

## The 12 Greek Gods and Their Unique Superpowers

By **guest** May 22, 2023



A statue of Zeus. Credit: [Mario Leonardo Iñiguez](#), CC BY 2.0/Wikipedia

*The [ancient Greek gods](#) remain fascinating to [Greek mythology](#) lovers around the world. As immortals with unusual powers, they appear in movies, books, video games, podcasts, and countless academic studies.*

By Patrick Garner

These Greek gods are often called the “Olympic gods” because some were said to live on Mt. Olympus, the highest mountain in [Greece](#), towering over the Gulf of Thermaïkós.

As captivating as they are, the Greek gods are only sketchily known to many. There are fully twelve Olympians and other divinities, as well. How many of us could name even half of them?

Doing so is tricky because of the Romans. When they conquered Greece, they renamed all but one of the gods. For instance, Aphrodite, the goddess of love,

became Venus. Zeus, the mightiest of the gods, became Jupiter. The war-god Ares was rebranded as Mars. Only Apollo, who was revered by successive Roman emperors, retained his Greek name.



The twelve Greek gods are Zeus, Poseidon, Hera, Aphrodite, Apollo, Artemis, Demeter, Hephaistos, Hermes, Ares, Athene, and Dionysos. Other divinities in Greek mythology often associated with them include Hades, Hekate, and Hestia.

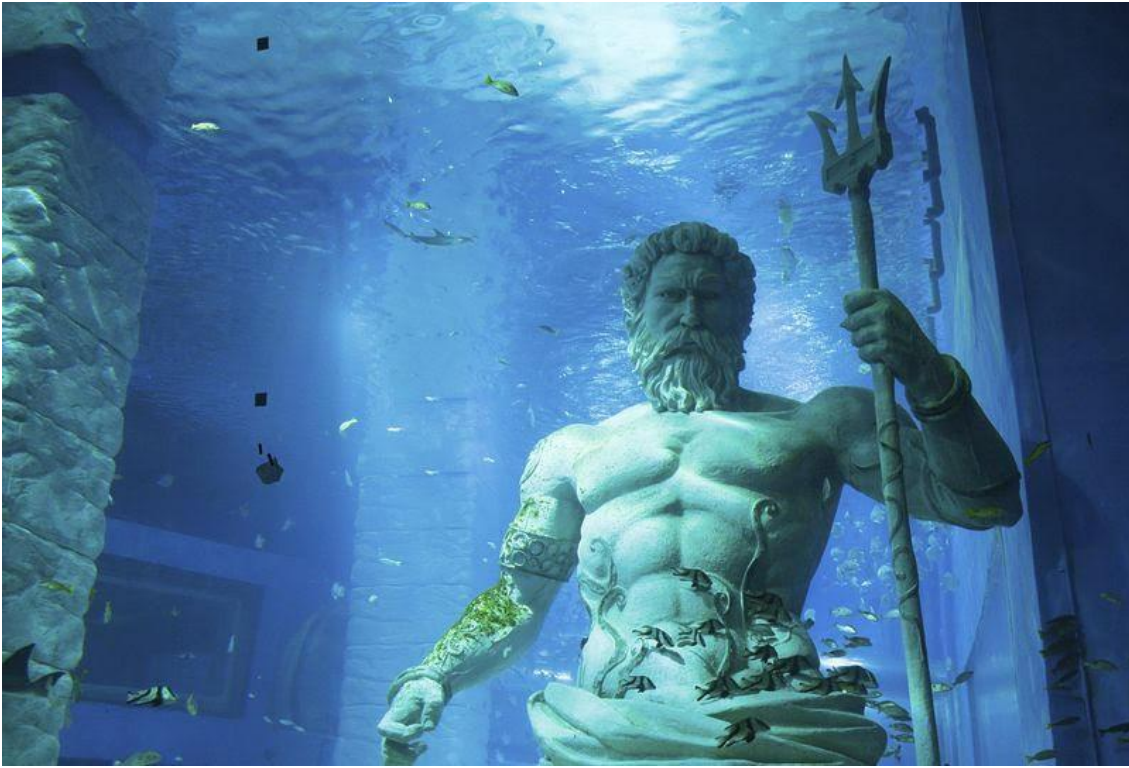
## Zeus, the Greek god of gods



*Zeus of Otricoli Ancient Roman copy of Hellenistic Original. credit: Wikimedia commons/Public domain.*

Zeus, son of Kronos and Rhea, sat at the head of the pantheon. He was the Greek god of gods. Notorious for throwing lightning bolts when angry, he was the sky and thunder god. Renowned in Greek mythology for his numerous erotic adventures, he fathered three of the Olympians. Utterly amoral, Zeus had multiple wives, conquests, and children.

