**Origin**

Athena is the Olympian goddess of wisdom and war and the adored patroness of the city of Athens. The Parthenon on the Acropolis of Athens is dedicated to her, along with numerous other temples and monuments. A virgin deity, she was also – somewhat paradoxically – associated with peace and handicrafts, especially spinning and weaving.

Majestic and stern, Athena surpassed everybody in both of her main domains. In fact, even Ares feared her; and all Greek heroes asked her for help and advice. Her major symbols include owls, olive trees, snakes, and the Gorgoneion. In art, she is generally depicted wearing a helmet and holding a spear.

From her origin as an Aegean palace goddess, Athena was closely associated with the city. She was known as Polias and Poliouchos (both derived from polis, meaning "city-state"), and her temples were usually located atop the fortified acropolis in the central part of the city. As the patron of craft and weaving, Athena was known as Ergane. She was also a warrior goddess, and was believed to lead soldiers into battle as Athena Promachos. Her main festival in Athens was the Panathenaia, which was celebrated during the month of Hekatombaion in midsummer and was the most important festival on the Athenian calendar.

She was known as Athena Parthenos "Athena the Virgin," but in one archaic Attic myth, the god Hephaestus tried and failed to rape her, resulting in Gaia giving birth to Erichthonius, an important Athenian founding hero. Athena was the patron goddess of heroic endeavor; she was believed to have aided the heroes Perseus, Heracles, Bellerophon, and Jason. Along with Aphrodite and Hera, Athena was one of the three goddesses whose feud resulted in the beginning of the Trojan War.

She plays an active role in the Iliad, in which she assists the Achaeans and, in the Odyssey, she is the divine counselor to Odysseus. In the later writings of the Roman poet Ovid, Athena was said to have competed against the mortal Arachne in a weaving competition, afterward transforming Arachne into the first spider; Ovid also describes how she transformed Medusa into a Gorgon after witnessing her being raped by Poseidon in her temple. Since the Renaissance, Athena has become an international symbol of wisdom, the arts, and classical learning. Western artists and allegorists have often used Athena as a symbol of freedom and democracy.

**Birth and Childhood**

Athena was born in most miraculous circumstances. On learning that Metis’ next child may overthrow him, Zeus swallowed his first wife who was already pregnant with Athens. When the time came, Zeus started feeling tremendous headaches. As even he couldn’t bear them, Hephaestus struck him with his axe and – lo and behold! – Athena leapt out of Zeus’ head, fully armed and with a cry so mighty and fearsome that Uranus and Gaea were shaken to their bones with terror. Zeus was delighted and full of pride.

As a child, Athena had a friend she loved above all. Her name was Pallas and she was all but her equal in the art of war. However, one day, as they were practicing some martial exercises, Athena accidentally killed her friend. Grief-stricken and in an attempt to preserve her memory, she added her friend’s name to her own. That’s why many people know Athena as Athena Pallas.

**Epithets and attributes**

Athena was known as Atrytone (Άτρυτώνη "the Unwearying"), Parthenos (Παρθένος "Virgin"), and Promachos (Πρόμαχος "she who fights in front"). The epithet Polias (Πολιάς "of the city"), refers to Athena's role as protectress of the city. The epithet Ergane (Εργάνη "the Industrious") pointed her out as the patron of craftsmen and artisans. Burkert notes that the Athenians sometimes simply called Athena "the Goddess". After serving as the judge at the trial of Orestes in which he was acquitted of having murdered his mother Clytemnestra, Athena won the epithet Areia (Αρεία).

Athena was sometimes given the epithet Hippia (Ἵππια "of the horses", "equestrian"), referring to her invention of the bit, bridle, chariot, and wagon. The Greek geographer Pausanias mentions in his Guide to Greece that the temple of Athena Chalinitis ("the bridler") in Corinth was located near the tomb of Medea's children. Other epithets include Ageleia, Itonia and Aethyia. In a temple at Phrixa in Elis, reportedly built by Clymenus, she was known as Cydonia (Κυδωνία). Pausanias wrote that at Buporthmus there was a sanctuary of Athena Promachorma (Προμαχόρμα), meaning protector of the anchorage.

