

Greek Gods - The Historical Background

Greek gods were an essential part of Greek mythology. Our proper knowledge of the ancient Greek gods can be traced back to Homer who wrote The Iliad and The Odyssey.

It is also believed that the myths were heavily influenced by the Mycenaean culture that existed in Greece from 1700 to 1100 BC. However there is some evidence that the beginnings of Greek mythology and beliefs can be traced back to the ancient Middle Eastern cultures. There are many similarities between the mythology of these ancient Middle Eastern cultures and the ancient Greeks.

Greek Gods - Religious & Social Background

The Greek gods were created in order to explain the world around them in order to put a reason or explanation behind everything, and to provide entertainment for the masses.

In the Greek religion however there was not a sole source or reading that could be studied and preached, i.e. Muslims study the Koran, and Christians the Bible.

However the Greeks were broader and less strict in the way they practised their faith, each different Greek city-state would devote itself to a particular god or a set of gods, and depending on the location of the state the characteristics of the gods could vary many city-states erected temples to their particular gods, and these gods were honoured in festivals and animal sacrifices.

The ancient Greek gods were believed to take on human form and lived in a society similar to human society, the only difference was that the Gods were immortal and each one had a certain power designated to them.

Greek Gods - The Creation Myths

It is difficult to trace the ancestry of the ancient Greek gods since there are several creation myths. A combination of the account put together by the Greek Poet Hesiod in the 8th century BC and an account written by a mythographer. Apollodorus would have been recognized by most ancient Greeks. It was as follows:

The creation of the Greek gods goes as follows:

The god Chaos was the foundation of all creation. Out of this god arose Gaea, Tartarus (underworld) and Eros (love). The god Eros was necessary to draw Chaos and Gaea together so that they would produce offspring.

The first born of Gaea was Uranus (god of the heavens). The union of Chaos and Gaea also resulted in the creation of the mountains, seas, and gods known as Titans. The interaction of these early gods resulted in the creation of several other gods. These included figures such as Aphrodite, Hades, Poseidon and Zeus.

Zeus eventually waged war on the Titans. After this Zeus took on his own place and created Mt. Olympus. Zeus ruled the sky, Poseidon ruled the seas, Hades ruled the underworld.

12 Main Gods

Aphrodite (Venus) | goddess of love and beauty

Apollo (Apollo) | god of the arts (esp. poetry and music), archery, and divination

Ares (Mars) | god of war

Artemis (Diana) | goddess of the hunt and protector of children

Athena (Minerva) | goddess of wisdom, war, and crafts; patron of Athens

Demeter (Ceres) | goddess of agriculture and fertility

Dionysos (Bacchus) | god of wine, mysteries, and the theatre

Hephaistos (Vulcan) | god of smiths and metal-workers

Hera (Juno) | goddess of marriage; consort of Zeus

Hermes (Mercury) | god of merchants; messenger of Zeus

Poseidon (Neptune) | god of the sea and earthquakes

Zeus (Jupiter) | god of the sky; ruler of Olympus

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