

name | Artemis

role | goddess of the hunt and protector of children

symbols | bow, deer

Artemis in Myth

The goddess Artemis played an intriguing role in Greek mythology and religion. She was known as the "Mistress of Animals" and the protectress of children, but she was also a huntress and the goddess who could bring death with her arrows. Myths such as the one about Niobe show Artemis as a strong willed and powerful goddess, a female who could punish injustices against the gods with ferocious and deadly accuracy.

Artemis was the daughter of Leto and Zeus (the ruler of the Greek gods). Together with her twin brother Apollo she enjoyed the status and privileges of an Olympian. And as an Olympian goddess, Artemis was free to pursue her interests, and was often found frolicking in the forests, accompanied by a band of nymphs.

Myths of the Maiden Goddess

Myths and legends show that the goddess Artemis was aloof and free-spirited, and not constrained by husband or hearth. Her independent nature is further reinforced in a very important way, for in mythology and religion, the goddess remained eternally a virgin. Indeed, those who in some way compromised her strict requirements for chastity were severely punished by the maiden goddess.

There are several tales that describe the swift and terrible retribution of Artemis. One of the most revealing of these stories involves the youth Actaeon. In addition, Artemis was also responsible for punishing the nymph Callisto. In myth, Callisto was at one point a follower of the virgin goddess, but when she became involved in an affair with the god Zeus, Artemis had her revenge on the unfortunate nymph.

The Moon Goddess

In myth, Artemis is sometimes identified with Selene, the Greek goddess of the moon. Indeed, this association between Artemis and the moon is revealed in one of the epithets used to describe the goddess - Phoebe ("the bright one").

The goddess Artemis was known as Diana in Roman mythology.

Homeric Hymns (ed. Hugh G. Evelyn-White)

I sing of Artemis, whose shafts are of gold, who cheers on the hounds, the pure maiden, shooter of stags, who delights in archery, own sister to Apollo with the golden sword. Over the shadowy hills and windy peaks [5] she draws her golden bow, rejoicing in the chase, and sends out grievous shafts. The tops of the high mountains tremble and the tangled wood each awesomely with the outcry of beasts: earth quakes and the sea also where fishes shoal. But the goddess with a bold heart [10] turns every way destroying the race of wild beasts: and when she is satisfied and has cheered her heart, this huntress who delights in arrows slackens her supple bow and goes to the great house of her dear brother Phoebus Apollo, to the rich land of Delphi, [15] there to order the lovely dance of the Muses and Graces. There she hangs up her curved bow and her arrows, and heads and leads the dances, gracefully arrayed, while all they utter their heavenly voice, singing how neat-ankled Leto bare children [20] supreme among the immortals both in thought and in deed.