The Greek biographer Plutarch (AD 46–120) refers to an instance during the Parthenon's construction of her being called Athena Hygieia (Ὑγίεια, i. e. personified "Health") after inspiring a physician to a successful course of treatment.

In Homer's epic works, Athena's most common epithet is Glaukopis (γλαυκῶπις), which usually is translated as, "bright-eyed" or "with gleaming eyes". Athena was clearly associated with an owl from very early on; in archaic images, she is frequently depicted with the owl perched on her hand. Through its association with Athena, the owl evolved into the national mascot of the Athenians and eventually became a symbol of wisdom.

### **Trojan War**

all the gods and goddesses as well as various mortals were invited to the marriage of Peleus and Thetis (the eventual parents of Achilles). Only Eris, goddess of discord, was not invited. She was annoyed at this, so she arrived with a golden apple inscribed with the word καλλίστῃ (kallistēi, "for the fairest"), which she threw among the goddesses. Aphrodite, Hera, and Athena all claimed to be the fairest, and thus the rightful owner of the apple.

The goddesses chose to place the matter before Zeus, who, not wanting to favor one of the goddesses, put the choice into the hands of Paris, a Trojan prince. After bathing in the spring of Mount Ida where Troy was situated, the goddesses appeared before Paris for his decision.

In the extant ancient depictions of the Judgement of Paris, Aphrodite is only occasionally represented nude, and Athena and Hera are always fully clothed. Since the Renaissance, however, Western paintings have typically portrayed all three goddesses as completely naked.

All three goddesses were ideally beautiful and Paris could not decide between them, so they resorted to bribes. Hera tried to bribe Paris with power over all Asia and Europe, and Athena offered fame and glory in battle, but Aphrodite promised Paris that, if he were to choose her as the fairest, she would let him marry the most beautiful woman on earth. This woman was Helen, who was already married to King Menelaus of Sparta. Paris selected Aphrodite and awarded her the apple. The other two goddesses were enraged and, as a direct result, sided with the Greeks in the Trojan War.

Athena aids the hero Diomedes, who, in the absence of Achilles, proves himself to be the most effective Greek warrior. Numerous passages in the Iliad also mention Athena having previously served as the patron of Diomedes's father Tydeus. When the Trojan women go to the temple of Athena on the Acropolis to plead her for protection from Diomedes, Athena ignores them.

In Trojan war while Achilles is chasing Hector around the walls of Troy, Athena appears to Hector disguised as his brother Deiphobus and persuades him to hold his ground so that they can fight Achilles together. Then, Hector throws his spear at Achilles and misses, expecting Deiphobus to hand him another, but Athena disappears instead, leaving Hector to face Achilles alone without his spear.

In Sophocles's tragedy Ajax, she punishes Odysseus's rival Ajax the Great, driving him insane and causing him to massacre the Achaeans' cattle, thinking that he is slaughtering the Achaeans themselves. Even after Odysseus himself expresses pity for Ajax, Athena declares, "To laugh at your enemies - what sweeter laughter can there be than that?". Ajax later commits suicide as a result of his humiliation.

## Post-classical culture

Early Christian writers, such as Clement of Alexandria and Firmicus, denigrated Athena as representative of all the things that were detestable about paganism; they condemned her as "immodest and immoral". During the Middle Ages, however, many attributes of Athena were given to the Virgin Mary, who, in fourth century portrayals, was often depicted wearing the Gorgoneion.

Some even viewed the Virgin Mary as a warrior maiden, much like Athena Parthenos; one anecdote tells that the Virgin Mary once appeared upon the walls of Constantinople when it was under siege by the Avars, clutching a spear and urging the people to fight. During the Middle Ages, Athena became widely used as a Christian symbol and allegory, and she appeared on the family crests of certain noble houses.

