

THE ORIGINAL DYSFUNCTIONAL FAMILY



BASIC CLASSICAL *FOR THE*
MYTHOLOGY **NEW**
MILLENNIUM

By Rose Williams



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Basic Classical Mythology for the New Millennium

Rose Williams

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PREFACE

Classical Mythology is an important literary and philosophical thread which permeates society to the present day. Familiarity with it enhances our understanding of art and literature through much of human history. However, it can be somewhat confusing. This little book presents the basic structure of this huge body of stories which involve a family of gods. These beings are represented as springing from nature and growing from the beginning of the earth into a ruling clan with immense powers over the universe and over the race of men, who are their creations and in some cases their descendants.

This simple basic reader will be useful for those studying ancient literature, language, culture, or history. Its organization is loosely chronological, following the development of this mythical family of deities. It presents the Greek version of each god or goddess and also provides separate explanations of the Roman version of each god or goddess. Because the Roman mind and conceptions differed somewhat from those of the Greeks, their stories differ somewhat from the Greek ones.

Terms that might be unfamiliar to the reader are emphasized in bold-face type. The notes section at the back of the book provides an explanation for the terms. The illustrations are intended merely to evoke the gods, not to be accurate representations of a god's likeness.

The Original Dysfunctional Family: A Basic Classical Mythology for the New Millennium will serve as an ancillary and quick reference book for any group studying the ancient world. It is a good resource for those using the Bolchazy-Carducci textbook *Latin for the New Millennium* and coordinates as follows.

COORDINATION WITH CHAPTERS IN *LATIN FOR THE NEW MILLENNIUM*

- II. The Elder Gods (LNM Review 1)
- III. Olympians or Dii Consentes
 - III.1 Zeus/Jupiter (LNM Review 1)

- III.2 Hera/Juno (LNM Review 1)
- III.3 Poseidon/Neptune (LNM Review 2)
- III.4 Pluto/Hades (LNM Review 2)
- III.5 Hestia/Vesta (LNM Review 2)
- III.6 Ares/Mars (LNM Chapter 1, Review 1)
- III.7 Phoebus Apollo (LNM Review 3)
- III.8 Artemis/Diana (LNM Review 5)
- III.9 Aphrodite/Venus (LNM Review 5)
- III.10 Athena/Minerva (LNM Review 5)
- III.11 Hermes/Mercury (LNM Review 4)
- III.12 Hephaestus/Vulcan (LNM Review 7)

IV. The Two Great Earth Gods

- IV.1 Demeter/Ceres (LNM Review 2)
- IV.2 Dionysus/Liber (LNM Review 6)

INTRODUCTION

Human beings have always been surrounded by events and circumstances beyond their control. Even today, when technology lets us at least predict natural disasters and keeps us informed of political and social ones, we sometimes feel helpless. In the ancient world that feeling of helplessness was also great, and often sent human beings searching for supernatural help. The inhabitants of peninsular and insular Greece, as well as those of Asia Minor, had a mosaic of city-states great and small, and each of these had its own stories of the gods, their powers, and how they could be persuaded to help people. Later the Romans adapted these stories, picking and choosing and adding their own interpretations as they saw fit. They then proceeded to give the gods they chose another set of names: those of established Roman and Etruscan gods who were in the beginning very different. The very early Romans worshipped *numina*, faceless, formless, but very powerful divinities whose will could be seen in the natural world. Later, under the combined influence of the Greeks and the Etruscans, a fierce and intelligent people who were neighbors of Rome to the north, gods in more human form developed. However, there was always a close tie between the gods in human form and the natural world. Gods not only inhabited rivers and mountains, but were also identified with the rivers and mountains. The major gods whom we will discuss in this brief work are all members of one large extended family which began with natural phenomena and which was never entirely separated from those phenomena.

I. THE BEGINNING

Stories of the Greeks and Romans on how things came to be vary, but all show a unity not only between mankind and the animal kingdom, but also a sense of kinship with the entire natural world. Most agreed that the first existence was Chaos, from which sprang various living beings. Hesiod in his *Theogony* starts with Chaos, and has Night and Erebus (the deep underworld) springing from it. Night bore Light and Day in union with Erebus. Then for no apparent reason Earth (Gaia or Gaea) appeared and gave birth to Heaven (Uranus), “to cover her on every side, and to be an ever-sure abiding-place for the blessed gods.” (*Theogony* 1.121–123).



Mount Olympus, home of the Gods.

