**Cronus**

by Ron Leadbetter

[](http://www.pantheon.org/areas/gallery/mythology/europe/greek/cronus.html)

Cronus, the son of [Uranus](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/u/uranus.html) and [Gaia](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/g/gaia.html) and the youngest of the twelve [Titans](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/t/titans.html). His wife was also one of the Titans, since he married his sister [Rhea](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/r/rhea.html). Their offspring were [Demeter](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/d/demeter.html), [Hestia](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/h/hestia.html), [Hera](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/h/hera.html), [Hades](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/h/hades.html), [Poseidon](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/p/poseidon.html) and [Zeus](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/z/zeus.html).

It is written that Uranus, who in one version, hid his children away in the bowels of the earth ([Tartarus](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/t/tartarus.html)) as he was aghast at the sight of them, in reality he was fearful of their great strength and power. Gaia found her offspring uncomfortable and also painful and when she found the discomfort too much to bear she hatched a plan, which was to end the passions of Uranus, so no more offspring could be produced and that would be the ending of her hurt. But to achieve this she required the help from one of her children. She asked them all, but only her youngest child Cronus would heed her call. To help Cronus accomplish his task Gaia gave him a adamantine sickle to serve as his weapon.

Cronus lay in wait hidden from view, and when Uranus came to lay with Gaia Cronus struck. With one mighty blow from the sickle Cronus severed the genitals from Uranus' body. From the blood which fell to the earth (Gaia) where born the [Erinyes](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/e/erinyes.html) (Furies), the [Giants](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/g/gigantes.html) and also the Meliae (Nymphs of the manna ash trees). In other versions [Aphrodite](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/a/aphrodite.html) was born from the foam created from the sex organs of Uranus, after they had been thrown into the sea by Cronus.

Once Cronus had castrated Uranus, he and his wife Rhea took the throne. Under their power a time of harmony and prosperity began, which became known as the "[Golden Age](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/g/golden_age.html)"; a time when it was said that people lived without greed or violence, and without toil or the need for laws. But not all was well for Cronus, as it was fated that he would be overthrown by one of his own children. To prevent this from happening he began to swallow his newborn, taking them at birth then swallowing them whole, retaining them inside his own body where they could do him no harm.

Rhea did not like the thoughts of losing all her children, and with the help of Gaia she saved Zeus from this fate. Rhea wrapped a stone in Zeus' swaddling clothes which Cronus took and immediately swallowed thinking it was the child. Gaia and Rhea's plan worked well and the baby Zeus was taken to Crete, and there, in a cave on Mount Dicte, the divine goat [Amaltheia](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/a/amaltheia.html) suckled and raised the infant Zeus. When Zeus had grown into a young man he returned to his fathers domain, and with the help of Gaia, compelled Cronus to regurgitate the five children he had previously swallowed. (In some versions Zeus received help from [Metis](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/m/metis.html) who gave Cronus an emetic potion, which made him vomit up Zeus' brothers and sisters). Zeus led the revolt against his father and the dynasty of the Titans, defeated and then banished them.

The Romans compared Cronus with their [Saturn](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/s/saturn.html), who was to the Romans a corn god. This is from the association of the "Golden Age". In Athens on the 12th day of the month Hekatombaion a festival was held in honour of Cronus, which was known as the "Kronia". It was a celebration of the harvest. In art, Cronus was depicted carrying a sickle used to gather the harvest, but this was also the weapon he used to castrate his father.

The name may derive from the verb *kreno*, which means 'to exercise sway', 'to reign over', 'to govern'.

<http://www.pantheon.org/articles/c/cronus.html>

**Zeus**

by Ron Leadbetter

[](http://www.pantheon.org/areas/gallery/mythology/europe/greek/zeus.html)

Zeus, the youngest son of [Cronus](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/c/cronus.html) and [Rhea](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/r/rhea.html), he was the supreme ruler of Mount Olympus and of the Pantheon of gods who resided there. Being the supreme ruler he upheld law, justice and morals, and this made him the spiritual leader of both gods and men. Zeus was a celestial god, and originally worshiped as a weather god by the Greek tribes. These people came southward from the Balkans circa 2100 BCE. He has always been associated as being a weather god, as his main attribute is the thunderbolt, he controlled thunder, lightning and rain. Theocritus wrote circa 265 BCE: "sometimes Zeus is clear, sometimes he rains". He is also known to have caused thunderstorms. In Homer's epic poem the *Iliad* he sent thunderstorms against his enemies. The name Zeus is related to the Greek word *dios*, meaning "bright". His other attributes as well as lightning were the scepter, the eagle and his [aegis](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/a/aegis.html) (this was the goat-skin of [Amaltheia](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/a/amaltheia.html)).

Before the abolition of monarchies, Zeus was protector of the king and his family. Once the age of Greek kings faded into democracy he became chief judge and peacemaker, but most importantly civic god. He brought peace in place of violence and Hesiod (circa 700 BCE) describes Zeus as "the lord of justice". Zeus was also known as "Kosmetas" (orderer), "Soter" (savior), "Polieos" (overseer of the *polis*, city) and "Eleutherios" (guarantor of political freedoms). His duties in this role were to maintain the laws, protect suppliants, to summon festivals and to give prophecies (his oldest and most famous oracle was at [Dodona](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/d/dodona.html), in Epirus, northwestern Greece). As the supreme deity Zeus oversaw the conduct of civilized life. But the "father of gods and men" as Homer calls him, has many mythological tales.

His most famous was told by Hesiod in his *Theogony*, of how Zeus usurped the kingdom of the immortals from his father. This mythological tale of Zeus' struggle against the [Titans](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/t/titans.html) ([Titanomachy](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/t/titanomachy.html)) had been caused by Cronus, after he had been warned that one of his children would depose him. Cronus knowing the consequences, as he had overthrown his father [Uranus](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/u/uranus.html). To prevent this from happening Cronus swallowed his newborn children [Hestia](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/h/hestia.html), [Demeter](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/d/demeter.html), [Hera](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/h/hera.html), [Hades](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/h/hades.html) and [Poseidon](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/p/poseidon.html), but his wife Rhea (who was also his sister) and [Gaia](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/g/gaia.html) her mother, wrapped a stone in swaddling clothes in place of the infant Zeus. Cronus thinking it was the newborn baby swallowed the stone. Meanwhile Rhea had her baby taken to Crete, and there, in a cave on Mount Dicte, the divine goat Amaltheia suckled and raised the infant Zeus.

When Zeus had grown into a young man he returned to his fathers domain, and with the help of Gaia, compelled Cronus to regurgitate the five children he had previously swallowed (in some versions Zeus received help from [Metis](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/m/metis.html) who gave Cronus an emetic potion, which made him vomit up Zeus' brothers and sisters). However, Zeus led the revolt against his father and the dynasty of the Titans, defeated and then banished them. Once Zeus had control, he and his brothers divided the universe between them: Zeus gaining the heavens, Poseidon the sea and Hades the underworld. Zeus had to defend his heavenly kingdom. The three separate assaults were from the offspring of Gaia: they were the [Gigantes](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/g/gigantes.html), [Typhon](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/t/typhon.html) (Zeus fought them with his thunder-bolt and aegis) and the twin brothers who were called the [Aloadae](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/a/aloadae.html). The latter tried to gain access to the heavens by stacking Mount Ossa on top of Mount Olympus, and Mount Pelion on top of Mount Ossa, but the twins still failed in their attempt to overthrow Zeus. As he did with the Titans, Zeus banished them all to "[Tartarus](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/t/tartarus.html)", which is the lowest region on earth, lower than the underworld.

According to legend, Metis, the goddess of prudence, was the first love of Zeus. At first she tried in vain to escape his advances, but in the end succumbed to his endeavor, and from their union [Athena](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/a/athena.html) was conceived. Gaia warned Zeus that Metis would bear a daughter, whose son would overthrow him. On hearing this Zeus swallowed Metis, the reason for this was to continue to carry the child through to the birth himself. Hera (his wife and sister) was outraged and very jealous of her husband's affair, also of his ability to give birth without female participation. To spite Zeus she gave birth to [Hephaestus](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/h/hephaestus.html) parthenogenetically (without being fertilized) and it was Hephaestus who, when the time came, split open the head of Zeus, from which Athena emerged fully armed.

Zeus had many offspring; his wife Hera bore him [Ares](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/a/ares.html), Hephaestus, [Hebe](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/h/hebe.html) and [Eileithyia](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/e/eileithyia.html), but Zeus had numerous liaisons with both goddesses and mortals. He either raped them, or used devious means to seduce the unsuspecting maidens. His union with [Leto](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/l/leto.html) (meaning the hidden one) brought forth the twins [Apollo](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/a/apollo.html) and [Artemis](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/a/artemis.html). Once again Hera showed her jealousy by forcing Leto to roam the earth in search of a place to give birth, as Hera had stopped her from gaining shelter on terra-firma or at sea. The only place she could go was to the isle of Delos in the middle of the Aegean, the reason being that Delos was, as legend states, a floating island.

