

Gods in Grecianmythologie

To what extent did Grecian gods Influence the everyday life of
Greeks in the ancient world?

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1. Introduction

Over 2000 years ago, the gods of this ancient culture influenced the daily lifestyle of the Greeks in various ways. These mythical creatures, onto whom the ancient Greeks projected their hopes, fears and human qualities, played an important role in ancient society.¹ Greek gods and goddesses were not only supernatural beings with superhuman powers, but also reflections of human nature. Myths told by poets taught morality, explained natural phenomena and provided insights into the human psyche.² These stories formed the basis of Greek culture and had many effects on people's daily lives. The gods not only had power over the fate of people, but also had the power to influence their daily decisions, of everyday life and art. Temples and sanctuaries were built to honor the gods. Offerings were made as a sign of acknowledgment. As people tend to secure the goodwill of the gods, belief created a moral foundation for society.³ The myths also reflected the human weaknesses of the spirits, which created a link between the gods and ordinary people. This connection shaped the art, philosophy and ethics of the ancient Greeks and influenced the understanding of goodness and weakness.⁴ We will explore the stories of the gods in Greek mythology and take a closer look at their impact on the daily lives of people in the ancient world.

¹Cf., Unbekannt: „Griechische Götter“ <https://www.studysmarter.de/schule/geschichte/antike/griechische-goetter/#:~:text=der%20StudySmarter%20app.-,Griechische%20Götter%20-%20Bedeutung,zu%20persönlichen%20Angelegenheiten%20und%20Entscheidungen>. (last access: 30/01/2024 7:01 p.m.)

²Cf., Kerényi, Karl: Die Mythologie der Griechen, unknown: Klett Cotta, 2014, P. 190

³Cf., Unbekannt: „Griechische Mythologie“ <https://www.studysmarter.de/schule/geschichte/antike/griechische-goetter/#:~:text=der%20StudySmarter%20app.-,Griechische%20Götter%20-%20Bedeutung,zu%20persönlichen%20Angelegenheiten%20und%20Entscheidungen>. (last access: 30/01/2024 7:03 p.m.)

⁴Cf., Kerényi, Karl: Die Mythologie der Griechen, P.223

2. Religious context

Because the ancient Greeks viewed “all aspects of nature as either divine or divinely controlled {and believed that} all aspects of individual and social life were {...} subject to supernatural influence”⁵, due respect for the gods and heroes was considered a fundamental necessity of life.

2.1 Temples and sanctuaries

The temples and sanctuaries in Greek cities had many different meanings and functions. Mainly the temples were built to worship the spirits. Each temple was dedicated to a specific god or goddess. They were not only used for worship and service, but also as places where ritual sacrifices were made. These sacrifices could include animal sacrifices, offerings, or other ritual acts. They were also meeting places where believers gathered. They served as social centers for the community as religious festivals and ceremonies were kept in and around the temples. A very famous temple today stands in the northeastern valley of Messinen in the Peloponnese.⁶ The Temple of Apollo at Bassea was built in Athena between 450 and 400 BC. It represents thanks to Apollo for his help as he helped protect villagers



Figure 1 A ruined temple in ancient Delphi where people from all over the Mediterranean paid for advice

⁵Ivana Petrovic: „Religion in Ancient Greece”

<https://oxfordre.com/religion/display/10.1093/acrefore/9780199340378.001.0001/acrefore-9780199340378-e-63#:~:text=Since%20Ancient%20Greeks%20perceived%20all,a%20fundamental%20necessity%20of%20life.>

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⁶Cf., Unknown: „Apollontempel bei Bassae – Griechenlands altes verborgenes Wunderwerk“

<https://www.griechenland.de/apollontempel-bei-bassae/> (last access: 19/12/2023; 9:39 p.m.)

from a nearby settlement from a plague.⁷ Part of this temple is the Oracle of Delphi. This oracle was a very important place in ancient times. People would wander to the oracle and ask their questions regarding their future, as oracles were once used for divination. Of course, at that time there were many oracles scattered throughout Greece.

