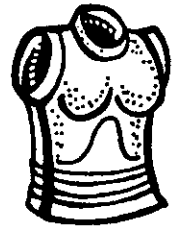


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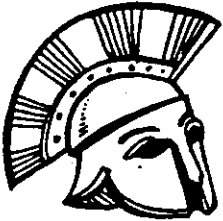


ANCIENT GREEK RELIGION AND TEMPLES

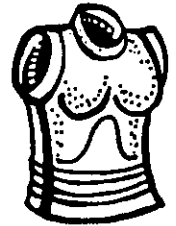
The Greeks believed that there were many divine beings, who look after all aspects of life and death. They felt their gods were human-like. The gods married, had children and displayed human characteristics such as love, jealousy, or deceitfulness. Many legends were told to describe the god's personalities and to teach what pleased or angered them.

Zeus was the ruler of the gods and controlled all the heavens. *Poseidon* was the brother of Zeus and the ruler of the seas. His home was an underwater palace, where he kept his gold chariot and white horses. Poseidon was thought to cause earthquakes and was often called the earthshaker. *Hera* was the wife and sister of Zeus. She was the protector of women and of marriage. She was very beautiful and proud. *Hestia* was the goddess of the hearth. She was gentle and pure and never became involved in the quarrels of the other gods. Every Greek city and family had a shrine dedicated to her. *Pluto* was the ruler of the underworld, the kingdom of the dead. He drove a gold chariot with black stallions. Pluto guarded the dead and rarely let any of them return to earth.

Demeter was the goddess of all plants. When her daughter was kidnapped, Demeter neglected her plants and went looking for her. This caused winter. When Persephone returned home, she brought the spring and summer. *Aphrodite* was the goddess of love and beauty. She was born in the sea and rode to shore in a seashell. *Hephaestos* was a blacksmith whose forge was beneath Mount Etna in Sicily. He was the patron of craftsmen and the long-suffering husband of Aphrodite. *Ares* was the god of war and Aphrodite's lover. He was short-tempered and violent. *Artemis* was the moon goddess and her silver arrows brought sickness and death. She was the protector of pregnant women and young girls. Artemis was the mistress of all wild animals and enjoyed



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hunting them in her chariot pulled by stags. *Hermes* was the messenger of the gods and was also the patron of travellers and thieves. He wore a winged hat, and winged sandals and carried a staff. *Athene* was the daughter of Zeus. She was the goddess of wisdom and war and the patron deity of Athens. *Dionysus* was the god of the vine and fertility. He wandered the world teaching people how to make wine.

The Greeks felt their gods needed a place to live on Earth so they built temples as their "earthly" homes. The *Parthenon* was built in Athens 447-438 B.C. and was a very large and elaborate, marble structure. A *peristyle*, a covered row of columns, surrounded the entire structure. Inside the temple was a room called a "cella". In this room was a statue of the goddess *Athene*. It was made of gold and ivory and stood 12 metres (40 feet) high. Behind the cella was a second room which was used as a treasury. Offerings of jewellery, vases and statues were stored here. Outside a temple, often in front of the main entrance a stone altar could be found. People would bring animals or birds as offerings to the temple deity and they were sacrificed by a priest at the altar.

The Greeks honoured their gods with many religious festivals. The festivals were held to please the gods and to persuade them to grant the peoples' wishes. Other events took place at the festivals such as athletic competitions and theatrical performances. The most important festival in Athens was the "*Great Panathenaea*", the feast of the goddess *Athene*. It was held every four years and lasted for six days. The people were entertained with music, poetry recitals and sports events.

A spring festival called the "*Anthesteria*" was held in Athens in the spring. The wine from the previous harvest was put on sale and the god of wine, *Dionysus*, was carried to his temple. On the last day of the festival, families placed meals for the spirits of the dead on the altar in their house.

Private worship was an important part of the Greek religion. Every day a Greek family would say prayers at the altar in the courtyard of their house. An offering of wine called a "*libation*" was poured over the altar during daily prayers. The Greek people prayed to the appropriate gods as they went about their daily life.