Besides deities, he also fathered many mortals. In some of his human liaisons Zeus used devious disguises. When he seduced the Spartan queen [Leda](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/l/leda.html), he transformed himself into a beautiful swan, and from the egg which Leda produced, two sets of twins were born: [Castor](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/c/castor.html) and [Polydeuces](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/p/polydeuces.html) and [Clytemnestra](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/c/clytemnestra.html) and [Helen](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/h/helen.html) of Troy. He visited princess [Danae](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/d/danae.html) as a shower of gold, and from this union the hero [Perseus](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/p/perseus.html) was born. He abducted the Phoenician princess [Europa](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/e/europa.html), disguised as a bull, then carried her on his back to the island of Crete where she bore three sons: [Minos](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/m/minos.html), [Rhadamanthys](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/r/rhadamanthys.html) and Sarpedon. Zeus also took as a lover the Trojan prince [Ganymede](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/g/ganymede.html). He was abducted by an eagle sent by Zeus (some legends believe it was Zeus disguised as an eagle). The prince was taken to Mount Olympus, where he became Zeus' cup-bearer. Zeus also used his charm and unprecedented power to seduce those he wanted, so when Zeus promised [Semele](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/s/semele.html) that he would reveal himself in all his splendor, in order to seduce her, the union produced [Dionysus](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/d/dionysus.html), but she was destroyed when Zeus appeared as thunder and lightening. [Themis](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/t/themis.html), the goddess of justice bore the three [Horae](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/h/horae.html), goddesses of the seasons to Zeus, and also the three [Moirae](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/m/moirae.html), known as these Fates. When Zeus had an affair with [Mnemosyne](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/m/mnemosyne.html), he coupled with her for nine consecutive nights, which produced nine daughters, who became known as the [Muses](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/m/muses.html). They entertained their father and the other gods as a celestial choir on Mount Olympus. They became deities of intellectual pursuits. Also the three [Charites](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/c/charites.html) or Graces were born from Zeus and [Eurynome](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/e/eurynome.html). From all his children Zeus gave man all he needed to live life in an ordered and moral way.

Zeus had many Temples and festivals in his honor, the most famous of his sanctuaries being Olympia, the magnificent "Temple of Zeus", which held the gold and ivory statue of the enthroned Zeus, sculpted by Phidias and hailed as one of the "Seven Wonders of the Ancient World". Also the [Olympic Games](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/o/olympic_games.html) were held in his honor. The Nemean Games, which were held every two years, were to honor Zeus. There were numerous festivals throughout Greece: in Athens they celebrated the marriage of Zeus and Hera with the Theogamia (or Gamelia). The celebrations were many: in all, Zeus had more than 150 epithets, each one being celebrated in his honor.

In art, Zeus was usually portrayed as bearded, middle aged but with a youthful figure. He would look very regal and imposing. Artists always tried to reproduce the power of Zeus in their work, usually by giving him a pose as he is about to throw his bolt of lightening. There are many statues of Zeus, but without doubt the Artemisium Zeus is the most magnificent. It was previously thought to be Poseidon, and can be seen in the Athens National Archaeological Museum.

<http://www.pantheon.org/articles/z/zeus.html>

**Poseidon**

by Paige Sellers

Poseidon is a god of many names. He is most famous as the god of the sea. The son of [Cronus](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/c/cronus.html) and [Rhea](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/r/rhea.html), Poseidon is one of six siblings who eventually "divided the power of the world." His brothers and sisters include: [Hestia](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/h/hestia.html), [Demeter](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/d/demeter.html), [Hera](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/h/hera.html), [Hades](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/h/hades.html), and [Zeus](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/z/zeus.html). The division of the universe involved him and his brothers, Zeus and Hades. Poseidon became ruler of the sea, Zeus ruled the sky, and Hades got the underworld. The other divinities attributed to Poseidon involve the god of earthquakes and the god of horses. The symbols associated with Poseidon include: dolphins, tridents, and three-pronged fish spears.

[](http://www.pantheon.org/areas/gallery/mythology/europe/greek/poseidon.html)Poseidon was relied upon by sailors for a safe voyage on the sea. Many men drowned horses in sacrifice of his honor. He lived on the ocean floor in a palace made of coral and gems, and drove a chariot pulled by horses. However, Poseidon was a very moody divinity, and his temperament could sometimes result in violence. When he was in a good mood, Poseidon created new lands in the water and a calm sea. In contrast, when he was in a bad mood, Poseidon would strike the ground with a trident and cause unruly springs and earthquakes, ship wrecks, and drownings.

Poseidon was similar to his brother Zeus in exerting his power on women and in objectifying masculinity. He had many love affairs and fathered numerous children. Poseidon once married a Nereid, [Amphitrite](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/a/amphitrite.html), and produced [Triton](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/t/triton.html) who was half-human and half-fish. He also impregnated the Gorgon [Medusa](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/m/medusa.html) to conceive Chrysaor and [Pegasus](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/p/pegasus.html), the flying horse. The rape of Aethra by Poseidon resulted in the birth of [Theseus](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/t/theseus.html); and he turned [Caeneus](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/c/caeneus.html) into a man, at her request, after raping her. Another rape involved [Amymone](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/a/amymone.html) when she tried to escape from a satyr and Poseidon saved her. Other offspring of Poseidon include: [Eumolpus](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/e/eumolpus.html), the Giant Sinis, Polyphemus, [Orion](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/o/orion.html), King Amycus, [Proteus](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/p/proteus.html), [Agenor](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/a/agenor.html) and Belus from [Europa](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/e/europa.html), [Pelias](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/p/pelias.html), and the King of Egypt, Busiris.

One of the most notorious love affairs of Poseidon involves his sister, Demeter. Poseidon pursued Demeter and to avoid him she turned herself into a mare. In his lust for her, Poseidon transformed himself into a stallion and captured her. Their procreation resulted in a horse, Arion. Poseidon is Greek for "Husband" (possibly of wheat), and therefore it is thought that he and Demeter (goddess of wheat) are a good match because they reign as the god and goddess of fertility.

[[](http://www.pantheon.org/areas/gallery/mythology/europe/greek/poseidon2.html)](http://www.pantheon.org/areas/gallery/mythology/europe/greek/poseidon2.html)Another infamous story of Poseidon involves the competition between him and the goddess of war, [Athena](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/a/athena.html), for the city of Athens. To win the people of the city over, Poseidon threw a spear at the ground and produced the Spring at the Acropolis. However, Athena won as the result of giving the people of Athens the olive tree. In his anger over the decision, Poseidon flooded the Attic Plain. Eventually, Athena and Poseidon worked together by combining their powers. Even though Poseidon was the god of horses, Athena built the first chariot. Athena also built the first ship to sail on the sea over which Poseidon ruled.

Poseidon often used his powers of earthquakes, water, and horses to inflict fear and punishment on people as revenge. Though he could be difficult and assert his powers over the gods and mortals, Poseidon could be cooperative and it was he who helped the Greeks during the Trojan War. Poseidon is an essential character in the study of Greek mythology

<http://www.pantheon.org/articles/p/poseidon.html>

**Hades**

by Micha F. Lindemans

Hades is the lord of the dead and ruler of the nether world, which is referred to as the domain of Hades or, by transference, as Hades alone. He is the son of [Cronus](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/c/cronus.html) and [Rhea](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/r/rhea.html). When the three sons of Cronus divided the world among each other, Hades was given the underworld, while his brothers [Zeus](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/z/zeus.html) and [Poseidon](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/p/poseidon.html) took the upperworld and the sea respectively. For a while Hades ruled the underworld together with [Persephone](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/p/persephone.html), whom he had abducted from the upperworld, but Zeus ordered him to release Persephone back into the care of her mother [Demeter](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/d/demeter.html). However, before she left he gave her a pomegranate and when she ate of it, it bound her to the underworld forever.

[](http://www.pantheon.org/areas/gallery/mythology/europe/greek/hades.html)

Hades sits on a throne made of ebony, and carries a scepter. He also has a helmet, given to him by the [Cyclopes](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/c/cyclopes.html), which can make him invisible. Hades rules the dead, assisted by various (demonic) helpers, such as [Thanatos](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/t/thanatos.html) and [Hypnos](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/h/hypnos.html), the ferryman [Charon](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/c/charon.html), and the hound [Cerberus](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/c/cerberus.html). Many heroes from Greek mythology have descended into the underworld, either to question the shades or trying to free them. Although Hades does not allow his subjects to leave his domain, on several occasions he has granted permission, such as when [Orpheus](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/o/orpheus.html) requested the return of his beloved [Eurydice](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/e/eurydice.html).