But the Oracle of Delphi was the most famous oracle. Even kings and military leaders traveled there to seek advice from the gods.⁸ Of course, the oracle itself could not speak; this was done by a priestess who positioned herself in front of the temple. For this purpose, she stood over a fissure in the earth through which gases escaped, which caused the so-called Pythia to enter a trance state.⁹

2.2 Rituals and celebrations

The Greeks in ancient Greece loved to celebrate festivals. Above all, they often held celebrations to honor certain gods. For example, the Panathenaia: a festival in honor of the goddess Athena. This was the most splendid festival, the Panathenaic Pageant, in Athens in the 5th century BC. Ch.¹⁰ It was also called the Panathenaic Games. The Athenians sacrificed one hundred oxen as they marched in procession to the Acropolis. In addition, they not only sacrificed something to the goddess Athena but also



Figure 2 Runner at the Panathenaic Vase ca. 530 BC.

made offerings to her in the Parthenon temple. Among them was a richly decorated piece of clothing for the image of the goddess.¹¹ Athletic and musical competitions as part of this festival began in the 6th century BC. Ch. to organise. With participants from all over the ancient world, the Panathenaia became one of the most important games outside of the Periodos.¹² The Greeks not only held festivals but also had rituals, such as sacrificial offerings. There were two types of sacrifices the bloodless and the bloody. Bloodless offerings included crops,

⁷ Cf., Unknown: „Apollontempel bei Bassea – Griechenlands altes verborgenes Wunderwerk“

⁸ Cf., Unknown: „Orakel von Delphi – Wichtigste Weissagungsstätte des antiken Griechenlands“ <https://www.griechenland.de/orakel-von-delphi/> (last access: 19/12/2023; 9:57 p.m.)

⁹ Cf., Unknown: „Orakel von Delphi – Wichtigste Weissagungsstätte des antiken Griechenlands“

¹⁰ Cf., Unknown: „Welche Feste gab es eigentlich bei den Griechen?“

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¹¹ Cf., Prof. Dr. Christian Mann: „Die Panathenäischen Spiele“. <https://www.phil.uni-mannheim.de/geschichte/lehrstuehle/alte-geschichte/forschung/projekte/mannheimer-forschungen-zum-antiken-sport/publikationen/website-sport-und-spiele-in-der-antike/griechenland/spiele-und-disziplinen/die-panathenaeischen-spiele/#top> (last access: 19/12/2023; 11:18 p.m.)

¹² Cf., Prof. Dr. Christian Mann: „Die Panathenäischen Spiele“

olives, grapes and flowers. Frankincense and myrrh were also included, as these were smoke offerings. Animal sacrifices counted as bloody offerings. The killing of an animal for religious reasons was known as animal sacrifice. These bloody offerings were dedicated to various deities and forces of nature.¹³ The gods became dependent on these sacrifices. And they demanded more and more and competed for it. But when people neglected them, the gods brought suffering and misfortune to the world because they were angry. In some places, such as springs, groves or lightning spots, they were particularly present and accessible to people. The great sanctuaries arose in precisely such places.¹⁴

3. Everyday influence

The development of ancient Greece was heavily influenced by Greek mythology. It included not only the basic structures of their buildings, but also the way they go about their daily lives. Everything revolved around the gods and goddesses of Greek mythology, including the way they prayed, did their daily tasks, and how they lived.¹⁵

3.1 The gods in everyday life

The gods in ancient Greek mythology had a significant influence on many things, including people's career choices. The Greeks believed that the gods influenced the human world through their decisions and actions. Here are some examples of the ways certain gods may have influenced career decisions: Athena is the goddess of wisdom, crafts, and strategy, and she could inspire those who wanted to specialize in crafts, warfare, and strategy. Hermes, as the messenger of the gods and protector of traders, may have influenced those involved in trade and communication. Demeter is a goddess of fertility and agriculture who may have inspired humans to engage in agricultural activities. Apollo, as the god of art, music, and light. Apollo may have influenced artists, musicians, and people in educational and scientific fields. Hephaestus, as the god of fire and blacksmithing, may have inspired people in crafts, particularly metalworking. It is important to remember that the ancient Greeks viewed their gods as part of their daily lives and that their beliefs influenced many aspects of their lives,

¹³Cf., Giebel, Marion: Tiere in der Antike; von Fabelwesen, Opfertieren und treuen Begleitern, Theiss Verlag, Stuttgart 2003, S 32/33

¹⁴Cf., Unknown: „Wie wurden die Götter verehrt?“. <https://www.wissen.de/bildwb/das-religioese-leben-der-griechen-opfer-und-orakel> (last access: 19/12/2023; 11:57 p.m.)

