

Aphrodite Venus

Goddess of Love

According to Hesiod (*Theogony* 190), when Kronos had cut off his father's members, he tossed them

into the sea. The immortal flesh eventually spread into a circle of white foam... from this foam, Aphrodite was created. Her name literally means foam-born. She was attended by Eros and Himeros

when she was first born but when she stepped ashore on Cyprus she was a "modest and lovely Goddess", since known as the Lady of Kypros. Her gentle domain was intended to be "the sweetness of

love" and "the whispering of girls" but her adventures, and the adventures of her children, caused as much misery and bloodshed as any of the immortals (except for Ares and Athena, they thrived on the sanguine).

Aphrodite and the Trojan War:

Her love of Alexandros (a.k.a. Paris) helped move the Trojan War into its bloodiest and saddest phase.

The Trojans and the Achaeans (a.k.a. the Greeks) agreed that Menelaos (Helen's Achaian husband) and

Alexandros (Helen's Trojan lover) would fight for Helen (and her possessions) in single combat. The

assembled armies swore oaths that they would abide by the results of the duel and all declared an end to

their nine year quarrel. The duel began... (*Iliad*, 3.380) Alexandros was dealt a deadly blow and should

have died on the battlefield, but Aphrodite covered him in mist and removed him to his perfumed bedchamber, unharmed. Aphrodite then went to Helen (*Iliad* 3.426) and threatened to encompass her with

"hard hate" if she did not go to Alexandros and comfort him.

The Trojan War was, of course, not Aphrodite's fault but her love for Alexandros, and her meddling caused considerable misery and death among both armies. Later (*Iliad* 5.311), Aphrodite, once

again,

entered the fray to save the life of her son Aineias. As she was shielding her staggering son from the thunderous assault of Diomedes, she was wounded in the hand. Athene, another meddler in the Trojan

War, had given Diomedes the power to see the immortals on the battlefield. She advised him (Iliad 5.129) to avoid all the gods except Aphrodite, "her at least you may stab". Diomedes lunged at Aphrodite and his pitiless bronze spear tore through the robe that the Graces had carefully woven and cut

the flesh of her immortal palm. The blood of the gods, ichor, poured darkly on her perfect skin (Iliad

5.340) as she fled the battlefield and went to Mount Olympus to seek comfort from Dione. Zeus advised

her, "No, my child, not for you are the works of warfare. Rather concern yourself only with the lovely

secrets of marriage..." (Iliad 5.428). (Please see the Book Review Page)

Aphrodite and Aries

In The Odyssey of Homer (8.266), a singer tells the tale of how Aphrodite and Aries secretly laid together in the bed of her husband, Lord Hephaestus. Helios, the sun, secretly observed the lovers and

told Hephaestus. The smith went to his work and devised clever fastenings that would ensnare and hold

the lovers in an unbreakable trap. The careless lovers fell into the trap and Hephaestus stood before the

other Olympians and demanded his gifts of courtship be returned. Only after Poseidon offered to pay the

adulterer's damages if Aries defaulted would Hephaestus loose the bonds. After being freed, Aphrodite

went to her sacred precinct on Cyprus where she was bathed by the Graces and Aries went Thraceward.

Seeing the two lovers in the indignity of the snare, Apollo asked Hermes how he would feel in such a

situation. Hermes answered that he would suffer thrice the number of bonds if only he could share the

bed of Aphrodite the Golden (Odyssey 8.342).

She is often confused with the Roman goddess, Venus.

Ares Mars

AriesEEEEAIR eez

God of War. Son of Zeus and Hera. He embodied, not just the act, but also the spirit of War.

Disliked by most Olympians but loved by Aphrodite, Ares was a god of action and determination.

When

he was fighting on the side of the Trojans he was wounded by Pallas Athene. She donned the helm of

Death and, after deflecting his spear, Athene hurled a bolder, knocking Ares senseless. He had to be assisted from the field of battle by Aphrodite. When Aries retreated to Mount Olympus his father, Zeus

said (before commanding Paieon to heal his wounded son) "To me you are most hateful of all gods who

hold Olympos", (Iliad 5.889).

Aries was sometimes accompanied into battle by his sister, Eris (Goddess of Discord) and Hades (Lord

of the Dead). Aries was the father of Deimos (Fear) and Phobos (Terror), among others. His son

Kyknos was killed by Herakles (Theogony 421) but Aries was unable to avenge the death because Zeus

would not permit his least favorite son, Aries, to harm his favorite son, Herakles. Although hated and

feared, Aries was honored by all great warriors, even Herakles.