Hades possesses the riches of the earth, and is thus referred to as 'the Rich One'. Possibly also because -- as Sophocles writes -- 'the gloomy Hades enriches himself with our sighs and our tears'. Of all the gods, Hades is the one who is liked the least and even the gods themselves have an aversion of him. People avoided speaking his name lest they attracted his unwanted attention. With their faces averted they sacrificed black sheep, whose blood they let drip into pits, and when they prayed to him, they would bang their hands on the ground. The narcissus and the cypress are sacred to him.

Other names include Clymenus ('notorious'), Eubuleus ('well-guessing') and Polydegmon ('who receives many').

<http://www.pantheon.org/articles/h/hades.html>

**Hera**

by Micha F. Lindemans

The queen of the Olympian deities. She is a daughter of [Cronus](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/c/cronus.html) and [Rhea](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/r/rhea.html), and wife and sister of [Zeus](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/z/zeus.html). Hera was mainly worshipped as a goddess of marriage and birth. It is said that each year Hera's virginity returns by bathing in the well Canathus. The children of Hera and Zeus are the smith-god [Hephaestus](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/h/hephaestus.html), the goddess of youth [Hebe](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/h/hebe.html), and the god of war [Ares](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/a/ares.html). According to some sources, however, her children were conceived without the help of a man, either by slapping her hand on the ground or by eating lettuce: thus they were born, not out of love but out of lust and hatred.

Writers represented Hera as constantly being jealous of Zeus's various amorous affairs. She punished her rivals and their children, among both goddesses and mortals, with implacable fury. She placed two serpents in the cradle of [Heracles](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/h/heracles.html); she had [Io](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/i/io.html) guarded by a hundred-eyed giant; she drove the foster-parents of [Dionysus](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/d/dionysus.html) mad, and tried to prevent the birth of [Apollo](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/a/apollo.html) and [Artemis](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/a/artemis.html). Even Zeus usually could not stand up to her. Sometimes when he got angry, he chained her to the mountain of Olympus by fastening anvils to her feet. However, most of the time Zeus resorted to stratagems: he either hid his illegitimate children, or he changed them into animals.

Hera's main sanctuary was at Argos in the Peloponnesus, where she was worshipped as the town goddess. Also, in this town the Heraia, public festivities, were celebrated. Other temples stood in Olympia, Mycene, Sparta, Paestum, Corinth, Tiryns, Perachora, and on the islands of Samos and Delos.

The peacock (the symbol of pride; her wagon was pulled by peacocks) and the cow (she was also known as Bopis, meaning "cow-eyed", which was later translated as "with big eyes") are her sacred animals. The crow and the pomegranate (symbol of marriage) are also dedicated to her. Other attributes include a diadem and a veil. Hera is portrayed as a majestic, solemn woman.

Her Roman counterpart is [Juno](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/j/juno.html).

<http://www.pantheon.org/articles/h/hera.html>

**Mars**

by Micha F. Lindemans

The god of war, and one of the most prominent and worshipped gods. In early Roman history he was a god of spring, growth in nature, and fertility, and the protector of cattle. Mars is also mentioned as a chthonic god (earth-god) and this could explain why he became a god of death and finally a god of war. He is the son of [Jupiter](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/j/jupiter.html) and [Juno](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/j/juno.html). According to some sources, Mars is the father of [Romulus and Remus](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/r/romulus.html) by the Vestal Ilia ([Rhea Silvia](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/r/rhea_silvia.html)). Because he was the father of these legendary founders of Rome, and thus of the Roman people, the Romans styled themselves 'sons of Mars'.

[](http://www.pantheon.org/areas/gallery/mythology/europe/roman/mars.html)

His main sanctuaries where the temple on the Capitol, which he shared with Jupiter and Quirinus, the temple of Mars Gradivus ("he who precedes the army in battle") where the Roman army gathered before they went to war, and the temple of Mars Ultor ("the avenger"), located on the Forum Augustus. The Campus Martius ("field of Mars"), situated beyond the city walls, was also dedicated to him. Here the army was drilled and athletes were trained. In the Regia on the Forum Romanum, the 'hastae Martiae' ("lances of Mars") were kept. When these lances 'moved', it was seen as a portent of war. The warlord who was to lead the army into battle had to move the lances while saying 'Mars vigila' ("Mars awaken"). As Mars Gradivus, the god preceded the army and led them to victory.

He had several festivals in his honor. On March 1, the Feriae Marti was celebrated. The Armilustrium was held on October 19, and on this day the weapons of the soldiers were ritually purified and stored for winter. Every five years the Suovetaurilia was held. During these fertility and cleansing rites, a pig (*sus*), a sheep (*ovis*) and bull (*taurus*) were sacrificed. The Equirria were on February 27 and March 14, on which horse races were held. The Quinquatrus was on March 19 and the Tubilustrium on March 23, on which weapons and war-trumpets were cleansed. The priests of Mars, who also served Quirinus, were called the Salii ("jumpers"), derived from the procession through the streets of the city which they completed by jumping the entire way and singing the Carmen Saliare. Mars' own priest was called the flamen Martialis.

Mars is portrayed as a warrior in full battle armor, wearing a crested helmet and bearing a shield. His sacred animals are the wolf and the woodpecker, and he is accompanied by Fuga and Timor, the personifications of flight and fear. The month March (Martius) is named after him (wars were often started or renewed in spring). His Greek equivalent is the god [Ares](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/a/ares.html).

<http://www.pantheon.org/articles/m/mars.html>

**Athena**

by Ryan Tuccinardi

Athena, the Greek goddess of wisdom, war, the arts, industry, justice and skill. She was the favorite child of [Zeus](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/z/zeus.html). She had sprung fully grown out of her father's head. Her mother was [Metis](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/m/metis.html), goddess of wisdom and Zeus' first wife. In fear that Metis would bear a son mightier than himself. Zeus swallowed her and she began to make a robe and helmet for her daughter. The hammering of the helmet caused Zeus great pain in the form of headaches and he cried out in agony. Skilled [Hephaestus](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/h/hephaestus.html) ran to his father and split his skull open and from it emerged Athena, fully grown and wearing her mother's robe and helmet. She is the virgin mother of Erichthnonius.

[](http://www.pantheon.org/areas/gallery/mythology/europe/greek/athena.html)

Athena and her uncle [Poseidon](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/p/poseidon.html) were both very fond of a certain city in Greece. Both of them claimed the city and it was decided that the one that could give the finest gift should have it. Leading a procession of citizens, the two gods mounted the Acropolis. Poseidon struck the side of the cliff with his trident and a spring welled up. The people marveled, but the water was as salty as Poseidon's sea and it was not very useful. Athena's gift was an olive tree, which was better because it gave the people food, oil and wood. Athena named her city Athens.

Athena's companion was the goddess of victory, [Nike](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/n/nike.html), and her usual attribute is the owl. Athena possessed the [Aegis](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/a/aegis.html).

<http://www.pantheon.org/articles/a/athena.html>

**Apollo**

by Ron Leadbetter

[](http://www.pantheon.org/areas/gallery/mythology/europe/greek/apollo.html)

The son of [Zeus](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/z/zeus.html) and [Leto](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/l/leto.html), and the twin brother of [Artemis](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/a/artemis.html). Apollo was the god of music (principally the lyre, and he directed the choir of the [Muses](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/m/muses.html)) and also of prophecy, colonization, medicine, archery (but not for war or hunting), poetry, dance, intellectual inquiry and the carer of herds and flocks. He was also a god of light, known as "Phoebus" (radiant or beaming, and he was sometimes identified with [Helios](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/h/helios.html) the sun god). He was also the god of plague and was worshiped as [Smintheus](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/s/smintheus.html) (from *sminthos*, rat) and as Parnopius (from *parnops*, grasshopper) and was known as the destroyer of rats and locust, and according to Homer's *Iliad*, Apollo shot arrows of plague into the Greek camp. Apollo being the god of religious healing would give those guilty of murder and other immoral deeds a ritual purification. Sacred to Apollo are the swan (one legend says that Apollo flew on the back of a swan to the land of the Hyperboreans, he would spend the winter months among them), the wolf and the dolphin. His attributes are the bow and arrows, on his head a laurel crown, and the cithara (or lyre) and plectrum. But his most famous attribute is the tripod, the symbol of his prophetic powers.