CHART 1: DESCENDANTS OF CHAOS

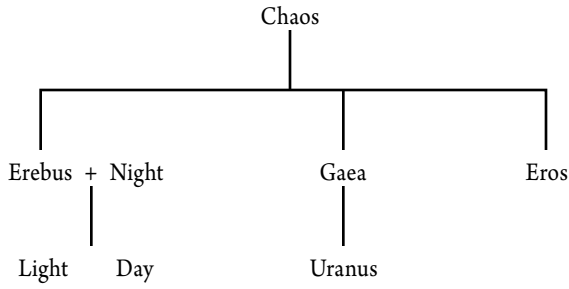


CHART 2: THE ELDER GODS

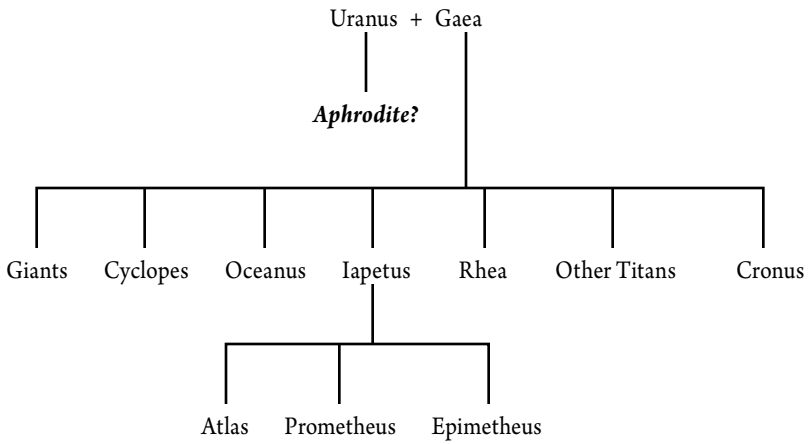
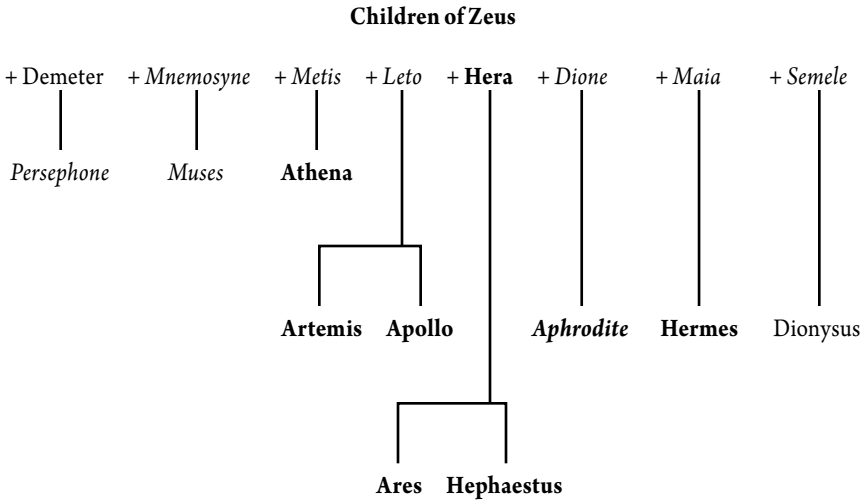
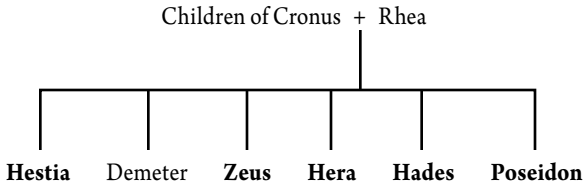


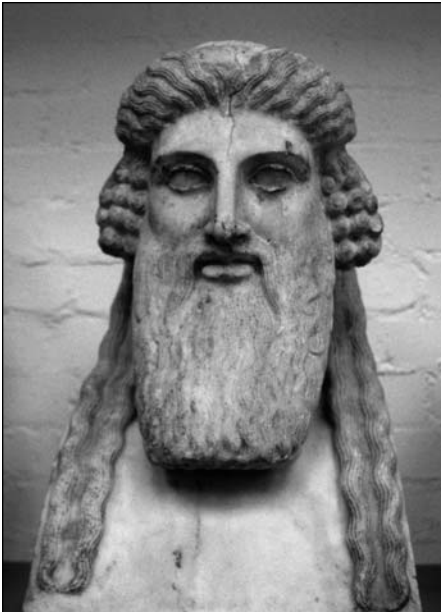
CHART 3: THE TWELVE GREAT OLYMPIANS



II. THE ELDER GODS

Gaea (Mother Earth) united with Uranus to bear the Titans: among them the strong males Oceanus, Coeus and Crius, Hyperion and Iapetus (father of Atlas, Prometheus, and Epimetheus), as well as the lovely females Theia and Rhea, Themis and Mnemosyne, gold-crowned Phoebe and lovely Tethys. Last she bore Cronus, who was wily and fierce and more daring than his brothers and sisters.

