



# **ENCYCLOPEDIA OF GODDESSES AND HEROINES**

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**Volume I & II**

**PATRICIA MONAGHAN**



 **Greenwood**  
PUBLISHING GROUP

# Encyclopedia of Goddesses and Heroines

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## About the Author

**Patricia Monaghan**, Professor of Interdisciplinary Studies at DePaul University in Chicago, is the author of more than 20 books including *The Encyclopedia of Celtic Myth and Folklore* (2004) and a study of goddesses in Ireland, *The Red-Haired Girl from the Bog* (2003). A poet and essayist, she has won the Pushcart Prize and the Paul Gruchow Award for Nature Writing. She serves as Senior Fellow for the Black Earth Institute, a progressive think-tank for artists, and is on the national board of the Association for the Study of Women and Mythology (ASWM).

# Encyclopedia of Goddesses and Heroines

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Africa, Eastern Mediterranean, Asia

Volume I

*Patricia Monaghan*

**GREENWOOD**

*An Imprint of ABC-CLIO, LLC*

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**Lady of Brassempouy.** One of the earliest known images of a woman's face, this tiny Paleolithic image was carved from ivory some 25,000 years ago. Found in Brassempouy, southwestern France, in 1892, she now rests in the Musée d'Archéologie Nationale in Paris.

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# Introduction

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In 2008, archaeologists excavating in Germany made a startling discovery. In the Swabian Jura, where caves in limestone cliffs offered shelter to ancient humans, a figurine was unearthed from rubble near a campsite. Carved from mammoth ivory, the tiny figure showed a naked woman. Found in Hohle Fels Cave, near where other such figures had been found, it was given the name of a Roman goddess, “Venus,” as has been common since the first of these sculptures was discovered more than a century ago. In Austria (Willendorf and Galgenberg), France (Brassempouy, Laussel), and other European sites (Dolní Vûstönice in the Czech Republic, Moravany in Slovakia, Monruz in Switzerland, Mal’ta in Russia), archaeologists have found tiny figures of naked women. They are among the most ancient artworks of humanity, carved from stone or bone or molded from clay between 20,000 and 30,000 years ago.

That long ago, during the Paleolithic Era (“Stone Age”), humans lived in small groups gathering vegetative foods, hunting mammals and birds, and fishing. Recent studies suggest that a large proportion, up to 80 percent, of their daily diet came from plant foods like berries, fruits, and roots, which scholars assume were gathered or dug by women. Meat, while providing necessary nutrients, was less readily available and required significant strength and skill to acquire. Scholars presume that hunting was a predominantly male occupation, although women may have trapped small mammals and caught fish. What distinguishes this period of human history from earlier ones is that, for the first time, humans began to use carefully crafted stone tools. This technological revolution led to others, such as the establishment of year-round villages and the creation of the first art.

What knowledge we have of our distant ancestors comes from scanty traces of their daily lives. Only material resistant to decay has survived the millennia: bone, stone, fired clay. We have no way of knowing how ancient humans dressed or what kind of footwear they favored. We have no Paleolithic fishing nets or traps, no spears, no baskets. We do not know how they organized their societies or traced their descent lines.

We have no idea what languages they used. But, because they carved bone and painted on stone, we can see and appreciate their art.

The magnificent cave paintings at Lascaux and Pech-Merle in France show that these ancient humans had a sophisticated sense of beauty and an astonishing command of painterly techniques. In Lascaux, animals leap and prance around the walls and roofs of a series of interlocking caves. At Pech-Merle, spotted horses and woolly mammoths adorn the walls, and an outline of a hand suggests the presence of the artist. In addition to such painted galleries, we have dozens of examples of Paleolithic portable art in the form of expressive incised drawings of animals on bone and delicate carvings of Venus figurines.

Before 2008, experts dated these figures to between approximately 24,000 and 28,000 years ago. Despite the long span of time involved, and despite the considerable stylistic diversity in the figures, the Venuses share an emphasis on female sexual characteristics. Breasts and pubic triangle are always exaggerated; thighs and buttocks can be disproportionately large as well. This emphasis seems to have been so important to the artists that many Venuses have no facial features and only sketchy arms and legs. They are never clothed, although some wear what appear to be woven belts, and most have elaborate hairstyles. Contemporaneous cave paintings, with their highly realistic depiction of prey animals, show that these carvings are neither naïvely created, nor do they reveal artistic inability. Rather, the artists appear to have selectively exaggerated certain aspects of female anatomy, for reasons that we can only surmise.

Ever since the Venuses began to be found more than a century ago, theories have not been lacking. Although we cannot know whether men or women (or both) made the carvings, or what they meant, interpretations abound. Among these is the idea that the images represent the first known human deity: a goddess. This theory is supported by the fact that virtually the only human images found in such ancient art are those full-bodied naked females, with the artists otherwise focusing their energies on depicting animals. But this idea is a controversial one, especially among male scholars, some of whom prefer to label the figures as “Paleolithic pornography,” projecting today’s sexual attitudes into the distant past. Because for nearly 2,000 years, monotheism has been the dominant religious pattern through much of the world, the idea that ancient humans honored a goddess as their primary divinity is deeply unsettling to many, scholars and non-scholars alike.

Whether she is a goddess or not, the figure at Hohle Fels Cave created an international sensation. Finds of Paleolithic Venuses, while never commonplace, are frequent enough that archaeologists were not surprised to unearth another. But stone figures like the Venus of Willendorf have been found with other objects suggesting an age of no more than 30,000 years old. Because the Hohle Fels figure was carved of bone, scientists were able to carbon-date it. This showed the figure to be a stunning 35,000–40,000 years old, as much as 10,000 years older than similar finds. The Venus of Hohle Fels is the oldest depiction of the human form ever found. And she is indisputably female.

What does this Venus look like? Like other such works, she is naked and robust, corpulent or possibly pregnant. Her breasts are huge and her pubic triangle exaggerated. Her arms and legs are tiny in proportion to her body, and she has no face at all.

Where the head should be, Venus has a ring, suggesting she was worn as a pendant or amulet. Photographed up close, she appears massive, but she is only 2-1/2-inches long and weighs less than an ounce.

Is this an image of humanity's primal divinity? We cannot know for certain what people believed in prehistory, as by definition they left no written records explaining their religion and culture. We do know that, since recorded history began, humans have honored goddesses, for among the earliest written documents are hymns to the goddess Inanna. But the Hohle Fels figure is 10 times older than the oldest religious writing.

Whether those who carved the Hohle Fels Venus intended to represent a divinity in female form cannot be known. But we do know that almost every culture since the dawn of time has honored goddesses as well as gods. Then, somewhere around 2,500 years ago, monotheism emerged in the eastern Mediterranean, first in the form of Hebrew tribal religion (which became Judaism), then as Christianity, and finally as Islam. These closely related religions center their worship on a single male divinity. In doing so, they eliminate age-old reverence for the divine embodied in female form.

By contrast, no goddess has ever occupied the solitary position in a religion. Every monotheism is based on a male god. All three of the world's monotheisms exclude feminine divinity, having god but no goddess. The difference between monotheism and goddess religion cannot be clearer: no monotheistic goddess religion has ever been found. Every religion that honors a goddess honors a god as well.

Debate rages over whether the honoring of goddesses makes any difference to the lives of real women, with critics pointing out the practice of widow-burning in polytheistic Hindu India, for instance, as proving that placing a goddess on the altar does not necessarily free women from oppression. Similarly, Greek and Roman religion created magnificent images of the feminine divine, yet denied basic rights to women. Patriarchy and monotheism are not identical. One can exist without the other.

But there is no question that monotheism limits women in religious situations. Only recently have some Christian denominations permitted women to serve as priests, with others holding up the presumed "sex of God" as a reason to deny the pulpit to women. Whether such bias extends beyond the church is a matter of debate, but there is little question that boys are taught that god looks like them, while their mothers and sisters are taught that divinity cannot be envisioned in womanly form. Thus, it is probably not surprising that those raised with such a cultural orientation find it difficult to believe that our forebears may have honored a goddess and captured her abundant image in forms such as the Hohle Fels Venus. Although it is certainly possible that men carved big-breasted women as fantasy sexual objects 35,000 years ago, the greater likelihood is that this faceless woman represents what we call "Mother Nature," the embodiment in female form of the forces to which human life is subject.

Whether or not prehistoric figures represent goddesses, there is no doubt that once written history begins, we find goddesses sharing the religious stage with gods. Often, these divine women acted like human women, especially when they performed the one activity biologically limited to women: bearing children. Goddesses often conceive their divine children without the help of a male partner. They are impregnated by wind or ocean waves, by snakes or fiery flames, or simply by their own desire. When they have a mate, the relationship need not replicate that of their human subjects. The



goddess may have intercourse with her father or her brother, with a stranger, or with several deities at once. She may be promiscuous. Or she may have one mate with whom she forms a model of the ideal human couple.

But not all female divinities are “mother goddesses,” however common that term might be. Goddesses can appear as free-spirited young nymphs, as self-reliant workers, and as aged sages. They can be athletes or huntresses, dancers or acrobats. They can be herbalists or midwives. We find goddesses who are teachers, inventors, bartenders, potters, surfers, magicians, warriors, and queens. Virtually any social role that women have played or are capable of playing appears in a goddess myth somewhere.

These volumes show the breadth of possibilities associated with the feminine through many ages and cultures. Some figures will be familiar to the general reader, especially those from classical European sources. Others are obscure, recorded only in a single source as, for instance, some native North American stories that were transcribed from the last speaker of a dying language. Not all would be called “goddesses” by the people who told their stories, for that word generally refers to divine or supernatural beings. Between such figures and mortal women exists a category that this work calls “heroines.” Some were originally human women who attained legendary status: clan ancestors, extraordinarily faithful lovers, self-sacrificing saviors, remarkable queens, bold adventurers, wonder-workers. Others represent a halfway category between human and divine. These include women with superhuman powers, spirits of nature, personified abstractions, bodhisattvas, ogres, cannibals, and saints. Finally, monotheistic religions often have female figures that function in goddess-like ways, giving birth to gods or saving humanity from peril. Although monotheisms deny the existence of goddesses, these figures are listed in this work, because such figures are sometimes submerged goddesses or powerful goddess-like beings. Where such figures are included, the view of worshipers from that religion is clearly stated.

No encyclopedia, no matter its length, could list all the goddesses the world has known. Due to colonization and forced conversion, innumerable goddesses and their stories have been lost. But an impressive amount of information remains, although scattered in sacred texts, literary epics and drama, story collections, ethnographies, and many other works. This encyclopedia brings together thousands of such sources to offer an entry point for further research. Casual and curious readers will find the legends and myths the most compelling part of this work, but researchers will be able to trace each figure to additional writers, who in turn will provide further reference points.

All the works referenced in this work are in English. This unfortunately excludes many excellent works available in other languages, especially those of the cultures in question. In some areas, as for instance with the former Soviet Union, little is available in translation. Were all published materials in multiple languages to be included in this encyclopedia, it would be many volumes longer. But the sources listed typically offer bibliographical references in the languages of cultural origin for each figure, so scholars should be able to access information where available.

Sources are not limited to scholarly ones, because much goddess material is to be found in literature and in children’s storybooks. The first may be easy to understand. The Roman poet Ovid, for instance, wrote goddess narratives that are among the

classics of ancient literature. But in other cultures, such literary treatments are not available in English, but the myths and legends appear as narrations for children and young adults. Where traditional religion was subjugated to a later monotheistic religion, goddess narratives often were sustained by becoming “old wives’ tales,” told to children and adults. Thus folklore, as well as literature, provides a source of information about ancient goddess figures.

Due to the occasional inconsistency of electronic sources, only material published in paper format has been used. Scholarly material becomes continually more readily available electronically, and many of these sources can be accessed that way. However, some materials available only on the Internet are of questionable validity and/or offer an uncritical analysis of the material. Thus Internet-only sources have been excluded.

These volumes are arranged by cultural region. Within each region, a pantheon list shows major entries (in boldface), alternative spellings and/or titles for major goddesses, and minor goddesses not covered in individual entries. Bibliographies of source material follow individual entries and are referenced therein.

Two introductory sections offer approaches to using the material in this encyclopedia. The section on “Symbols and Associations” offers a comparative analysis of commonly found symbols, mostly from the natural world but including phases of life and abstract qualities. The next section, “Approaches to Study of Goddess Myths and Images,” defines a number of methodological issues in goddess study and offers an exemplar for each method.

The encyclopedia’s main sections are based on geographical and cultural divisions. Each section offers an introduction describing the role of women in the major religion or religions of that culture. Any specific questions that contemporary researchers address are also covered in these introductory sections. Finally, modern revivals of ancient goddess religions are mentioned, as well as ethical or other concerns about such revivals. A listing of the goddesses from that culture offers the most common alternate spellings or names of listed divinities, as well as minor divinities about whom little is known. Each section provides individual entries for important goddesses and heroines from that culture. Rather than full footnotes for each entry, the source of the story is noted, and readers may then refer to the Further Reading list for that culture. A bibliography of general works about goddess studies, as well as exemplary books and articles employing important approaches and methods, concludes this work.

Despite its length, there is no question that some goddesses are missing from this encyclopedia. In some cases, their stories have not yet been published in English. In other cases, the narratives do not specify their names. A figure might be called “the earth goddess” while, in the same story, a male divinity is given a personal name. The quest to reclaim lost goddesses is never-ending, for like the Venus of Hohle Fels Cave, information continually comes to light. Such new information can only add to the richness of images of female potency and power offered in these pages.

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# Note on Spelling and Pronunciation

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Hundreds of languages and thousands of sources are found in this book. Because languages undergo changes, especially when transliterated (changed from one alphabet to another), varying spellings make consistency difficult when so many sources are involved. Therefore, the following rules have been used: where possible, the best-attested modern spelling is employed; otherwise, the spelling from the most recent source is offered. In a few cases, where a figure has become widely known under a spelling now considered inexact, the common spelling is used, with the more modern spelling included in the pantheon listing for reference. Pronunciation guides are not offered due to the number of languages in which goddess names and titles appear. For pronunciation, see sources and bibliographies.



