

Moirai



The three **Moirai**. Relief, grave of Alexander von der Mark by Johann Gottfried Schadow. Old National Gallery, Berlin

In Greek mythology, the **Moirai** or **Moerae** /'mɪr.i:/ or /'mi.ri:/ (Ancient Greek: Μοῖραι, “apportioners”), often known in English as the **Fates** (Latin: *Fatae*), were the white-robed incarnations of destiny; their Roman equivalent was the **Parcae** (euphemistically the “sparing ones”). Their number became fixed at three: **Clotho** (spinner), **Lachesis** (allotter) and **Atropos** (unturnable).

They controlled the mother thread of lifestyle of every mortal from birth to death. They were independent, at the helm of necessity, directed fate, and watched that the fate assigned to every being by eternal laws might take its course without obstruction. The gods and men had to submit to them, although **Zeus**’s relationship with them is a matter of debate: some sources say he is the only one who can command them (the *Zeus Moiragetes*), yet others suggest he was also bound to the Moirai’s dictates.^[1] In the **Homeric** poems **Moirai** or **Aisa**, is related with the limit and end of life, and **Zeus** appears as the guider of destiny. In the *Theogony* of **Hesiod**, the three **Moirai** are personified, daughters of **Nyx** and are acting over the gods.^[2] Later they are daughters of **Zeus** and **Themis**, who was the embodiment of divine order and law. In **Plato’s Republic** the Three Fates are daughters of **Ananke** (necessity).^[3]

It seems that **Moirai** is related with **Tekmor** (proof, ordinance) and with **Ananke** (destiny, necessity), who were primeval goddesses in mythical cosmogonies. The ancient Greek writers might call this power **Moirai** or **Ananke**, and even the gods could not alter what was ordained.^[4] The concept of a universal principle of natural order has been compared to similar concepts in other cultures like the **Vedic Rta**, the **Avestan Asha (Arta)** and the **Egyptian Maat**.

In earliest Greek philosophy, the cosmogony of **Anaximander** is based on these mythical beliefs. The goddess **Dike** (justice, divine retribution), keeps the order and sets a limit to any actions.^[5]

1 Etymology



The three fates, Lachesis, Atropos, and Clotho; by Hans Vischer ca 1530 AD. Kunstgewerbemuseum Berlin

The **Ancient Greek** word **moira** (μοῖρα) means a portion or lot of the whole, and is related to *meros*, “part, lot” and *meros*, “fate, doom”,^[6] **Latin** *meritum*, “desert, reward”, **English** *merit*, derived from the **PIE** root **(s)mer*, “to allot, assign”.^[7]

Moirai may mean portion or share in the distribution of booty (ἴση μοῖρα *ísē moîra* “equal booty”),^[8] portion in life, lot, destiny, (μοῖραν ἔθηκεν ἀθάνατοι *moîran éthēken athánatoi* “the immortals fixed the destiny”)^[9] death (μοῖρα θανάτοιο *moîra thanátoio* “destiny of death”), portion of the distributed land,^[10] The word is also used for something which is meet and right (κατὰ μοῖραν, *katà moîran*, “according to fate, in order, rightly”)^[11]

It seems that originally the word **moira** did not indicate destiny but included *ascertainment* or *proof*, a non-abstract certainty. The word *daemon*, which was an agent related to unexpected events, came to be similar to the word **moira**.^[12] This agent or cause against human con-

trol might be also called **tyche** (chance, fate): “You mistress **moira**, and **tyche**, and my **daemon**”^[13]

The word *nomos*, “law”, may have meant originally a portion or lot, as in the verb *nemein*, “to distribute”, and thus “natural lot” came to mean “natural law”.^[14] The word *dike*, “justice”, conveyed the notion that someone should stay within his own specified boundaries, respecting the ones of his neighbour. If someone broke his boundaries, thus getting more than his ordained part, then he would be punished by law. By extension, *moira* was one’s portion or part in destiny which consisted of good and bad moments as was predetermined by the *Moirai* (Fates), and it was impossible for anyone to get more than his ordained part. In modern Greek the word came to mean “destiny” (μοίρα or εμπαμένη).

Kismet, the predetermined course of events in the Muslim traditions, seems to have a similar etymology and function: Arabic *qismat* “lot” *qasama*, “to divide, allot” developed to mean Fate or destiny. As a loanword, *qesmat* ‘fate’ appears in Persian, whence in Urdu language, and eventually in English **Kismet**.

2 The three Moirai



The three Moirai, or the triumph of death, Flemish tapestry ca 1520, Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

When they were three,^[15] the three Moirai were:

- **Clotho** (/ˈkloʊθɔs/, Greek Κλωθώ [kloːˈtʰɔː] – “spinner”) spun the thread of life from her Distaff onto her Spindle. Her Roman equivalent was *Nona*, (the ‘Ninth’), who was originally a goddess called upon in the ninth month of pregnancy.

- **Lachesis** (/ˈlækɪsɪs/, Greek Λάχεσις [ˈlakʰɛsɪs] – “allotter” or drawer of lots) measured the thread of life allotted to each person with her **measuring rod**. Her Roman equivalent was *Decima* (the ‘Tenth’).

- **Atropos** (/ˈætrəpɒs/, Greek Ἀτροπος [ˈatropos] – “inexorable” or “inevitable”, literally “unturning”,^[16] sometimes called Aisa) was the cutter of the thread of life. She chose the manner of each person’s death; and when their time was come, she cut their life-thread with “her abhorred shears”.^[17] Her Roman equivalent was *Morta* (‘Dead One’).