When the goddesss [Hera](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/h/hera.html), the wife of Zeus (it was he who had coupled with Leto) found out about Leto's pregnancy, she was outraged with jealousy. Seeking revenge Hera forced Leto to roam the earth in search of a place to give birth. Sicne Hera had forbidden Leto to stay anywhere on earth, either on terra-ferma or an island at sea, the only place to seek shelter was Delos, being in the center of the Aegean, and also difficult to reach, as there were strong under-currents, because it was said to be a floating island. Because it was a floating island, it was not considered either of Hera's prohibitions, and so Leto was able to give birth to the divine twins Apollo and Artemis (before Leto gave birth to Apollo, the island was encircled by a flock of swans, this is why the swan was sacred to him). As a gesture of thanks Delos was secured to the sea-bed by four columns to give it stability, and from then on it became one of the most important sanctuaries to Apollo. (A variation of Apollo's birth was that the jealous Hera had incarcerated [Ilithyia](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/i/ilithyia.html), the goddess of childbirth, but the other gods intervened forcing Hera to release Ilithyia, which allowed Leto to give birth ).

Apollo's first achievement was to rid Pytho ([Delphi](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/d/delphi.html)) of the serpent (or dragon) [Python](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/p/python.html). This monstrous beast protected the sanctuary of Pytho from its lair beside the Castalian Spring. There it stood guard while the "Sibyl" gave out her prophecies as she inhaled the trance inducing vapors from an open chasm. Apollo killed Python with his bow and arrows (Homer wrote "he killed the fearsome dragon Python, piercing it with his darts"). Apollo not only took charge of the oracle but rid the neighboring countryside of widespread destruction, as Python had destroyed crops, sacked villages and polluted streams and springs. However, to make amends for killing Python, as the fearsome beast was the son of [Gaia](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/g/gaia.html), Apollo had to serve king [Admetus](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/a/admetus.html) for nine years (in some versions eight) as a cowherd. This he did, and when he returned to Pytho he came in the guise of a dolphin bringing with him priests from Crete (Apollo's cult title "Delphinios" meaning dolphin or porpoise, is probably how Delphi was so named). After killing Python and taking possession of the oracle, the god of light (Phobus) became known as "Pythian Apollo". He dedicated a bronze tripod to the sanctuary and bestowed divine powers on one of the priestesses, and she became known as the "Pythia". It was she who inhaled the hallucinating vapors from the fissure in the temple floor, while she sat on a tripod chewing laurel leaves. After she mumbled her answer, a male priest would translate it for the supplicant. Delphi became the most important oracle center of Apollo, there were several including Clarus and Branchidae.

Apollo, as with Zeus his father, had many love affairs with goddesses and mortals. Apollo's infatuation for the nymph [Daphne](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/d/daphne.html), which had been invoked by the young god of love [Eros](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/e/eros.html), because Apollo had mocked him, saying his archery skills were pathetic, and Apollo's singing had also irritated him. Daphne was the beautiful daughter of the river god Ladon, and she was constantly pursued by Apollo. To escape from Apollo's insistent behavior, she fled to the mountains, but the persistent Apollo followed her. Annoyed by this, she asked the river god [Peneus](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/p/peneus.html) for help, which he did. As soon as Apollo approached Daphne, he tried to embrace her, but when he stretched out his arms she transformed into a laurel tree. Apollo, distraught by what had happened, made the laurel his sacred tree. Apollo also loved [Cyrene](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/c/cyrene.html), she was another nymph, and she bore Apollo a son: [Aristaeus](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/a/aristaeus.html), a demi-god, who became a protector of cattle and fruit trees, and a deity of hunting, husbandry and bee-keeping. He taught men dairy skills and the use of nets and traps in hunting.

The most famous mortal loves of Apollo was [Hecuba](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/h/hecuba.html), she was the wife of [Priam](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/p/priam.html), the king of Troy. She bore him Troilius. Foretold by an oracle, as long as Troilius reached the age of twenty, Troy could not be defeated. But the hero [Achilles](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/a/achilles.html) ambushed and killed him, when the young prince and his sister Polyxena secretly visited a spring. Apollo also fell in love with [Cassandra](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/c/cassandra.html), the sister of Troilius, and daughter of Hecuba and Priam. He seduced Cassandra on the promise that he would teach her the art of prophecy, but having learnt the prophetic art she rejected him. Apollo, being angry of her rejection punished her, by declaring her prophecies never to be accepted or believed.

[Asclepius](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/a/asclepius.html), the god of healing, was also Apollo's offspring, after his union with [Coronis](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/c/coronis.html), who was daughter of [Phlegyas](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/p/phlegyas.html), king of the Lapiths. While she was pregnant by Apollo, Coronis fell in love with Ischys, son of Elatus, but a crow informed Apollo of the affair. Apollo sent his twin sister Artemis to kill Coronis, and Artemis carried out he brothers wishes. While her body was burning on the funeral pyre, Apollo removed the unborn child, and took him to [Chiron](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/c/chiron.html), who raised the child Asclepius.

Apollo also, as did his father Zeus, fall in love with one of his own gender, [Hyacinthus](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/h/hyacinthus.html), a Spartan prince. He was very handsome and athletic, which inflamed the passions of Apollo. One day while Apollo and Hyacinthus were practicing throwing the discus, [Zephyrus](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/z/zephyrus.html), the god of the west wind, who was also attracted to the young prince, and jealous of Apollo's amorous affection towards the boy, made the discus veer off course by blowing an ill wind. The discus, which Apollo had thrown, hit Hyacinthus, smashing his skull. Apollo rushed to him, but he was dead. The god was overcome with grief, but to immortalize the love he had for the beautiful youth, he had a flower grow were his blood had stained the earth. Apollo also loved the young boy [Cyparissus](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/c/cyparissus.html), a descendant of [Heracles](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/h/heracles.html). The impassioned Apollo gave Cyparissus a sacred deer, as a love token. The young deer became tame, and was the constant companion of the boy, until a tragic accident occurred. As the young deer lay sleeping in the shade of the undergrowth, Cyparissus threw his javelin, which by chance hit, and killed the deer. Grief-stricken by what had happened, Cyparissus wanted to die. He asked Apollo to let his tears fall for all eternity. With apprehension Apollo transformed the boy into a tree, the cypress, which became the symbol of sorrow, as the sap on its trunk forms droplets, like tears.

Apollo could also be ruthless when he was angered. The mortal [Niobe](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/n/niobe.html), boasted to Apollo's mother Leto, that she had fourteen children (in some versions six or seven), which must make her more superior than Leto, who had only bore two. Apollo greatly angered by this slew her sons, and Artemis killed Niobe's daughters. Niobe wept so much that she turned into a pillar of stone. Apollo was infuriated when the satyr [Marsyas](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/m/marsyas.html) challenged Apollo to music contest. After winning the competition, Apollo had Marsyas flayed alive, for being so presumptuous, as to challenge a god.

Apollo was worshiped throughout the Greek world, at Delphi every four years they held the Pythian Games in his honor. He had many epithets, including "Pythian Apollo" (his name at Delphi), "Apollo Apotropaeus" (Apollo who averts evil), and "Apollo Nymphegetes" (Apollo who looks after the Nymphs). As the god of shepherds he also had the cult titles "Lukeios" (from *lykos*; wolf), protecting the flocks from wolfs, and "Nomius" (of pastures, belonging to shepherds). Being the god of colonists, Apollo influenced his priests at Delphi to give divine guidance, as to where the expedition should proceed. This was during the height of the colonizing era circa 750-550 BCE. Apollo's title was "Archigetes" (leader of colonists). According to one legend, it was Apollo who helped either Cretan or Arcadian colonists found the city of Troy.

In art Apollo is at most times depicted as a handsome young man, clean shaven and carrying either a lyre, or his bow and arrows. There are many sculptures of Apollo and one of the most famous is the central figure from the west pediment of the Temple of Zeus, at Olympia, showing Apollo declaring victory in favor of the Lapiths in their struggle against the [Centaurs](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/c/centaurs.html).

A song sung in honor of Apollo is called a *paean*.

<http://www.pantheon.org/articles/a/apollo.html>

**Venus**

by Micha F. Lindemans

The Roman goddess of love and beauty, but originally a vegetation goddess and patroness of gardens and vineyards. Later, under Greek influence, she was equated with [Aphrodite](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/a/aphrodite.html) and assumed many of her aspects. Her cult originated from Ardea and Lavinium in Latium. The oldest temple known of Venus dates back to 293 BCE, and was inaugurated on August 18. Later, on this date the Vinalia Rustica was observed. A second festival, that of the Veneralia, was celebrated on April 1 in honor of Venus Verticordia, who later became the protector against vice. Her temple was built in 114 BCE. After the Roman defeat near Lake Trasum in 215 BCE, a temple was built on the Capitol for Venus Erycina. This temple was officially opened on April 23, and a festival, the Vinalia Priora, was instituted to celebrate the occasion.

