The Great Gods: Olympians and Others

The Great Gods lived on Mount Olympus, an actual mountain, the highest in Greece, nearly ten thousand feet above the sea. In these stories, Olympus also sometimes seems to be a place much higher in the heavens.

There were twelve chief gods and goddesses and several lesser ones. When Greeks began settling in Italy, the Romans liked the Greek gods well enough to create their own myths about them, although they changed many of the names. Even at the height of the Roman Empire, the Roman gods were considered identical to their Greek counterparts. Here are the names of the chief gods and goddesses:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GREEK NAME</th>
<th>ROMAN NAME</th>
<th>CHARACTERISTICS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Zeus [ZOS]</td>
<td>Jupiter [JOO-pit-er]</td>
<td>King of the gods. He is sometimes angry at the behavior of gods and people, but he can also be a gentle and caring ruler. He is particularly fond of beautiful women, regardless of whether they are goddesses or mortals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hera [HEE-ruh]</td>
<td>Juno [JOO-noh]</td>
<td>Zeus’s wife. Queen of the gods, guardian of marriage. She is a great lady and diplomat. Though she is often jealous and nags her husband, she can also be a tender and loving wife.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Athena [uh-THEEN-uh]</td>
<td>Minerva [min-ER-vuh]</td>
<td>Daughter of Zeus (born, it is said, from his brain, when he had a bad headache). She is the goddess of wisdom and war, patriotism and good citizenship. She is the protector and namesake for the city of Athens.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apollo [uh-PAW-loh]</td>
<td>Apollo</td>
<td>Son of Zeus. God of poetry, music, and medicine, and god of light. He is associated with the sun.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Artemis [AH-term-is]</td>
<td>Diana [die-AN-uh]</td>
<td>Apollo’s twin sister. Goddess of hunting and of wild things. She is associated with the moon. She is sometimes called “Cynthia.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hephaestus [hee-FES-toohs]</td>
<td>Vulcan [VUL-kan]</td>
<td>Son of Zeus and Hera, the lame blacksmith god of fire.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aphrodite [af-ROH-DIE-tee]</td>
<td>Venus [VEE-ruh]</td>
<td>The wife of Hephaestus, she is the goddess of love and beauty. She is said to have been born of the sea foam. Her son, Eros [AIR-ohs] (the Roman Cupid [KEE-pid]), shoots arrows which cause men and women to fall in love. Another son, Aeneas [ee-NEE-tuh], is a mortal man, considered to be the ancestor of the Romans.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hermes [HER-meez]</td>
<td>Mercury [MER-cure-ee]</td>
<td>Son of Zeus. Messenger of the gods, he is also the god of science and invention.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demeter [dee-MEE-tuh]</td>
<td>Ceres [SEER-eez]</td>
<td>Zeus’s sister. She is the very important goddess of grain and agriculture. She is a kind of bond between heaven and earth.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These are the “Big Twelve,” six gods and six goddesses, the top rank of the Olympians. Their traits and characters are as clear and human as those of mortal men and women.

Along with the twelve Olympians there were other important gods. Zeus’s other brother, Hades [HAY-deez], more commonly known by his Roman name of Pluto [PLOO-toh], was lord of the dead and the underworld (also called “Hades”) where the dead go. As we might expect, he was a dim, shadowy figure. There was also the great earth god Pan, god of woods and fields, who was half man (his upper part) and half goat (his lower part). Pan often played his “pipes,” a kind of flute made from several tubes of reeds bound together. He was not often seen, but when he played on his pipes the woods were full of rather eerie music, which, especially at twilight, often scared people just to hear it, causing them to panic, as we say. The word panic comes from the name Pan.

Another important earth god was Dionysus [dye-on-IS-uh] (the Roman Bacchus [BAK-]...
Dionysus (DIE-ohn-see-us), god of wine and revelry, dancing and drama. Myths tell of his coming from faraway lands, bringing with him a new ecstatic (emotionally rapturous) religion and dancing followers of wild behavior, including the Maenads ("raving women"), satyrs (half goat, like Pan), and sileni (half horse). His opponents, defenders of more dignified old-time religions, despised his cult and fought it. But in the end, Dionysus was recognized as a god—perhaps the most popular of all gods.