In the *Republic* of Plato, the three Moirai sing in unison with the music of the **Seirenes**. **Lachesis** sings the things that were, **Clotho** the things that are, and **Atropos** the things that are to be.^[18] Pindar in his Hymn to the Fates, holds them in high honour. He calls them to send their sisters **Hours**, **Eunomia** (Lawfulness), **Dike** (Right), and **Eirene** (Peace), to stop the internal civil strife:

Listen Fates, who sit nearest of gods to the throne of Zeus, and weave with shuttles of adamant, inescapable devices for counsels of every kind beyond counting, **Aisa**, **Clotho** and **Lachesis**, fine-armed daughters of Night, hearken to our prayers, all-terrible goddesses, of sky and earth. Send us rose-bosomed Lawfulness, and her sisters on glittering thrones,

Right and crowned Peace, and make this city forget the misfortunes which lie heavily on her heart.^[19]

3 Origins

In ancient times caves were used for burial purposes in eastern Mediterranean, in conjunction with underground shrines or temples. The priests and the priestesses exerted considerable influence upon the world of the living. Births are also recorded in such shrines, and the Greek legend of conception and birth in the tomb – as in the story of Danae- is based on the ancient belief that the dead know the future. Such caves were the caves of Ida and Dikte mountains in **Crete**, where myth situates the birth of **Zeus** and other gods, and the cave of **Eileithyia** near **Knossos**.^[20] The relative Minoan goddesses were named **Diktynna** (later identified with **Artemis**), who was a mountain nymph of hunting, and **Eileithyia** who was the goddess of childbirth.^[21]

It seems that in Pre-Greek religion Aisa was a **daemon**. In Mycenaean religion Aisa or Moira was originally a living power related with the limit and end of life. At the moment of birth she spins the destiny, because birth ordains death.^[22] Later Aisa is not alone, but she is accompanied by the “Spinners”, who are the personifications of

Fate.^[23] The act of spinning is also associated with the gods, who at birth and at marriage do not spin the thread of life, but single facts like destruction, return or good fortune. Everything which has been spun must be winded on the spindle, and this was considered a cloth, like a net or loop which captured man.^[24]

Invisible bonds and knots could be controlled from a loom, and twining was a magic art used by the magicians to harm a person, and control his individual fate.^[25] Similar ideas appear in **Norse mythology**,^[26] and in Greek folklore. The appearance of the gods and the Moirai may be related to the fairy tale motif, which is common in many **Indo-European** sagas and also in Greek folklore. The fairies appear beside the cradle of the newborn child and bring gifts to him.^[27]

The services of the temples were performed by old women who were physically misshapen, though intellectually superior persons, giving rise to the fear of witches and of the misshapen. They might be considered representations of the Moirai, who belonged to the underworld, but secretly guided the lives of those in the upperworld. Their power could be sustained by witchcraft and oracles.^[20] In **Greek mythology** the Moirai at birth are accompanied by **Eileithyia**. At the birth of **Hercules** they use together a magic art, to free the newborn from any “bonds” and “knots”.^[25]

4 The Homeric Moira



An 1886 bas-relief figure of *Dike Astraea* in the Old Supreme Court Chamber at the *Vermont State House*.

Much of the **Mycenean** religion survived into **classical Greece**, but it is not known to what extent Greek religious belief is Mycenean, nor how much is a product of the **Greek Dark Ages** or later. **M. Finley** detected only few authentic Mycenean beliefs in the eighth-century **Homeric** world.^[28] The religion which later the Greeks considered **Hellenic** embodies a paradox. Though the world is dominated by a divine power bestowed in different ways on men, nothing but “darkness” lay ahead. Life was frail and unsubstantial, and man was like “a shadow in a dream”.^[29]

In the **Homeric** poems the words *moira*, *aisa*, *moros* mean “portion, part”. Originally they did not indicate a power which led destiny, and must be considered to include the “ascertainment” or “proof”. By extension *Moira* is the portion in glory, happiness, mishappenings, death (μοίρα θανάτοιο: destiny of death) which are unexpected events. The unexpected events were usually attributed to **daemons**, who appeared in special occurrences. In that regard *Moira* was later considered an agent, like the daemon of Pre-Greek religion.^[30]

People believed that their portion in destiny was something similar with their portion in booty, which was distributed according to their descent, and traditional rules. It was possible to get more than their ordained portion (*moira*), but they had to face severe consequences because their action was “over *moira*” (υπέρ μοίραν: over the portion). It may be considered that they “broke the order”. The most certain order in human lives is that every human should die, and this was determined by *Aisa* or *Moira* at the moment of birth.^[22] The **Myceneans** believed that what comes should come (**fatalism**), and this was considered rightly offered (according to **fate**: in order). If someone died in battle, he would exist like a shadow in the gloomy space of the underworld.^[30]

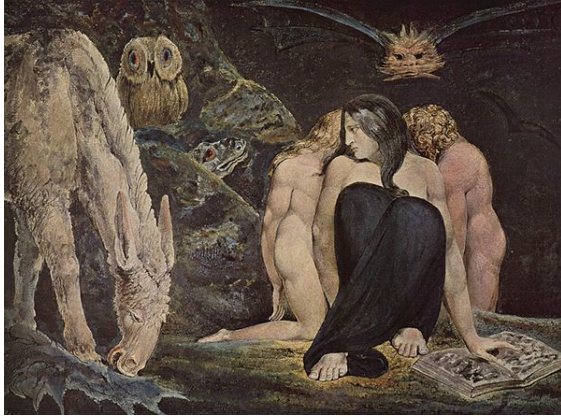
The kingdom of *Moira* is the kingdom of the limit and the end. In a passage in *Iliad*, **Apollo** tries three times to stop **Patroclus** in front of the walls of **Troy**, warning him that it is “over his portion” to sack the city. *Aisa* (*moira*) seems to set a limit on the most vigorous men’s actions.^[31]

