacina: Roman goddess of the sewers.

Cronus: Last-born of the Titans, who usurped his father Uranus. Father, by Rhea, of Zeus and other Olympians, who later defeated him.

Demeter: (Rom. Ceres) Olympian Grain goddess, daughter of Cronus and Rhea, and mother (by Zeus) of Kore/Persephone. Her mysteries were celebrated annually at Eleusis.

Dionysos: (cf. Rom. Bacchus) Olympian God of wine and ecstasy. His Roman counterpart, Bacchus, was a much coarser figure, a mere drunkard.

Dryads: The spirits of oak trees, portrayed as beautiful maidens.

Eros: (Rom. Cupid) God of desire. In earlier myths, one of the primal forces of creation. In later versions, the son of Aphrodite and Ares, too irresponsible to be made an Olympian. Married Psyche, originally a mortal woman who was later deified by Zeus. In modern times, degenerated to the red cardboard silhouette of a cute little boy with bow and arrows.

Eurynome: According to the Pelasgian creation myth, the Mother of All Things. In the form of a dove, she laid the Universal Egg which was fertilized and hatched by the North Wind in the form of the serpent Ophion. From it, all things arose.

Ganymede: Born mortal. As a beautiful young man, abducted by Zeus to become his lover. Replaces Hebe as Zeus' cupbearer.

Ge (Gaia): The Great Mother, the Earth. Incited the Titans to rebel against Uranus.

Hades: (a.k.a. Pluto, "the wealthy one", Rom. Dis) Brother of Zeus, Poseidon, and Demeter, uncle and husband of Persephone. Lord of the Underworld and ruler of the dead.

Hebe: Daughter of Zeus and Hera, goddess of youth. Eventually, bride of Heracles. Served her father as cupbearer, until one day she stumbled and fell with the cup, and was thereafter replaced by Ganymede.

Hecate: A cthonic fertility goddess. Together with Artemis and Selene, one aspect of a triple lunar goddess. Daughter of Leto's sister Asterie and of Perses. Dweller in the Underworld, and psychopomp. Goddess of crossroads, often portrayed with three heads, of a lion, a dog, and a mare. Accompanied by hounds and ghosts, carries a torch and a scourge. Goddess of sorceresses and witches.

Hephaestus: (Rom. Vulcan) Olympian God of the forge. Son of Zeus and Hera, who threw him into the sea at birth because of his weakness; raised by Eurynome and the sea-nymph Thetis. Ugly and ill-tempered; he once ridiculed Aphrodite and Ares before the gods by trapping them in a net together. Crippled when he reproached Zeus for his treatment of Hera.

Hermes: (Rom. Mercury) Olympian Wing-footed messenger of the gods. Trickster, and patron of thieves. Psychopomp. Many of his shrines contain not a human-like figure, but an abstract or realistic phallic image.

Hera: (Rom. Juno) Sister and wife to Zeus. Queen of Olympus, goddess of marriage. Spent much of her time taking revenge upon Zeus for his many marital infidelities. Her Roman counterpart, Juno, is a much stronger figure.

Hestia: (Rom. Vesta). Daughter of Cronus and Rhea. Goddess of the hearth, home, and hospitality. Alone of the Olympians, never took sides in disputes or wars. A celibate goddess to whom Zeus awarded the first victim of public sacrifices. She later gave up her seat on Olympus to Dionysos. In Rome, the Vestal Virgins, Her priestesses, were among the most powerful figures in public life, but the penalty for breaking their vows of celibacy was to be buried alive.

Janus: Roman god of river crossings, of gateways and doors, of beginnings. Portrayed with two (on coins) or four (on statues) faces.

Kore: A title, not a name: "Girl" or "Maiden." This was the only name given to Persephone before her marriage to Hades. Sometimes also used as a title of Artemis or Athena, the virgin goddesses.

Kybele: Phrygian Great Mother goddess. Her priests often castrated themselves in ecstatic trance as an act of worship.

Lares and Penates: Roman; small gods of the household. Each house had its own. The Lares were the gods of the exterior of the house, the yard or field; the Penates were the gods of the interior of the home.

Mithras: Roman bull-god, whose mystery cult was popular among Roman soldiers. Many of its characteristics were later reflected in Christianity.

Moirae: The Fates, daughters of Zeus and Themis: Clotho, who spins the thread of human destiny; Lachesis, who measures the thread, and Atropos, who cuts it.

Muses: Patronesses of the arts and inspiration. Their numbers vary, but in later accounts there are nine: Calliope (epic poetry), Clio (history), Euterpe (lyric poetry), Melpomene (tragedy), Terpsichore (choral dancing), Erato (love poetry), Polyhymnia (sacred music or dance), Urania (astronomy), and Thalia (comedy).

Naiads: The spirits of streams and rivers, portrayed as beautiful young women.

Pan: (Rom. Faunus, Sylvanus) Goat-footed, cthonic forest god. Dancer, musician. Fertility god. Often merged with Priapus, the ithyphallic god.

Persephone: (Rom. Proserpine) Daughter of Demeter and Zeus, wife of Hades and queen of the Underworld. Goddess of regeneration, whose mercy tempers the harsh rule of Hades.

Poseidon (Rom. Neptune). Olympian god of the sea and earthquakes. Son of Cronus and Rhea, brother of Zeus. Surly and quarrelsome in nature, and greedy of earthly kingdoms. He lived in an underwater palace, and had a golden chariot drawn by white horses.

Titans: Children of Eurynome, predecessors of the Olympians. They included Theia and Hyperion (associated with the Sun), Phoebe and Atlas (Moon), Dione and Crius (Mars), Metis and Coeus (Mercury), Themis and Eurymedon (Jupiter), Tethys and Oceanus (Venus), and Rhea and Cronus (Saturn).

Uranus: First-father, sky-father. Son of Ge (Gaia), father of the Titans, whom he banished to the Underworld. Castrated by Cronus, his genitals fell into the sea, from which arose Aphrodite.

Zeus: (Rom. Jupiter) God of thunder, ruler of Olympus and foremost among the Olympian gods. By his many amorous adventures, father of many gods and demigods, thus absorbing many older and local deities into the Olympian pantheon.