

Crafty Athena, cont.

Teiresias of Thebes had the misfortune to see her naked and went blind, though she later regretted her hasty response, giving him a staff allowing him to operate as though sighted. And poor Medusa. It was Athena who changed her into a gorgon, and then aided Perseus in killing her.

Patron goddess of the state, Athena served a protective role, fortifying harbors and towns. As goddess of arts and crafts, she taught man many of the necessary skills to grow in prosperity. She also championed many heroes and was seen as fair and ethical.

Athena often appears in armor, complete with helmet, shield, and spear. She wears the aegis² over her breast, while Medusa's head graces her shield, a gift from Perseus. She was tall, with a calm, majestic demeanor, and was often referred to as "gray-eyed Athena." Her favorite, or totem, animal was the owl and her favorite plant was the olive tree.

Notes:

1. In another version of the story, Arachne hangs herself in shame at what she's accomplished. Taking pity on her, Athena changes the dangling girl into a spider.

2. Athena's aegis was given to her by her father, Zeus, and was made of a tasseled goatskin.

Bibliography:

Athena, like so many other deities, is difficult to condense into such a small space. If you'd like to know more, check out the following sources:

Bell, Robert E. *Women of Classical Mythology: A Biographical Dictionary*. Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 1991. Probably the best, and longest, article on the goddess Athena.

Grant, Michael and John Hazel. *God and Mortals in Classical Mythology*. G. & C. Merriam Company: Springfield, MA, 1973.

Grimal, Pierre. *Dictionnaire de la mythologie grecque et romaine. (The dictionary of classical mythology.)* New York : Blackwell, 1986.

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The Palladium

The Palladium was an ancient image of the goddess Athena, about 54 inches tall, depicting the goddess with her legs together, a spear in her right hand and a spindle and distaff in her left. Possession of the statue guaranteed a city an extra measure of protection and security.

Originally the statue stood next to Zeus's image on Olympus. After Electra fled to the image following Zeus's rape, he threw the statue from Olympus in fury. It landed on the site of Troy, where the city was founded and built around it. A sanctuary was built around the statue itself, making it the center of the city.

After the fall of Troy, Odysseus and Diomedes carried the Palladium away, presumably back to Ithaca. After that several city-states claimed possession of it, including Rome, Athens, Argos, and half a dozen others.

Sources:

Bell, Robert E. *Women of Classical Mythology: A Biographical Dictionary*. Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 1991.

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