[](http://www.pantheon.org/areas/gallery/mythology/europe/roman/venus.html)

Venus is the daughter of [Jupiter](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/j/jupiter.html), and some of her lovers include [Mars](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/m/mars.html) and [Vulcan](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/v/vulcan.html), modeled on the affairs of Aphrodite. Venus' importance rose, and that of her cult, through the influence of several Roman political leaders. The dictator Sulla made her his patroness, and both Julius Caesar and the emperor Augustus named her the ancestor of their (Julian) family: the 'gens Julia' was [Aeneas](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/a/aeneas.html), son of Venus and the mortal [Anchises](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/a/anchises.html). Ceasar introduced the cult of Venus Genetrix, the goddess of motherhood and marriage, and built a temple for her in 46 BCE. She was also honored in the temple of Mars Ultor. The last great temple of Venus was built by the emperor Hadrianus near the Colusseum in 135 CE.

Roman statues and portraits of Venus are usually identical to the Greek representations of Aphrodite.

<http://www.pantheon.org/articles/v/venus.html>

**Hermes**

by Ron Leadbetter

[](http://www.pantheon.org/areas/gallery/mythology/europe/greek/hermes.html)

Hermes, the herald of the Olympian gods, is the son of [Zeus](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/z/zeus.html) and the nymph [Maia](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/m/maia.html), daughter of [Atlas](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/a/atlas.html) and one of the [Pleiades](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/p/pleiades.html). Hermes is the god of shepherds, land travel, merchants, weights and measures, oratory, literature, athletics and thieves, and known for his cunning and shrewdness. Most importantly, he is the messenger of the gods. Besides that he was also a minor patron of poetry. He was worshiped throughout Greece -- especially in Arcadia -- and festivals in his honor were called Hermoea.

According to legend, Hermes was born in a cave on Mount Cyllene in Arcadia. Zeus had impregnated Maia at the dead of night while all other gods slept. When dawn broke amazingly he was born. Maia wrapped him in swaddling bands, then resting herself, fell fast asleep. Hermes, however, squirmed free and ran off to Thessaly. This is where [Apollo](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/a/apollo.html), his brother, grazed his cattle. Hermes stole a number of the herd and drove them back to Greece. He hid them in a small grotto near to the city of Pylos and covered their tracks. Before returning to the cave he caught a tortoise, killed it and removed its entrails. Using the intestines from a cow stolen from Apollo and the hollow tortoise shell, he made the first lyre. When he reached the cave he wrapped himself back into the swaddling bands. When Apollo realized he had been robbed he protested to Maia that it had been Hermes who had taken his cattle. Maia looked to Hermes and said it could not be, as he is still wrapped in swaddling bands. Zeus the all powerful intervened saying he had been watching and Hermes should return the cattle to Apollo. As the argument went on, Hermes began to play his lyre. The sweet music enchanted Apollo, and he offered Hermes to keep the cattle in exchange for the lyre. Apollo later became the grand master of the instrument, and it also became one of his symbols. Later while Hermes watched over his herd he invented the pipes known as a syrinx (pan-pipes), which he made from reeds. Hermes was also credited with inventing the flute. Apollo, also desired this instrument, so Hermes bartered with Apollo and received his golden wand which Hermes later used as his heralds staff. (In other versions Zeus gave Hermes his heralds staff).

Being the herald (messenger of the gods), it was his duty to guide the souls of the dead down to the underworld, which is known as a psychopomp. He was also closely connected with bringing dreams to mortals. Hermes is usually depicted with a broad-brimmed hat or a winged cap, winged sandals and the heralds staff (kerykeion in Greek, or Caduceus in Latin). It was often shown as a shaft with two white ribbons, although later they were represented by serpents intertwined in a figure of eight shape, and the shaft often had wings attached. The clothes he donned were usually that of a traveler, or that of a workman or shepherd. Other symbols of Hermes are the cock, tortoise and purse or pouch.

Originally Hermes was a phallic god, being attached to fertility and good fortune, and also a patron of roads and boundaries. His name coming from *herma*, the plural being *hermai</I< A herm was a square or rectangular pillar in either stone or bronze, with the head of Hermes (usually with a beard), which adorned the top of the pillar, and male genitals near to the base of the pillar. These were used for road and boundary markers. Also in Athens they stood outside houses to help fend off evil. In Athens of 415 BCE, shortly before the Athenian fleet set sail against Syracuse (during the Peloponnesian War), all the herms throughout Athens were defaced. This was attributed to people who were against the war. Their intentions were to cast bad omens on the expedition, by seeking to offend the god of travel. (This has never been proved as the true reason for the mutilation of the herms.)*

*The offspring of Hermes are believed to be* [*Pan*](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/p/pan.html)*,* [*Abderus*](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/a/abderus.html) *and* [*Hermaphroditus*](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/h/hermaphroditus.html)*. Hermes as with the other gods had numerous affairs with goddesses, nymphs and mortals. In some legends even sheep and goats. Pan, the half man half goat, is believed to be the son of Hermes and* [*Dryope*](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/d/dryope.html)*, the daughter of king Dryops. Pan terrified his mother when he was born, so much so that she fled in horror at the sight of her new born son. Hermes took Pan to Mount Olympus were the gods reveled in his laughter and his appearance and became the patron of fields, woods, shepherds and flocks. Abderus, a companion of the hero* [*Heracles*](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/h/heracles.html)*, is also thought to be a son of Hermes, he was devoured by the Mares of* [*Diomedes*](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/d/diomedes.html)*, after Heracles had left him in charge of the ferocious beasts. Hermaphroditus (also known as Aphroditus) was conceived after the union of Hermes and* [*Aphrodite*](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/a/aphrodite.html)*. He was born on Mount Ida but he was raised by the* [*Naiads*](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/n/naiads.html) *(nymphs of freshwater). He was a androgynous (having the characteristics of both sexes) deity, depicted as either a handsome young man but with female breasts, or as Aphrodite with male genitals.*

*It was Hermes who liberated* [*Io*](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/i/io.html)*, the lover of Zeus, from the hundred-eyed giant* [*Argus*](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/a/argus.html)*, who had been ordered by* [*Hera*](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/h/hera.html)*, the jealous wife of Zeus, to watch over her. Hermes charmed the giant with his flute, and while Argos slept Hermes cut off his head and released Io. Hera, as a gesture of thanks to her loyal servant, scattered the hundred eyes of Argos over the tail of a peacock (Heras' sacred bird). Hermes also used his ingenuity and abilities to persuade the nymph* [*Calypso*](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/c/calypso.html) *to release* [*Odysseus*](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/o/odysseus.html)*, the wandering hero, from her charms. She had kept Odysseus captive, after he was shipwrecked on her island Ogygia, promising him immortality if he married her, but Zeus sent Hermes to release Odysseus. Legend says that Calypso died of grief when Odysseus sailed away. Hermes also saved Odysseus and his men from being transformed into pigs by the goddess and sorceress* [*Circe*](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/c/circe.html)*. He gave them a herb which resisted the spell. Hermes also guided* [*Eurydice*](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/e/eurydice.html) *back down to the underworld after she had been allowed to stay for one day on earth with her husband* [*Orpheus*](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/o/orpheus.html)*.*

*Known for his swiftness and athleticism, Hermes was given credit for inventing foot-racing and boxing. At Olympia a statue of him stood at the entrance to the stadium and his statues where in every gymnasium throughout Greece. Apart from herms, Hermes was a popular subject for artists. Both painted pottery and statuary show him in various forms, but the most fashionable depicted him as a good-looking young man, with an athletic body, and winged sandals and his heralds staff. His Roman counterpart* [*Mercury*](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/m/mercury.html) *inherited his attributes, and there are many Roman copies of Greek artistic creations of Hermes.*

*The Greek post office has Hermes as its symbol.*<http://www.pantheon.org/articles/h/hermes.html>

**Artemis**

by Ron Leadbetter

[](http://www.pantheon.org/areas/gallery/mythology/europe/greek/artemis.html)

The daughter of [Leto](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/l/leto.html) and [Zeus](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/z/zeus.html), and the twin of [Apollo](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/a/apollo.html). Artemis is the goddess of the wilderness, the hunt and wild animals, and fertility (she became a goddess of fertility and childbirth mainly in cities). She was often depicted with the crescent of the moon above her forehead and was sometimes identified with [Selene](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/s/selene.html) (goddess of the moon). Artemis was one of the Olympians and a virgin goddess. Her main vocation was to roam mountain forests and uncultivated land with her [nymphs](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/n/nymphs.html) in attendance hunting for lions, panthers, hinds and stags. Contradictory to the later, she helped in protecting and seeing to their well-being, also their safety and reproduction. She was armed with a bow and arrows which were made by [Hephaestus](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/h/hephaestus.html) and the [Cyclopes](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/c/cyclopes.html).