# Symbols and Associations

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No matter from what culture they arise, goddesses have been associated with the natural world. Animate or inanimate, lasting or temporary, natural objects provide the most common goddess symbols. Although goddesses are often depicted or described as having a woman's body, they also appear as animal, plant, mountain, water source, or celestial object. Because the distinction is not always clear between a tree symbolizing a goddess, and the tree being the embodiment of that divinity, the descriptions in this section include both.

In addition to natural objects, abstract ideas such as wisdom or wildness can be associated with goddesses. Often a divinity is associated with more than one such quality, some of which can be in apparent opposition, as with goddesses connected with both virginity and fertility. Other common associations are with phases of life and specific human activities, such as hunting and weaving. The following list offers an overview of common goddess associations, as well as exemplary goddesses in each category.

## SUN

It is commonplace to describe the sun as a symbol of the masculine, linked to reason, consciousness, and goodness. Typically, writers under the influence of essentialist ideas of gender describe an opposition between "masculine" sun and "feminine" moon, the latter representing such qualities as emotion and irrationality ("lunacy" is derived from the Latin word for moon). However, such claims have no basis in cross-cultural mythological comparisons.

More cultures have seen the sun as a goddess than as a god. In Europe, the Celts, the pre-Hellenic Greeks, the Baltic people including the Lithuanians and Latvians, the Finns and the related Hungarians, the Scandinavians and Germans, and the Slavic peoples all envisioned the sun as female (see **Saulė**, **Sól**, **Beiwe** and **Xatel-Ekwa**, and

**Solntse** in those sections, respectively). Sun goddesses are found around the world: in Arabia (**Al-Lat**), Australia (**Bila, Walo**); India (**Bisal-Mariamna, Bomong, Kn Sgni**) and Sri Lanka (**Pattinī**); among the Hittites (**Wurusemu**), Egyptians (**Hathor, Sekhmet**), and Babylonians (**Shapash**); in Native America, among the Cherokee (**Unelanuhi**), Natchez (**Wal Sil**), Inuit (**Malina**), Miwok (**Hekoolas**); and in many other cultures.

The sun goddess is typically depicted as generous and maternal, spreading her warmth freely among her earthly children. An example of this is found along the shores of the Baltic Sea, where the Lithuanians envisioned the sun as **Saulė**, the beloved sun-mother who danced in silver shoes on the hilltops on summer nights. A related image is that of the sun as a spinner or weaver, a woman who casts fibers of light across the sky. Scandinavian **Sól** was described as sitting at the edge of the world each morning, weaving a net of sunlight.

Like the mother of a family living within a subsistence economy, the sun goddess was described as industrious in providing for her children's needs. In a human mother's case, this would be food and clothing; in the case of the sun, the goddess provides the light that causes plants to grow and thus supplies our food. Sometimes, these sun goddesses became associated with birth, both because of the sun's maternal nature and because, at birth, an infant first sees the sunlight; Roman **Lucina**, "light," was such a goddess, as was Baltic **Saulė**.

Maternal love is not the only emotion that sun goddesses can represent. Egyptian **Hathor**, depicted as a cat, was goddess of earthly pleasure, including the arts and love. A related goddess, **Sekhmet**, represented the more threatening aspects of the luminary, for she could grow as angry and destructive toward humanity as the fierce desert sun. Violence and lust combine in the daughter of the Hungarian sun goddess **Xatel-Ekwa**, who baked young men she found attractive.

Myths explain the disappearance of the sun in winter as a violation, sometimes an incestuous one. Her father the moon violated **Saulės Meita**, daughter of the Baltic sun goddess **Saulė**. The Inuit sun goddess **Malina**, violated by her brother, tore off one breast before rising into the sky to flee from him; she became the sun, he the moon. Her brother threatened the Khasi goddess **Ka Sgni** with incest, but she escaped by scorching his face with ashes, still visible on the moon today (see India).

Sometimes the mythic theme is not rape but threat of other violence, as when the Finnish sun goddess **Päivätär** was stolen from the sky by the winter-witch **Louhi**. Saami **Akanidi** (see Finno-Ugric) retreated from earth after being threatened with death by greedy people. Sometimes, the sun retreats on her own initiative, as in the case of the Japanese **Amaterasu**, who hid in a cave after being insulted by her brother, the storm god. Similarly, the annual disappearance of the Siberian **Kaja é** was seen as the goddess's own choice. A variant story of disappearance appears in South America, where the sun-woman **Akewa** was abandoned in the sky when her sister suns descended to the earth because of their curiosity about the men who lived there. When a hairy earthling bit the solar ladder in half, the sun women were stranded on earth and became mothers of humanity. Themes of retreat and loss are thus part of sun goddess mythology.

Stories of the sun changing position from primordial times are common. Miwok **Hekoolas**, stuck on one side of the sky, was towed into her current position. Among the Cherokee, the spider goddess **Kanene Ski Amai Yehi** was the only animal who could bring the sun to this side of the world in a hand-spun basket. But she positioned it too close to earth, and the animal elders had to push the sun farther away. Among the Tunica, the sun goddess **Tso** moved herself, once she realized that she was scorching people with her heat (see North America for all).

Sun goddesses are connected with death and ultimate rebirth, for the luminary disappears into darkness each evening but is reborn afresh each dawn. The British **Sul** was embodied in hot springs near Bath, for she was imagined as descending at dusk to travel beneath the earth, heating the thermal waters as she passed through them. Those bathing at her shrine were believed to take in the strength and endurance of a goddess who could, daily, seem to die and be reborn.

Finally, a common symbol for the sun goddess is the eye, for the goddess is imagined as an eye in the sky, able to see everything. For this reason she is sometimes associated with fortune telling, for from her height she sees past, present, and future. Hittite **Wurusemu** was, like other sun goddesses, associated with such activities; she was also a goddess of fate, controlling the destiny of everyone she observed.

Although goddesses inarguably associated with the sun are found in many cultures, scholarly bias in favor of the solar masculine has led to many goddesses with solar associations being misinterpreted. The familiar figure of the Greek **Medusa**, whose snake-crowned visage looks like the rayed sun, has often been described as representing the moon. Several Irish figures, including **Griánne** and **Áine**, have solar associations but are not traditionally called sun goddesses. Thus, the determination of which goddesses can be described as solar divinities is worthy of additional analysis.

## MOON

If the commonplace view holds that the sun is a masculine symbol, the moon is typically described as the primary symbol of the feminine, associated with emotion, changefulness, and fluidity. Scholars thus describe moon goddesses in terms of presumably archetypal feminine characteristics, which typically bear the stamp of social expectations of human women. Yet moon goddesses who are passive, dependent, and fickle are rare in world religion.

The list of presumed “moon goddesses” is often misleading. Although the world’s cultures have indeed produced many goddesses of the moon, scholarly bias lengthens the list to include goddesses whose original meaning was considerably more expansive than the lunar orb. Such is the case with **Diana**, Roman goddess of the open sky who, through association with the Greek goddess **Artemis**, became described as strictly lunar. Automatic associations of cosmic goddesses like Carthaginian **Tanit** with the moon have wrongly limited the domain of such divinities. Roman **Juno**, too, is described as lunar because her feasts were celebrated at certain moon phases, yet her area of concern was greater than the night. Thus the term “moon goddess” can



sometimes describe a deity accurately, but can also indicate a goddess whose domain has been narrowed to fit scholarly prejudices.

Further scholarly misinterpretation can occur when it is presumed that the moon always maintained a limited, reflective marital relationship to a male sun. While a female sun may be paired with a male sun as husband and wife (Mexican **Coatlicue**, North American **Hanwi**), they may also be described as brother and sister; in some cases (Eskimo **Malina**, African **Mweel**), such sibling luminaries were incestuous lovers. Yet other cultures described sun and moon as a pair of sisters (see **Bomong** in India; **Hae-Soon** in Korea). Sun and moon can be seen as rivals, as with the Southeast Asian **Buan**, who tried to trick the sun and was endlessly pursued by him in punishment. Finally, we sometimes find myths in which the moon was once a sun, but because her light was too bright, she was turned into the moon or voluntarily diminished her light, as with Native American **P'áh-hlee-oh** who gave up one of her bright eyes so the world could get some rest. The idea of a worldwide connection and opposition between sun/male/husband and moon/female/wife is not cross-culturally sustainable.

Where the moon was deified as a goddess, she need be neither passive nor emotionally unstable. Polynesian **Hina** moved to the moon because, as a married woman, she found her family too demanding and abandoned them. Many important lunar divinities were fierce and self-reliant, even dangerous to humans. The Greek archer **Artemis** protected pregnant animals from hunters who might break her rules against killing them; she also condemned to death any man who insulted her purity or threatened the virginity of her associated **Nymphs**. The Aztec **Coatlicue** wore a skirt of snakes and a necklace of human skulls, symbolizing her control over death. Greek **Hecate** was goddess of the powers of magic, served by wild dogs.

The connection of the moon goddess with animals is found in many cultures. Sometimes, as with **Artemis**, the animals were wild, often herd animals that needed protection from predators. In other cases, the animals were tame, as with African **Abuk**, guardian of sheep; the moon, these people said, looked like one of Abuk's flock. Cattle, too, were associated with the moon, which was imagined as a fine white cow (Irish **Bó Finne**) or occasionally, as a bull (Greek **Europa**). Many lunar animals are prey rather than predators, living in groups under the leadership of a matriarch. Thus, although often described as virginal, the goddess serves as "mother" to the flocks she guards. But variant animal associations abound, as with Chinese **Ch'ang O** who was depicted as a toad, sitting on the moon as on a lily pad.

Many moon goddesses are connected with water, especially the ocean. Ancient peoples did not fail to notice the moon's connection with the sea's tides. The monthly bleeding of women was discovered in early times to be related to the lunar cycle. The mermaid **Ymoja** of the African diaspora is depicted swimming in the ocean. Moon goddesses are paradoxically associated with the birthing process, with the moon depicted as a cosmic midwife. Some goddesses, such as **Artemis**, are both virginal and associated with midwifery.

The fact that the moon visibly changes its shape each month may have enhanced its connection with pregnancy, for the luminary grows round as a pregnant belly each month. This pregnancy is associated, in Bali, with vegetative abundance, as the

goddess **Dewi Shri** is seen as pregnant with rice at the full moon (see India). The moon's monthly shape-shifting also made it a fitting symbol for magicians and witches, who could change the shapes of things at will (Greek **Hecate**, Mexican **Tlazoltéotl**, Celtic **Arianhrod**). The change of shape was sometimes described as the result of an attack on the goddess (Mexican **Coyolxauhqui**). But the moon's changeful appearance was also described as exemplifying the power of the moon goddess to change earthly chaos into order and measurement (North American **Menil**).

## STARS

The myriad stars in the night sky, so visible to our ancestors before the invention of artificial lights, were often described as spirits or minor divinities. When female, they typically were seen as playful young women (Slavic **Zorya**), often the children of the sun and/or moon goddess (Baltic **Ausriné** and **Valkyriné**). Occasionally, a star woman appears as a temptress, as with African Morongo (see **Massasi**), who lusted after her son and, after her husband raped her, arranged for his murder in punishment. Rarely, a star goddess appears as an aged woman like South American **Ceiuci** or of indeterminate age like Tibetan **Tārā**.

A few stars and star groups have been traditionally noticed for their prominence in the sky at specific times. In Egypt, the rising of the star we call Sirius in spring coincided with the land-renewing floods of the Nile. The star was the vehicle of the goddess **Sothis**, associated with rebirth. The morning and evening star, which we call **Venus** after a Roman goddess not originally associated with the planet, appears in several mythologies (Eastern Mediterranean **Ishtar** and **Astarte**, North American **Gen-denwitha**); she was typically associated with relationships and love. At times, the sexual relationship was destructive, as with the Baltic **Saulés Meita**, the beloved sun daughter raped by her moon father. Sometimes, a star goddess is associated with a specific human endeavor other than lovemaking, as when Celtic **Sirona** ruled the healing arts.

The **Pleiades** were seen in many cultures as a group of sisters or playmates (North American **Chehiayam** and **Kusi'tawa'qari**, among others). Stories about how groups of girls found themselves transformed into stars offer various explanations, including being punished for doing something forbidden (often slight, such as whistling) or resulting from shared passion for men who live in the sky. Occasionally, as with Australian **Abobi**, violence or incest is involved. Their rapist father pursued that goddess's daughters until she turned them into stars. Some constellations bear the names of Greek goddesses and heroines; see **Andromeda**, **Cassiopeia**, and **Cynosura**. Finally, the pole star or North Star appeared as the goddess **Tou-Mou** in China.

## SKY

The earth's blue atmosphere rarely appears in mythology as divine, although the sky as an image of the upper world or heavens is found in many cultures, especially those that

posit a multistory universe inhabited by different beings at different levels. Although often gendered as masculine, the heavens also appear in female form, as with the Roman goddess **Diana**, originally a goddess of the open sky who was later limited to the moon, and Maori **Mahora-nui-a-rangi** (see Pacific Islands), a heavenly creatrix. Such sky divinities can be connected with boundlessness (Indian **Adīti**), because the sky seems to have no beginning nor ending. Occasionally such goddesses represented the entire cosmos, earth and sky together (Eastern Mediterranean **Tanit**). Because of the vastness of the sky, it was sometimes depicted as dual-sexed, as with African So (see **Mawu**), who was considered a goddess despite having a masculine aspect.

Although sky goddesses often have little personality and seem remote from human affections, the Egyptian sky goddess **Nut** was the mother to whom the dead returned and, as such, was painted across the inside lid of coffins, stretching out her starry body. She was also a lusty goddess who had to be forcibly separated from her lover, the earth god. The need to separate earth and sky, who remain otherwise in unending intercourse, is a common mythic tale, although most of the sky divinities are male, the earth female.