These Titans, as their name has come to suggest, were large, strong and handsome. Mother Earth's next children were not so appealing, at least from the Greek point of view, which held that man was the measure of all things. First came the Cyclopes (the Wheel-eyed), huge and somewhat like the Titans, except that each had only one eye, which was located in the middle of his forehead. Hesiod names them Brontes, Steropes, and Arges, but we will discover as we go along that there are others, perhaps a hundred or so, with some appalling characteristics. Not that they were nearly as appalling, at least in appearance, as the next three, Cottus and



“Was fatherhood worth it?”

Briareus and Gyes, who each had one hundred arms and fifty heads. Their father Uranus detested these monsters and hid them underground.

Gaea made a sickle of grey flint and asked her children the Titans to avenge the wrongs that Uranus had done to his other children. All shied away except Cronus, who took the sickle and waited in ambush for his father. When Uranus spread down to visit Gaea, Cronus cut off his genitals and threw them in the sea. From Uranus' blood came various creatures: armed

Giants, Furies, and according to some accounts Aphrodite, who will be discussed later. Uranus roared and vowed that his brutal son would pay for his deed when he was dethroned by a son of his own.

Cronus ruled the earth for eons, but he never forgot that a son of his was fated to replace him, and he made a futile attempt to outwit the Fates. The wife of Cronus was Rhea, who in time became identified with her mother Gaea, with the Phrygian goddess Cybele, and with other personifications of Mother Earth. She is described as “daughter of earth and sky, whose chariot is drawn by fierce lions” (*Orphic Hymn to Rhea*). As each of Rhea’s children, Hestia, Demeter, Hera, Hades, and the rest were born, Cronus swallowed them. Rhea reacted to this mistreatment of her offspring as angrily as had Gaea. When she was about to bear Zeus, she begged for the help of her parents Gaea and Uranus in stopping Cronus’ infanticide. They directed her to the land of Crete, where Gaea received the babe to be brought up on Mount Aegaeum. Rhea gave Cronus a stone wrapped in a baby blanket, which he swallowed with no comment. When Zeus was grown and powerful, Rhea gave Cronus an emetic, and his children sprang forth unharmed. Thus began the War of the Gods, with Atlas leading the Titans and Zeus, aided by Prometheus, leading the opposition (Hesiod *Theogony* 617–885). The Greeks remembered Cronus kindly, and dedicated some of the smaller, older temples and a feast day or two connected with the harvest to him, but the days of his great glory were gone.



“I will protect my children.”

Saturn was an ancient Italian deity identified with Cronus, and like Cronus he was king of the gods before he was overthrown. After his dethronement by Jupiter, Saturn fled to Italy, where he reigned during

the Golden Age, a time of peace and prosperity which the cynics associated with the time before Jupiter ordered the creation of woman. The Romans dedicated his temple in 498 BCE, and it was rebuilt in 42 BCE and again in the fourth century CE by the senate and people of Rome. It contained the State Treasury and the bronze tablets of Roman law. His festival, the Saturnalia, was celebrated originally on December 17 but later expanded to seven days. During this festival all public business was suspended, declarations of war and criminal executions were postponed, friends made presents to one another, and the slaves were indulged with great liberties.

III. OLYMPIANS OR DII CONSENTES

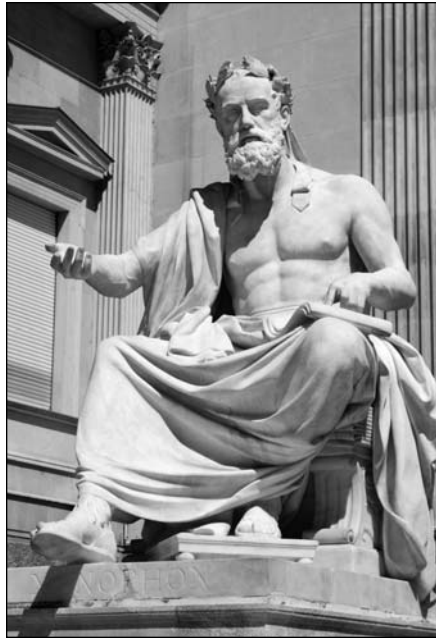
Now we must take a look at the histories, as carefully edited by the conquering invaders, of the best-known and most powerful group of Greek gods, those who lived in Thessaly on Olympus, the highest mountain in Greece. For the sake of order, let us try to line up the legendary Twelve Great Olympians. (Not that this is easy to do. Some say that Pluto [also known as Hades] and even Poseidon do not truly belong to Olympus, as they are not sky gods. Others insist on including Demeter or Dionysus.) To complicate matters which need no complication, according to the Roman poet Ennius, who lived in the third century BCE, the group of twelve Gods especially honored by the Romans, called the Dii Consentes, were Jupiter, Juno, Minerva, Vesta, Ceres, Diana, Venus, Mars, Mercury, Neptune, Vulcan, and Apollo. Evidently Ceres the grain goddess, the counterpart of Greek Demeter, was in the Roman pantheon in place of Pluto/Hades. Organizing all these deities is a thankless if not impossible task, but let us give a brief overview of the major traditional lineup and take up the complications later.