Moira is a power acting in parallel with the gods, and even they could not change the destiny which was predetermined. In the *Iliad*, **Zeus** knows that his dearest **Sarpedon** will be killed by **Patroclus**, but he cannot save him.^[32] In the famous scene of **Kerostasia**, **Zeus** the chief-deity of the **Myceneans** appears as the guider of destiny. Using a pair of scales he decides that **Hector** must die, according to his *aisa* (destiny).^[33] His decision seems to be independent from his will, and is not related with any “moral purpose”. His attitude is explained by **Achilleus** to **Priam**, in a parable of two jars at the door of **Zeus**, one of which contains good things, and the other evil. **Zeus** gives a mixture to some men, to others only evil and such are driven by hunger over the earth. This was the old “heroic outlook”.^[34]

The personification of *Moira* appears in the newer parts of the epos. In *Odyssey*, she is accompanied by the “Spinners”, the personifications of **Fate**, who do not have separate names.^[23] *Moira* seems to spin the predetermined course of events. **Agamemnon** claims that he is not responsible for his arrogance. He took the prize of **Achilleus**, because **Zeus** and *Moira* predetermined his decision.^[35] In the last section of *Iliad*, *Moira* is the “mighty fate” (μοίρα κραταιά: *moira krataia*) who leads destiny and the course of events. **Thetis** the mother of **Achilleus** warns him that he will not live long because mighty fate stands hard by him, therefore he must give to

Priam the corpse of Hector.^[36] At Hector's birth mighty fate predetermined that his corpse would be devoured by dogs after his death, and Hecabe is crying desperately asking for revenge.^[37]

5 Mythical cosmogonies



Hekate and the Moirai (The Night of Enitharmon's Joy), by William Blake, Tate Gallery

The three Moirai are daughters of the primeval goddess Nyx (Night), and sisters of Keres (black Fates), Thanatos (Death) and Nemesis.^[2] Later they are daughters of Zeus and the Titaness Themis (the "Institutor"),^[38] who was the embodiment of divine order and law.^{[39][40]} and sisters of Eunomia (lawfulness, order), Dike (Justice), and Eirene (Peace).^[38]

Hesiod introduces a moral purpose which is absent in the Homeric poems. The Moirai represent a power to which even the gods have to conform. They give men at birth both evil and good moments, and they punish not only men but also gods for their sins.^[2]

In the cosmogony of Alcman (7th century BC), first came Thetis (Disposer, Creation), and then simultaneously Poros (path) and Tekmor (end post, ordinance).^{[41][42]} Poros is related with the beginning of all things, and Tekmor is related with the end of all things.^[43]

Later in the Orphic cosmogony, first came Thesis (Disposer), whose ineffable nature is unexpressed. Ananke (necessity) is the primeval goddess of inevitability who is entwined with the time-god Chronos, at the very beginning of time. They represented the cosmic forces of Fate and Time, and they were called sometimes to control the fates of the gods. The three Moirai are daughters of Ananke.^[44]

6 Mythology

The Moirai were described as ugly old women, sometimes lame. They were severe, inflexible and stern.



Prometheus creates man. Clotho and Lachesis besides Poseidon (with his trident), and presumably Atropos besides Artemis (with the moon crescent). Roman sarcophagus, Louvre.

Clotho carries a spindle or a roll (the book of fate), Lachesis a staff with which she points to the horoscope on a globe, and Atropos (Aisa) a scroll, a wax tablet, a sundial, a pair of scales, or a cutting instrument. At other times the three were shown with staffs or sceptres, the symbols of dominion, and sometimes even with crowns. At the birth of each man they appeared spinning, measuring, and cutting the thread of life.^[45]

The Moirai were supposed to appear three nights after a child's birth to determine the course of its life, as in the story of Meleager and the firebrand taken from the hearth and preserved by his mother to extend his life.^[46] Bruce Karl Braswell from readings in the lexicon of Hesychius, associates the appearance of the Moirai at the family hearth on the seventh day with the ancient Greek custom of waiting seven days after birth to decide whether to accept the infant into the Gens and to give it a name, cemented with a ritual at the hearth.^[47] At Sparta the temple to the Moirai stood near the communal hearth of the polis, as Pausanias observed.^[48]

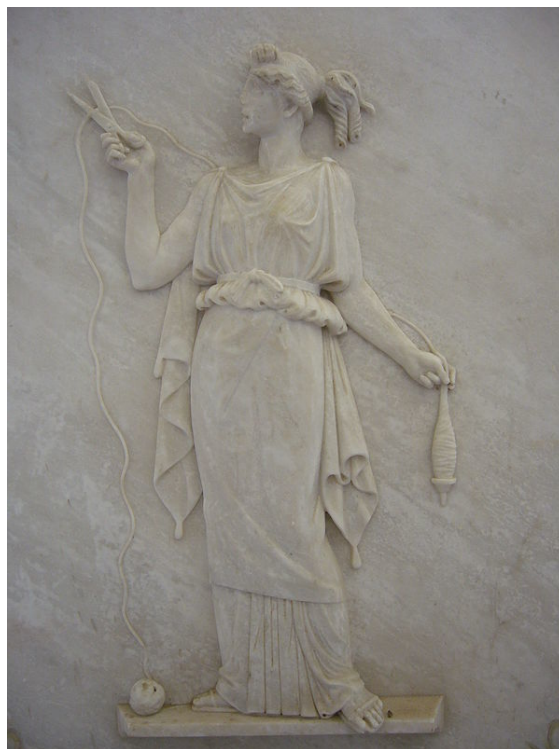
As goddesses of birth who even prophesied the fate of the newly born, Eileithyia, the ancient Minoan goddess of childbirth and divine midwifery, was their companion. Pausanias mentions an ancient role of Eileithyia as "the clever spinner", relating her with destiny too.^[49] Their appearance indicate the Greek desire for health which was connected with the Greek cult of the body that was essentially a religious activity.^[50]