The sky's light, especially at dawn, was often pictured as a voluptuous and promiscuous goddess (Roman **Aurora**, Greek **Eos**, Indian **Ūsas**). The lustful goddess is more typically pictured as the morning and evening star (see above). However, the goddess as a creator of light, and as light itself, is found in many cultures.

Some earth goddesses and divine ancestors appear as women who originally lived in the sky but descended to the earth's surface, often because of love for an earthly man. Thus African **Nambi** fled her sky home, bringing the food that humanity needed to survive down with her. Andriambavirano of Madagascar (see Africa, **Andriana**) similarly became enamored of a human male, but her original descent was motivated by boredom and curiosity about the earth. Finally, some figures are described as living in the sky but are not otherwise specifically associated with the heavens (see African **Mbokomu** and **Nambi**; Chinese **T'ai-hsüan Nü**; Circumpolar **Kadlu**.)

## WEATHER

Just as the heavens are commonly described as part of the masculine sphere, opposed to the feminine earth, so weather (especially storms with thunder and lightning) is often connected with male divinities and their powers. Yet some cultures grant control of the weather to a powerful female divinity. Often she is depicted as an aged woman, sometimes a giant, such as the Celtic **Cailleach** who stirred up storms at sea and covered the land with her cloudy cloak. In Scotland and Ireland, this figure was connected with high hills and mountains, around which clouds gathered and which even today bear her name. She was a figure more feared than beloved, associated with bad weather rather than sunny spells, although she can appear in double form, as with Britain's fearsome **Black Annis** and her corollary, **Gentle Annie**.

Among the Balts, the similar figure **Ragana** caused storms by waving a red wand. Both these figures were seen as old, but sexually active, indeed somewhat predatory.

They favored strong and virile young men, whom they exhausted or even killed with their energy and sexual appetites. The similar Hungarian witch, **Szépasszony**, was a frightening figure who kidnapped humans, often for sexual purposes. The Russian witch **Baba Yaga** controlled the weather, brewing up storms to hide her raids on human settlements where she stole children. Nearby, the dual Germanic goddesses **Perchta** and **Holle** not only controlled the weather but were also connected with seasonal change, typically accompanied by a change in weather. The distinction between a seasonal goddess and a weather-controller can be difficult to distinguish, with divinities like Georgian **Tamar** (see Slavic) serving in both capacities.

Storms include wind as well as rain, and goddesses whose special domain is the wind are not uncommon, although more typically associated with male divine figures (as is thunder). At times these winds are drying, as with Egyptian **Sekhmet** who represents the desiccating desert wind as well as the heat of the sun. African **Qya** controlled winds on the river named for her, while in the African diaspora, she continued to control wind, both gentle breezes and dangerous storms. Similarly, the Haida figure **Djū** (see North America) controlled both soft and harsh winds by the height to which she raised her dress. Sumerian **Lilith** (see Eastern Mediterranean) is another wind goddess, embodying a **Cailleach**-like sexual danger in a voluptuous form.

Because goddesses are often associated with water (see below), they can be described as having special power over rain. An important example is Persian **Anāhitā** (see Eastern Mediterranean), who was seen as both earthly water and as rain that replenished streams and rivers. These rain goddesses can appear as fertility figures like African **Mujaji**, for farmers depend upon rain at appropriate times in order for crops to thrive and ripen. In northern climes, the goddess of precipitation was associated with snow rather than rain, as evidenced by Siberian **Asiaq** and Eskimo **Kadlu** (see Circumpolar for both).

One weather-related phenomenon typically associated with goddesses is the rainbow, which was in many lands seen as an airborne woman like the Greek **Iris** and **Ochumare** of the African diaspora. In Australia, the rainbow was a female serpent flung across the sky (see **Julunggul** and **Kunapipi**). The same connection is found in the African diaspora, where **Aida Wedo** is both rainbow and serpent in Haiti. Other lands also saw a connection between rain and snakes or dragons, as Korean **Aryong-Jong**, “queen of the dragon palace,” suggests. Similarly, the clouds that give birth to rain are depicted as goddesses, such as Indian **Abhramū** and Greek **Nephele**.

The connection of such goddesses to water seems primary, so they may be seen in bodies of water such as lakes and rivers, as well as in falling rain. They can, as well, be associated with the oceans, as the Taiwanese goddess **Ma-tsu** attests. She especially controlled the weather at sea, which impacted the fisherman who honored her (see China). In Latvia (see Baltic), **Mjer-jema** was honored as a weather goddess who controlled the storms at sea and thus assured or spoiled good fishing. In Finland the goddesses of air and weather ruled the healing arts (see **Ismo**).

## LIGHT/DAY

Goddesses of light are usually associated with the sun (see above), but occasionally we find divinities associated with light in general. An example of such a goddess is Roman **Diana**, often described as a moon goddess but originally a goddess of the sky, especially when lit by one of the celestial luminaries. Other light goddesses appeared as midwives (Roman **Lucina**, Babylonian **Bau**), for they represented the first light that a newborn sees. Even more generally, the Australian light goddess **Yhi** represented the moment of creation, at which all creatures came forth into light.

Some light goddesses are connected with a specific time of day. Slavic **Poldunica** was bright noontime, while Greek **Eos** and Hindu **Ṛ̥sas** both represented dawn. Other dawn goddesses include Eastern Mediterranean Aja (see **Ishtar**), Chinese Zhunti (see **Ma-tsu**), Buddhist **Mārīcī** (see India), Polynesian **Atanua** and **Hina**, Hungarian **Xoli-Kalte** (see Finno-Ugric, **Xatel-Ekwa**), and Roman **Mater Matuta**. At the other end of day, Greek **Hesperides** and Slavic **Zorya** represented the fading light of evening, often embodied in the first stars seen in the darkening sky (see Stars, above). The temperaments and symbols of these goddesses vary according to the kind of light they represent, with dawn goddesses appearing often as lusty maidens, full of energy, while deities of evening are more sedate but nonetheless seductive (see also Fire, below).

## DARKNESS/NIGHT

Light has a physical source in the sun, which can readily be envisioned as a divinity. But darkness, the absence of light, has no similarly specific source. Darkness as a quality, then, is less often imagined embodied as a goddess, although India provides one in the form of kindly **Rātri**, sister to the dawn goddess **Ṛ̥sas**, representing restful night. The Greeks, too, had a goddess of night, **Nyx**, a primordial figure who gave birth to the early gods and represented a time before the creation of light. A similar figure, **Nött**, appears in Scandinavian myth.

Many goddesses are described as having dark skin, usually to emphasize their connection to the dark fertile soil rather than to indicate their connection to nighttime. This appears to be the case with the so-called Black Madonnas (see **Mary**, Eastern Mediterranean), found in an area predominantly occupied by light-skinned people. Some goddesses of death, such as Sumerian **Erishkegal** (see Eastern Mediterranean) are described as powers of darkness, apparently because they are associated with the physical inability to see light after death. Goddesses associated with darkness could be associated with magic, as with Greek **Hecate** who appeared at the dark of the moon accompanied by black dogs.

Finally, darkness sometimes indicates a people's natural complexion and has no special symbolic meaning. Racism is occasionally found in mythology, reflecting societal divisions and injustices. For example, the Indian goddess **Pārvāti**, originally dark-skinned like many of her worshipers, underwent an initiatory experience in order to attain a presumably more beautiful light skin. The presumption that "dark" indicates

negative forces or even evil is unfounded in most mythologies. Even when a goddess is connected with death, that does not necessarily indicate that her powers are negative, as death is a natural part of life.

## TIME AND SEASONS

The concept of time appears as a goddess in several cultures. In Hindu India, **Nidra** is the sleep of time, whose passage is beyond human control, while **Kālī** represents the many eras of the world's life, with the final era named after her. In North America, the Cherokee saw time as ruled by the sun goddess **Unelanuhi**, who divided night from day and thus invented all measurement. Among the pre-Roman Etruscans, time was the goddess **Nortia**, in whose honor nails were pounded each year into her temple. The later Roman **Juno** represented time as embodied in women's passage through life's stages, with multiple Junos representing each woman as she aged. Some time goddesses are also foretellers of fate, as was Arabic **Manāt** (see Eastern Mediterranean). Finally, many goddesses are associated with the period before day was divided from night. These divinities appear in a primordial, often chaotic "time before time," and are often creatrices who form the universe.

Many goddesses, especially earth goddesses, are associated with specific seasons that paralleled the seasons of a woman's life. Spring goddesses (Roman **Flora**, Greek **Hebe**, Slavic **Kostrubonko**, Scandinavian **Rana Neida**) are typically young and sexually active or even promiscuous, unburdened by children. They are kind and generous, beautiful and tender. Often spring goddesses are associated with dawn, both representing the promise of new beginnings. Just as dawn goddesses (see Light/Day, above) could be dangerous as well as desirable, so figures connected with spring, like Slavic **Rusálki**, could present themselves as threatening. Spring was a time of hunger to subsistence farmers, who had devoured their stored crops and were awaiting new growth. Even for gathering-hunting cultures, spring could be difficult, so in the Arctic we find **Asiaq** (see Circumpolar), to whom shamans made sacrifices if ice did not break up in the rivers, allowing fishing. Thus maiden spring goddesses such as Greek **Persephone** were connected to death, an ever-present danger in hungry springtime.

Summer goddesses, by contrast, are typically maternal, indicative of the earth in its agricultural abundance. Like Roman **Ceres** (from whom we derive the word "cereal"), these goddesses are often associated with food plants, which flourish in summer weather (see also Vegetation, below). In North America, such goddesses could be embodied in the important food-crop, maize or corn; see **Selu** and **Oniata**. Such goddesses are typically depicted as mature and fertile, women in the prime of their reproductive years. But in desert lands, summer goddesses could appear as threatening, as with Egyptian **Sekhmet** who represents the scorching sun, or Sri Lankan **Pattinī** (see India) who began as a gentle woman but became rage-filled and destructive later.

It might be assumed that autumn goddesses would represent decline and death, but fall is a season for both harvest and the hunt. Thus goddesses connected with autumn could be paradoxically both fertile and deadly. Some, such as Irish **Tailtu**, were



sacrificed in order to provide fertility to the land, while in other cases such as Slavic **Baba Yaga**, they threatened others with death by devouring. In Mesoamerican ritual, a mature woman assumed the identity of **Toci** and was sacrificed and flayed at her harvest festival. Other autumn goddesses (South American **Pachamama**, Greek **Demeter**, Roman **Pomona**) were goddesses of abundance, appropriate to harvest season. These goddesses are typically shown as a woman past the prime of life but still vigorous. With the Irish **Cailleach**, this vigor included sexual appetite; this divine female could exhaust and even kill young men with her demands.

Winter goddesses, typically envisioned as old women, are often threatening. This is hardly surprising, as winter in earlier times was a time of hardship and want. Winter goddesses are shown with the power to control the weather (see *Weather*, above). Thus they were to be propitiated, lest they grow angry and bring on dangerous storms. The Scandinavian winter goddess appeared as a pair, with friendly **Holle** shaking her feather beds to make snow and rewarding those pleasant to her with gold, while her twin **Perchta** roamed through the world looking for people to punish for minor infractions, bringing bitter cold with her. Some winter goddesses are paired with a spring deity. In Scotland, the **Cailleach** appeared with the girl Bride, who spent winter trying to escape the hag's grasp. Finally, some winter divinities are witches (Roman **Befana**, Finno-Ugric **Louhi**) who kidnap good weather and growth, holding it hostage until spring.

## EARTH

The most common symbol for goddesses is the earth, although it can be argued that the symbolism goes the other way around: that goddesses symbolize earth, both as soil and as planet. Whichever came first, the connection of goddess and earth is found throughout the world. It is not, however, invariable. The binary opposition of male/sky and female/earth is sometimes reversed. Earth gods are found in some cultures, often associated with sky goddesses, a subject that has not been sufficiently studied to determine its frequency. Despite exceptions, however, earth and goddess are connected in many cultures, so much so that goddesses whose symbolism was originally other evolve into earth goddesses over time. In some cases, however, writers unthinkingly and inappropriately use the term “earth goddess” or “earth mother” where the divinity in question is a celestial or cosmic figure.

Earth goddesses are often described as creating the earth (see also *Creatrix*, below); such goddesses can be described as self-creating. In Korea, **MaGo** created the world by singing, while in Greece, the earth goddess **Eurynome** created the universe through dance. Some earth goddesses do not create the land but populate it by creating humans and animals. African **Butan** was the first creation of the double-sexed primary god. She then populated the world without need of mate.

Earth goddesses often create vegetation from their bodies, the rich soil. Because humans and animals require vegetation to survive, earth goddesses are envisioned as benevolent and generous. In some cases, the connection between earth and nourishment is made clear, as with Indian **Basmoti** who created rice by vomiting it forth. This

generosity can be seen in the name of the early Greek earth goddess **Pandora**, “all-giver,” or Danish **Gefjion**, “gift” (see Scandinavia). Such images tend to come from cultures that practice agriculture. Where people live from fishing and hunting, the goddess of abundance is more typically connected with wildlife (see Animals, below).

Many earth goddesses are described as maternal forces, providing for the creatures of earth as a good mother provides for her children. Some myths put special emphasis on the maternal feelings of the goddess, as in the Greek story of **Demeter** and her lost daughter **Persephone**. Baltic **Žemyna** appeared at the birth of every child, and Siberian Umay (see Circumpolar, **Umaj**) was the placenta that feeds the fetus as the earth feeds its creatures. Other myths connect goddesses of earth with human fecundity. Estonian **Ma-Emma** (see Finno-Ugric) was the fertile, endlessly pregnant earth, and as such controlled the wombs of young women, permitting them to bear children successfully. The Roman earth goddess **Anna Perenna** responded to the sexual activities of humans by growing more fertile.