III.1 ZEUS, FATHER OF GODS AND KING OF MEN

The War of the Gods, with Atlas leading the Titans, did not look too promising for Zeus and his siblings until he released all those monstrous relatives whom Cronus had imprisoned. They not only fought for him with their hundred hands and other attributes, but they gave him the lightning and the thunderbolts which were to be his trademark. The Titans were defeated, and, since they were immortal, most found themselves imprisoned down in Tartarus (the region of the Underworld reserved for punishing the wicked). Atlas remained in the Upperworld, but he was condemned to bear the world (or some say the sky) on his shoulders.

It did not take Prometheus long to dissipate the goodwill Zeus had felt for him while the war was being waged. Because Prometheus stole fire from Heaven for humans, and did other things to give man a foothold on survival, Zeus had Prometheus chained to a rock and sent his own bird

the eagle to eat Prometheus' immortal liver by day; by night the liver grew as much again as the bird had devoured in the day. (The ancients believed that the liver, rather than the heart, was the seat of all emotion.) The agonizing liver-devouring process went on for thirty thousand years, until Heracles slew the bird. Zeus, who wanted his son Heracles to receive credit for this great deed, did not complain about being deprived of his long-standing grudge.



“The Earth is a great responsibility.”

As can be seen by the genealogy of the Olympians, Zeus was not a faithful husband. His wife Hera (who was also his sister, as all the gods were relatives) was the protector of marriage, which in her personal case took a good deal of protecting. As has been mentioned, many city-states and societies came to worship Zeus, and these multiple spouses may be the chief goddesses of various worship centers. However that may be, Zeus' philandering and occasional petty behavior did not lessen the concept of his might and power. Homer says of him, “He then lowered his glowing countenance, and the ambrosial locks swayed on his immortal head, till vast Olympus reeled” (*Iliad* 1.520–526). Such signs of his approval, while not as bad as his disapproval, must have made life on Olympus rather stressful.

ROMAN JUPITER

The differences between Greek and Roman gods are greater than modern mythological studies sometimes indicate. As has been mentioned, from the founding of Rome, the *numina*, formless though they were, showed their power and their will by means of natural phenomena which the pious Roman constantly sought to interpret. Since everything in Nature was inhabited by *numina*, great attention was paid to omens and portents in daily life. Roman writers of every era make many references to the

auspices, or interpretations of these portents, and to the unseen numina one must propitiate. The priestly college of augurs interpreted every aspect of the flights of birds, as they believed that these birds of Jupiter showed his decrees by their movements. Cicero speaks of birds as Jupiter's messengers and of the augurs, of whose college he was a member, as the interpreters of Jupiter Optimus Maximus (*De legibus* 2.8)

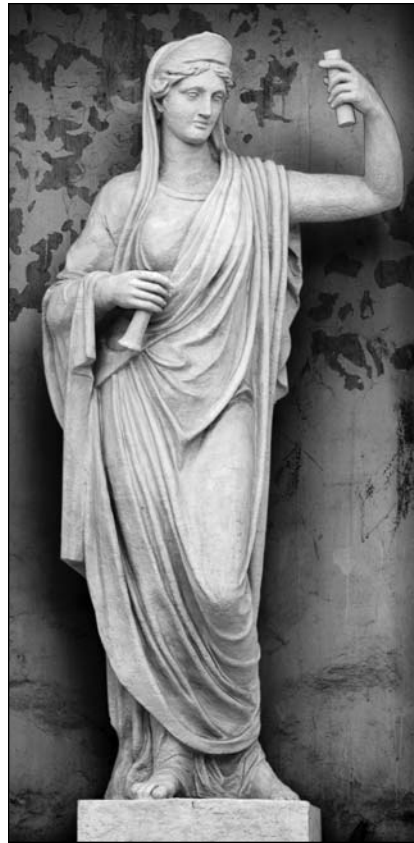
As mentioned before, the Poet Ennius in the third century BCE listed as most honored by the Romans a group of twelve Gods called Dii Consentes: Iuppiter, Juno, Minerva, Vesta, Ceres, Diana, Venus, Mars, Mercurius, Neptunus, Volcanus, and Apollo (their names rendered in Latin). Their gilt statues stood in the Forum, later apparently in the Porticus Deorum Consentium. They were probably the twelve worshipped in 217 BCE at a *lectisternium*, which means a banquet of the gods at which the statues of the gods were placed upon cushions and were offered meals. Although the Etruscans also worshipped a main pantheon of twelve Gods, the Dii Consentes were not identified with Etruscan deities but rather with the Greek Olympian Gods (though apparently the original character of the Roman Gods was different from that of the Greek). The twelve Dii Consentes were led by the first three, Jupiter, Juno, and Minerva. These form the Capitoline Triad whose rites were conducted in the Capitolium Vetus on the Capitoline Hill.