## Poseidon, the God of the seas



*Poseidon. God of the sea, rivers, storms, earthquakes, bulls and horses, Poseidon occupies a large amount of ancient Greek mythology. Credit: Public domain.*

Zeus' brothers were Poseidon and Hades. They divided up the world between themselves by drawing lots, with Zeus claiming the sky, [Poseidon the seas](#), and Hades (as the loser) the underworld. Poseidon established a vast estate for himself under the seas. Hades, who rarely emerged from underground, built a palace deep in the bowels of the earth.

Devoted to bottle-nosed dolphins and infamous for creating earthquakes, Poseidon ruled the seas and rivers. To impress Demeter, he created the horse ("hippos" in Greek), and maintained elaborate stables for his stallions on his underwater estate. Like Zeus, he had numerous affairs with goddesses, nymphs, and mortal women.

[Hades](#) was a glowering, humorless Greek god. Not an Olympian, he ruled the underworld where all mortals went upon death. Famous for absconding with Demeter's daughter, Persephone, he was hated by all mortals for his role as overseer of the afterlife. Greeks, afraid to draw his attention to themselves, would even avoid saying his name.

## Hera in Greek Mythology



*Goddess Hera. Credit: Wikipedia/Public domain*

One of Zeus' seven wives was the Olympian Hera, who was also his sister. She played the unenviable role of jealous wife, as Zeus was constantly having affairs.

## The astonishingly beautiful Aphrodite



*Ancient Greek Statue of Venus de Milo or Aphrodite of Milos. Credit: Public domain.*

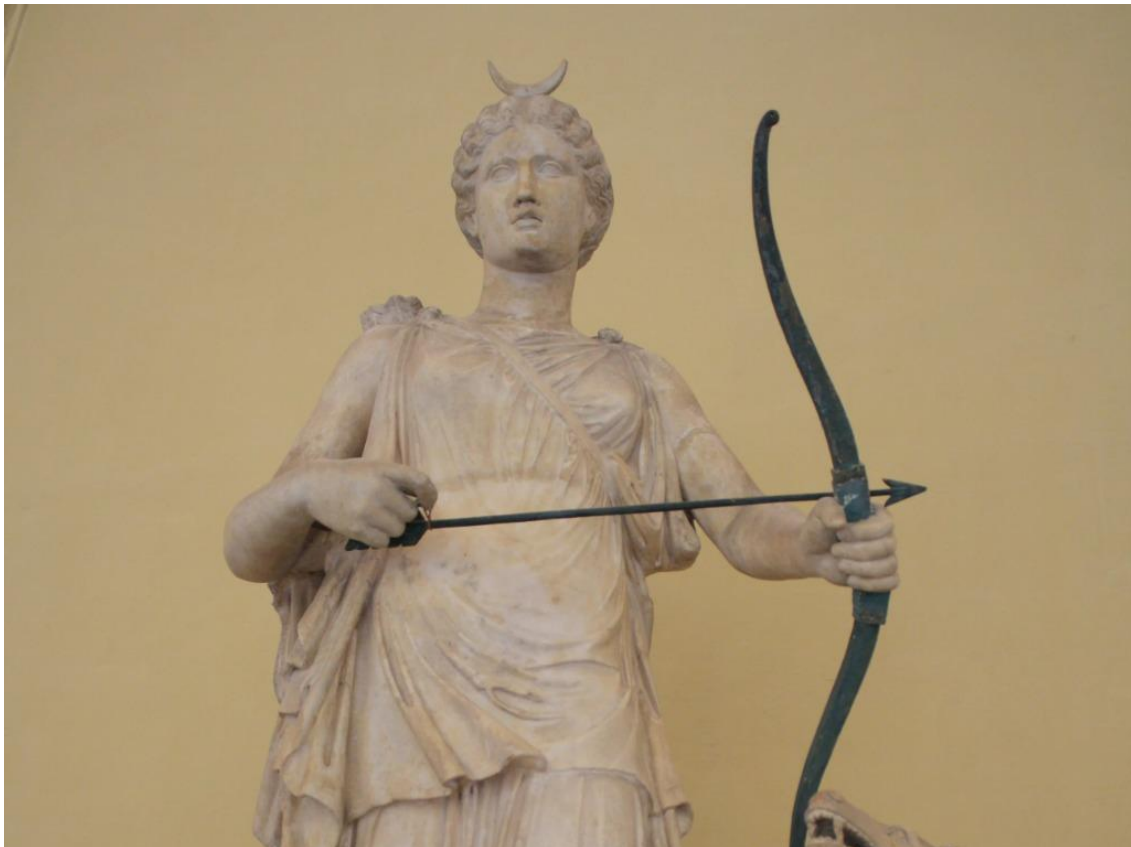
The goddess Aphrodite, astonishingly beautiful, reigned over all matters having to do with love. She protected lovers and watched over women in childbirth. She was married to the Olympian Hephaistos but was unfaithful, having a lengthy affair with Ares, with whom she had two children.