Goddesses like Scandinavian **Fulla** and Roman **Ops**, from whose names the English words “full” and “opulent” derive, represent both bountiful vegetation and the abundant life expressed in human procreation. African goddess **Aje** was similarly connected with abundance of all sorts, including food, money, and beloved children. She created the soil that bears crops by scratching at it in primordial times, when it was hard as rock and she wore the body of a chicken. Hindu **Lakṣmī**, often represented by coins and bills, began as an earth goddess whose abundance created monetary wealth. As an esoteric symbol, she represents spiritual wealth as well.

The earth has rarely been seen as a solitary divinity. Rather, she is envisioned as part of a divine family that includes gods as well as other goddesses. At times, the earth was part of a family headed by the maternal sun, as with Finno-Ugric earth goddess **Muikis-Mumi**, whose sister was the sun, or Baltic **Žemyna**, who was the sun’s daughter. In other cases, we find the earth as mother of a clan that includes goddesses of culture and of food; the Pawnee earth divinity was **Atira** (see Native American), whose daughter was the corn goddess.

Often, the earth mother was the mate of a sky god. In Polynesia, the earth goddess **Papa** lay in perpetual intercourse with her sky husband and had to be forcibly separated from him in order for other life to emerge. In Greek myth, earth mother **Gaia** birthed many children after mating with the sky god but finally grew weary of his endless sexual demands. She convinced one of her sons to castrate him, thus ending their endless embrace, after which she gave birth parthenogenetically. The Zuni goddess **Awitelin Tsita** lay in continual intercourse with the sky until she conceived the human race. Her husband, the sky, solicitously attended upon **Maka** of the Lakota as she created humanity (see Native American for both).

Although typically the earth goddess hungered for intercourse, a few earth goddesses were unwilling sexual partners. Hindu **Tārī** (see India) refused the solicitations of the sun god, whereupon he created human women to serve his sexual needs. Even when the goddess is energetically sexual, many myths describe tensions among the divine family, with the earth mother siding with her children against her spouse.

The earth goddess is never described in fearsome or negative terms, although she can be seen as a strict keeper of order, as was the case with Greek **Themis**, who



represented the force of law. Judgmental goddesses sustain the natural laws and punish those who break them. Such goddesses could be punitive, as when the Mongol earth goddess **Etugen** brought about earthquakes to purify the land of people's wrongdoing. Hindu **Prthivī** (see India) also showed her displeasure at human failing by shaking fiercely, as did South American **Pachamama**.

Because earth goddesses serve as all-seeing witnesses to what transpires on their surface, people turned to them when oaths were required. Slavic people held a handful of soil while swearing by **Žemyna** (see Slavic), and Romans pointed downward toward the earth goddess **Tellus** when they made a pledge. African **Ala** was a force of social order, for she witnessed all promises and knew instantly when one was broken because there was nowhere on earth where one could hide from her. Also in Africa, followers of **Oddudua** devote themselves to maintenance of social order. Greek **Demeter** was known as the lawgiver ("Thesmophoros"), for she created the order of the ideal human society as she did for the rest of nature. The connection between earth and human society can be detected in the name of the Scandinavian earth goddess **Fjörgynn**, from which we derive both the words "earth" and "hearth."

Just as she could see anything that happened on her surface, the earth goddess could see into the future. Thus she represented the force of destiny. Iranian **Ārmaiti** (see Eastern Mediterranean) ruled both reproduction and fate, which in many cultures were seen as inextricably linked. As the overseer of birth, the goddess was in the position to know the fate of each newborn. Just as often, earth goddesses are connected to death, especially in cultures where the dead were entombed within the earth; the dark skin of Russian **Mokosh** (see Slavic) was not only the color of fertility but of the endless night of death.

The earth goddess was literally the earth beneath our feet. Siberian **Mou-Njami** had soil for skin and green grass for hair. In that culture, digging into the earth was forbidden, because to do so would be to injure the goddess. Southeast Asian **Ponniyamman** is depicted as a rock head, sitting on the earth, which forms her body. Some goddesses occupy specific and delimited areas of land—for example, mountains. One of the world's most famous peaks is named for the Hindu goddess **Annapuṛṇā** (see India). Sometimes a single peak is designated as the embodiment or residence of the goddess, as in the Irish triad **Bandba**, **Fódla**, and **Ériu**, or the Native American goddess **Tacoma** of the mountain that bears her name. In other cases, goddesses occupied entire mountain ranges, such as Celtic **Echtghe**, after whom low hills in County Clare are named. Occasionally the goddess's mountain is an imaginary one; **Xiwang Mu** of China was envisioned as occupying the supernatural Jade Mountain. Volcanoes were commonly imagined as goddesses, but connected with fire rather than earth (see Fire, below).

Goddesses inhabited and embodied forests. Because these forests were important sources of wild food, Celtic **Ardwinna** and Greek **Artemis** were connected with hunting, while Finno-Ugric **Vir-Azer-Ava** was associated with foraging for berries and mushrooms. But dense forests could also be dangerous. Thus threatening figures were described as ready to kidnap people who lost their way in the woods, like the Scandinavian **Skogsnufrar** (see **Buschfrauen**) who froze people to death for wandering in her domain.

Mountain and forest goddesses can be seen as specialized forms of the earth goddess. Another category was the territorial goddess who represents not the entire planet but the region occupied by a single group. The alternative name of the Roman **Tellus** was *Italia*, a name also given to the long mountainous peninsula she ruled. In India, multiple goddesses called by the generic **Grāmadevatā** represent the land on which a village's people depended. In Ireland, land goddesses often appear as goddesses of the watershed, showing the necessary connection of earth and water for fertility (see Celtic **Aveta**, **Sequana**, **Berba**, **Bóand**, **Sínann**). Given the frequency of association of goddess and earth, it is not uncommon to find earth goddesses also identified as goddesses of water, abundance, and creation.

## WATER

After earth, the symbol most commonly associated with goddesses is water, both as the fresh water of rivers and streams, and as the oceans' salty waves. The gendering of water as feminine is not invariable, however. Some mythologies describe the oceans as masculine. The Greeks had a sea god, Poseidon, while a similar figure among the Irish was Manannán mac Lir. In both cases, the ocean was defined as masculine, as distinguished from fresh water, which was feminine. Among the Greeks, who despite seeing the ocean as masculine pictured its waves as the innumerable feminine Oceanids, we find the freshwater **Nymphs** called the Nereids. The Irish knew many river goddesses such as **Sínann**, **Berba**, and **Bóand**, while outside Ireland we find dozens of Celtic water goddesses including **Abnoba**, **Aveta**, **Coventina**, **Natosuelta**, and **Sabrina**.

This salt and fresh water distinction, however, is not universal. Some goddesses were described as ruling the oceans, including the Scandinavian **Ran** who ruled the northern sea, and Chermis **Büt aba** and Finnic **Mere-Ama** (see Finno-Ugric), whose domains were similarly in the arctic waters. Hebrew **Miriam** (see Eastern Mediterranean) was connected with the "bitter waters" or the salty seas, although a freshwater stream created by her brother Moses also bore her name. The connection between the ocean's salt water and female fertility is emphasized in the Hindu myth of **Prakṛti** (see India), whose amniotic fluid became the oceans after she gave birth to the gods.

In many cultures, an ocean goddess controls the fish and mammals that live in her waters and on which humans depend for food. An important example of such a figure is Inuit **Sedna** (see Circumpolar) who, thrown into the water as a sacrifice, thereafter receives sacrifices herself as the "great food-dish." Finnish **Vellamo** (see Finno-Ugric), too, is an ocean goddess who determines how many fish humans can take from her waters, taking advice from her many daughters, the waves of the sea. Similarly, the South American sea-mother **Mama Cocha** brings fish and sea-mammals close to people so that they can be harvested for food. Fishermen often fall under the rulership of ocean goddesses, who like **Ma-tsu** (see China) protects them when they are faring on the waves.

In some cases, the oceanic goddess is depicted as a primordial mother or creatrix, one from whose depths life was born, as with Babylonian **Ti'âmat** (see Eastern

Mediterranean). Finno-Ugric **Luonotar**, while not the ocean itself, is intimately connected with it, having spent much of eternity floating on cosmic waters. The sky-woman of the American Iroquois, **Ataensic**, floated on the ocean's waters until earth was created (see North America). Wherever the waters of the Wintu goddess **Mem Loimis** fell, the earth grew fertile, while areas not endowed with her watery gift were left as desert (see North America).

Ocean goddesses could be charming and delightful. Lithuanian **Amberella** tossed pieces of amber to the shore, to reward those who honored her, and Greek **Aphrodite** was ravishingly beautiful even when fickle. But they could also be dangerous. Mermaids and sirens, which appear in many mythologies as ocean-dwelling women of great beauty, are threatening water divinities who lure sailors to their death. Such figures guarded the boundaries between water and land, like Siberian **Sug Eezi** (see Circumpolar) who like other mermaids had long hair that mimicked the rippling streams that she inhabited. Celtic **Korrigans** danced each night, drawing victims to themselves and drowning them. Greek **Aphrodite** was born of the ocean's waves and, although beautiful, could also be pitiless, for love is never without possible threat of loss. In China, the primary goddess **Xiwang Mu** controlled the world's waters and was invoked when floods threatened, showing that the activities of such cosmic goddesses could be damaging to humanity were she not ritually appeased. Thus ocean goddesses represent both creative possibility and danger.

Goddesses associated with fresh water are powers of fertility. Such watershed goddesses can be seen as divinities of the land as well as the rivers that drain it. In India, many rivers are imagined as goddesses of earthly abundance, none more so than the Ganges, whose powerful river drains much of the subcontinent and is seen as the actual body of the goddess **Gaṅgā**. In Egypt, where the annual inundation of the land by the river Nile was typically associated with the god Osiris, we find the water goddess **Anuket** representing the connection between water and the land's increased fertility. In Africa, major rivers were goddesses (**Yemaja**, **Oshun**, **Qya**) who were sometimes in conflict with each other over their shared consort. Such river goddesses were typically maternal forces, providing their human children with sustenance. A similar goddess in Russia, **Mokosh** (see Slavic), was a motherly figure whose presence was most actively felt in budding springtime.

Smaller water sources such as springs and creeks could be seen as threatening rather than helpful. In Slavic lands, supernatural women, once human, haunted quick-flowing streams. Deprived by early death of a chance to have children, the **Rusálki** drowned sweet babies or fertile young people. The Scandinavian **Nixies** were similarly dangerous. In tribal India, the **Nippong** especially targeted young pregnant women, whom they caused to miscarry. Such spirits were often most active in spring and may represent the possibility of flash floods. Tribal Indian **Bai Tanki**, another destructive river goddess, spreads disease through her water—a mythic narrative with a firm basis in science, for polluted water can indeed spread disease.

Fountains and bedrock springs were often seen as locations of inspiration because of the goddesses who inhabited them. The Greek **Musae** are still known as an image of the force that causes artists to create. In India, the river goddess **Sarasvatī** was the source of inspiration as well as a cosmic creatrix. Such inspiration could be legal and

organizational as well as artistic. Among the Roman water nymphs called the **Camenae** was **Egeria**, who oracularly dictated the first laws of Rome and whose name is still used to describe a wise woman advisor.

Freshwater goddesses, endowed with the gift of seeing the future, could help those who wished to practice the oracular arts. Babylonian **Nanshe** (see Eastern Mediterranean) was a fortune-tellers' goddess celebrated at waterborne festivals. Prophecy was not always seen as a gift; the Greek water **Nymph** Telphusa killed anyone who drank her prophetic waters. Yet most often, prophecy was a positive act, connected with healing because the ill and infirm turn to oracles in hopes of receiving predictions of positive change. So common was the connection between springs and healing among the Celts that the names of many of their goddesses have been lost, for they were renamed "Minerva Medici" after the Roman goddess of healing, during Imperial occupation.

Healing was a common part of the domain of the freshwater goddess, a tradition that continues today with the prayerful use of water from the well at Lourdes, France, dedicated to the virgin **Mary** (see Eastern Mediterranean). In Africa, we find the lake goddess **Idemili** and the water spirit **Mammywata**, both of whom offered healing to their worshipers. The Hindu goddess **Narmadā** (see India) was especially powerful against snakebite, while the healing offered by **Gaṅgā** extended beyond this life, for those who died in her waters were freed from the cycle of rebirth.

Some important goddesses controlled all water, whether found in rivers or in oceans. **Anāhitā**, one of the most important Persian divinities (see Eastern Mediterranean), ruled everything fluid in the universe, even those of the human body. Similarly, among the Lithuanians (see Baltic), the water mother **Jurate** controlled all the earth's waters. Aztec **Chalchihuitlicue** (see Mesoamerican) could be found in lakes, rivers, and the ocean.

Finally, some goddesses could be described as divinities of what science calls the water cycle, for they ruled the rain that falls on the land, the bodies of water (above-ground and underground) that gather the rain and return it to the ocean, and the ocean where clouds are born to return water to the land. Such goddesses connect air and water like the African sky woman **Andriana** who descended to earth to become a water goddess. Rainbows, those bridges between sky and earth formed by water vapor, often symbolize such goddesses. In Australia, the primal serpent **Julunggul** ruled ocean, rivers (especially waterfalls), and rain; she was embodied in the rainbow. A similar rainbow-water-snake spirit found in Haiti was **Aida Wedo** (see African Diaspora).

## AIR

Goddesses of air are uncommon, perhaps because air is not visible, audible, or tangible until it forms itself into wind and thus is difficult to imagine as having personality, much less gender. Only one goddess represents the invisible atmosphere that envelops and sustains us. The name of Inuit **Sila** (see Circumpolar) has been translated as "air," and this goddess embodies the entire cosmos that sustains life. She is also associated with the visions of shamans, who traveled through the air without touching ground.