There were several groups of minor divinities. Beautiful young women called nymphs guarded different parts of nature. Nymphs called Dryads lived in the woods, sometimes inside trees. Other nymphs called Nereids, daughters of Poseidon, lived in the sea.

The nine Muses, daughters of Zeus and Mnemosyne [nay-MOSS-in-ee] (Zeus had several wives), lived on the heights of Mount Parnassus, Pindos, and Helicon, whose springs and streams were sacred to them, as were the palm tree and the laurel. Apollo, god of poetry and music, was naturally their patron and leader. They were goddesses of various arts, mostly literary. Terpsichore [terp-SIK-oh-ree] was Muse of choral song and dance, Euterpe [yoo-TER-pe] of lyric poetry, Erato [AIR-at-oh] of love poetry, Polymnia [paw-lee-POH-mee-nuh] of sacred poetry (hymns), Thalia [tha-LIE-uh] of comic drama, Calliope [kuh-LIE-oh-pee] of epic poetry, and Melpomene [mel-POH-mee-nee] of tragic drama. Urania [yoo-RAW-nee-uh] was Muse of astronomy, and Clio [KLIE-oh] was, Muse of history. Poets in need of inspiration have called upon the aid of the Muses for centuries.

Three goddesses called the Fates controlled the destiny of every mortal person, man or woman. There was Clotho [KLO-thoh], who spun the bright threads of youth; Lachesis [LAH-see-sis], who wound them on her distaff or spindle, distributing and directing them along the course of each human destiny; and Atropos [AT-roh-pohs], the eldest, somber symbol of death, who cut the threads with her sharp slender shears. The gods who lived on Mount Olympus had control over the world and nature, but it was the Three Fates who decided the length of human life. Even the gods could not interfere.
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Give both Greek and Latin (Roman) names.

1. King and father of the gods: ______________________

2. His wife, queen of gods: ______________________

3. Goddess of wisdom, war, and civic pride: ______________________

4. God of poetry, music, medicine, and light; associated with the sun: ______________________

5. His sister, goddess of hunting; associated with the moon: ______________________

6. The god who rules the sea; father of the Nereids: ______________________

7. God of war: ______________________

8. The blacksmith god of fire: ______________________

9. Goddess of love and beauty; born of sea foam: ______________________

10. Messenger of the gods: ______________________

11. Goddess of hearth and home: ______________________

12. Goddess of grain and agriculture: ______________________

ACROSS
1. Roman archer-god, son of Love Goddess
4. Roman messenger of the gods
5. Greek name for god of wine and revelry
8. God of poetry, music, medicine, light
10. Latin Greek blacksmith god
13. Greek goddess of hearth and home
14. Roman name for goddess of wisdom and war, born from Zeus's brain
15. Earth god of woods and fields, half man and half goat
16. Roman god of war
17. Beautiful young goddess of nature
18. Roman name of Zeus's wife
20. Greek king of the gods
21. Greek archer-god who causes men and women to fall in love
22. Roman goddess of grain and agriculture
24. Greek goddess of grain and agriculture
25. Place where the dead go, and Greek name of the lord of the Underworld
27. Three goddesses who control mortal destiny
29. Greek name of Apollo's twin, goddess of hunting
30. Roman god of wine and revelry

DOWN
2. Greek name for the god of the ocean
3. Roman name for the king of the gods
6. Roman name for god who carries a three-pronged trident
7. Roman blacksmith god
8. Greek goddess of stillbirth and beauty
9. Greek goddess of order and beauty
11. Greek queen of the gods, guardian of marriage
12. Roman goddess of the hunt
14. Nine goddesses of the arts
15. Roman lord of the Underworld
16. Daughters of Poseidon
18. Roman goddess of the hearth and home
22. Roman goddess of grain and agriculture
25. Greek messenger of the gods
26. Nymph of the woods
28. Greek goddess of wisdom and war; Greek capital is named for her