## Greek gods Apollo and Artemis



*Apollo in the temple of Zeus. Credit: Egisto Sani/CC BY-NC 2.0*

**Apollo** and Artemis were brother and sister in Greek mythology. They were born to Leto on the island of Delos. Leto, like so many girls, had caught Zeus' eye. She fled from Hera's fury to Delos, where she promised the few inhabitants fame and glory if they would shelter her in childbirth.



*Statue of the Greek goddess of hunting Artemis. Credit: Mark Cartwright/CC BY-SA 4.0*

They did so, and Apollo—also known as Phoebus—quickly became revered for his ability to heal and prophesy. He founded Delphi, home of the most important oracle in Greece. Both Apollo and Artemis were skilled archers. Artemis was a protector of young girls and animals. Yet, she was described by ancient writers as being in constant pursuit of game with her band of loyal nymphs.

## Demeter the earth goddess



*Demeter accepting an offering of wheat during the Eleusinian Mysteries. Credit: public domain*

Demeter was an earth goddess, celebrated for providing grains to mortals, according to Greek mythology. When Hades stole her daughter, Persephone, Demeter's grief brought ruin to all of earth's crops. After humans faced starvation (and presumably could no longer serve the gods), Zeus asked Hekate and Hermes to travel to the underworld to persuade Hades to release Persephone.

They succeeded, and she was returned to her mother for a portion of each year. In celebration, Demeter created the Eleusinian Mysteries in Eleusis, the small town where Persephone emerged from Hades' darkness.

## Hephaistos, the craftsman among Greek gods



*Hephaistos Thetis at Kylix by the Foundry Painter Antikensammlung Berlin. Credit: Public domain.*

Then there was Hephaistos, the Leonardo da Vinci of his time. He was a master craftsman who invented elaborate machines, including the first robots. He lived on Lemnos, designed the mansions on Mt. Olympus, and was married, however unhappily, to Aphrodite.

## Hermes, the messenger of the Greek gods



*Ancient Greek statue of Hermes by Praxiteles. Credit: Paolo Villa/Wikimedia Commons/ CC BY 4.0*



Hermes, the messenger of the Greek gods, was also the protector of thieves. He was fleet of foot and depicted as having small wings on his sandals. He was also the ultimate diplomat and accompanied the dead as they were ferried by Charon over the River Styx to the underworld.

During the nineteenth century, the Kingdom of Greece depicted Hermes on postage stamps, implying that letters would be delivered swiftly.

## War-god Ares



*Marble statue of Ares: "Pyrrhus", dated at I sec. A.D. Height: cm 360. It was found in the Nerva's Forum, in Rome, and it's now placed in the atrium of Capitoline Museums in Rome. Credit: Wikipedia/Andrea Puggioni/CC BY 2.0*

The Greek war-god, Ares, often appears in today's cinema. He played a key role in the 2017 Hollywood movie *Wonder Woman*. In Greek mythology, he personified bloodlust and the passion for war. His terrifying shriek was said to be heard above the din of clashing armies.

## Athene, goddess of wisdom



*Statue of Athena Promachos by Leonidas Drosis (1836-1882) at the Academy of Athens on Panepistimiou Street. Athens, Greece. Credit: Wikipedia/George E. Koronaios/CC BY-SA 4.0*

The goddess Athene, whose name often appears as Athena today, was the protector of Athens for whom the city was named. At her birth, she sprung—fully armed—from the head of Zeus. The opposite of Ares, she was known for her wisdom and intellectual approach to war. She appeared with her owl on the Athenian tetradrachm, the silver coin known to all as the “Owl.”

## Dionysus, the Greek god of wine and dance



*Statue of Dionysus. Credit: Wikipedia/George E. Koronaios/CC BY-SA 4.0*

Dionysus was the outlier. Never popular with the other divinities, he gave many gifts to the Greek people. One of the greatest was wine, which he was credited with

inventing. He was also the originator of theater—all of the ancient Greek tragedies were dedicated to him.



Perhaps most famously, Dionysus created the Bacchic Dances, which were women-only raves that took place at night in the countryside. Participants danced until daybreak, intoxicated with wine, song, and passion. Their husbands were not amused.

The Greek gods are the ultimate personification of power, rage, lust, devotion, and passion. Throughout the years, Greek mythology and the Greek Gods continue to fascinate new audiences—and remind us how little humans have changed over the millennia.

*\*Patrick Garner is the author of [three novels about Greek gods in the contemporary world](#). He is also the creator and narrator of [the breakout podcast called Garner's Greek Mythology with listeners in 131 countries](#).*

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