¹⁵Cf., Unknown: "Greek Mythology Impact on Greece" <https://www.ukessays.com/essays/english-literature/greek-mythology-impact-greece-7901.php> (last access: 28/01/2024 1:36 p.m.)

including professions and crafts.¹⁶ Because the Greeks worshipped a variety of gods and goddesses, each responsible for different aspects of life, prayers and offerings were very important. In ancient Greece, people often had a home altar where they regularly made offerings and recited prayers to seek the protection of household gods. To ask the gods for blessings and protection, prayers and small offerings could be made before meals were eaten. Peasants and farmers gave up their crops to the gods of the earth and agriculture, such as Demeter, to obtain a good harvest. People gave offerings and prayed to gods such as Hermes (the god of travellers) or Poseidon (the god of the sea) for protection from a journey or sea voyage. At significant life events, such as births or weddings, offerings were made and prayers were said to ask the gods for blessings and protection.¹⁷¹⁸

3.2 Arts and Culture

The Greek gods have been represented in a variety of ways in art and literature. The gods were often displayed as perfect human-like figures to highlight beauty and perfection. For example, Zeus sculptures from ancient Greece are known for highlighting his powerful and regal presence. Greek vase paintings often outline mythological scenes depicting gods in various roles and relationships with humans. Particular attention was paid to the appearance and clothing of the gods.¹⁹ Epic poetry, particularly Homer's works such as the Iliad and the Odyssey, describes the actions and characters of the gods in the context of Greek mythology. Gods are often treated as important characters

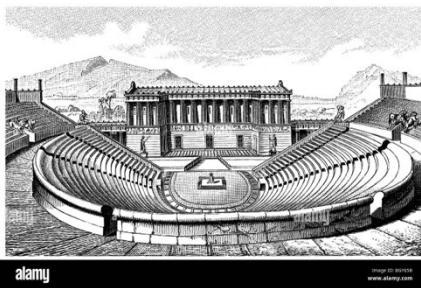


Figure 3: Greek theatre reconstruction



Figure 4: Greek Gods: In ancient times people believed in the existence of several gods

in the plots of plays by authors such as Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides. The representation ranges from polite to critical and mocking. Hesiod's Theogony provides a

¹⁶Cf., Unknown: „THEOI GREEK MYTHOLOGY“. <https://www.theoi.com/> (last access: 14/01/2024; 5:38 p.m.)

¹⁷Cf., Unknown: „THEOI GREEK MYTHOLOGY“

¹⁸Cf., Unknown: „Wie wurden die Götter verehrt?“ <https://www.wissen.de/bildwb/das-religioese-leben-der-griechen-opfer-und-orakel> (last access: 14/01/2024; 6:00 p.m.)

¹⁹Cf., Unknown: „Was sind Götter?“ <https://www.studysmarter.de/schule/geschichte/antike/griechische-goetter/#:~:text=Götter%20werden%20in%20verschiedenen%20Formen,darbringen%20und%20Gebete%20sprechen%20können>. (last access: 14/01/2024; 6:22 p.m.)

deep insight into Greek mythology and describes the background of the gods and titans.²⁰ Offering a variety of stories, characters, and moral dilemmas, mythological themes have a rich tradition in the world of theatre and music. Mythological tales are often used as the basis for epic dramas, tragedies or comedies in the theatre. Mythological stories, which offered deep insights into human nature and fate, were often the basis for the works of ancient Greek playwrights. Operas, oratorios and musical productions are examples of the use of mythological themes in music. Composers like Richard Wagner created complex musical works that brought mythological stories to the stage, such as "The Ring of the Nibelung."²¹ Modern plays and musicals use mythology to explore timeless questions about love, power, and the human condition. Artists can explore deep emotional resonances and universal truths that remain relevant across the ages by using mythological themes.²²

4. Chiton

We have a very clear idea of the clothing of the ancient Greeks thanks to pictorial evidence. Vases, pots and statues carefully presented the fashion history of ancient Greece. All early clothing styles are based on simple basic forms based on girdles, belts, brooches, clasps or pins to give shape and form to the human body. Greek clothing was primarily made of pieces of cloth that were artfully pinned together and positioned. The careful arrangement of folds



Figure 5 Ancient Greek Clothing
History | Greek Chiton

and the intricate arrangement of girdles, ties or belts give it elegance. When combined as a long chiton robe, simple borders create interesting patterns.²³ As my own contribution, I chose a chiton, which was a famous piece of clothing from the Greek gods, to sew myself. It is a cloth in the shape of a square made of linen or wool, sewn on one side and attached to the shoulders. A belt was also tied around the waist.²⁴ First

²⁰Cf. Brigitte Valenta: "Ilias und Odysse - Als alles began" <https://ci-a.at/2020/03/08/ilias-und-odyssee-als-alles-begann/> (last access: 14/01/2024; 6: 32 p.m.)

