

Ancient Goddesses and Gods

Women in Antiquity | Meeting #3

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Upcoming Dates

- Monday, October 6
Images Essay Due
- Tuesday, September 23
No class meeting
- Sunday, September 14
Responses for Week 3 Due

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Five things today

- The Aegean world
- The Greeks and their gods
- Pre-Olympian gods
- Strong goddesses and philandering gods
- Medusa and Pandora

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Quiz #1 | Ancient Goddesses and Gods

- According to Pausanias, Athena, the Greek goddess of war and wisdom, is "the most complex of the goddesses" because:
a. She has a complicated love life
b. She works all day and parties all night
☒ c. She possesses both masculine and feminine qualities
d. She has seven uteruses
- A double standard seen in stories about the gods' and goddesses' relationships is:
☒ a. Goddesses are expected to sleep only with other gods, but gods can sleep with whoever
b. Goddesses can sleep with women, but gods can never sleep with men
c. Gods can give fruit baskets and other gifts to their lovers, but goddesses can't
d. Curing your lover can only be done on Sundays
- The "virginal" Olympian goddesses (that is, goddesses who are unmarried and not bound to a male god) include all of the following [\[see 3.1.1\]](#):
a. Athena
b. Artemis
c. Hestia
☒ d. Hera
- Mother goddesses in various cultures make a connection between female fertility and:
a. architecture
☒ b. agriculture
c. astrology
d. anemophysics
- The pre-Olympian god Cronus is known for all of the following [\[see 3.1.2\]](#):
a. Castrating his father with a sickle
b. Swallowing his own children
c. Being defeated by Zeus with the help of Cronus's wife Rhea
☒ d. Having weekly in goats' milk

Extra Credit

EC: In the readings (Pausanias or Hesiod), which goddess's story stood out to you? Why?

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Responses

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Questions about whatever



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The Aegean world

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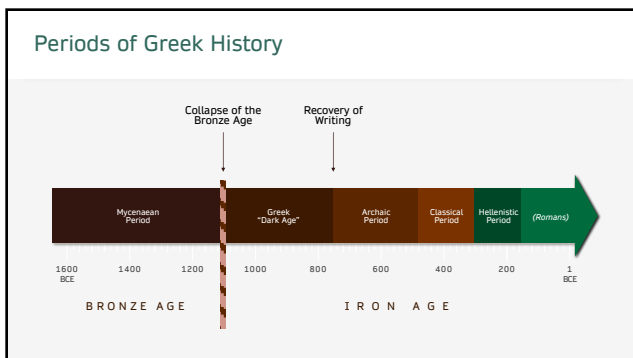
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Minoans

- Indigenous Aegean city-state culture
- No writing, only images
- Sacred places located in the depths of nature, not in great temples in the cities
- Some imagery seems to emphasize female deities and priestesses

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Mycenaean Greeks

- Massive migration of Indo-Europeans from the north into the Aegean
- Envied and emulated the Minoan city-state industrial culture
- Brought with them Indo-European ideas of the gods
 - Ruling sky god
 - Wide pantheon of gods and goddesses

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The Trojan War

- Fight to the death for Aegean economic power
- Some argue that the war is entirely mythological
- Archaeological evidence of Troy being violently destroyed ca. 1200 BCE

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Homer

- Key works: *Iliad* and *Odyssey*
- Written version of a story told orally for 500 years
- Focus on flawed Greeks and noble Trojans
- Has the Trojan War caused by abduction of Helen by a Trojan prince

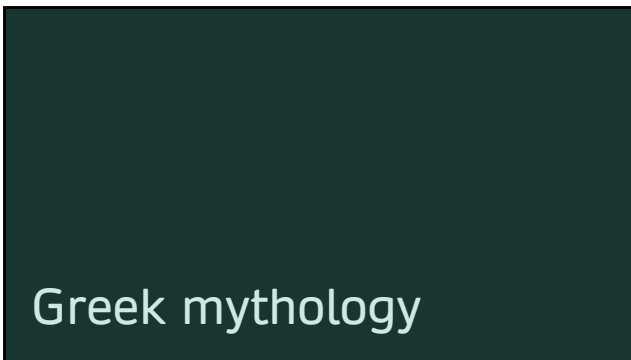
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Hesiod

- Key works:
Theogony,
Works and Days
- Perspective of a small landholder
- Writes about the roles of mortals and gods in society and nature

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Greek mythology


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The Greeks and their gods

- No priestly class
- Their understanding of the gods comes from literature
- Gods react to mortals' betrayals of the community
- Rarely punish the wrongdoer only, often visiting suffering on family and descendants

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Great mothers vs. goddesses

- Birth of all nature vs. functional roles
- Gods and goddesses

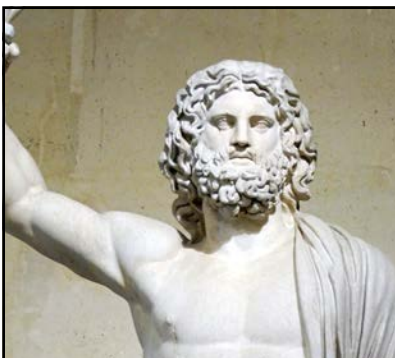
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Pre-Olympian Gods

- Gaia and Cronos show basic Greek gender archetypes
- Cronos
 - Rivalry between fathers and sons – males in fierce rivalry with each other
 - Male archetype = reactive, destructive, animalistic
- Gaia and Rhea
 - Move in opposite direction, counteract hostility, actively create a future
 - Female archetype = wise, constructive, rational

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Zeus

- King/father of the gods
- Wife is goddess of marriage
- Known for having sex with mortals and gods
- Why is Zeus portrayed this way?


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Primary Source Reading

Hesiod
Theogony

Hesiod's treatment of the Titans
Zeus's first children are the Muses
Hekate's unique and independent place among the gods
The price of Prometheus's betrayal

- The creation of "an evil thing for men": the beauty of women
- Men must marry to avoid solitary, demeaning final years



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Olympian goddesses



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Athena

- Daughter of Zeus
- Goddess of wisdom, warfare, and handicraft
- "The most complex of the goddesses"

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Birth of Athena

- Several versions
- Zeus swallows pregnant Metis
- Athena emerges from Zeus's forehead
- Complicates idea of parentage

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Aspects and Epithets

- Gods and goddesses serve different roles
 - Sometimes regional or the result of merging different myths
- Athena
 - Athena Parthenos ("the pure")
 - Athena Nike ("the victorious")
 - Athena Polias ("of the city")
 - Pallas Athena ("heroine")

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Artemis

- Goddess of the hunt, animals, virginity, young women, and archery
- Strength and independence

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Hestia

- Goddess of the domestic and civic hearth; the home; and sacred and sacrificial fire
- Not the subject of stories

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Aphrodite

- Goddess of love, lust, beauty, and sexuality
- Reflects both carnal sexuality and emotional union

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Birth of Aphrodite

- Genitals thrown into the sea
- Results in her being formed in the foam

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Hera

- Goddess of marriage and matrons
- Myths about anger and vengeance toward Zeus's conquests and offspring

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Demeter

- Goddess of the harvest, agriculture
- Key myth involves her daughter, Persephone (Korē)

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Secondary Source Reading

Lucia Nixon
"The Cults of Demeter and Korē"

- Collective religion – public festivals in agora
- Cults and rituals – Some just for women
 - Literal and figurative sanctuaries
 - Several about Demeter and Korē/Persephone
- Nice contrast to father/son hostility among gods
 - Parallel land fertility, human fertility
 - Agricultural revolution makes possible creation of the future (grow a community)
- Demeter represents ultimate capacity of humans not just to survive but to grow



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Hekate

- Goddess of magic, the moon, the night, and crossroads
- On the boundary between the human and divine worlds

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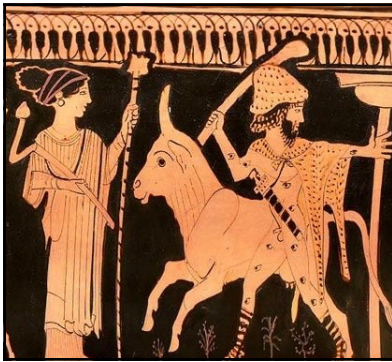


Olympian goddesses

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Mortals, demigods,
and monsters

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Gods with mortals

- Male gods often shown seducing or raping mortals
 - Sometimes the god takes the form of an animal
 - Consequences for female victims, but not the god
 - Fallout different for male vs. female victims
- Female gods expected to consort with peers only

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Pandora

- "First woman"
- Zeus was angry over Prometheus's theft of fire
- Pandora given as bride to Prometheus's brother
 - Made to be beautiful and alluring
 - Bears a gift of jar containing evils
- In some versions there are two jars

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Secondary Source Reading


From I. Zeitlin

"Signifying Difference: The Myth of Pandora"

- Pandora and Hekate
 - Pandora – represents rupture between gods and mortals
 - Hekate represents intermediation between divine and mortal
- Pandora seen as an image of the gods and something new and different
 - Evolution from the divine to the mortal (!)
 - Power of reason and ability to grow



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Medusa

- One of the Gorgons
- Anyone who looked upon her was turned to stone


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Secondary Source Reading

Philip E. Slater

"The Greek Family in History and Myth"

- Relationship between parent and child and how this resonates in mythology and epic poetry
- Medusa represents all that men fear in women
 - Creates incapacity, inability to act or think
 - The ultimate Greek monster
- Reflection of this idea in ordinary life – fear carries over in boy's relationship with mother ("Medusa dread")
 - Mother does not necessarily have positive relation with child
 - Symbolized in legend and mythology in story of Agamemnon's family
- Solution of rejecting mother and devotion to father has a certain appeal in the Greek mind
 - Not a lot of positive father/son models in literature



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