The Moirai assigned to the terrible chthonic goddesses Erinyes who inflicted the punishment for evil deeds their proper functions, and with them directed fate according to necessity. As goddesses of death they appeared together with the daemons of death Keres and the infernal Erinyes.^[45]

In earlier times they were represented as only a few—perhaps only one—individual goddess. Homer's *Iliad* (xxiv.209) speaks generally of the Moira, who spins the thread of life for men at their birth; she is *Moirā Krataia* "powerful Moira" (xvi.334) or there are several Moirai (xxiv.49). In the *Odyssey* (vii.197) there is a reference to the *Klôthes*, or Spinners. At Delphi, only the Fates of Birth and Death were revered.^[51] In Athens, Aphrodite, who had an earlier, pre-Olympic existence, was called *Aphrodite Urania* the "eldest of the Fates" according to Pausanias (x.24.4).



Bas relief of Lachesis. Base of a lampstand in front of the Supreme Court of the United States Washington, D.C..



Bas relief of Atropos cutting the thread of life

Some Greek mythographers went so far as to claim that the Moirai were the daughters of Zeus—paired with Themis (“Fundament”), as Hesiod had it in one passage.^[52] In the older myths they are daughters of primeval beings like Nyx (“Night”) in *Theogony*, or Ananke (“Necessity”) in *Orphic* cosmogony. Whether or not providing a father even for the Moirai was a symptom of how far Greek mythographers were willing to go, in order to modify the old myths to suit the patrilineal Olympic order,^[53] the claim of a paternity was certainly not acceptable to Aeschylus, Herodotus, or Plato.

Despite their forbidding reputation, the Moirai could be placated as goddesses. Brides in Athens offered them locks of hair, and women swore by them. They may have originated as birth goddesses and only later acquired their reputation as the agents of destiny.

According to the mythographer Apollodorus, in the *Gigantomachy*, the war between the Giants and Olympians, the Moirai killed the Giants Agrios and Thoon with their bronze clubs.^[54]

7 Zeus and the Moirai

In the *Homeric* poems Moira, who is almost always one, is acting independently from the gods. Only Zeus, the chief sky-deity of the Myceneans is close to Moira, and in a passage he is the being of this power.^[30] Using a weighing scale (balance) Zeus weighs Hector’s “lot of death” (Ker)

against the one of Achilleus. Hector’s lot weighs down, and he dies according to Fate. Zeus appears as the guider of destiny, who gives everyone the right portion.^{[55][56]}

In a Mycenean vase, Zeus holds a weighing scale (balance) in front of two warriors, indicating that he is measuring their destiny before the battle. The belief (fatalism) was that if they die in battle, they must die, and this was rightly offered (according to fate).^[57]

In *Theogony*, the three Moirai are daughters of the primeval goddess, Nyx (“Night”),^[58] representing a power acting over the gods.^[2] Later they are daughters of Zeus who gives them the greatest honour, and Themis, the ancient goddess of law and divine order.^{[39][40]}

Even the gods feared the Moirai or Fates, which according to Herodotus a god could not escape.^[59] The Pythian priestess at Delphi once admitted, that Zeus was also subject to their power, though no classic writing clarifies as to what exact extent the lives of immortals were affected by the whims of the Fates. It is to be expected that the relationship of Zeus and the Moirai was not immutable over the centuries. In either case in antiquity we can see a feeling towards a notion of an order to which even the gods have to conform. Simonides names this power Ananke (necessity) (the mother of the Moirai in *Orphic* cosmogony) and says that even the gods don’t fight against it.^[60] Aeschylus combines Fate and necessity in a scheme, and claims that even Zeus cannot alter which is ordained.^[4]

A supposed epithet Zeus Moiragetes, meaning “Zeus



Bas relief of Clotho. Base of a lampstand in front of the Supreme Court of the United States, Washington