²¹Cf. Unknown: "Theater des antiken Griechenlands" <https://www.hisour.com/de/theatre-of-ancient-greece-32687/> (last Access: 14/01/2024; 6:48 p.m.)

²²Cf., Unknown: „Theater des antiken Griechenlands“

²³Cf., Fashion – Era: "Greek Clothing" <https://fashion-era.com/ancient-costume/chiton-clothing> (last access: 21/01/2024 3:44 p.m.)

²⁴Cf., Traditionelle griechische Kleidung: Die Mode der Hellenen „Die Geschichte der griechischen Mode“ <https://blog.grekaventura.de/traditionelle-griechische-kleidung#:~:text=Der%20korrekte%20Fachbegriff%20f%20die,um%20den%20Tr%20ger%20drapiert%20wurde.> (last access: 21/01/2024 3:46 p.m.)

of all, I ordered a 2x3 meter linen fabric on Amazon. Then I spread the fabric out on the base and, as you can see in the picture, folded it over about a quarter. Then I folded the fabric in half. Next, I took a needle and thread and sewed two points together by hand so that it would hold on to the shoulders. I also had a lot of difficulties during this because I'm not a professional at hand sewing. Then I just did something to make it last. Which worked out in the end. When all I had to do at the end was pull it over my head and wrap a leash around my waist, I was disappointed. It didn't turn out the way I imagined. The cloak was far too big at the bottom and dragged on the ground as I walked. And there was way too much material on the hips, so the leash barely fit around the hips. But still it looked reasonably good. When I wore it, I found out that the Greeks didn't wear anything under this cloak. No underwear or anything. It was just the cloak. One side of this cloak wasn't closed or anything else. It was just open. That surprised me very much. In summary, I am not very happy with the result, as it does not correspond at all to what I had in mind at the beginning. Even if something like this looks very simple, you should never underestimate it.

5. Conclusion

The Greek gods drastically influenced the lives of ancient Greeks. Not only the everyday life of the Greeks but also their future, as well as their choice of profession, the annual festivals, the music, the art and also the clothing. In ancient times, the gods were considered living beings with powers that they used when they were not valued enough. To honor and appreciate them, temples and shrines were built in many cities, such as the Temple of Bassae. Offerings were brought to this temple, which was another way to worship the gods. The festivals and rituals also served to worship certain gods. An example is the Panathenaia, which was celebrated in honor of the goddess Athena. There were also offerings during the rituals they held. There were two offer options. The bloodless and the bloody. The gods became dependent on these rituals and wanted more and more. And when they didn't get more, they brought suffering and misfortune to the world. The Greeks were so dependent on the gods that they influenced their career choices, the way they lived their daily lives, and the way they prayed. They were inspired by the gods to pursue certain professions, such as musicians and artists. They were inspired by Apollo, the god of music, art and light. They prayed to the gods of the house for a good meal or a good harvest. Also at weddings or at birth as a blessing and protection. But people also prayed for protection on long sea voyages or journeys. The gods were portrayed in art and literature as perfect human-like figures to emphasize beauty and perfection. They were shown in vases, paintings, but also in the

theater, in different roles and relationships with people. The portrayal ranges from polite to critical and mocking. In the theater they were mostly used as important roles in storylines. By using mythological themes, artists were able to explore deep emotional resonances and universal truths that remain relevant across the centuries. Greek clothing, like all other things, was inspired by the gods. Clothing usually consisted of scraps of fabric held together with brooches, belts and pins to give the body a beautiful figure. Through all these things it can be said that the life of the Greeks in ancient times was very influenced by the gods, and not only their everyday life, but also their future.

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7. List of illustrations

Figure1: <https://www.sueddeutsche.de/image/sz.1.3841993/1408x792?v=1516959082&format=webp> (last access: 29/01/2024 9:48 p.m.)

Figure2: https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/a/a9/Greek_vase_with_runners_at_the_panathenaic_games_530_bC.jpg/1280px-Greek_vase_with_runners_at_the_panathenaic_games_530_bC.jpg (last access: 29/01/2024 9:50 p.m.)

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8. Author's statement

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