All these differences notwithstanding, Jupiter, or Jove Pater, in classical times corresponded in many aspects to Zeus. Rome's chief god had a collection of names even more confusing than most, as the Romans called him Jove, then added *pater*, or father, when addressing him or speaking of him as a subject. This was contracted to Juppiter (Jupiter). In all other constructions he is Jove. Whatever one called him, this son of Saturn and husband and brother of Juno was the supreme god of the Roman pantheon. Like Zeus he wielded the lightning bolt, and the eagle was both his symbol and his messenger. In addition to being the ruler of the sky, he was also the protector of the state and its laws. Since Roman deities usually received extra names for their duties, in his protector role he was Jupiter Optimus Maximus (Best and Greatest). The great temple on the Capitoline Hill was dedicated to this aspect of Jupiter. Cicero called the Senate to a meeting in the Temple of Jupiter Stator (Stayer or Sustainer). His other titles include Caelestis (heavenly), Lucetius (of the light), Tonans (thunderer), Fulgurator (of the lightning). As Jupiter Victor he led

the Roman army to victory, and in his spare time was the protector of the Latin League (an ancient confederation of Italian city-states basically independent but bound together by the necessity of defending themselves against their various enemies). Though he shared a great temple on the Capitoline Hill with Juno and Minerva, he was the most prominent of the three. Before the stories about Zeus were added to his biography, he was a very majestic, extremely powerful, and somewhat dull father figure.

III.2 HERA, QUEEN OF THE GODS

Hera seems to come late in Zeus' list of wives, but perhaps because she had long been patroness of some large and powerful cities, she soon became the permanent and supreme one. Zeus wooed her soon after the successful completion of the war of the gods, and after some trickery won her. This in no way impeded his love affairs, and Hera was often jealous and frustrated. Maidens whom she knew him to favor often had a hard time of it, being turned into animals or constellations. Unfortunately he did not confine his attentions to maidens. Zeus visited Alcmena, the wife of Amphitryon, in the guise of her husband. Alcmena bore two sons, Iphicles to Amphitryon and the great Heracles to Zeus. Hera promptly began a campaign against Heracles' life. She sent two giant serpents into the cradle of Heracles and Iphicles when they were not yet one year old. Hearing the screams of Iphicles, Alcmena ran into the nursery to find Heracles laughing and holding a strangled snake in each hand. In no way discouraged, Hera set out to torment Heracles with the same vengeance she would show in dealing with the Trojans after the Trojan War.



“My tasks are many.”

Once, feeling that she had borne enough, Hera led a rebellion against Zeus, who suspended her in the sky until all the gods promised never to revolt against him again. After this she confined her efforts to trying to trick and occasionally persuade her powerful husband.

All this jealous rage and spousal war in no way diminished Hera's majesty, however. An anonymous Greek poet in one of the ancient Homeric Hymns (which actually have nothing to do with Homer) says, "I sing of Hera of the golden throne, immortal queen whom Rhea bore, radiant in beauty, sister and wife of loud-thundering Zeus; she is the illustrious one whom all the blessed ones throughout high Olympus hold in awe and honor, just as they do Zeus who delights in this lightning and thunder" (*Homeric Hymn 12 to Hera*). Her many temples and holy places were filled with suppliants asking her favor and keeping a wary eye out for any signs of her displeasure.

ROMAN JUNO

Juno was an imposing and powerful figure, guardian and special counselor of the Roman state and queen of the gods. She was protector of the Roman people and especially women, being the goddess of marriage, fertility and all aspects of pregnancy and childbirth. Like Jupiter, she had a wealth of titles. As the matron goddess of Rome and the Roman Empire she was called Regina ("queen"). She was worshiped as Juno Capitolina as part of the Capitoline Triad, in conjunction with Jupiter and Minerva, at the temple on the Capitoline Hill in Rome. From her title "Juno Moneta" comes the modern word "money," as the Roman mint was built close to her temple on the Arx, one of the two prongs of the Capitoline hill. Juno Sospita (Savior), who had her own festival on February 1st, was the patron goddess of the state, and her temple for this function was in the Forum Holitorium in Rome. As Juno Curitis or Juno Quiritis, the protector of spearmen, she had a temple on the Campus Martius. She was the only deity to be worshipped by all thirty *curiae*, the Roman military and administrative units introduced by Romulus.