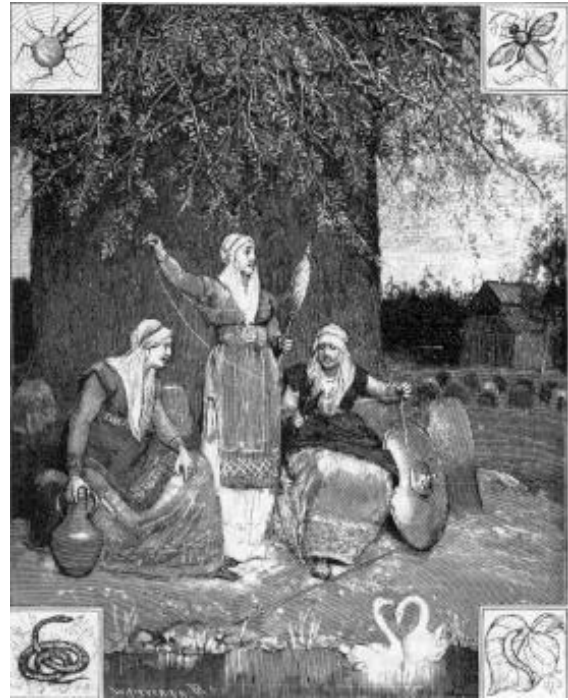
Leader of the Moirai” was inferred by Pausanias from an inscription he saw in the 2nd century AD at Olympia: “As you go to the starting-point for the chariot-race there is an altar with an inscription to the Bringer of Fate.^[61] This is plainly a surname of Zeus, who knows the affairs of men, all that the Fates give them, and all that is not destined for them.”^[62] At the Temple of Zeus at Megara, Pausanias inferred from the relief sculptures he saw “Above the head of Zeus are the Horai and Moirai, and all may see that he is the only god obeyed by Moira.” Pausanias’ inferred assertion is unsupported in cult practice, though he noted a sanctuary of the Moirai there at Olympia (v.15.4), and also at Corinth (ii.4.7) and Sparta (iii.11.8), and adjoining the sanctuary of Themis outside a city gate of Thebes.^[63]

8 Cross-cultural parallels

8.1 Europe

In Roman mythology the three Moirai are the Parcae or Fata, plural of “fatum” meaning prophetic declaration, oracle, or destiny. The English words fate (native *wyrd*) and fairy (magic, enchantment), are both derived from “fata”, “fatum”.^[64]

In Norse mythology the Norns are female beings who rule the destiny of gods and men, twining the thread of life. They set up the laws and decided on the lives of the children of men.^[65] Their names were Urðr (that which became or happened) related with Wyrd, weird (fate),



The Norns spin the threads of fate at the foot of Yggdrasil, the tree of the world.

Verðandi (that which is happening)^[66] and Skuld (that which should become, debt, guilt).^[67]

In younger legendary sagas, the Norns appear to have been synonymous with witches (*Völvas*), and they arrive at the birth of the hero to shape his destiny. It seems that originally all of them were *Disir*, ghosts or deities associated with destruction and destiny. The notion that they were three, their distinction and association with the past, present and future may be due to a late influence from Greek and Roman mythology.^[68]

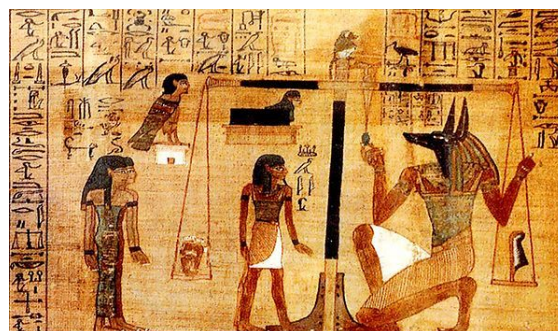
The Valkyries (choosers of the slain), were originally daemons of death. They were female figures who decided who will die in battle, and brought their chosen to the afterlife hall of the slain. They were also related with spinning, and one of them was named Skuld (debt, guilt).^[69] They may be related to Keres, the daemons of death in Greek mythology, who accompanied the dead to the entrance of Hades. In the scene of Kerostasie Keres are the “lots of death”, and in some cases Ker (destruction) has the same meaning, with Moira interpreted as “destiny of death” (*moira thanatoio* :μοῖρα θανάτοιο).^[70]

The Germanic Matres and Matrones, female deities almost entirely in a group of three, have been proposed as connected to the Norns and the Valkyries.^[71]

In Anglo-Saxon culture Wyrd (Weird) is a concept corresponding to fate or personal destiny (literally: what befalls one). Its Norse cognate is Urðr, and both names are derived from the PIE root *wert*, “to turn, wind”,^[72] related with “spindle, distaff”.^[73] In Old English literature Wyrd goes ever as she shall, and remains wholly



Macbeth and Banquo meeting the three weird sisters in a woodcut from Holinshed's Chronicles.



A section of the Egyptian Book of the Dead written on papyrus showing the "Weighing of the Heart" in the Duat using the feather of Maat as the measure in balance.

inevitable.^{[74][75]}

In *Macbeth* the Weird sisters (or Three Witches), are prophetesses, who are deeply entrenched in both worlds of reality and supernatural. Their creation was influenced by British folklore, witchcraft, and the legends of the Norns and the Moirai.^[76] Hecate, the chthonic Greek goddess associated with magic, witchcraft, necromancy, and three-way crossroads,^[77] appears as the master of the "Three witches". In Ancient Greek religion, Hecate as goddess of childbirth is identified with Artemis,^[78] who was the leader (ἡγεμόνη: *hegemone*) of the nymphs.^[79]

In Lithuanian mythology Laima is the personification of destiny, and her most important duty was to prophecy how the life of a newborn will take place. She may be related to the Hindu goddess Laksmi, who was the personification of wealth and prosperity, and associated with good fortune.^{[80][81]} In Latvian mythology, Laima and her sisters were a trinity of fate deities.^[82]

The Moirai were usually described as cold, remorseless and unfeeling, and depicted as old crones or hags. The independent *spinster* has always inspired fear rather than matrimony: "this sinister connotation we inherit from the spinning goddess," write Ruck and Staples (Ruck and Staples 1994:). See *weaving (mythology)*.

