



2: Gods, goddesses, myths and magic

Religion is a very important part of Ancient Greek life. I should know - people give me credit for telling a few of the best-known stories about the gods, goddesses and heroes. *The Iliad*, *The Odyssey* - just two of my epic works. I'm a pretty impressive guy. Homer is my name. You may have heard of me? Homer?

No not that Homer! Oh well. Anyway, enough about me. Back to religion.

We Ancient Greeks believe in many different gods and goddesses, all of them related to Gaia - the Creator the Earth - and Ouranos - the God of the sky and the stars.

Twelve of the most import gods are called *The Olympians*, named after Mount Olympus, the highest mountain in Greece. Most of them live there too.

They look just like ordinary people, and they do a lot of the things that ordinary people do as well - like fall in love, get married, have parties, argue, fight. But they're also immortal - they live forever - and they have some rather wacky magical skills.

That big guy with the white beard - he's Zeus. King of the Olympians and God of thunder. He can get pretty angry and throw lightning bolts at people.

He's married to Hera - Goddess of marriage and children. To be fair she can get pretty angry too. Especially when Zeus starts falling in love with other gods or humans.

The other main gods and goddesses are:

Poseidon: God of the sea...

Athena: Goddess of wisdom and war...

Dionysus: God of wine and fruitfulness...

Aphrodite: Goddess of love...

Hephaestus: God of fire and sculpture...

Demeter: Goddess of the harvest...

Ares: God of war...

Artemis: Goddess of hunting...

Apollo: God of light, music and healing...

And lastly Hermes: Messenger of the gods - who delivers us all the news and guidance from Mount Olympus.

Phew. There we go - a quick rundown.

We believe that the gods control every aspect of the world and our lives. For example, every day Apollo drives his magnificent chariot across the sky pulling the sun behind him...and Poseidon creates the waves and storms at sea with his trident.

There are many other lesser gods and goddesses who all have a role to play in the way the world works, and worshipping the gods is essential if you want to stay healthy, safe and prosperous.

We build temples to them, make statues of them, make offerings of food and drink to them. And every Greek city has its own calendar of festivals during which people make sacrifices to them. And every four years we hold a sporting contest - called the *Olympic Games* - in their honour. All to keep the gods and goddesses happy, so life will be good.





Many of the stories we tell or write about in our plays are all about the gods and goddesses and the humans they control. The very same stories that have passed down through the generations and you call Ancient Greek myths.

Finally, there is the afterlife. We believe that when people die it is by no means the end. In fact, they start a weird and wonderful journey to a new existence in the underworld.

Hermes - the messenger of the gods - leads your spirit to the entrance of the Underworld.

Then Charon rows you across the River Styx in his boat, before you pass through a gate guarded by a three headed dog, called Cerberus.

Then Hades - the God of the dead - decides where you get to spend eternity.

If you've been good, you'll relax in the paradise of Elysium; but if you've been bad, you'll end up being tortured in the burning pits of Tartarus.

So, there we go. Best to be good, I say.