III.3 POSEIDON, GOD OF THE SEA

Son of Cronus and Rhea, brother of Zeus, Hades, Hestia, Demeter and Hera, Poseidon was one of the older Olympians, and he answered to no one except Zeus (and sometimes conveniently forgot to answer to him).

Poseidon ruled the vast sea, living on the ocean floor in a palace made of coral and jewels. As his floods reached far into the countryside, people who lived near the sea and inlanders as well went to great lengths to keep him happy. When in a good mood, he not only supplied a calm sea but also created new lands in the water, but he could produce terrible storms in an instant. Called the earthshaker, he pounded land and water with his trident in anger, in pleasure, or just for the fun of it, riding the waves in a chariot drawn by dolphins, horses, or, contribution of the logical, sea horses. Longing to be the patron deity of an outstanding city like the other gods, Poseidon came to Athens where, with a blow of his trident on the Acropolis, he produced a sea or perhaps just the well of seawater. Pallas Athena also laid claim to this high city, and the Athenians, who were never slow to take advantage of a promising situation, devised a competition between her and Poseidon. The giver of the best gift would be their chief divinity and their city would carry his or her name. Athena created the very useful olive tree, and won, even though in the heat of competition Poseidon, not settling for that salty spring, created the horse and thus changed the shape of history.



“The mighty seas are mine.”

Like his brother Zeus, Poseidon had many love affairs and fathered numerous children, among whom the Cyclops Polyphemos, the hero Bellerophon, and even the winged horse Pegasus are sometimes placed. His wife was the Oceanid Amphitrite.

The Greek hero Odysseus not only blinded Poseidon's son, the Cyclops Polyphemos, but also taunted Polyphemos, saying that not even his father Poseidon could restore the sight that he, the great Odysseus, had taken away. Poseidon would have drowned him except for the fact that the Fates, whose words always came to pass, had decreed that Odysseus would return to his kingdom of Ithaca. He did get there, but Poseidon saw to it that he arrived alone, beggared, late, and in a borrowed ship, only to find his house full of enemies.

When not stirring up storms, avenging insults, or pursuing maidens, Poseidon was quite a construction engineer. Not only did his taking the wrong side of squabbles lead to his building a great part of Troy, but he also constructed the brazen fence that surrounds Tartarus and its gates of bronze, behind which the Titans were confined.

ROMAN NEPTUNE, GOD OF WATERS

Neptune was originally simply the god of all waters for Romans, as well as Neptune Equester, creator of the horse. In the early days Romans had as little to do with the sea as possible, but as their history evolved they not only fell under Greek influence but also acquired some extra-peninsular enemies. As they felt the need of divine protection when dealing with the always moody Mediterranean, Neptune was therefore promoted to god of the sea (as Neptune Oceanus). Neptune Oceanus was often depicted surfing on a sea shell towed by "sea horses" i.e., hippocampi, half horses and half fish (as the Romans were practical even in their most fanciful moments, the front half of these remarkable beings were horses, the back half fish). Neptune was equated with Poseidon and assumed his characteristics, but he was far less popular among Romans than Poseidon was with Greeks, who had a fondness for the sea that the Romans never pretended to share.

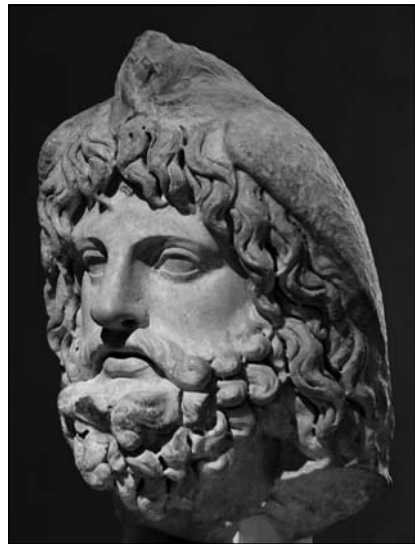
When Aeolus at the behest of Juno stirred a mighty tempest on the sea, Vergil says that Neptune raised his great head calmly above the waters, rebuked the winds, calmed the turbulent waves, drove away the storm

clouds, and brought back the sun. Then he drove his horses, with their bronze hooves and golden manes, across a suddenly quiet sea, bringing peace and beauty as he moved (*Aeneid* 1.124–156). The Romans, who always kept a wary eye on the sea and never felt at home on it, preferred to think of Neptune, if they must think of him at all, as quieting the waters.