8.2 Orient

The notion of a universal principle of natural order has been compared to similar ideas in other cultures, such as *aša*, (*Asha*) in Avestan religion, *Rta* in Vedic religion, and *Maat* in Ancient Egyptian religion.^[83]

In the Avestan religion and Zoroastrianism, *aša*, is commonly summarized in accord with its contextual implications of "truth", "right(eousness)", "order". *Aša* and its Vedic equivalent, *Rta*, are both derived from a PIE root meaning "properly joined, right, true". The word is the proper name of the divinity *Asha*, the personification of "Truth" and "Righteousness". *Aša* corresponds to an objective, material reality which embraces all of existence.^[84] This cosmic force is imbued also with morality, as verbal Truth, and Righteousness, ac-

tion conforming with the moral order.^[85] In the literature of the Mandeans, an angelic being has the responsibility of weighing the souls of the deceased to determine their worthiness, using a set of scales.^[86]

In the Vedic religion, *Rta* is an ontological principle of natural order which regulates and coordinates the operation of the universe. The term is now interpreted abstractly as "cosmic order", or simply as "truth",^[87] although it was never abstract at the time.^[88] It seems that this idea originally arose in the Indo-Aryan period, from a con-sideration (so denoted to indicate the original meaning of communing with the star beings) of the qualities of nature which either remain constant or which occur on a regular basis.^[89]

The individuals fulfill their true natures when they follow the path set for them by the ordinances of *Rta*, acting according to the *Dharma*, which is related to social and moral spheres.^[90] The god of the waters *Varuna* was probably originally conceived as the personalized aspect of the otherwise impersonal *Rta*.^[91] The gods are never portrayed as having command over *Rta*, but instead they remain subject to it like all created beings.^[90]

In Egyptian religion, *maat* was the ancient Egyptian concept of truth, balance, order, law, morality, and justice. The word is the proper name of the divinity *Maat*, who was the goddess of harmony, justice, and truth represented as a young woman. It was considered that she set the order of the universe from *chaos* at the moment of creation.^[92] *Maat* was the norm and basic values that formed the backdrop for the application of justice that had to be carried out in the spirit of truth and fairness.^[93]

In Egyptian mythology, *Maat* dealt with the weighing of souls that took place in the underworld. Her feather was the measure that determined whether the souls (considered to reside in the heart) of the departed would reach the paradise of afterlife successfully. In the famous scene of the Egyptian *Book of the Dead*, Anubis, using a scale, weighs the sins of a man's heart against the feather of truth, which represents *maat*. If man's heart weighs down, then he is devoured by a monster.^[94]

9 References in literature

In the novel *Captain Blood* by Raphael Sabatini, Captain Peter Blood names his three buccaneering pirate ships after the three fates: Clothos, Atropos, and Lachesis.

In the novel *Cold Days* by Jim Butcher, Mother Winter, Matriarch of the Winter Court of Fae and “Queen that Was,” is revealed to also be the historic Atropos, as well as Skuld.

In the novel *Insomnia* by Stephen King, the three little bald doctors Ralph Roberts and Lois Chasse constantly see were named after Atropos, Clotho and Lachesis. These little bald doctors were the ones who control everybody’s lives cutting a “balloon string” off their auras.

In the novel *With a Tangled Skein* (part of the Incarnations of Immortality series) by Piers Anthony, the main protagonist, Niobe, joins the incarnation of Fate first as Clotho and then as Lachesis in order to thwart the plans of Satan.

In the short story: The Loom of Thessaly by David Brin the three Fates are encountered by a latter day Greek hero. Collected in the anthology *The River of Time*.

10 Astronomical objects

The asteroids (97) Klotho, (120) Lachesis, and (273) Atropos are named for the Three Fates.

11 See also

- Ananke
- Asha
- Istustaya and Papaya
- Kallone
- Enchanted Moura
- Laima
- Matrones
- Norns
- Parcae
- Rta
- Tekmor
- Three Witches

12 Notes

- [1] “Theoi project: Moirae and the Throne of Zeus”. Theoi.com. Retrieved 2013-01-24.
- [2] Hesiod, *Theogony* 221–225. “Also Night (Nyx) bare the destinies (Moirai), and ruthless avenging Fates (Keres), who give men at their birth both evil and good to have, and they pursue the transgressions of men and gods... until they punish the sinner with a sore penalty.” online *The Theogony of Hesiod. Transl. Hugh Evelyn White* (1914) 221–225.
- [3] Plato, *Republic* 617c (trans. Shorey) (Greek philosopher 4th century BC): Theoi Project – Ananke.
- [4] Aeschylus, *Prometheus Bound*, 510–518: “Not in this way is Moira (Fate) who brings all to fulfillment, destined to complete this course. Skill is weaker far than Ananke (necessity). Yes in that even he (Zeus) cannot escape what is foretold.” Theoi Project – Ananke
- [5] Simplicius, *In Physica* 24.13. The Greek peers of Anaximander echoed his sentiment with the belief in natural boundaries beyond which not even the gods could operate: Bertrand Russell (1946). *A history of Western Philosophy, and its connections with Political and Social Circumstances from the earliest times to the Present Day*. New York. Simon and Schuster p. 148.
- [6] Moira, Online Etymology Dictionary
- [7] merit, Online Etymology Dictionary
- [8] Iliad, 9.318: *Lidell, Scott A Greek English Lexicon*: μοῖρα,
- [9] *Odyssey* 19.152: *Lidell, Scott A Greek English Lexicon*: μοῖρα
- [10] The citizens of Sparta were called *omoioi* (equals), indicating that they had equal parts (“isomoiria” ἰσομοῖρία) of the allotted land
- [11] Iliad 16.367: *Lidell, Scott A Greek English Lexicon*: μοῖρα
- [12] M.Nillson, Vol I, p.217
- [13] Euripides, *Iph. Aul.* V 113: " 'ὦ πότνια μοῖρα καὶ τύχη, δαίμων τ' ἐμός " *Lidell, Scott A Greek English Lexicon*: τύχη.
- [14] L.H.Jeffery (1976) *Archaic Greece. The City-States c. 700–500 BC*. Ernest Benn Ltd. London & Tonbridge p. 42 ISBN 0-510-03271-0
- [15] The expectation that there would be three was strong by the 2nd century CE: when Pausanias visited the temple of Apollo at Delphi, with Apollo and Zeus each accompanied by a Fate, he remarked “There are also images of two Moirai; but in place of the third Moira there stand by their side Zeus Moiragetes and Apollon Moiragetes.”
- [16] Compare the ancient goddess Adrasteia, the “inescapable”.
- [17] “Comes the blind Fury with th’abhorred shears, / And slits the thin spun life.” John Milton, *Lycidas*, l. 75. Works related to *Lycidas* at Wikisource