In one legend, Artemis was born one day before her brother Apollo. Her mother gave birth to her on the island of Ortygia, then, almost immediately after her birth, she helped her mother to cross the straits over to Delos, where she then delivered Apollo. This was the beginning of her role as guardian of young children and patron of women in childbirth. Being a goddess of contradictions, she was the protectress of women in labor, but it was said that the arrows of Artemis brought them sudden death while giving birth. As was her brother, Apollo, Artemis was a divinity of healing, but also brought and spread diseases such as leprosy, rabies and even gout.

Being associated with chastity, Artemis at an early age (in one legend she was three years old) asked her father, the great god Zeus, to grant her eternal virginity. Also, all her companions were virgins. Artemis was very protective of her purity, and gave grave punishment to any man who attempted to dishonor her in any form. [Actaeon](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/a/actaeon.html), while out hunting, accidentally came upon Artemis and her nymphs, who bathing naked in a secluded pool. Seeing them in all their naked beauty, the stunned Actaeon stopped and gazed at them, but when Artemis saw him ogling them, she transformed him into a stag. Then, incensed with disgust, she set his own hounds upon him. They chased and killed what they thought was another stag, but it was their master. As with [Orion](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/o/orion.html), a giant and a great hunter, there are several legends which tell of his death, one involving Artemis. It is said that he tried to rape the virgin goddess, so killed him with her bow and arrows. Another says she conjured up a scorpion which killed Orion and his dog. Orion became a constellation in the night sky, and his dog became Sirius, the dog star. Yet another version says it was the scorpion which stung him and was transformed into the constellation with Orion, the later being Scorpio. Artemis was enraged when one of her nymphs, [Callisto](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/c/callisto.html), allowed Zeus to seduce her, but the great god approached her in one of his guises; he came in the form of Artemis. The young nymph was unwittingly tricked, and she gave birth to [Arcas](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/a/arcas.html), the ancestor of the Arcadians, but Artemis showed no mercy and changed her into a bear. She then shot and killed her. As Orion, she was sent up to the heavens, and became the constellation of the Great Bear (which is also known as the Plough).

Artemis was very possessive. She would show her wrath on anyone who disobeyed her wishes, especially against her sacred animals. Even the great hero [Agamemnon](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/a/agamemnon.html) came upon the wrath of Artemis, when he killed a stag in her sacred grove. His punishment came when his ships were becalmed, while he made his way to besiege Troy. With no winds to sail his ships he was told by the seer [Calchas](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/c/calchas.html) that the only way Artemis would bring back the winds was for him to sacrifice his daughter [Iphigenia](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/i/iphigenia.html). Some versions say he did sacrifice Iphigenia, others that Artemis exchanged a deer in her place, and took Iphigenia to the land of the Tauri (the Crimea) as a priestess, to prepare strangers for sacrifice to Artemis.

Artemis with her twin brother, Apollo, put to death the children of [Niobe](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/n/niobe.html). The reason being that Niobe, a mere mortal, had boasted to Leto, the mother of the divine twins, that she had bore more children, which must make her superior to Leto. Apollo being outraged at such an insult on his mother, informed Artemis. The twin gods hunted them down and shot them with their bows and arrows; Apollo killed the male children and Artemis the girls.

Artemis was worshiped in most Greek cities but only as a secondary deity. However, to the Greeks in Asia Minor (modern day Turkey) she was a prominent deity. In Ephesus, a principal city of Asia Minor, a great temple was built in her honor, which became one of the "Seven Wonders of the Ancient World". But at Ephesus she was worshiped mainly as a fertility goddess, and was identified with Cybele the mother goddess of eastern lands. The cult statues of the Ephesian Artemis differ greatly from those of mainland Greece, whereas she is depicted as a huntress with her bow and arrows. Those found at Ephesus show her in the eastern style, standing erect with numerous nodes on her chest. There have been many theories as to what they represent. Some say they are breasts, others that they are bulls testes which were sacrificed to her. Which is the true interpretation remains uncertain, but each represent fertility.

There were festivals in honor of Artemis, such as the Brauronia, which was held in Brauron; and the festival of Artemis Orthia, held at Sparta, when young Spartan boys would try to steal cheeses from the altar. As they tried they would be whipped, the meaning of Orthia and the nature of the ritual whipping has been lost and there is no logical explanation or translation. Among the epithets given to Artemis are: [Potnia Theron](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/p/potnia.html) (mistress of wild animals) this title was mentioned by the great poet Homer; Kourotrophos (nurse of youth's); Locheia (helper in childbirth); Agrotera (huntress); and Cynthia (taken from her birthplace on Mount Cynthus on Delos). When young girls reached puberty they were initiated into her cult, but when they decided to marry, which Artemis was not against, they were asked to lay in front of the altar all the paraphernalia of their virginity, toys, dolls and locks of their hair, they then left the domain of the virgin goddess.

<http://www.pantheon.org/articles/a/artemis.html>

**Pandora**

by Micha F. Lindemans

In Greek mythology, Pandora was the first woman on earth. [Zeus](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/z/zeus.html) ordered [Hephaestus](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/h/hephaestus.html), the god of craftsmanship, to create her and he did, using water and earth. The gods endowed her with many talents; [Aphrodite](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/a/aphrodite.html) gave her beauty, [Apollo](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/a/apollo.html) music, [Hermes](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/h/hermes.html) persuasion, and so forth. Hence her name: Pandora, "all-gifted".

[](http://www.pantheon.org/areas/gallery/mythology/europe/greek/pandora.html)

When Prometheus stole fire from heaven, Zeus took vengeance by presenting Pandora to [Epimetheus](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/e/epimetheus.html), Prometheus' brother. With her, Pandora had a jar which she was not to open under any circumstance. Impelled by her natural curiosity, Pandora opened the jar, and all evil contained escaped and spread over the earth. She hastened to close the lid, but the whole contents of the jar had escaped, except for one thing which lay at the bottom, and that was Hope.

http://www.pantheon.org/articles/p/pandora.html

**Prometheus**

by Jonathan Vadakethu

Prometheus was the son of [Iapetus](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/i/iapetus.html) who was one of the [Titans](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/t/titans.html). He tricked the gods into eating bare bones instead of good meat. He stole the sacred fire from [Zeus](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/z/zeus.html) and the gods. Prometheus did not tell Zeus the prophecy that one of Zeus's sons will overthrow him. In punishment, Zeus commanded that Prometheus be chained for eternity in the Caucasus. There, an eagle (or, according to other sources, a vulture) would eat his liver, and each day the liver would be renewed. So the punishment was endless, until [Heracles](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/h/heracles.html) finally killed the bird. Prometheus is known to be one of the most interesting characters in Greek Mythology.

[](http://www.pantheon.org/areas/gallery/mythology/europe/greek/prometheus.html)

<http://www.pantheon.org/articles/p/prometheus.html>

**Dionysus**

by Rachel Gross and Dale Grote

Dionysus, also commonly known by his Roman name [Bacchus](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/b/bacchus.html), appears to be a god who has two distinct origins. On the one hand, Dionysus was the god of wine, agriculture, and fertility of nature, who is also the patron god of the Greek stage. On the other hand, Dionysus also represents the outstanding features of mystery religions, such as those practiced at [Eleusis](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/e/eleusis.html): ecstasy, personal delivery from the daily world through physical or spiritual intoxication, and initiation into secret rites. Scholars have long suspected that the god known as Dionysus is in fact a fusion of a local Greek nature god, and another more potent god imported rather late in Greek pre-history from Phrygia (the central area of modern day Turkey) or Thrace.

|  |
| --- |
| [Dionysus](http://www.pantheon.org/areas/gallery/mythology/europe/greek/dionysus3.html) |

According to one myth, Dionysus is the son of the god [Zeus](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/z/zeus.html) and the mortal woman, [Semele](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/s/semele.html) (daughter of Cadmus of Thebes). Semele is killed by Zeus' lightning bolts while Dionysus is still in her womb. Dionysus is rescued and undergoes a second birth from Zeus after developing in his thigh. Zeus then gives the infant to some nymphs to be raised. In another version, one with more explicit religious overtones, Dionysus, also referred to as [Zagreus](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/z/zagreus.html) in this account, is the son of Zeus and [Persephone](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/p/persephone.html), Queen of the Underworld. [Hera](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/h/hera.html) gets the [Titans](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/t/titans.html) to lure the infant with toys, and then they rip him to shreds eating everything but Zagreus' heart, which is saved by either [Athena](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/a/athena.html), [Rhea](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/r/rhea.html), or [Demeter](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/d/demeter.html). Zeus remakes his son from the heart and implants him in Semele who bears a new Dionysus Zagreus. Hence, as in the earlier account, Dionysus is called "twice born." The latter account formed a part of the Orphic religion's religious mythology.