More commonly, a goddess might be associated with the air that she breathes into inert matter, thus vivifying it. Examples of such breath-creatrixes are Egyptian **Hekt**, Siberian **Ajysyt** (see Circumpolar), Greek **Aphrodite**, Lakota **Whope** (see North America), and South American **Amáru**.

Flying goddesses, whose domain can be interpreted as including air, are quite common. Most, like Scandinavian **Frigg** and Russian **Baba Yaga** (see Slavic), rode in some kind of vehicle: a chariot drawn by cats in the first case, a mortar rowed with a pestle in the second. Persian **Añahiña**'s vehicle was drawn by four majestic white horses, Babylonian **Ishtar**'s by lions (see Eastern Mediterranean for both). Wild boars pulled Indian **Mārīcī**. In some cases, such high-flying goddesses were connected with dawn or with the sun, as with Indian **Ūsas** and Scandinavia **Sól**. Celestial goddesses are often difficult to distinguish from air goddesses, as both travel through the atmosphere.

Goddesses connected to birds can arguably be called air divinities. In some cases, as with Southeast Asian **Kinnarī** or Hindu **Yoginī** (see India for both), the goddess can be embodied as a bird, rather than as a human female. The same was true of Samoan **Tuli** (see Pacific Islands), who created the world in the form of a bird flying across the primeval sea. Sometimes the bird becomes the goddess's vehicle, as in Russia, where the air goddess **Berehinia** rode the magnificent Firebird (see Slavic).

More obvious air goddesses are connected to wind. Such goddesses are not always violent or stormy. The Greek breeze goddesses, the **Litae**, carried prayers to the gods. In Finland, the helpful goddess **Ismo** blew out fires that threatened to burn down houses; her sisters were healing divinities who healed by blowing on wounds. But some air goddesses are clearly dangerous, as with the Caribbean **Guabancex**, who caused hurricanes. It can be difficult to distinguish storm goddesses from goddesses of weather (see above), who like African Mujaji and **Qya** control both stormy winds and the accompanying thunder, lightning, and rain.

## FIRE

The mobile element of fire is more typically depicted as feminine than masculine, although a few fire gods appear in world mythology. These are often blacksmiths, such as the Celtic Goibniu, Greek Hephaestus, or Roman Vulcan. Such gods do not so much embody fire as use it in transformation of one material to another. But the role of smith is not always a male one in mythology. Smith goddesses also appear, most notably Celtic **Brigit**, connected to smithcraft, poetry, and healing, all of which show her transformational power. In Japan, too, we find the smith goddess **Ishikore-Dome**, who crafted the first mirror and saved the world from darkness. In China, the smith **Moye** worked with her husband to craft an impossibly strong sword, in the process of which she sacrificed herself to the fire.

Fire itself appears as a goddess in one of two forms: as the wild, tempestuous fire of volcanoes, and as the tamed and useful fire of the hearth. The former figures are typically depicted as voluptuous and demanding of lovers, who often perish at their embrace. The unpredictability of volcanic eruption and the potential destructiveness to human settlement, coupled with the astonishing fertility of volcanic soil after it has

cooled and settled, led to depiction of volcano goddesses as both threatening and fecund. Around the “ring of fire” in the Pacific, such volcano women can be found, from the Aleutian **Chuginadak** and Multnomah **Loo-Wit** (see North America) to Micronesian **Latmikaik** and Hawai’ian **Pele** (see Pacific Islands). In Europe, a similar figure is Roman **Aetna**, whose mountain bears her name. The earth’s inner fires, which pour out from the surface as lava, gave rise to images of women with flames hidden in their genitals, as in **Goga** (see Pacific Islands).

The connection of such natural fires with the domestic flame upon the hearth was articulated in some cases, as in Japanese **Fuji**, who was both the volcanic mountain and the family’s cook fire. More commonly, the fire goddess of the household is seen as a distinct domestic presence, to whom simple rituals are offered daily while cooking and eating. The hearth, which is either the home of the goddess or her very body, was often hedged about with taboos. Spitting in the fire, dumping urine or other waste upon it, or otherwise showing disrespect was typically forbidden, with penalties enacted for transgressions. Across Indo-European territory, the hearth goddess was typically virginal (Greek **Hestia**, Roman **Vesta**, Celtic **Brigit**) and served by a college of similarly chaste priestesses. At other times, she was a nurturing maternal force (such as the Baltic **Gabija**). Finally, in a few cases fire goddesses were connected with water, especially hot springs, as was Celtic **Sul** (see Sun, above).

## VEGETATION

In some areas, vegetation is connected with a male god. In Southeast Europe, for instance, the mountain goddess **Cybele** took the tree god Attis for her lover. In spring rituals in the eastern Mediterranean, women planted gardens of Adonis, dedicated to the young lover of Greek **Aphrodite** who was killed in his prime, as the seedlings of the Adonis gardens were to die after a brief period of growth. The connection of male divinity with vegetation has been described as the background for the image of the Christian savior Christ, meeting his death upon a dead tree.

Most cultures have connected plants with goddesses. Such goddesses were typically associated with agriculture and represented the abundant food produced by the fertile fields. Such vegetation goddesses can be forms of the earth mother (see above), for goddesses embodied in the fertile soil and those found in plants that spring from that soil can be difficult to distinguish, if indeed such a distinction was made by the goddess’s followers. Goddesses of vegetation can be embodied in plants (African **Abuk**, who was a bean; Southeast Asian **Hainuwele**, who turned into a date-palm) or may tend them as gardeners (Hawai’ian **Hi’iaka**, African **Mbokomu**, South American **Nugkui**).

A culture’s vegetation goddess reveals its mainstay foods, for which reason many goddesses are connected with grains rather than, for instance, leafy greens that do not store well and are available for only part of the year. In the eastern Mediterranean, **Ninlil** and her mother Ninshebargunu ruled barley and other nourishing seeds. In Rome, we find **Ceres**, from whose name we derive a term for grains. Similarly, Greek **Demeter** and Slavic **Žemyna** are connected with wheat and rye and barley, called



“corn” in old texts that use the term “maize” for the yellow grain from the Americas. In India and southeast Asia, goddesses were associated with the mainstay of the daily meal, rice, most famously embodied in the Hindu goddess of wealth, **Lakṣmī**, who appears in Bali and nearby islands as the primary goddess **Dewi Shri**. A similar goddess was **Basmati**, whose name we still use for a type of rice; in central India, **Astangi Devī** brought humans not only rice but bamboo, with its edible shoots. In Japan, the rice goddess was the fox-woman **Inari**, a divinity who is still very popular today. In central and north America, the goddess of agricultural plenty was connected with maize or corn; Cherokee **Sélu** and Pawnee **Uti Hiata** are among the “corn mothers” of the Americas. In South America, where the potato was a mainstay of life, the goddess of abundance was **Pachamama**. In the Pacific, the goddess **Pani** was associated with yams, an important food plant.

Goddesses of vegetation could be divinities of birth as well, not only because farming reproduces plants but because sufficient food is necessary for women to become pregnant. In Babylonia, the birth goddess **Bau** derives her name from a term meaning “giver of vegetables” (see Eastern Mediterranean). In Thailand, the primary goddess is **Mae Phosop**, deity of rice who appears as a pregnant woman when the grains swell to maturity and who gives birth to the new crops (see India). In Australia, Imberombera walked around creating life by giving birth and forming plants (see **Mutjingga**).

Not only were vegetation goddesses associated with birth; they were also connected with death. In the cycle of the crops, farmers saw their own lives: flourishing in youth, reaching productive adulthood, finally dying. This identification was reflected in myth. African **Asase**, who claimed the dead, was primarily a goddess of vegetation. **Nambi**, also from Africa, stole seeds to bring food plants to earth, but unwittingly opened the way for death to descend from the heavens. In Egypt, the tree-living death goddess **Ament** offered food to the newly dead, the tasting of which kept them from returning to life. Yet even in death, vegetation goddesses promise new life. Egyptian **Hekt** was embodied in grain, which seems to “die” before it sprouts. Eating the fruit of Chinese **Xiwan Mu**’s magical peach tree transformed the deceased into an immortal.

Flowers and fruit both serve as goddess images. Often the goddesses are depicted, respectively, as younger and older, with a nubile goddess envisioned as a deity of flowers while a more mature goddess is the resulting fruit. Among important flower goddesses we find Rome’s **Flora**, divinity of prostitutes and sexuality; **Bloduwedd** in Wales (see Celtic), a heroine made completely of flowers; Greek **Persephone** (Roman **Proserpina**), a maiden goddess raped while picking crocuses; and the Aztec **Xochiquetzal**, the deity embodied in the marigold. In India, the **Apsarās** were bedecked with flower garlands that, if offered to a human, indicated willingness to engage in intercourse. In Russia (see Slavic), a young woman embodying **Berehinia** wore a crown of red flowers to represent the goddess. As flowers are the genitalia of plants, they often symbolize the goddess’s female organs.

The fruit that results from pollination of flowers becomes the symbol of mature goddesses. The most familiar is the apple associated with **Eve**, ancestral mother of humanity (see Eastern Mediterranean). The peach offered by Chinese **Xiwan Mu** brought immortality to the eater. A pomegranate represented **Hera**, Greek goddess of woman’s power. The apple was connected with Lithuanian **Saulė** (see Baltic). Among goddesses

of fruit we find several connected to intoxication, for sugary fruit naturally ferments into wine. Sumerian **Nikasi** was embodied in strong grapevines (see Eastern Mediterranean). African **Oya** was connected with palm wine; Greek **Oeno**, with wine from grapes.

The tree provided an image of the goddess as provider of food, with fruit trees especially regarded as feminine. In Scandinavia, where fruit varieties were limited, **Idunn** was associated only with apples, while in Japan, **Kono-Hana-Sakuya-Hime** and **Yaya-Zakura** were goddesses of the cherry tree and **Rafu-Sen** of the plum. Greek **Carya** ruled the walnut, Irish **Buan** the hazelnut (see Celtic), Roman **Rumina** the fig.

Even trees that do not bear edible fruit or nuts had goddess associations. Many trees were described as inhabited by feminine spirits like Greek Dryads, tree-living **Nymphs** who died when their tree died. Similarly, Scandinavians envisioned the forests of northern Europe as inhabited by **Askefruer**, ash-tree women. The Greeks connected goddesses with specific tree species, as with the multiple Heliaces (poplar) and Meliae (ash), as well as the singular **Daphne** (laurel) and **Carya** (walnut). Tree cults are attested in Greek religion, including one centered on Helen, who was ritually hung from a tree in ancient times. Such goddesses could appear as ancestral figures; among the Scandinavians, **Embla** was said to have been the primordial woman, born of an ash tree. Trees were the preeminent image of the Hebrew goddess **Asherah**, whose image was carved from a wooden plank. The Arabic goddess **Uzza** was also honored in groves of trees (see Eastern Mediterranean for both).

## ANIMALS

Both wild and domesticated animals appear as goddess images. In at least one case, we find a wild and a domesticated version of the same animal representing separate goddesses: Egyptian **Bast** (domesticated cat) and **Sekhmet** (lioness). In all circumstances, however, the goddess's familiar animal was common in the area where she was worshiped; goddesses are not represented by exotic or alien fauna.

One of the most important animal images for the goddess is the cow. Domesticated in Egypt approximately 5,000 years ago from wild cattle (where cows were honored as images of the goddesses **Hathor** and **Neith**), the cow's nourishing milk symbolically connects this animal to human mothers. In a few cases, the goddess is seen associated with a bull. Greek **Europa** was carried across the sky by a bull, Mesopotamian **Innana** owned the bull of heaven (see Eastern Mediterranean), Irish **Medb** kidnapped a magical bull (see Celtic). But most commonly, the milch cow serves as a symbol of the abundant and nurturing goddess.

In Scandinavia, the cow was a primal being, **Audhumbla**, who freed the first beings from the primordial ice in which they were frozen. Among the Irish Celts, we find **Bóand**, "she of the white cows," who brought fertility to the land through the waters of the river that bears her name (Boyne). Honoring the "sacred cow," embodiment of the Hindu goddess **Pṛthvī**, in India gives religious support for respecting the cow's economic and nutritional importance. In the same culture, the goddess of wealth, **Lakṣmī**, appears as a beautiful cow, and cows are called by her name. In Egypt, **Hathor** was depicted with the horned head of a cow, which had huge wings rising from



her shoulders; in this shape, she gave birth to the universe. **Anāhitā** (see Eastern Mediterranean) was embodied in herds of cows on whose brows moons were branded. Nearby, Ugaritic **Anat** took on the form of a cow to mate with her beloved brother, the god Ba'al.

The cow was not only an earthly creature but was imagined as heavenly as well. When a greedy person milked Ireland's **Glas Ghaibhleann** (see Celtic) into a sieve, the animal was so insulted that she levitated into the heavens where she walks the "White Cow's Path," the Milky Way. The Greeks connected this broad band of stars with the cow goddess **Hera**, who sprayed the heavens with milk while feeding her son Heracles. In some Christian narratives, the starry road was formed from the milk of the virgin **Mary** (see Eastern Mediterranean). The Egyptians saw the sky as a great cow's belly, with the sun rising between the horns of the solar cow **Hathor**.

Another domesticated animal that provided meat and milk, as well as skin for leather, was the goat, whose usefulness became part of her symbolic importance. The hollow horn of Greek **Amaltea** became the cornucopia, symbol of abundance. The Scandinavian heavenly goat **Hedrun** provided endless intoxicating mead that fed heroes in the afterlife. Goats were offered as sacrifices to Hittite **Wurusemu** (see Eastern Mediterranean). Other goddesses to whom goats are sacrificed are Tibetan **Tārā** (see India) and Ethiopian **Atete** (see Africa).