- [18] Plato, *Republic*, 617c (translated by Sorrey). Theoi Project – Ananke
- [19] Pindar, *Fragmenta Chorica Adespota*, 5. Diehl
- [20] R. G. Wunderlich (1994). *The secret of Crete*. Efstathiadis group, Athens pp. 290–291, 295–296. (British Edition, Souvenir Press Ltd. London 1975) ISBN 960-226-261-3
- [21] Burkert, Walter. (1985). *The Greek Religion*, Harvard University Press. pp 32–47
- [22] “Not yet is thy fate (moira) to die and meet thy doom” (*Ilias* 7.52), “But thereafter he (Achilleus) shall suffer whatever Fate (Aisa) spun for him at his birth, when his mother bore him”: (*Ilias* 20.128): M. Nilsson. (1967). *Die Geschichte der Griechische Religion*” Vol I, C.F.Beck Verlag., München pp. 363–364
- [23] “But thereafter he shall suffer whatever Fate (Aisa) and the dread Spinners spun with her thread for him at his birth, when his mother bore him.” (*Odyssey* 7.198)
- [24] “Easily known is the seed of that man for whom the son of Cronos spins the seed of good fortune at marriage and at birth.” (*Odyssey*, 4.208): M. Nilsson. (1967). “Die Geschichte der Griechische Religion”. C.F.Beck Verlag., München pp. 363–364
- [25] M. Nilsson. (1967). “Die Geschichte der Griechische Religion”. C.F.Beck Verlag., München pp. 114, 200
- [26] “If a lady loosened a knot in the woof, she could liberate the leg of her hero. But if she tied a knot, she could stop the enemy from moving.”: Harrison, D. & Svensson, K. (2007): *Vikingaliv*. Fäth & Hässler, Värnamo. P. 72 ISBN 978-91-27-35725-9
- [27] M. Nilsson. (1967). “Die Geschichte der Griechische Religion”. C.F.Beck Verlag., München pp. 363–364
- [28] M. Finley (1978). *The world of Odysseus*. p.124
- [29] “Man’s life is a day. What is he, what is he not? A shadow in a dream is man.: Pindar, *Pythionikos* VIII 95-7: C. M. Bowra (1957). *The Greek experience*. The World publishing company. Cleveland and New York. p. 64
- [30] M. Nilsson (1967). *Die Geschichte der Griechischen Religion*, Vol I. C.F.Beck Verlag. München. p.361-368
- [31] *Iliad* 16.705: “Draw back noble Patrolos, it is not your lot (aisa) to sack the city of the Trojan chieftains, nor yet it will be that of Achilleus, who is far better than you are.”: C. Castoriades (2004), *Ce que fait La Grece. 1 D' Homere a Heraclite. La creation Humaine II*. Edition du Seuil, Paris p.300
- [32] *Iliad* 16.433: “Ah, woe is me, for that it is fated that Sarpedon, dearest of men to me, be slain by Patroclus, son of Menoetius! And in twofold wise is my heart divided in counsel as I ponder in my thought whether I shall snatch him up while yet he liveth and set him afar from the tearful war in the rich land of Lycia, or whether I shall slay him now beneath the hands of the son of Menoetius.”
- [33] Morrison, J. V. (1997). “Kerostasia, the Dictates of Fate, and the Will of Zeus in the *Iliad*”. *Arethusa* 30 (2): 276–296. doi:10.1353/are.1997.0008.
- [34] *Iliad* 24.527-33: C. M. Bowra (1957). “The Greek experience”. The World publishing company. Cleveland and New York. p. 53
- [35] *Iliad* 19.87: “Howbeit it is not I that am at fault, but Zeus and Fate (Moirai) and Erinys, that walketh in darkness, seeing that in the midst of the place of gathering they cast upon my soul fierce blindness on that day, when of mine own arrogance I took from Achilles his prize.”
- [36] *Iliad* 24.131: “For I tell thee, thou shall not thyself be long in life, but even nowdoth death stand hard by thee and mighty fate (moira krataia)”.
- [37] *Iliad* 24.209: On this wise for him did mighty fate spin with her thread at his birth, when myself did bear him, that he should glut swift-footed dogs far from his parents, in the abode of a violent man. "
- [38] *Theogony* 901: *The Theogony of Hesiod*. Transl. Hugh Evelyn White (1914) 901–906 online
- [39] M. Finley (1978) *The world of Odysseus* rev.ed. New York Viking Press p.78 Note.
- [40] In *Odyssey*, *Themistes*: “dooms, things laid down originally by divine authority”, the *themistes* of Zeus. Body: council of elders who stored in the collective memory. *Thesmos*: unwritten law, based on precedent: L.H. Jeffery (1976) *Archaic Greece. The City-States c. 700–500 BC*. Ernest Benn Ltd. London & Tonbridge p. 42 ISBN 0-510-03271-0
- [41] τέκμαρ (Tekmor): fixed mark or boundary, end post, purpose τέκμαρ,
- [42] Old English: *Takn*, sign, mark, English: *token*, sign, omen. Compare Sanskrit, *Lakṣmi*. *token*, Online Etymology Dictionary
- [43] Alcman, frag 5, (from Scholia), Transl Cambell, Vol *Greek Lyric II: Theoi Project – Ananke*.
- [44] *Orphica. Theogonies frag 54 (from Damascius). Greek hymns 3rd to 2nd centuries BC* Theoi Project – Ananke.
- [45] “Theoi Project Moirai”. Theoi.com. Retrieved 2013-01-24.
- [46] Pseudo-Apollodorus, story of Meleager in *Bibliothèque* 1.65.
- [47] Braswell, Bruce Karl (1991). “Meleager and the Moirai: A Note on Ps.-Apollodorus 1. 65”. *Hermes* 119 (4): 488–489. JSTOR 4476850.
- [48] Pausanias, 3.11. 10–11.
- [49] Pausanias, 8.21.3.
- [50] Pindar, *Nemean* VII 1–4
- [51] Kerenyi 1951:32.
- [52] Hesiod, *Theogony*, 904.
- [53] “Zeus obviously had to assimilate this spinning Goddess, and he made them into his daughters, too, although not by all accounts, for even he was bound ultimately by Fate”, observe Ruck and Staples (1994:57).