III.4 PLUTO/HADES, GOD OF THE UNDERWORLD

Pluto had an especially diverse variety of names, largely because people were afraid to pronounce his chief one, Hades. The ancient *Hymn to Demeter* coyly calls him the Lord of Many, or the Host of Many, referring to the multitudes of the dead over whom he ruled. He was usually referred to as Pluto, a name which most mythologists connect with riches, and the Romans called him Dis (the Rich One) as well as Pluto and (if deemed absolutely necessary) Hades. He was the brother of Zeus and Poseidon and shared the lordship of the world with them, his share being the Underworld.

Pluto's dismal realm was located underground and was separated from the land of the living by five rivers, none of which were placid little streams—the first four were Phlegethon, the river of fire, Acheron, the river of woe, Cocytus, the river of lamentation, and Lethe, the river of forgetfulness. Number Five was the Styx, the river of the unbreakable oath, surrounding the whole enclave with its dark waters. According to Vergil, the boatman Charon plied his trade at the joining of Acheron and Cocytus. This redoubtable mariner was old, unkempt, and dirty, with flaming eyes and great strength. As he poled up to the bank he was besieged by scores of dead people who wanted to get across to Hades, where all the



“Of death and riches I am king.”

deceased of the ancient world, good, bad, or indifferent, were supposed to go. If they had no proper burial or passage money, he refused them; indeed he took only a few of the properly certified. Once accepted by Charon, the dead still weren't home free. He whisked them across and deposited them in the oozing mud on the far side, which they trudged through while keeping a wary eye on Cerberus, the beloved watchdog of Pluto, who waved his dragon's tail and barked his three heads off. He lay beside the actual entrance to inner Hades, and his assignment was to keep those inside Hades in and unacceptable visitors out. Just past Cerberus' station three judges, Aeacus, Minos and Rhadamanthus, decided the fate of souls: heroes went to the Elysian Fields; evildoers to Tartarus. Those who didn't really fit in either category went, according to Vergil, to a number of pigeonholes in between. On the right (of course, since literature has long had something against all things on the left) was the path to Elysium, eternal home of the blessed, and to the left was the triple wall of Tartarus, eternal home of the definitely unblessed. Around that triple wall roared Phlegethon, River of Fire. The wall was breached by a gate of adamantine, the hardest substance known to the ancient world. The gate tower was of iron, and atop it perched Tisiphone, one of the Furies (those female demon-deities who had snakes for hair and eyes that wept tears of blood and who were sent to punish the guilty). From beyond the walls came sounds of lashes, clanking iron, dragging chains, and, as might have been expected, groans. Rhadamanthus, the most inflexible of Hades' three judges, made the inmates of Tartarus confess their evil deeds and assigned imaginative punishments as just recompense. These punishments differed in many respects, but they were all exceedingly unpleasant.

The blessed dead who went to the Elysian Fields fared better. In Elysium, unlike the gloomy grey atmosphere of the rest of Hades, sunlight and green plants existed and some normal activities were possible.

Pluto, as all classical gods seemed to do, longed for feminine companionship. Women were understandably reluctant to receive his addresses, as he was huge and sulfurous. His palace down in the Underworld was described only as being many-gated, surrounded by wide wastelands and pale meadows of flowering asphodel. (Nobody knew exactly what that was, and marriageable maidens were not eager to find out.)

The myths agree that Pluto fell madly in love with Persephone, daughter of Zeus and the grain goddess Demeter. He sprang, in his dark chariot with its rusty reins, from his underworld realm and carried her off as she was picking flowers (a notoriously unsafe occupation which was the undoing of more than one mythological maiden). Exactly where the dangerous flowers were located, though, is a problem. Pausanias (*Description of Greece* 1.38.5) says that Pluto carried Persephone through a cave at Eleusis beside the stream Cephisus. Diodorus Siculus (*Bibliotheca Historica* 5.3), however, quoting from Carcinus the tragic poet who visited often in Syracuse, states flatly that the abduction of Persephone took place in the Sicilian territory of Enna, where the meadows known for beautiful flowers, especially violets, were favorite haunts of Demeter and her daughter Persephone. Ovid in *Metamorphoses* 5 sides with Diodorus and declares that the foul deed took place in Sicily. All sources agree that the terrified girl called on her mother and her companions, but there was no rescue. The *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* circa 650–550 BCE says that Helios the sun saw all, and would later carry the tale to Demeter.