Used less often for food than for transportation, the horse appears connected with goddesses prominently in the mythologies of most Indo-European cultures as well as that of other lands. Goddesses can appear in horse form, accompanied by or riding horses, or drawn by them in a chariot. Many are associated with celestial powers, including the sun and moon. Celtic **Epona** and **Áine** may have represented the sun that speeds across the sky in a chariot drawn by horses; the folkloric English figure **Lady Godiva** (see Celts) may descend from a horse goddess. The feminine solar horse appears in India as well, in the figures of **Samjñā** and the dawn maiden **Ūsas**, who drove a chariot pulled by red horses. Two divine horses pulled the chariot of Scandinavian **Sól**, while Hungarian **Xatel-Ekwa** rode three horses simultaneously. Occasionally, a lunar goddess was associated with the horses that pull the moon's silver chariot; Greek **Selene** rode in such a chariot. Persian **Anāhitā** (see Eastern Mediterranean) rode in a chariot drawn by four white horses signifying her control over the weather. Although typically connected with light, horses can also be associated with goddesses of darkness. A nightmarish horse, Russian **Mora** (see Slavic), killed people as they slept. In Scandinavia, the goddess **Nótt** drove black horses that pulled the darkness across the sky at nightfall.

As horses were often used in battle, it is not surprising to find goddesses of war associated with this animal. In Greece, horses were connected with the warrior women called **Amazons**, who bore horse-names like Hippolyta and Melanippe. In Scandinavia, a similar group of horsewomen, the **Valkyries**, brought dead heroes from the battlefield to heaven. In Ireland, the war goddess **Macha** was identified with horses, for she could outrun them even when nine months pregnant.

Horses can represent transformation, as with Sumerian **Ereshkegal** (see Eastern Mediterranean), whose horse rode the boundary between death and life, or Greek **Medusa** who gave birth to the winged horse Pegasus, symbol of transformative poetry.

Medusa may be connected with an obscure form of the grain goddess **Demeter**, who was impregnated while wearing a horse's head. In the Baltic, the death goddess **Giltinė** drove two black horses, while in Wales the goddess **Rhiannon** rode a white horse from the Otherworld and was later forced to carry people on her own back like a mare.

In hunting societies, wild herd animals like deer and buffalo appear as divinities, sometimes pictured in whimsical fashion. In Scandinavia, the Skogsfruen (see **Buschfrauen**) herded wild animals and, when not otherwise occupied, liked to knit socks. But the underlying image of the goddess of wild herds is as a cosmic game warden, controlling access to the beasts and thus to the meat they provide. In southeastern Europe, **Dali** was goddess of mountain sheep who appeared as a nubile woman with whom male hunters had intercourse, which empowered them to become great hunters. Yet, like other goddesses of the hunt, she put prohibitions on hunters and killed any who broke her commands.

The connection of goddesses with hunting is common, despite similarly common prohibitions on human women hunting. Greek **Artemis** wanders through the forests accompanied by her **Nymphs**, tending to woodland creatures and helping animals safely bear their young. Other such goddesses are Celtic **Arduinna** and **Artio**, Irish **Flidais** (see Celtic), Finnish **Mielikki**, Eskimo **Sedna**, and Siberian **Umaj** (see Circumpolar). In North America, **Wohpe**, the white buffalo calf-woman of the North American Sioux, is not only a guide to correct behavior when hunting but a general power of order. Such woodland goddesses set the rules and expectations for hunters, who were rewarded with success if they treated the goddess with respect.

Dogs often appear as goddess images, as do their wild counterparts, wolves. Often the dog appears as a companion of the goddess rather than an embodiment of her, as with Celtic **Nehalennia**, Greek **Hecate**, and Hawai'ian **Pele** (see Pacific Islands). Eskimo **Sedna** (see Circumpolar) lived with a dog, described sometimes as her husband. Scandinavian Frau Gôde (see **Holle** in Scandinavia) always traveled with a dog, which she used to annoy people who did not sufficiently respect her. Babylonian **Gula** was always shown accompanied by dogs, and dogs were buried in her temple, suggesting that they were connected with her healing powers.

In rare cases, as with Irish **Uirne**, the divine figures are themselves canine in form, but more typically we find the dog by the goddess's side. Wolf goddesses, by contrast, were embodied in wolf form rather than merely traveling in their company. The related Roman figures of **Rhea Silvia**, **Lupa**, and **Acca Larentia** show the goddess in both human and lupine form. Both as dog and as wolf, the goddess appears more protective than threatening, although as **Brimwylf** (see Scandinavian) she can appear monstrous to those who would threaten her child.

Like canines, felines can appear as both wild and tame in goddess iconography. However, when the tame cat appears as the wild lion, she changes from an affectionate goddess (Egypt's **Hathor**, with her cat ears; Scandinavia's sensual **Freja**; Chinese **Wu Lo**, goddess of fertility) to a fierce one (India's **Durgā**, a warrior goddess; Babylonian **Eriskegal**, queen of death; Egypt's raging **Sekhmet**). At times, a complex but generally kindly goddess such as **Cybele** (see Southeastern Europe) or China's **Xiwang Mu** appeared accompanied by lions or tigers, which suggest the goddess's fiercer powers.

Among other wild animals that serve as goddess images or vehicles, the bear appears as both the goddess herself (Greek **Callisto** and **Artemis**, Celtic **Artio**) and as her mate (Tlingit **Rhpisunt**; see North America). The goddess appeared as a fox in Japan (**Inari**), where she could transform herself into a beautiful woman to seduce and kill men. Finally, occasional goddesses take on animal forms appropriate to a specific region, such as Egyptian **Taweret** (hippopotamus).

## REPTILES, BIRDS, AMPHIBIANS

Like animals, reptiles and birds appear frequently as images of feminine divinity. While these creatures might seem opposites, many early statues show them united, as we find in the unnamed bird-headed snake goddesses of central Europe, whose image may represent the cosmic reach of a goddess who ruled both earth and sky. The imagery survives into historical times as the Greek **Gorgons**, winged snake-haired sisters of the goddess **Medusa**.

Snake goddesses often represent rebirth or renewal, for as the snake sheds its skin, so the soul is reborn into another life. Egyptian **Mafdet** and **Mertseger** were connected with both burial and the promise of an afterlife. In India, black-faced **Kālī**, ruler of death and transformation, is bedecked in writhing snakes. Other Indian goddesses associated with snakes include **Manasā**, who guards against snakebite and brings prosperity, and the snake-women called **Nāginīs**, associated with water and the monsoon season. This connection of snakes with water is also found in Australia, where the rainbow serpent **Julunggul** (see also **Kunapipi**) lived in deep pools, from which she stirred herself at times of creation and of initiation ceremonies.

Snakes could appear maternal, for snakes protected stored grain from encroaching vermin and thus preserved the family's health. Lithuanian **Aspelenie** was such a protector, as was Greek **Athena**. Even in nonagricultural societies, we find snake protectors, such as Siberian **Irt** (see Circumpolar), who protected the fecundity of rivers. Snakes appear as images of reproductive sex in the image of Chinese **Nüwa**, entwined with her serpent mate, while Indian **Kadrū** offers an image of reproductive abundance with her clutch of a thousand eggs.

Conversely, snakes could be fearsome and threatening. Some terrifying snakes were connected with magic and shape-shifting, such as Greek **Hecate**, Roman **Angitia**, Celtic **Mórrígan**, and Aztec **Coatlicue**. Perhaps as an extension of this power, serpent goddesses ruled sexuality, as we find with Celtic **Melusine** and **Ezili-Freda** of the African diaspora. The snake **Kundalinī**, in Hindu India, symbolizes sexual power that rises through the snakelike spinal column linking the groin and head.

Finally, reptilian goddesses appear as cosmic creatrices. In Africa, the snake **Aido Hwedo** was present at creation and provided the pattern for the sinuous shape of mountains and rivers. Some serpents provided the material for the world from their own body, as did Aztec **Cipactónal** and Babylonian **Ti'âmat**. Polynesian **Walutahanga** suffered dismemberment but, once made whole again, provided fresh water and food to humanity.

The snake goddess can appear as a dragon, especially in Asia where these imaginary hybrids were a common mythic motif. Typically, dragons were associated with the ocean's power. Japanese **Benten** either took the form of a dragon or rode one on the ocean waves. In Egypt, the goddess **Meretseger** was a snake with human head, or a snake with three heads, a form that stressed her otherworldly aspects. Other reptiles appear as goddess images in regions where they are common, as with African **Nyakae**, a crocodile.

Birds also appear frequently as goddess images. **Pedammā-Mariammā** (see India) was one of several creatrices who took bird form; she laid an egg that contained the universe and the gods. Polynesian **Tuli** flew across the primal ocean, creating island homes for people as she did. Finnish **Luonotar** was not herself a bird, but provided a place for the cosmic eggs to be laid by a duck in primeval times.

Sometimes the bird is of a specific species: the owl accompanied and represented Greek **Athena**, while Irish **Étain** took the form of a swan (see Celtic). In such cases, the bird's qualities were associated with the goddess (wisdom and loyalty, respectively). Observation of bird behavior led to the connection of the Greek tragic heroine **Aedon** with the loud-crying nightingale; the Celtic war goddess **Badb** with the carrion-eating crow; the Saami spring goddess **Barbmo-Akka** (see Finno-Ugric) with migrating waterbirds; and the loyal Celtic heroine **Fionnuala** with the similarly loyal swan. Greek **Aphrodite** was associated with several kinds of birds, including the goose and the sparrow, which were imagined as sexually vigorous.

Occasionally the bird was not the goddess but her mate. The goddess of sexuality in the African diaspora, **Oshun**, is associated with the peacock, the male of which preens its lavish tail to attract a mate. Eskimo **Sedna** (see Circumpolar) was mated to a sea-bird, but grew tired of living on scraps of fish that he provided. In Greek mythology, the sky god Zeus turned himself into a bird in order to assault goddesses and **Nymphs**. Thus **Hera** was associated with the quail, for Zeus disguised himself as one in order to gain access to Hera's lap, while **Leda** was associated with the swan, in which form Zeus raped her, as he did the goddess of vengeance, **Nemesis**.

**Frigg**, the Scandinavian all-mother, lived in a sky palace to which she ascended on hawks' wings. Birds provided a disguise for shape-shifted goddesses such as Russian **Baba Yaga** (see Slavic) and Irish **Mórrígan** (see Celtic). **Nemain**, a Celtic war goddess, flew over the battlefield like a crow to observe the slain, as did the Scandinavian **Valkyries**. Birdsong figures in goddess imagery both as a positive image of beauty (Thai **Kinnari**, see Southeast Asia) and as a threatening one of loss of self (Greek **Sirens**).

In addition to the earthbound serpent and the airy bird, we find goddesses in the form of amphibians, which live in water as juveniles and, after undergoing metamorphosis, breathe air as adults. The most common amphibian image of the goddess is the frog or toad, often used as an image of the birthing creatrix because its bent-legged shape looks like a woman squatting in labor. This connection of frogs with birth was found in Egypt, where **Hekt**, a woman with a frog's head, was a midwife.

Frogs and toads were also widely associated with weather. The Australian frog goddess **Quork-Quork** was the mother of rain, thunder, and lightning. **Yang Sri**, the toad goddess of Vietnam, controlled the weather, as did the Baltic weather witch

**Ragana**. Scandinavian **Holle** hid in a deep well disguised as a frog. Finally, in a few instances, we find a connection between frogs and fire, notably in South America, where the frog goddess **Nayobo** made fire by vomiting, while another frog goddess of the region, **Kibero**, brought fire to humanity.

## FISH, INSECTS

Those who live by fishing often honor a goddess who controls the sea life, such as the important Eskimo goddess **Sedna** (see Circumpolar), Celtic **Nehalennia**, or Finno-Ugric **Avfruvva**. In South America, **Mama Cocha** was the “mother of whales” because she brought the massive mammals close to hunters. Polynesian **Lorop** (see Pacific Islands) lived under the earth, sending up food for her children in the form of fish.

In other cases, the goddess was seen not as controlling the sea creatures but as one of them, as with Celtic **Lí Ban**, transformed into a salmon, and Eastern Mediterranean **Atargatis**, who swam in the pool of her temple as a trout. In India, the group of spirits called the **Ḍākinīs** took on fish shapes to attend upon the goddess of death, **Kālī**. In Africa, the heroine **Chichinguane** joined the fish people because her human kin were unkind to her.

Among insects, the industrious bee and the crafty spider are common goddess images. Bees, whose hives are centered on a queen and whose female workers produce honey, appear as companions of goddesses associated with social life. Lithuanian **Aus-  
teja** was celebrated in an annual holiday dedicated to bees. **Artemis** of Ephesus, goddess of the warrior Amazons (see Greece), was depicted surrounded by bees; her priestesses were called Melissae, also a name used of bee **Nymphs**. Irish **Gobnait** (see Celtic) lived among bees that warned her of approaching danger.

Spiders, with their ability to weave intricately architectural webs from their own bodies, appear as creatrix figures in several cultures. Hopi **Kókyangwúti** created human beings; Cherokee **Kanene Ski Amai Yehi** brought the sun to earth. Greek **Athena** was connected to spiders because she made the first one from an insultingly competitive human girl, **Arachne**. Finally, both butterflies (see **Psyche**, see Greece; **Ix Chel**, see Mesoamerica) and scorpions (South American **Ituana**, Egyptian **Selkhet**) appear as goddess images.

## ABSTRACT QUALITIES

Where abstract qualities are associated with goddesses, the goddess might appear as the embodiment of the quality, or she may be envisioned as bestowing it upon favored humans. Beauty, love, wisdom, and justice are commonly associated with goddesses, as is the control of fate or destiny. Some of these qualities are associated with an essentialist “femininity,” while others are more typically associated with “masculinity.” In the realm of goddesses, expectations of the social roles typically occupied by women do not always hold true. Even within a culture, goddesses defy gender stereotypes, as

with war goddesses found in imperial patriarchies like Rome (see **Bellona**).