Aries rode into battle on the side of the Trojans with his horses, Flame and Terror, pulling his war chariot. He swooped down to help Aphrodite defend her son Aineias (Iliad 5.355) and saved him from

sure death at the hands of the Achaians. While Ares protected Aineias with his shield, Aphrodite made

her escape to Mount Olympus to tend her wounds.

He is most often confused with the Roman god, Mars.

Artemis Diana

ArtemisEEEEHR tuh mihs

The Virgin Goddess of the Moon, twin sister of Apollo.

The children of Zeus and Leto, she and Apollo were born on the Island of Delos. Both are associated with the bow. Apollo is said to use the curved bow and Artemis uses the silver bow. She is one of only three who are immune to the enchantments of Aphrodite (the other two are Hestia and Athene).

She is a friend to mortals, and dances through the countryside in her silver sandals giving her divine protection to the wild beasts, particularly the very young. She rides her silver chariot across the sky and shoots her arrows of silver Moonlight to the earth below.

She, like the other Olympians, has favorites among the mortals but she could not protect the fine huntsman, Skamandros, from the spear of Menelaos at the battle for Troy.

Unlike her brother Apollo, Artemis is not skilled in warcraft but she can punish and kill as the will of Zeus dictates. In The Iliad (24.603), her mother, Leto, was insulted by a woman named Niobe. Niobe boasted that she had twelve children and Leto only had two. As punishment, Apollo killed Niobe's six sons and Artemis killed her six daughters.

In The Odyssey (15.403), Odysseus was told the story of a wonderful island, Syria, where hunger and grim old age have no dominion. When the Fates determined that the noble inhabitants of this island were

at the end of their lives, Artemis and Apollo would swoop down and painlessly kill them with their silver bows.

She is sometimes confused with the Roman goddess, Diana.

Athena Minerva

AtheneEEEuh THEE nee

Goddess of Wisdom

There is always a degree of uncertainty when we try to be specific as to the names and origins of the Greek gods. This is especially true of Athene. She is called Athene in The Iliad but after 500 B.C.E. she is referred to as Athena. Her various other names are of uncertain meaning: Pallas Athene (the 'young woman' Athene?), Tritogeneia (?) and glaukopis (blue eyed?) are a few examples.

Her mother, Metis, was the first wife of Zeus and her name (Metis) might mean 'wisdom'. If this is true, then it would be more proper to call Athene 'The Daughter of Wisdom' instead of 'The Goddess of Wisdom'.

When Zeus saw that Metis was pregnant, he was afraid that the child, if allowed to live, would be his doom. He swallowed Metis to prevent the birth. It didn't work. Athene sprang, fully armed and armored, from the head of Zeus but Metis was never seen again.

Athene is the virgin goddess of intellect and invention. She is one of only three who can resist the charms and spells of Aphrodite. Hestia and Artemis are the other two.

At the battle of Troy Pallas Athene, descended Olympus and strode between the two armies, only to inspire the Trojan, Pandaros, to a supreme act of cowardice. Pandaros, against all oaths, loosed the arrow that broke the fragile peace. The arrow injured Menelaos and the bloody war was resumed to

the
delight and horror of the Olympians.

To avenge Aphrodite's meddling, Athene gave Diomedes the ability to see the immortals on the battlefield and advised him to avoid them, but she suggested that if he sees Aphrodite, to attack her (Iliad 5.129). Diomedes obeyed, and Aphrodite was the first immortal to be wounded on that bloody day (Iliad 5.337).

Athene is called the grim goddess because the snaky head of The Gorgon, Medusa is on her aegis, but Athene's gift of the olive tree made her 'grimness' tolerable. The city, Athens, was named in her honor.

Her love and protection of Odysseus permitted the long suffering hero to finally return home to his wife and son again. She would assume the shape of men (Odyssey 8.8), women (Odyssey 6.23) and children (Odyssey 7.20) to better serve as guide and protector of the resourceful Odysseus. (Please see my Book Review page)

She is often confused with the Roman goddess, Minerva.

Demeter Ceres

DemeterEEEEduh MEE tur

Goddess of the Harvest

The Titans, Kronos and Rhea had six children: Demeter, Hera, Poseidon, Hades, Hestia and Zeus.

Demeter is the fair haired earth goddess who blesses all phases of the harvest. She walks the furrowed fields dressed in green and displays her moods with feast and famine.

Demeter and the Abduction of Persephone

The story of the abduction of Persephone is best told in the Hymn to Demeter. The story begins in the middle, i.e., Persephone is kidnapped as part of a secret agreement between Zeus and Hades. Although Demeter is one of the six Olympians and brother to Zeus and Hades, she was not told of the fate of her beloved daughter until it was (almost) too late.