It does seem clear that Dionysus, at least the Phrygian Dionysus, was a late arrival in the Greek world and in Greek mythology. He is hardly mentioned at all in the Homeric epics, and when he is it is with some hostility. A number of his stories are tales of how Dionysus moved into a city, was resisted, and then destroyed those who opposed him. The most famous account of this is that of Euripides in his play *the Bacchae*. He wrote this play while in the court of King Archelaus of Macedon, and nowhere do we see Dionysus more destructive and his worship more dangerous than in this play. Scholars have speculated not unreasonably that in Macedon Euripides discovered a more extreme form of the religion of Dionysus being practiced than the more civil, quiet forms in Athens.

Briefly, Dionysus returns to Thebes, his putative birthplace, where his cousin [Pentheus](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/p/pentheus.html) is king. He has returned to punish the women of Thebes for denying that he was a god and born of a god. Pentheus is enraged at the worship of Dionysus and forbids it, but he cannot stop the women, including his mother [Agave](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/a/agave.html), or even the elder statesmen of the kingdom from swarming to the wilds to join the [Maenads](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/m/maenads.html) (a term given to women under the ecstatic spell of Dionysus) in worship. Dionysus lures Pentheus to the wilds where he is killed by the Maenads and then mutilated by Agave.

A song sung in honor of Dionysus is called a *dithyramb*.

<http://www.pantheon.org/articles/d/dionysus.html>

**Demeter**

by Micha F. Lindemans

The Greek earth goddess *par excellence*, who brings forth the fruits of the earth, particularly the various grains. She taught mankind the art of sowing and ploughing so they could end their nomadic existence. As such, Demeter was also the goddess of planned society. She was very popular with the rural population. As a fertility goddess she is sometimes identified with [Rhea](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/r/rhea.html) and [Gaia](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/g/gaia.html).

[](http://www.pantheon.org/areas/gallery/mythology/europe/greek/demeter.html)In systematized theology, Demeter is a daughter of [Cronus](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/c/cronus.html) and Rhea and sister of [Zeus](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/z/zeus.html) by whom she became the mother of [Persephone](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/p/persephone.html). When Persephone was abducted by [Hades](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/h/hades.html), lord of the underworld, Demeter wandered the earth in search of her lost child. During this time the earth brought forth no grain. Finally Zeus sent [Hermes](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/h/hermes.html) to the underworld, ordering Hades to restore Persephone to her mother. However, before she left, Hades gave her a pomegranate (a common fertility symbol). When she ate from it, she was bound to spend a third of the year with her husband in the infernal regions. Only when her daughter is with her, Demeter lets things grow (summer). The dying and blossoming of nature was thus connected with Demeter.

In the [Eleusinian mysteries](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/e/eleusinian_mysteries.html), Demeter and Persephone were especially venerated. When she was looking for her daughter, in the shape of an old woman called Doso, she was welcomed by [Celeus](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/c/celeus.html), the king of [Eleusis](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/e/eleusis.html) (in Attica). He requested her to nurse his sons Demophon and [Triptolemus](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/t/triptolemus.html) '. To reward his hospitality she intended to make the boy [Demophon](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/d/demophon.html) immortal by placing him each night in the hearth, to burn his mortal nature away. The spell was broken one night because [Metanira](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/m/metanira.html), the wife of Celeus, walked in on her while she was performing this ritual. Demeter taught the other son, Triptolemus, the principles of agriculture, who, in turn, taught others this art. In Demeter's honor as a goddess of marriage, women in Athens, and other centers in Greece, celebrated the feast of Thesmophoria (from her epithet Thesmophoros, "she of the regular customs"). Throughout Classical times members of all social strata came from all parts of the Mediterranean world to be initiated in and celebrate her Mysteries at Eleusis.

In ancient art, Demeter was often portrayed (sitting) as a solemn woman, often wearing a wreath of braided ears of corn. Well-known is the statue made by Knidos (mid forth century BCE). Her usual symbolic attributes are the fruits of the earth and the torch, the latter presumably referring to her search for Persephone. Her sacred animals were the snake (an earth-creature) and the pig (another symbol of fertility). Some of her epithets include Auxesia, Deo, Chloe, and Sito. The Romans equated her with the goddess [Ceres](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/c/ceres.html).

' According to some sources, Demephon and Triptolemus are the same character, namely Triptolemus.<http://www.pantheon.org/articles/d/demeter.html>

**Hephaestus**

by Ron Leadbetter

[](http://www.pantheon.org/areas/gallery/mythology/europe/greek/hephaestus.html)

Hephaestus, the god of fire, especially the blacksmith's fire, was the patron of all craftsmen, principally those working with metals. He was worshiped predominantly in Athens, but also in other manufacturing centres. He was the god of volcanoes. Later, the fire within them represented the smith's furnace. Hephaestus was associated with Mount Etna, which is on the island of Sicily. Known as the lame god, Hephaestus was born weak and crippled. Displeased by the sight of her son, [Hera](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/h/hera.html) threw Hephaestus from Mount Olympus, and he fell for a whole day before landing in the sea. Nymphs rescued him and took him to Lemnos, where the people of the island cared for him. But other versions say [Zeus](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/z/zeus.html) threw him from [Mount Olympus](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/o/olympus.html) after Hephaestus had sided with his mother in a quarrel. This legend says that Hephaestus fell for nine days and nine nights, and he landed on the island of Lemnos. It was on Lemnos where he built his palace and his forges under a volcano.

To gain revenge for his rejection by Hera, Hephaestus fashioned a magic throne, which was presented to her on Mount Olympus. When Hera sat on the throne, it entrapped her, making her a prisoner. The gods on Mount Olympus pleaded with Hephaestus to return to their heavenly domain, as to release Hera, but he refused. [Dionysus](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/d/dionysus.html) gave the smith god wine, and when Hephaestus was intoxicated, Dionysus took him back to Mount Olympus slumped over the back of a mule. This scene was a favorite in Greek art. Hephaestus released Hera after being given the beautiful [Aphrodite](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/a/aphrodite.html) as his bride. Dionysus was rewarded by being made one of the Olympian Pantheon.

Hephaestus is known as the son of Hera and Zeus, although Zeus had nothing to do with the conception. Hephaestus was parthenogenetic, meaning he was conceived without male fertilisation. Hera was jealous of Zeus after he had an affair with [Metis](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/m/metis.html), from which the goddess of prudence was pregnant with [Athena](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/a/athena.html). However, Gaia had warned Zeus that Metis would bear a daughter, whose son would overthrow him. To prevent this, Zeus swallowed Metis, so he could carry the child through to the birth himself, although Zeus could not give birth naturally. For retribution Hera produced (parthenogeny) Hephaestus, and legend says, that Hephaestus split the head of Zeus with an axe, from which Athena appeared fully armed.

One particular legend says that Hephaestus wished to marry Athena, who was also a patron of smiths, but she refused because she found him ugly. Another legend says that Athena disappeared from their bridal bed but Hephaestus did not see her vanish, and spilt his seed on the floor. In a similar version the semen fell from Athena's thigh and from it was produced [Erechtheus](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/e/erechtheus.html), who became a king of Athens. (This relates to Erechtheus being the son of [Gaia](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/g/gaia.html), Earth.)

Aphrodite, in some versions, was the wife of Hephaestus, and he was suspicious that Aphrodite had been committing adultery. To catch her being unfaithful he fashioned an extraordinary chain-link net, so fine and strong no one could escape from it. Then one day he surprised Aphrodite and the war god [Ares](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/a/ares.html) as they lay together in bed. He threw his magic net over them and hauled them before the Olympian gods and exhibited them as they were, naked and wrapped in each others arms. Hephaestus asked the assembled gods for just retribution, but they did the total opposite. The gods roared with laughter at the sight of the naked lovers, after which they allowed the couple to go free. According to Homer's *Iliad* Hephaestus had a wife called [Aglaea](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/a/aglaea.html), who was one of the [Charites](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/c/charites.html) (Graces).

Being a great craftsman Hephaestus manufactured wonderful articles from various materials, primarily from metal. With help from the [Cyclopes](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/c/cyclopes.html), who were his workmen and assistants, he fashioned the thunderbolts for Zeus and his sceptre. He made weapons and armour for the other gods and heroes. For Athena, he made her shield or aegis and for the god of love, [Eros](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/e/eros.html), he made the arrows. The wonderful chariot which the sun god [Helios](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/h/helios.html) rode across the sky was made by Hephaestus and in some versions it was a golden cup or goblet. He also fashioned the invincible armour of [Achilles](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/a/achilles.html). Hephaestus helped to create the first woman, with the assistance of other gods, after Zeus had ordered that there be a new kind of human. Zeus plotted against [Prometheus](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/p/prometheus.html) because he and his race of mortals had only included one gender, which was male, and so Hephaestus formed the first woman from clay. Her name was [Pandora](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/p/pandora.html) (all gifts) and from a supernatural jar, she released the evils of the world on mankind.