Beauty is the quality most commonly associated with goddesses. The beauty of some goddesses reflects their status as divinities of earth and represents the idea of nature's loveliness. One such is the Tantric **Bhuvanésvarī** (see India), described as so beautiful that the god Shiva made himself a third eye, the better to enjoy her. At other times, beauty is connected with sovereignty. Queenly figures are flatteringly described as beautiful. Thus the Queen of Sheba, **Bilqis** (see Eastern Mediterranean) was described as possessing great beauty, although she was also said to have had the legs of a goat. **Hera**, Greek goddess of women's power, was renowned for her beauty, as was the Irish warrior queen **Medb** (see Celtic), who represented sovereignty over the land as well as women's sexuality. The Celtic goddess who appeared variously as **Gráinne**, **Iseult**, and **Gueneviere** embodied the land's need for a vigorous king, with the "love triangle" of their stories describing the replacement of an aging ruler with a younger one.

Not surprisingly, beauty is often (although not invariably) connected with love. Such love could be generic, as with Greek **Aphrodite** or African **Oshun**, whose power infused the world of animals as well as humans. Other goddesses embody divine love, such as Indian **Pārvatī** whose beauty was reserved for her consort Shiva. Finally, a goddess's desire could be directed only toward humans, as with Celtic **Niamh**, who sought lovers among human men, or the group of Indian spirits called **Yakṣī** who have sex with human men before eating them. More positively, Lakota **Whope** (see North America) formed the pattern of beauty after which human women were designed, so that they might attract vigorous mates.

Love goddesses are not always benevolent. Many narratives emphasize betrayal and heartbreak (Celtic **Bloduwedd** and **Deirdre**, Hebrew **Naamah**, Greek **Sirens**). Although a beautiful goddess can be heartless, loyal lovers such as Indian **Rādhā** and Hebrew **Sarah** are found in mythology alongside destructive seducers like the Celtic **Leanann Sidhe** and Hebrew **Lilith**. Additionally, some myths warn of the difficulties that beauty can bring, as with Hindu **Manasā** (see India), whose beauty attracted the god Shiva, leading to her mutilation at his wife's hands.

Unlike beauty, wisdom is not today necessarily connected with the archetypal feminine. But in many cultures, goddesses were associated with this quality, which refers to a right ordering of society that aligns it with natural law. Thus Greek **Athena** and **Metis**, Roman **Egeria** and Providentia, and Hebrew **Hokmah** all connected the human world with nature through wise counsel. In some cases, as with Scandinavian **Voluspa** and Greek **Python**, wisdom was conveyed through oracular practices inspired by an all-seeing earth goddess. Roman **Egeria** pronounced the first laws of the city-state while in an oracular trance. In Ireland (see Celtic), goddesses of wisdom such as **Bóand** gained knowledge through eating nuts that fall from a magical tree that connects underworld, middle earth, and sky; thus their wisdom encompassed the universe. In most of these Irish narratives, the woman was specifically forbidden from seeking wisdom, but her decision to break that prohibition results in world-creating acts.

Goddesses of justice, often pictured as mature or even elderly women, control the orderly structure of society. Thus Greek **Themis**, on whom oaths were sworn, represented the just underpinnings of civilization. Similarly, Hebrew **Torah** represented



“the law” that controlled and defined appropriate human behavior. The domain of Egyptian **Ma’at** (see Africa) extended beyond death, for she judged the soul’s righteousness. The Iroquois heroine **Genetaska** (see North America) brought justice and peace to her people. Some goddesses of justice were also goddesses of vengeance, demanding retribution for wrongdoing, as did Greek **Erinyes** and **Nemesis**.

Goddesses also represent scholarship and learning. Because most societies have been oral rather than literate, such goddesses were associated with the transmission of wisdom through speech and stories (Scandinavian **Saga** and **Edda**, Indian **Vāc**). The connection between memory, including historical memory, and the creation of art was emphasized in the Greek belief that **Mnemosyne**, goddess of memory, was mother to the **Musae**, goddesses of art. Goddesses like the Eastern Mediterranean **Nisaba** represented both the act of writing and the priestesses who employed it.

Finally, one of the most common powers ascribed to goddesses is control over destiny. Individual fate goddesses are connected with midwifery. Such divinities as Baltic **Laimė**, Egyptian **Hathor**, Slavic **Dolya** and **Orisnitsi**, and Finno-Ugric **Madder-Akka** appeared at a child’s birth and predict its future life. Fate goddesses could be ancestral spirits (see Scandinavian **Dís**) because heredity is one determinant of fate. Fate goddesses measured a person’s life, like Hittite **Wurusemu** (see Eastern Mediterranean) or Greek Lachesis (see **Moirae**). Other fate goddesses, like the Roman **Camenae** and **Carmenta** who lived in springs, were associated with especially hallowed places.

## HUMAN ACTIVITIES

Almost every sphere of human endeavor, from law to horticulture and from spinning to poetry, has had a guardian goddess somewhere in the world. Although most cultures divide tasks according to gender, which activities are deemed as masculine prerogatives and which are restricted to women varies by culture. In some lands, for instance, weaving is a male activity, while in others, women do the spinning and weaving.

Similarly, there is no absolute division of labor among divinities. Goddesses of war and hunting, typically male activities, can be found as well as goddesses of weaving and hearth-tending, functions associated with women. Nor are goddesses only associated with activities performed by women in the culture in question. We find societies in which war is limited to men but presided over by a goddess (see Roman **Bellona**, Celtic **Badb**), and nations where men are weavers that have weaving goddesses (Native American Hopi **Kókyangwúti** and Chinook **Tsihooskwallaa**). The biologically limited task of bearing children, however, is almost invariably associated with goddesses rather than gods. Gods occasionally give birth (Greek Zeus to **Athena**, for instance), but divinities of childbirth are always female.

War, although typically described as a male activity, often comes under the control of a powerful goddess. Some are protector goddesses, devoted to preserving their worshipers from invasion and death at the hands of enemies. Such goddesses can, like Siberian **Umaj** (see Circumpolar), represent the productive land that draws invaders

and thus demands defense. In Africa, **Qya** is a warrior who controls the rivers on which fertility depends.

Goddesses of war can be frightening, like the Celtic trinity of **Mórrígan**, **Nemain**, and **Badb** who flew over battlefields, lusting after blood. Goddesses also appear as women soldiers (Scandinavian **Alfild** and **Hervor**, Irish **Nothain**, Greek **Amazons**, Eastern Mediterranean **Judith**, North American **Pohaha** and **Warharmi**) and as queenly leaders of armies (Celtic **Medb**, Japanese **Jingo**). The Indian goddess **Durgā** protected the entire universe against the depredations of evil demons. Eastern Mediterranean **Anat** was a warrior-mother who protected humanity through her control over the earth's fertility.

Protection—whether of an individual, a family, or a larger social unit like a town—is often associated with goddesses. Some goddesses protected children, acting as a human mother might (Greek **Amalthea**, Celtic **Fionnuala**, Roman **Rumina**). In Taiwan, the birth goddesses **Chhit-niuma** (see China) guarded children until the age of 16. Other goddesses protected adults as well. In some cases, a single family might be the beneficiary, as with Siberian **Tu-Njami** (see Circumpolar), who spread her mantle over anyone who ate at her hearth-fire. But other goddesses protected anyone in her territory. Greek **Athena** wore a warrior helmet to symbolize her protection of Athens, and Roman **Tyche**'s crown was formed of the walls of her city. Most generously, Chinese **Guanyin** offered protection to any who called out her name.

Provision of food is a prime activity for all people. Among hunting people, goddesses represent the land and the animals, as well as the act of hunting (see *Animals*, above). Similarly, goddesses of agriculture represent fruitful plants as well as the activity of tending them. Rome's **Pomona** was embodied in fruit-trees but also commanded planting, pruning, and harvesting. The Romans' many other agricultural goddesses ruled every activity of the farmer and gardener. Greek **Demeter** invented the tasks of agriculture and the rituals that were necessary for success. In Indonesia, **Hainuwele** (see *India*), first to domesticate tree-fruits that became a staple of her people, may be a mythic memory of actual ancient women.

Once crops were harvested and/or animals were slaughtered, food preparation became necessary. Virtually all divinities of cooking were goddesses; the cauldron and the hearth are important goddess symbols. Indo-Europeans honored goddesses of the hearth who represented not only the activity of keeping families fed and warm, but the common "hearth fire" of the community; these include Roman **Vesta**, Greek **Hestia**, Baltic **Gabija**, and Celtic **Brigit**. Among the Ainu of Japan, the hearth goddess was **Kamui Fuchi**, while to the Cheremiss (see *Circumpolar*), she was **Port-Kuva**. Indonesian **Dewi Nawang** (see *India*) combines the act of cooking with abundance, for when she was on earth, people could make a whole pot of rice from just one grain, but when she departed for the heavens, that gift was lost.

Agriculture and food preparation were not the only ways that women contributed to their family's health and comfort. In preindustrial societies, women also created many of life's necessary artifacts, activities reflected in goddess imagery. Important among them was clothing, whose manufacture required spinning and weaving as well as sewing. Dozens of goddesses deal with spinning thread from flax, wool, and other fibers. These include **Eileithyia** (Greek), **Sól** and **Holle** (Scandinavian), **Habetrot** (Celtic),



**Isis** (Egypt), and **Päivätär** (Finno-Ugric). Such spinning and weaving implements as the spindle and the spinning wheel appear frequently as attributes of goddesses, even those such as Greek **Aphrodite** whose sphere ranged far beyond the domestic. Because of the omnipresence of fiber work in women's lives, holding a spindle telegraphed femininity. Spinning goddesses connected with fate (Greek **Moirae**, Slavic **Sreca**) may reference the trancelike state that repetitive motion can create, a state connected with prophetic power in many cultures.

Weaving spun fibers into cloth was both an important craft and an art, for sophisticated weavers could produce cloth with multicolored designs and impressive patterns. **Saulė** and **Amaterasu**, Baltic and Japanese sun goddesses respectively, were described as weavers, for they created light each day. Where the major fiber was grass, weaving goddesses were connected to the art of basketry, used for creation of storage vessels and garments. Cherokee **Kanene Ski Amai Yehi** (see North America) wove the basket in which she carried the sun.

Pottery provided householders a means of crafting vessels for cooking, storage, and even burial of human remains. Although both men and women make pots, most pottery divinities are goddesses, suggesting that women may have invented this important craft. In China, the creator goddess **Nü Wa** made humans from clay; the same image appears in the Eastern Mediterranean myth of **Ninmah**. Pots made in the shape of goddesses are common, although in many cases the name of the goddess is not known. In Egypt, however, we recognize the goddess **Taweret** in jugs showing a woman holding up one breast from which fluid can be poured.

Other arts have also been connected with goddesses. Often these were associated with religious ritual rather than merely representing decoration or secular festivities. Some goddesses, like the Greek **Musae**, command all arts, but more commonly, goddesses have specific connections to an artistic form. Even within an art form, goddesses frequently specialized. In Ireland, **Canola** invented harp music (see Celtic); in Egypt, **Hathor** was connected to the sistrum, a type of rattle (see Africa); the Greek **Sirens** were associated with singing. Music's companion art, dance, was guided by such goddesses as the free-spirited Greek **Nymphs** and the Slavic **Rusálki**, both of whom were seen in collective form; such collective dance goddesses may represent ritual dancers. In some cases, dancing represents magical possession, as with the Sri Lankan **Rangda**; in the case of Hindu **Kālī**, dance represents transformation and creation (see India for both).

Poetry too was under the guidance of goddesses. Celtic **Brigit** represents oracular poetry, as do Hebrew **Miriam** and **Deborah**. In Scandinavia, the goddess **Gunnlod** had a cauldron filled with mead that bestowed poetic eloquence on whomever drank it. Poetry was also a major mechanism for transmitting cultural history, so we find **Edda** and **Saga**, who gave their names to Scandinavian literary forms.

Sorcery and magic fall under the control of goddesses, who were occasionally demonized by those who feared their power. Finnish **Louhi**, originally a shaman-like figure of power, later became a frightening witch. Greek **Medea**, whose name indicates that she was originally a "ruler," came into literature as a jealous woman feared for her magical powers. Often these goddesses were described as old, like Welsh **Ceridwen** with her cauldron of transformation or Balinese **Rangda**, who appears as a

frightening warrior. Yet others are nubile women, seductive to men, like Greek enchantress **Circe** or Scandinavian **Freya**, goddess of love. Some goddesses of magic were specifically connected with shamanic rituals. Korea's **Pali Kongju** was the first shaman, and the transformative dance of Japan's **Uzume** restored the world. Goddesses associated with magic often appear as shape-shifters, able to assume the appearance of a sacred animal or to change into many forms. Irish **Mórrígan** was so fluid that she could appear as a cow, a crone, or a crow; Celtic **Epona** turned into a horse, as did Greek Hippias; Welsh **Bloduwedd** became an owl; the Scandinavian **Valkyries** transformed themselves into birds as they flew above battlefields.

Related to sorcery are the arts of healing, which traditionally involved prayer and ritual as well as herbs and other medicines. Thus, the distinction between a goddess of magic and one of healing can be difficult to discern. Many goddesses connected with healing were associated with specific places, for instance hot springs or wells believed to have magical properties. The Celtic goddess **Brigit** is still connected with "holy wells" in Ireland and Britain that are especially efficacious for healing on her holy days. In other Celtic lands, we find goddesses such as **Sul** (at Bath in England) and **Coventina** (at Chester, also in England), also water goddesses connected with physical healing. In India, the great **Gangā** heals both body and soul through the waters of her river, while **Sītāla** and **Māriyammān** rule the dreaded fever of smallpox, both embodying the disease and holding the key to healing. Some goddesses were revered for their connection with healing plants, as was the case with Irish **Airmed**, Italian **Angitia**, Scandinavian **Buschfrauen**, and Slavic **Dziwozony**. Goddesses were invoked for specialized healing, such as from toothache (Celtic **Aibheag**) or diseases of the eyes (Korean **Mulhalmoni**, Irish **Caolainn**). Because children were especially vulnerable, specific goddesses were called upon to protect them from infection, including South Asian **Kiri Amma**.