During the Renaissance, Athena donned the mantle of patron of the arts and human endeavor; allegorical paintings involving Athena were a favorite of the Italian Renaissance painters. In Sandro Botticelli's painting Pallas and the Centaur, probably painted sometime in the 1480s, Athena is the personification of chastity, who is shown grasping the forelock of a centaur, who represents lust. Andrea Mantegna's 1502 painting Minerva Expelling the Vices from the Garden of Virtue uses Athena as the personification of Graeco-Roman learning chasing the vices of medievalism from the garden of modern scholarship. Athena is also used as the personification of wisdom in Bartholomeus Spranger's 1591 painting The Triumph of Wisdom or Minerva Victorious over Ignorance.

During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Athena was used as a symbol for female rulers. In his book A Revelation of the True Minerva (1582), Thomas Blennerhassett portrays Queen Elizabeth I of England as a "new Minerva" and "the greatest goddesse nowe on earth". A series of paintings by Peter Paul Rubens depict Athena as Marie de' Medici's patron and mentor; the final painting in the series goes even further and shows Marie de' Medici with Athena's iconography, as the mortal incarnation of the goddess herself.

The German sculptor Jean-Pierre-Antoine Tassaert later portrayed Catherine II of Russia as Athena in a marble bust in 1774. During the French Revolution, statues of pagan gods were torn down all throughout France, but statues of Athena were not. Instead, Athena was transformed into the personification of freedom and the republic and a statue of the goddess stood in the center of the Place de la Revolution in Paris. In the years following the Revolution, artistic representations of Athena proliferated.

A statue of Athena stands directly in front of the Austrian Parliament Building in Vienna, and depictions of Athena have influenced other symbols of Western freedom, including the Statue of Liberty and Britannia. For over a century, a full-scale replica of the Parthenon has stood in Nashville, Tennessee. In 1990, the curators added a gilded forty-two-foot (12.5 m) tall replica of Phidias's Athena Parthenos, built from concrete and fiberglass. The Great Seal of California bears the image of Athena kneeling next to a brown grizzly bear. Athena has occasionally appeared on modern coins, as she did on the ancient Athenian drachma. Her head appears on the $50 1915-S Panama-Pacific commemorative coin.

**Mythology**

ATHENA VERSUS POSEIDON AT ATHENS

*Poseidon* was *one of the Twelve Olympians* and was *god of the sea, earthquakes, storms and horses*. Poseidon and Athena had a much-publicized quarrel over *who deserves to be the patron of the most prosperous ancient Greek city, Athens*. In order to prove their respective worth as a deserving candidate, it was decided that *each god would present the city with the gift*. *Cecrops*, the*first king of Athens*, was the *judge of the contest* and would determine which gift was better. Poseidon *struck the ground with his trident* and a *salt water spring* sprang up thus giving the Athenians access to trade and water.

Athena, on the other hand, offered the Athenians an *olive tree*. Since the tree brought them*wood, oil*and*food*; the Athenians*choose it over the not so useful salty water of the spring*. The olive tree later went on to become *a symbol of Athenian economic prosperity*. After losing the competition, Poseidon was furious and *he sent a monstrous flood to the Attic plain to punish the Athenians.*

## ATHENA AND MEDUSA

*Medusa* was a monster, a *Gorgon*, generally described as *a winged human female* with *living venomous snakes in place of hair*. However, she was initially a *ravishingly beautiful woman* who was *priestess to the goddess Athena*. A requirement for being a priestess to Athena was that*the woman should be a virgin*. Medusa was deeply desired by Poseidon and he pursued her to great lengths. Medusa tried to escape him by running to the temple of Athena. Nonetheless, Medusa was found by Poseidon, who went on to rape her on the floor of the temple itself.