Hephaestus is usually shown as an animated cripple bent over his anvil. He wears a beard and is normally depicted as being ugly, and in some art forms he walks with the aid of a stick. Homer describes Hephaestus as lame and walking with the aid of a stick. Hepheastus was worshiped mainly in Athens, where the Temple of Hephaestus and Athena (the Hephaesteum, also known as the Theseum) still stands. It is the most complete example of a "Doric" temple (one of the three orders in Greek architecture). It was built in 449 BCE and stands on a hill close to the Agora at the foot of the Acropolis. Hephaestus and Athena Ergane (protectress of craftsman and artisans) were honoured with the festival "Chalceia" on the 30th day of the month Pyanopsion. The Romans took Hephaestus as one of their own gods attaching the myth and cult to their god of fire and calling him [Vulcan](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/v/vulcan.html) (Volcanus).

<http://www.pantheon.org/articles/h/hephaestus.html>

**Eris**

by Ryan Tuccinardi

Eris is the Greek goddess of discord and strife. She is [Ares](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/a/ares.html)' constant companion and follows him everywhere. Eris is sinister and mean, and her greatest joy is to make trouble. She has a golden apple that is so bright and shiny everybody wants to have it. When she throws it among friends, their friendship come to a rapid end. When she throws it among enemies, war breaks out, for the golden apple of Eris is the Apple of Discord. She did this once during the wedding of [Peleus](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/p/peleus.html) and [Thetis](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/t/thetis.html), and this act brought about the Trojan War.

<http://www.pantheon.org/articles/e/eris.html>

**Paris**

by Jared Martin

Paris was the youngest son of [Priam](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/p/priam.html) and Hecuba. When he was born, it was foretold that he would be the cause of the downfall of Troy, as told in a dream of Hecuba. He was sent out of Troy in hopes that the message would be false. He went to Mount Ida in order to be a shepherd.

[](http://www.pantheon.org/areas/gallery/mythology/europe/greek_people/paris.html)

[Eris](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/e/eris.html), the goddess of strife, was not invited to the wedding of [Peleus](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/p/peleus.html) and Thetis. She came anyway, and she threw a golden apple into the middle of the wedding. Inscribed on the apple was a message. It read "To the fairest." Immediately, the apple was claimed by [Hera](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/h/hera.html), [Athena](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/a/athena.html) and [Aphrodite](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/a/aphrodite.html). They all asked [Zeus](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/z/zeus.html) to decide on who should receive the apple. Zeus knew how much trouble he would be in if he decided on one, because the other two would have grave revenge. So Zeus descended to Mount Ida where Paris was farming and asked him to be the Judge.

Paris, being a mortal, could not decide. However, each of the three goddesses decided to make it easier for him. They would each offer him gifts, and he would get the gifts form the goddess he chose.

Hera offered Paris power. She offered to give him all of Asia, and great power. He thought this offer was great, but he decided to hear the other offers first before deciding.

Athena offered him great wisdom, and great luck in battle. He would be the best strategist in the world. He loved this idea, but he waited to hear Aphrodite's offer.

Aphrodite offered him two things. The first was his body, and the second was the love of the most beautiful woman in the world, [Helen](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/h/helen.html). Since Paris's first love was women, he decided to pick Aphrodite's offer. Hera and Athena vowed vengeance.

Paris soon went home to Troy after that, and with Aphrodite's help, he managed to send a fleet of ships, break into [Menelaus](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/m/menelaus.html)'s palace in Greece and kidnap Helen. He also took a lot of treasure with him.

As Helen was the most beautiful woman in the world, all of her suitors were the most powerful people in Greece. In order for peace to be kept when Helen chose a suitor, all other suitors must vow to keep Helen as the wife of whom she chose. So when Helen chose Menelaus, all of the other suitors had to agree that if anyone tried to kidnap her, they would try to get her back. So, when Paris kidnapped her, all of Greece declared war on the city of Troy.

These actions of Paris and Aphrodite started the Trojan war. Paris fights, but he is mostly out of legend until [Hector](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/h/hector.html) is killed by [Achilles](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/a/achilles.html). While Achilles and his allies bring Hector's body back into Troy for a funeral, Paris take a bow and arrows and shoots it at Achilles. [Apollo](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/a/apollo.html) guides his arrow so that it hits Achilles's foot, in the famous Achilles tendon. Achilles dies. Paris is soon killed afterwards in the war.

<http://www.pantheon.org/articles/p/paris.html>

**Menelaus**

by James Hunter

Menelaus was the son of [Atreus](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/a/atreus.html) and the brother of [Agamemnon](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/a/agamemnon.html). He was married to [Helen](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/h/helen.html), and became the ruler of Helen's homeland, Lacedaemon; the couple had a daughter, [Hermione](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/h/hermione.html). Helen's abduction by [Paris](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/p/paris.html), the son of King [Priam](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/p/priam.html) of Troy, was the cause of the Trojan War.

[](http://www.pantheon.org/areas/gallery/mythology/europe/greek_people/menelaus.html)

Menelaus fought bravely at Troy, although he did not occupy as important a position as his brother Agamemnon, who was the commander-in-chief of the Greek forces. At one point he agreed to settle the conflict by single combat with Paris, but [Aphrodite](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/a/aphrodite.html) interfered to prevent the duel from being decisive, and [Athene](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/a/athena.html) prompted a resumption of hostilities.

During his return from Troy, Menelaus' ships were becalmed on the island of Pharos, near Egypt. In order to discover what he should do to obtain fair winds for the journey, Menelaus had to consult [Proteus](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/p/proteus.html), the old man of the sea. He waited until Proteus had gone to sleep among his herd of seals and then seized him tightly. Proteus changed into many shapes in an attempt to escape, but Menelaus perservered, refusing to let go. Finally Proteus, unable to get free, agreed to answer Menelaus' questions truthfully. He described the sacrifices necessary to appease the gods and gain safe passage across the sea, as well as revealing that the gods would transport Menelaus to Elysium at the end of his mortal life.

Menelaus eventually returned safely to Lacedaemon, where he and Helen apparently settled back into happily married life.

<http://www.pantheon.org/articles/m/menelaus.html>

**Helen**

by James Hunter

Helen (often called "Helen of Troy") was the daughter of [Leda](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/l/leda.html) and [Zeus](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/z/zeus.html), and was the sister of the [Dioscuri](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/d/dioscuri.html) and [Clytemnestra](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/c/clytemnestra.html).

Since Zeus visited Leda in the form of a swan, Helen was often presented as being born from an egg. She was reputed to be the most beautiful woman in the world. When Helen was still a child, she was abducted by [Theseus](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/t/theseus.html). Since she was not yet old enough to be married, he sent her to Aphidnae and left her in the care of his mother, [Aethra](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/a/aethra.html). The Dioscuri rescued her and returned her to her home in Lacedaemon, taking Aethra prisoner at the same time.

When Helen reached marriageable age, all the greatest men in Greece courted her. Her mother's husband, King Tyndareos of Lacedaemon, was concerned about the trouble that might be caused by the disappointed suitors. Acting on the advice of [Odysseus](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/o/odysseus.html), he got all the suitors to swear that they would support the marriage rights of the successful candidate. He then settled on [Menelaus](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/m/menelaus.html) to be the husband of Helen. She lived happily with Menelaus for a number of years, and bore him a daughter, [Hermione](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/h/hermione.html).

After a decade or so of married life, Helen was abducted by -- or ran off with -- [Paris](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/p/paris.html), the son of King [Priam](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/p/priam.html) of Troy. Menelaus called on the other suitors to fulfill their oaths and help him get her back. As a result, the Greek leaders mustered the greatest army of the time, placed it under the command of [Agamemnon](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/a/agamemnon.html), and set off to wage what became known as the Trojan War.

After the fall of Troy, Menelaus took Helen back to Lacedaemon, where they lived an apparently happy married life once more. After the end of their mortal existence, they continued to be together in Elysium.

There were a number of different accounts of Helen's relationship with Paris. In some, she was truly in love with him, although her sympathies were mostly with the Greeks who beseiged Troy. In others, she was a beautiful and wanton woman who brought disaster upon those around her. In still other accounts, she never went to Troy at all: [Hermes](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/h/hermes.html), acting on Zeus's orders, spirited her away to Egypt and fashioned a phantom out of clouds to accompany Paris; the real Helen was reunited with Menelaus after the Trojan War.

<http://www.pantheon.org/articles/h/helen.html>