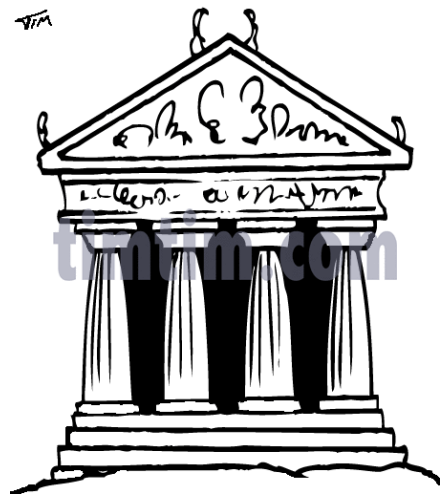


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Religion in Ancient Greece

The three-headed dog Cerberus guarded the gates to the Underworld. Funeral mourners left honey cakes for him.

The Greeks believed that gods and goddesses watched over them. The gods were like humans, but immortal (they lived for ever) and much more powerful. The Greeks believed in many Gods and Goddesses, which is called *polytheism*. A family of gods and goddesses lived in a cloud-palace above Mount Olympus, the highest mountain in Greece. The gods looked down to watch what people were doing, and from time to time, interfered with what went on.

The gods did not always behave very well. Their king, Zeus, was always being unfaithful to his wife Hera. He appeared on Earth as a human or an animal to trick women he had fallen in love with. Zeus was king of the gods. He threw thunderbolts to punish anyone who disobeyed him. His brother Poseidon was god of the sea. Another brother, Pluto (also called Hades), ruled the underworld. Zeus had many children, among them Apollo, Artemis, Athena and Ares. Apollo was the sun god, and the god of the arts, medicine, music and poetry. His twin sister Artemis was goddess of the moon, and goddess of childbirth, and of all natural things. She is often shown as a hunter with a bow and arrow. Athena was goddess of wisdom, and of crafts such as spinning, weaving and pottery. Ares was the bad-tempered god of war - not even his own father liked him!

The Greeks put statues of their Gods in temples. Some temples were quite small, others very large and beautiful, with amazing decorations. The most famous temple in Greece is the Parthenon (which you can still see today) in Athens. Every city in Greece had a 'patron' god or goddess - a special god whom people believed protected them from harm. People went to a temple to pray for help - perhaps when they were sick, going on a journey, or worried about the harvest. To please the gods, they brought gifts of money, flowers, food and drink, which were offered as sacrifices. Temple priests kept the most valuable gifts under guard in the temple treasury. Animals, such as cattle, were killed as sacrifices, and then people feasted on the roasted meat. At a big religious festival, like the Panathenae in Athens, as many as 100 cattle were sacrificed.

Greeks believed the dead went to an Underworld called Hades, ruled by Hades. Good people and heroes went to the Elysian Fields (Elysium). Wicked people ended up in Tartarus, a horrid pit deep below the Underworld. Hades let his bride Persephone leave the gloomy Underworld for half the year. The time she spent above ground was the season when farm

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crops grew. To reach the Underworld, the dead had to cross three rivers, called Acheron, Lethe and Styx. If they drank from Lethe, they forgot everything in their past lives. To cross the Styx, they had to pay Charon the grumpy ferryman. So at funerals a coin was placed in the mouth of the dead person, to pay Charon.

Checking for Understanding

What is polytheism?

Name 3 ways the Ancient Greeks tried to please the Gods

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

What did the Ancient Greek believe happened to a person after they died?

Critical Thinking

Why do you think the ancient Greeks believed there were so many gods and goddesses?
(full sentence answers please!)