- [54] Apollodorus, 1.6.1–2.
- [55] Ilias X 209 ff. O.Crusius RI, Harisson *Prolegomena* 5.43 ff: M. Nilsson (1967). *Die Geschichte der Griechische Religion. Vol I*. C.F.Beck Verlag. Munchen pp. 217, 222
- [56] This is similar to the famous scene in the Egyptian book of the dead, although the conception is different. Anubis weighs the sins of a man's heart against the feather of truth. If man's heart weighs down, then he is devoured by a monster: Taylor, John H. (Editor- 2009), *Ancient Egyptian Book of the Dead: Journey through the afterlife*. British Museum Press, London, 2010. pp. 209, 215 ISBN 978-0-7141-1993-9
- [57] M.P.Nilsson, "Zeus-Schicksalwaage ". *Homer and Mycenea* D 56. The same belief in Kismet. Also the soldiers in the World-War believed that they wouldn't die by a bullet, unless their name was written on the bullet: M. Nilsson (1967). *Die Geschichte der Griechische Religion. Vol I*. C.F.Beck Verlag. Munchen pp. 366, 367
- [58] H.J. Rose, *Handbook of Greek Mythology*, p.24
- [59] Herodotus, *Histories* I 91
- [60] Diels-Kranz. Fr.420
- [61] The Greek is *Moiragetes* (Pausanias, 5.15.5).
- [62] Pausanias, v.15.5.
- [63] "There is a sanctuary of Themis, with an image of white marble; adjoining it is a sanctuary of the Fates, while the third is of Zeus of the Market. Zeus is made of stone; the Fates have no images." (Pausanias, ix.25.4).
- [64] *Online Etymology Dictionary*: fate, fairy
- [65] *Voluspa* 20: Henry Adams Bellows' translation for The American-Scandinavian Foundation with clickable names *Völuspá*
- [66] Both are derived from the Old Norse verb *verða*, "to be" Swedish Etymological dictionary
- [67] *Online Etymology Dictionary* shall
- [68] Nordisk familjebook (1913)/ Ugglepplagan.19.Mykenai-Newpada. Nordisk Familje-book
- [69] Davidson H.R. Ellis (1988). *Myths and symbols in Pagan Europe. Early Scandinavian and Celtic Religions*. Manchester University Press p. 58-61 ISBN 0-7190-2579-6
- [70] Keres, derived from the Greek verb *kirainein* (κηραίνειν) meaning "to be destroyed". Compare *Kir* (κηρ), "candle". M.Nilsson (1967). Vol I, p 218, 366
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- [72] *Online Etymology Dictionary*: wyrd
- [73] Latin *vertere* and Russian *vreteno*: *Online Etymology Dictionary*: versus versus
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- [78] Heidel, William Arthur (1929). *The Day of Yahweh: A Study of Sacred Days and Ritual Forms in the Ancient Near East*, p. 514. American Historical Association.
- [79] Martin Nilsson (1967). "Die Geschichte der Griechischen Religion". Vol I. C.F.Beck Verlag, Muenchen, pp. 499–500
- [80] Greimas Algirdas Julien (1992). *Of gods and men. Studies in Lithuanian Mythology*. Indiana University Press. p. 111, ISBN 0-253-32652-4
- [81] Related to "Iaksmilka", mark, sign or token (Rigveda X, 71,2): Monier Williams. *Sanskrit-English Dictionary*
- [82] Bojtár Endre (1999). *Forward to the past. A cultural history of Baltic people*. CEU Press, p. 301, ISBN 963-9116-42-4
- [83] Cf. Ramakrishna (1965:153–168), James (1969:35–36)
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- [88] See the philological work of Own Barfield, e.g Poetic Diction or Speaker's Meaning
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14 External links

- Theoi Project: “Moirai”
- The Theogony of Hesiod. Transl. H. E. White (1914)
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