Finally, goddesses rule the healing art of midwifery. Virtually all midwives in all cultures have been women, who attended to other women and employed herbs as well as rituals to ease the difficulties of childbirth. Greek **Artemis** was a midwife from birth, springing forth from the womb to assist her mother in birthing her twin brother. Roman **Egeria**, like other midwives, could foresee the future of the newborn. The Egyptian birth goddess **Meskhoni** served as a midwife and prophet, as did Baltic **Dekla** and Egyptian **Hekt**.

Sexuality is another area of human behavior with which goddesses were associated. Some goddesses were connected with the overall biological urge toward sex that led to reproduction, as was the Eastern Mediterranean **Anat**, who was described as having intercourse with her brother/lover in the forms of many different animals. Greek **Aphrodite**, although often described as a "love goddess," was connected with the urge toward sexual behavior and controlled animal as well as human sex. Roman **Flora** represented not only human reproduction but also that of the vegetative world.

In some patriarchal cultures, goddesses of sexuality who were originally powerful positive figures were later described as demonic or threatening. **Lilith**, a Hebrew spirit of lust, was transformed into a monstrous and predatory female image; the related figure of **Naamah** was similarly demonized (see Eastern Mediterranean). In other cases, a sexual goddess became an ambiguous figure, as did Irish **Sheela-na-gig** (see Celtic),

who became a warning figure without being described in entirely negative terms. Finally, some goddesses of sexuality had magical or shamanic powers, as did Japanese **Uzume** whose sexually revealing dance brought back the sun and Mesoamerican **Tlazoltéotl** whose priests were skilled diviners.

Occasionally, a goddess of sexuality and love is described in terms of partnership and affection, even of what might be called romantic love (an invention of medieval times). The Irish **Étain** remained with her beloved **Midir** through many lifetimes. In Greece, we find the faithful wife **Halcyone** who, when her husband died, became a bird that endlessly mourned his passing. Human companionship as well as lust have been considered part of the domain of the goddess.

## STAGES OF LIFE

Some writers about goddess mythology, especially those influenced by the English poet Robert Graves, speak of three stages of the goddess as though maiden, mother, and crone are universally true. But the idea of the “triple goddess” is not borne out cross-culturally. What is true is that goddesses can be found who epitomize or represent different stages of a woman’s life, from birth through youth and ripening, to age and death.

Goddesses of youth are typically unmarried and without children. Although the term “virgin” is often used of such unencumbered divinities, they may be sexually active, although they are not linked to a specific consort god. In some cases, the goddesses flee from violent sex, as with Cretan divinity **Britomartis** who died attempting to escape a male assailant, or the many Greek **Nymphs** who, like **Daphne**, were transformed as they ran from assault. In other cases, the goddess resisted sexual encounters with men by living surrounded by other females (see Greece, **Artemis**).

Young goddesses can be protective, in an almost matronly way, as with Irish **Fionnuala** who cared for her three younger brothers during their 900-year transformation into swans (see Celtic), or Taiwanese **Ma-tsu**, who took care of her distant seagoing brothers in her dreams (see China). They can be deeply connected with their mothers, as with Greek **Persephone**, daughter of the grain goddess **Demeter**, or the parallel Roman figures of **Proserpina** and **Ceres**. Young goddesses can also appear as twins of a mother goddess; Greek **Hebe**, the younger version of **Hera**, is an example of such a pairing.

Occasionally, paired goddesses appear to represent seasons of the year, as with Russian **Kostrubonko**, who represented springtime and was paired with wintry **Maslenitsa** (see Slavic); the Scottish/Irish Bride, daughter or servant of the crone goddess **Cailleach** (see Celtic); and Baltic **Saulés Meita**, daughter and younger version of the sun goddess **Saulė**. Goddesses of childhood and youth are often connected with springtime, as was the case with Scandinavian **Ostara**, from whom the name of Easter is derived.

Goddesses of the prime of life are often described as “mother goddesses,” although that term is questionable, given that the goddesses may not be maternal in any conventional sense. For instance, the single child of **Cybele** was conceived upon her while she

was in the form of a rock and was never reared by her (see Southeastern Europe). Similarly, the eastern Mediterranean goddess **Ninlil** “gave birth” by making images of people from clay, as did the Chinese goddess **Nüwa**. The distinction between mother goddess and creatrix is often difficult to locate. In the Pacific, the goddess **Papa** both created the earth and gave birth to the gods.

The role of goddess as creatrix is common among goddesses, who can create by some other mechanism than birth, as Inuit **Aakuluujjusi** did when she threw her clothing on the ground, which walked away as animals. Siberian **Miti** (see Circumpolar) created humanity by throwing stones on the ground. Irish **Cailleach** (see Celtic) created mountains by dropping stones from her apron; Finnish **Luonnatar** made the world by accidentally breaking a duck’s eggs. Sumerian **Ninmah**, as we have seen above, created humans by molding them from clay, as did Chinese **Nüwa** and African **Woyengi**. But other creatrices were literal mothers, making the world from their bodies. Australian Imberombera (see **Mutjingga**) made the world this way, as did South American **Coadidop**, who was propelled by boredom into creativity.

Many goddesses give birth parthenogenetically, without a male partner. Among these are Indian **Adīti**, the Australian **Djanggal Sisters** and **Wawalag** (see Pacific Islands), Greek **Gaia**, Egyptian **Neith**, and Eastern Mediterranean **Ti’âmat**. Other divine figures conceive after encountering a nonhuman being. Irish **Dechtire** (see Celtic) gave birth after drinking from a glass that had a worm in it, while Chinese **Huaxi** conceived after stepping in a giant footprint. The Christian image of the virginal **Mary** who gave birth to the savior (see Eastern Mediterranean) thus has much in common with other goddess myths.

Some goddess myths make birth of central importance. In Greece, **Leto** gave birth to two gods after having been cursed to wander, unable to give birth on this earth; her sister created an undersea island where Leto bore her divine twins. Such figures show how diverse the image of the woman of childbearing age can be.

Older women appear as goddesses in many cultures. Often such a figure holds great power, either within the family (as ancestral mother or grandmother) or within the larger social unit (as empress or ruler). At times the crone goddess is awesome or frightening, as with Russian **Baba Yaga** (see Slavic), who lived in the forest and ate people, or **Snēnē’ik** of the Bella Coola (see North America) who stole children but also bestowed gifts. In some cases, the cruel image of the crone goddess may be the result of a later culture’s attempt to demonize a powerful divinity, while in others the complexity of life was expressed in the goddess’s image or story, as with Indian **Kālī**, who represented both life’s difficulties and its freedom.

Related to these ancestral figures are goddesses of the underworld or afterlife, who are predominantly depicted as older women, or women of indistinct age but clearly no longer young, with occasional exceptions such as Greek **Persephone**/Roman **Proserpina**. The English word for the underworld is the name of the Scandinavian goddess **Hel**, who inhabited a somber place intended for those who died peacefully. In Egypt, death was associated with the west, the direction of the setting sun, and with the goddesses of that region, especially **Merseger** and **Saosis**. In the Eastern Mediterranean, the realm of death was controlled by **Eriskegal**, who kept prisoner anyone who entered her abode. At times, a goddess offered assistance to the newly dead Kabbalistic

**Matronit** (see Eastern Mediterranean) showed the way to freedom in the afterlife. At other times, she judged the person, as did Egyptian **Ma'at** who weighed the deceased's actions during life.

All aspects of life, from birth to death, have been connected in some culture to a goddess, spirit, or mythic heroine. Even impregnation, apparently a male activity, is found in stories of goddesses who become parthenogenetically pregnant. The scope of goddess imagery includes, as we have shown, not only natural objects but also abstractions and stages of life. The goddesses mentioned in this section are but a few of the thousands listed in these volumes.

# Approaches to the Study of Goddess Myths and Images

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Study of goddess myths and images forms part of many disciplines: history, religious studies, literature, psychology, anthropology, art, classics. Each discipline has its approved and appropriate methods of study, as well as its canon of approved authors and theorists. But those who seek to study goddesses face considerable difficulties in applying approved methods. Earlier scholars may have been biased, either consciously or unconsciously. This bias may reveal itself in selection of subjects for study. For instance, many more studies exist of male shamanism than of the same religious activity performed by women. Or the bias can take the form of neglecting an important traditional women's activity, such as spinning or cooking. Information may be lost this way, for an ethnographer recording the lives of a polytheistic people who does not inquire about whether there is a vegetation goddess may publish the sole book on the subject, based on an assumption that hunting rather than gardening is the most important sustenance activity.

Even the best scholars are motivated by their own life experience and interests, and until relatively recently women were not permitted equal access to higher education. England's prestigious University of Cambridge did not offer degrees to women until a mere 60 years ago. Assumptions based on class background, too, influenced the work of earlier scholars of religion. Finally, but most importantly, most writers about the subject came from a monotheistic background that colored their understanding of goddess religion and myth. Even doubters and atheists emerged from a male-centered monotheistic society, whose impact on the study of goddesses cannot be underestimated.

Despite limitations of gender, race, and class, women scholars have for more than 150 years studied goddesses and related subjects. This section describes some of those women and the influence they have had upon goddess studies. Each represents a

specific approach to the field, based on life experiences as well as academic training. Each of them creatively applied theories and methods, sometimes stirring controversy in the process. Although other methods also exist that can be profitably applied to the study of goddess myths and images, those described here represent the most significant contributions to the field by women scholars and creative artists.

## ELIZABETH CADY STANTON: EXAMINING SCRIPTURE AS A WOMAN

Many scholars of women and religion are primarily interested in religion rather than women. In Stanton's case, the reverse was the case. Driven to understand the influences upon women's lives, she determined that religion was one of the most powerful. Her feminism led her to her creation of *The Woman's Bible*, which she considered her major work, a definitive statement of societal support for oppression of women. But today, biographers tend to focus on her leadership of the 19th-century women's movement rather than on her writings about religion.

Her impact on that historic movement was unquestionably significant. Elizabeth was born November 12, 1815, into a prominent New York family. Her father was a lawyer, legislator, and judge. Peter Teabout, first a slave and later a freeman in the household, cared for Elizabeth and her siblings. When Peter took the Cady children to Episcopal church each Sunday, they sat in back with him, rather than in front with white families, a pattern of behavior later echoed in Elizabeth's abolitionist activities.

Unusually for her time, Elizabeth was not educated at home but at the coeducational Johnstown Academy, where her studies included Latin, Greek, and mathematics, all subjects not usually taught to women. She especially excelled in Greek, but when she graduated, young men she had bested in classes moved on to colleges closed to women. Elizabeth enrolled at Troy Female Seminary, founded by visionary educator Emma Willard. There she encountered revivalist preacher Charles Finney, who first terrified Elizabeth with his depictions of the perdition she faced as a freethinking woman, then drove her permanently away from Christianity.

Soon after, Elizabeth met abolitionist orator Henry Brewster Stanton. They married in 1840, when Elizabeth was an "old maid" of 25. The couple had seven children, the last born when Elizabeth was 44. The couple's home hosted such prominent intellectuals and activists as Louisa May Alcott, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and Frederick Douglass. Both Elizabeth and her husband were leaders in the progressive movements of their time.

The turning point in Stanton's life came in 1840, when she and Henry attended the International Anti-Slavery Convention in London. Although women delegates carried appropriate credentials, male delegates refused to seat them; a compromise allowed women to witness, but not participate in, the deliberations. At the meeting was Quaker minister and feminist Lucretia Mott, who became Elizabeth's lifelong friend and, with her, an organizer of the first public meeting for women's suffrage. Held in 1848 in Seneca Falls, New York, the meeting drew nearly 300 people including some 40 men. The convention's "Declaration of Sentiments," written by Stanton, was



modeled on the U.S. Declaration of Independence. Among its accusations about how men kept women from full participation in society were the following:

“He allows her in church, as well as State, but a subordinate position, claiming Apostolic authority for her exclusion from the ministry, and, with some exceptions, from any public participation in the affairs of the Church.

“He has usurped the prerogative of Jehovah himself, claiming it as his right to assign for her a sphere of action, when that belongs to her conscience and her God.”

Thus, early in her feminist career, Stanton connected religious beliefs with oppression of women. But she did not expand upon that insight for several decades, during which time she worked as an organizer for the cause of suffrage, a cause that did not reach its conclusion until American women gained the vote in 1920. Discouraged by the slowness of the suffrage cause, Elizabeth in the 1870s turned her attention to the role that religion plays in limiting women’s rights. She argued that the Bible, far from being divinely inspired, was written by humans and aimed at establishing a social code in which women were subservient to men. Together with several other women scholars, she produced *The Woman’s Bible*, whose publication infuriated those who saw it as an assault on divine truth.

*The Woman’s Bible* focuses on patriarchal religion rather than goddesses, but Stanton’s emphasis on questioning scriptural truth while promoting women’s equality has continued. Today, liturgies for “mother/father god” and the concept of the church as feminine (“womanchurch”), as well as pressures for ordination of women in Christian denominations, stem from awareness that religion is a human construct and, as such, has deficiencies connected to social inequities. Writers who deconstruct and reconstruct such Christian female figures as **Sophia** (Holy Wisdom), the Virgin **Mary**, and **Mary Magdalen**, participate in the movement begun with Stanton’s Declaration of Sentiments and *The Woman’s Bible*.

Stanton died on October 26, 1902, nearly two decades before women won the right to vote in the United States. Two countries in which women are still not permitted to vote are Saudi Arabia and Vatican City.

## JANE ELLEN HARRISON: RITUAL AND MATRIARCHY IN CLASSICAL ART

In the middle of the 19th century, the opening of higher education to women meant new avenues were opened for study of goddesses. Education was still not widely available. