

Notes on Quiz #1: Ancient Goddesses and Gods

1. Pomeroy calls Athena/Minerva “the most complex of the goddesses.” What’s unusual or distinctive about her?

The text draws attention how she's presented as a "masculine woman": female in appearance and in some aspects (olive fertility, handicrafts), but associated with traditionally “male” elements (warrior goddess, protector of the citadel, depicted with armor and weapons, patroness of particular warriors; goddess of industry and manufacture (but also spinning and weaving); also wisdom, later appropriated by Greek men as a male attribute). Disguising herself as a man is also unusual. She’s a virgin, born of man, not woman, and identifies the father as the true parent.

Adding to her complexity is the fact that more stories and plays have survived depicting her, placing her in many diverse contexts.

2. What do you think was Hesiod’s overall message in *Theogony*? What parts stood out to you that relate to this perspective?

There are all kinds of responses to this. Some that are particularly relevant include:

- The treatment of the Titans as primal and powerful, the male Titans animalistic and destructive, the females (Rhea) more rational;
- Zeus’s first children are the Muses, female goddesses of inspiration in the creative arts;
- The positive view taken of Hekate and her unique and independent place among the gods;
- How the price of Prometheus’s betrayal, providing forbidden fire to mortals, is the creation of “an evil thing for men”: the beauty of women, whom men must marry to avoid solitary, demeaning final years.

EC1. The “virginal” (that is, unmarried and non-monogamous) Olympian goddesses include all of the following EXCEPT:

- (a) Athena
- (b) Artemis
- (c) Hestia
- ✓ (d) Hera [*Hera was considered monogamous, as she was always the wife of Zeus*]

EC2. How would you describe the Greek (male) gods’ sexual liaisons with female mortals? How do they compare to goddesses’ liaisons with mortal men?

Pomeroy notes a double standard wherein goddesses are expected to have sex with individuals close to them in rank—male gods or demigods/heroes—but gods fornicate with all sorts.

Gods’ relations with mortals (mostly Zeus and Apollo) tend to result in suffering, revealing the vulnerability of the women and the male gods’ tendency to exploitation.