Pluto was successful in his abduction, and Persephone became the Queen of the Dead, the one whose name may not be mentioned (Diodorus *Bibliotheca Historica* 5.3), to whom such charming offerings as a sterile cow were made (Vergil *Aeneid* 6). As we shall see when we come to the story of her mother, Persephone's tenure in Dis' gloomy palace was at least not year-round.

ROMAN PLUTO

The Romans paid as little attention to Pluto/Hades/Dis as they politely could. Ceres and not Pluto is the twelfth of the Roman Dii Consentes. He and Proserpina (the Latin name of Persephone) were known as the Dii Inferi, Gods of the Underworld (Inferus). They symbolized the power of the Earth to provide human beings the necessities for living, as Proserpina was the Spring Maiden (a fact we shall go into later) and Dis controlled the riches underground as well as the Inferus, the home of the dead. Strangely enough Pax, the Roman goddess who was the personification of peace, in her well-equipped temple in Rome was depicted with an untipped spear, holding an olive twig in her hand and the young Pluto in her arm. Whether the Romans thought that Pluto God of Riches or Pluto God of the Dead was connected with peace they left unspecified.

The Romans associated Pluto with the least appealing aspects of their terrain. Near the shrine of Apollo at Cumae lie Lake Avernus and the Burning Fields, two forbidding and extremely smelly geographical features involving boiling mud, spewing gases, and the yellow fluorescence and strong odor of abundant sulfur. This dismal spot was proclaimed to be an entrance to Hades, the World of the Dead.

III. 5 HESTIA, GODDESS OF THE HEARTH

Hestia, the Greek goddess of the hearth or fireplace, was the sister of Zeus, Hera, Poseidon, and Pluto, but her history was one step more outlandish than her siblings. The firstborn offspring of Cronus and Rhea, she was the first to be swallowed by Cronus and the last to be given back; thus she was known as the first and the last of his children. (This is sometimes said to be the reason why the Greeks gave her offerings at the beginning and the end of their meals.)

However difficult her beginning, she was central to Greek life; the hearth or fireplace which was her special domain was the all-important source of warmth and light and cooking and the symbol of the home and of life itself. Each

newborn child was carried around her fire before being received into the family. Hestia was no less important in civic life: each city had a public hearth sacred to her, where the fire was never allowed to go out. If a colony was to be founded, the colonists carried with them coals from the hearth of the mother city with which to kindle the fire on the new city's hearth, which they promptly dedicated to Hestia.



“The house must have a fire.”

Plato makes Socrates say (*Phaedrus* 246e) that when Zeus and all the other Olympians go out to wage a war, Hestia alone remains in the house of the gods. Rather than having temples of her own, Hestia was honored by the fire placed in every temple (*Homeric Hymn* 5). *Homeric Hymn* 29 extols her importance and invokes her aid. “Hestia, in the high places of all, both immortal gods and men who walk on earth, you hold the highest honor: your portion and your right is glorious indeed. For there are no mortal banquets where one does not duly pour a libation of sweet wine to Hestia both first and last . . . Hestia, holy and dear, come and dwell in this glorious house in friendship . . . being aware of the noble actions of men, increase their wisdom and their strength.”

ROMAN VESTA

Vesta, Hestia’s counterpart, was one of the most popular and mysterious goddesses of the Roman pantheon. Not much is known of her origin, except that she was goddess of the hearth, which was the center of the Roman home. Every day, during a meal, Romans threw a small cake on the fire for Vesta. Good luck was assured if it burned with a crackle, so wise housewives probably chose its ingredients to assure that it would.

The worship of Vesta, like much of Roman worship, originated in the home, but quite early her worship evolved into a state cult set up by King Numa Pompilius (715–673 BCE). He established the Vestal Virgins (*Livy Ab Urbe Conditā* 1.20) to keep her home fire burning, as she was protector of the sacred flame which was said to have been brought from Troy to Italy by the hero Aeneas. This fire was relit every March 1st from a coal of the old one and had to be kept alight all year. In her shrine was also the sacred Palladium, a small wooden statue of Minerva, which Aeneas supposedly brought from Troy. According to legend, if anything ever happened to either of these, disaster would fall on Rome. The worship of Vesta declined after Constantine adopted Christianity as the state religion, and in 382 CE Gratian (one of the less successful later Emperors) confiscated the Atrium Vestae. Disaster did indeed fall on Rome, but this probably had more to do with Gratian’s policies than with Vesta’s sacred fire.

Vesta was a quiet well-behaved goddess, never joining in the endless arguments and fights of the other gods. When Bacchus/Liber demanded a spot among the Dii Consentes, Vesta gave him hers. She had probably had more than enough of that august but boisterous assembly.