After discovering this, *Athena was filled with rage*. Punishing her for losing her purity, *Athena transformed Medusa’s beautiful hair to serpents and made her face so terrible to behold that the mere sight of it would turn onlookers to stone.*

## ATHENA AND PERSEUS

*Perseus* is the*legendary founder of Mycenae,* which was one of the major centers of Greek civilization. Athena was particularly fond of courageous youths and helped many heroes in their quests and one of them was Perseus. When Perseus was sent to kill the Gorgon, Medusa, Athena appeared to him after he set off on his quest and *gifted him with tools he would need to kill the Gorgon*.

She gave Perseus *a polished bronze shield* to *view Medusa’s reflection rather than looking at her directly* and thereby avoid being turned to stone. Perseus went to the cave of Medusa while she was sleeping. By viewing her reflection in his polished shield, *he safely approached and cut off her head*. This resulted in *Chrysaor* and *Pegasus* emerging from her neck. They are considered to be children of Medusa and Poseidon.

## ATHENA AND PALLAS

*Pallas* was the daughter of *Triton*, who was *messenger of the seas*. Athena and Pallas were *childhood friends*and Triton taught both the girls the*art of war*. During an athletics festival, Pallas and Athena *fought with spears in a friendly mock battle* in which the victor would be *whoever managed to disarm her opponent*. While Athena led the battle initially, Pallas gained the upper hand after a while. Zeus, not wanting her daughter to lose, distracted Pallas. Due to this, Athena *accidentally killed Pallas* as Pallas didn’t dodge her move as expected by her. Out of sadness and regret, Athena created the *Palladium* and was said to have *carved the statue herself in the likeness of her dead friend Pallas*.

Later, distraught over what she had done, Athena also *took on the title Pallas as tribute to her late friend*. It was said that *as long as the Palladium remained in Troy, the city would not fall*. Due to this, the *word palladium is now used to mean anything believed to provide protection or safety*. Moreover, the *chemical element Palladium* is named after the*asteroid Pallas*, which was itself named after *the title of Pallas which Athena acquired to honor her friend*.

## ATHENA AND ARACHNE

*Arachne* was a *maiden* from the city of*Lydia*. She was a*talented weaver and spinner*; and she *challenged Athena, goddess of wisdom and crafts, to a weaving contest*. Athena wove a beautiful cloth showing the gods and goddesses sitting together on Mount Olympus and doing good deeds for people. On the other hand, Arachne wove a cloth *making fun of the gods and goddesses, showing them getting drunk and falling down and making a mess of things*.

When Athena saw what Arachne had woven, she became *furious with anger and pointed her finger at Arachne.* Suddenly Arachne’s nose and ears shrank up, her hair all fell out, her arms and legs got long and skinny, and her whole body shrank until *she was just a little tiny spider*. The *name for spiders in many languages* as well as the*taxonomical class name Arachnida* comes from *Arachne*. Moreover, Arachne has appeared numerous times in popular culture; in novels, and in movies and television series; as a monstrous spider.

## ATHENA AND TIRESIAS

*Tiresias* was the son of a shepherd named *Everes* and a nymph named *Chariclo*, who happened to be *friends with the goddess Athena*. One day, Athena was bathing in a spring on Mount Helicon at midday with Chariclo. Chariclo’s son Tiresias happened to be hunting on the same mountain and came to the spring searching for water. He inadvertently saw Athena completely naked while she was taking a bath. *Athena blinded him as a punishment to ensure that he would never again see what a man was not intended to see*. Chariclo, the mother of Teiresias, was heartbroken and intervened on her son’s behalf to *beg Athena to have mercy and to restore the sight of her son*.

After enough persuasion, Athena agreed, but was unable to restore his sight. In order to make amends, she*cleansed Tiresias’ ears* and gave him the ability to *understand the language of the birds* and *the gift of prophecy*. Teiresias became *the most famous of all ancient Greek seers*.