While at play with the beautiful daughters of Okeanos, Persephone was picking flowers... but these weren't earthly flowers... these flowers were the work of Zeus and put there for "a girl with a flower's beauty". The flowers were there to guide Persephone to The Trap. A beautiful, divine trap... the trigger for the trap was an irresistible flower with one hundred stems of fragrant blossoms. When Persephone reached out with both hands to pluck the flower the earth opened at her feet. Hades roared forth in his golden chariot and seized her before the alarm could be raised.

No mortal on the earth heard Persephone's pleas for help before she vanished into The Underworld. Of the immortals, only two heard the faint cries of the abducted girl: Hekate and Helios.

Demeter began searching in vain for her daughter. Her sorrow was so great that she denied herself all food, drink, and comfort for nine days. When Dawn arrived on the tenth day, Hekate came to Demeter and told her that she had heard a voice but had not seen the abduction of poor Persephone. The two goddesses went to Helios because he sees all mortal and immortal actions. Helios, indeed knew the plot and the players. He told Demeter that the blame was that of Zeus, Zeus and Hades. He further advised her to accept the situation because Hades was Lord of Many and "not an unseemly bridegroom". Demeter did not like his advice and choose a long, brooding path to regain her precious daughter.

In a strange act of revenge, Demeter, disguised as a mature woman, became the servant and nanny for the infant son of Keleos, and his wife Metaneira. The boy, Demophoon, was raised to be noble and pure but Demeter was surely 'stealing' the boys affection and loyalty away from his parents (just as her daughter had been stolen from her). But before Demeter (still in disguise) could make Demophoon immortal, Metaneira recognized Demeter for the goddess she was and stopped the ceremony.

Keleos, and the other nobles were glad to oblige when Demeter demanded that a temple be built in her honor. After it was completed, she retreated into the temple and her brooding took on a deadly turn. The following year, no seed sprouted. No barley grew in the plowed fields. The mortals were doomed to famine and eventual destruction if Demeter did not lift her curse.

Zeus sent Iris to dissuade Demeter from her destructive course but Demeter was unmoved. In turn, all the immortals came to Demeter's temple and begged the blond goddess to change her mind and give life back to the earth. She refused them all.

Zeus now sent Hermes to the underworld to speak with Hades and Persephone. Hermes explained the situation and suggested, with gentle words, that Persephone be returned to her mother. Hades was filled with compassion but he was also intent on keeping his bride. He offered Persephone a honey-sweet pomegranate seed as she departed. By tasting the seed she became eternally bound to Hades and The Underworld.

Demeter was joyous when she saw her darling Persephone again but her joy was tempered with the fact that Hades had tricked the innocent Persephone and she must eventually return to him.

Now, in an effort to save the earth and appease his sister, Zeus sent Rhea, mother of the Olympians, and offered Demeter honors if she would only return to Olympos and lift the curse that was killing the earth. Zeus promised that Persephone could spend two thirds of the year with her mother but the remaining third of the year would be spent with her husband, Hades.

Demeter was moved by her mother's plea. The earth began to swiftly recover its vitality and became fertile again. Demeter and Persephone ascended to Olympos and it is said that those on earth whom they gladly love are thrice blessed. It's interesting to note that the year was divided into thirds, just as the three brothers, Zeus, Hades and Poseidon, divided creation into thirds after the overthrow of Kronos.

When Persephone is with Hades the earth is wracked by the sorrow of her mother. But, when Persephone returns from The Underworld to walk the earth again, Demeter pours forth the blessings of Spring to welcome her beloved daughter home.

Her age old feud with her brother, Poseidon, might serve to explain why the edge of the sea is barren of crops. The origin of this feud is vague.

She is most often confused with the Roman goddess, Ceres.

Erinyes Furiae

The Punisher of the Unfaithful

Originally called Erinys... later called, Erinyes. Referred to as, "the mist-walking..." and, with fear and

respect, "the kindly one". She would harass and injure her prey but not kill them. Homer refers to her in

the singular (Odyssey 15.234) but, much later (circa 450 B.C.E.), Euripides used the number 'three' and eventually 'they' assumed the names: Tisiphone, Megaera and Alecto. Their brass wings made escape impossible, their ripping claws made their torment relentless and horrible.

We often confuse 'them' with the Roman goddesses, the Furiae.

Eris Discordia

Goddess of Discord,

Sister of Ares, daughter of Zeus and Hera

Eros Cupid

Fates Morae

Graces Charites

Hades Pluto

Hephaistos Vulcan

Hera Juno

Herakles Hercules

Hermes Mercury

Hestia Vesta

Hours Horae

Hypnos Somnus

Kronos Saturn

Odysseus Ulysses

Pan Faunus

Persephone Proserpina

Poseidon Neptune

Zeus Jupiter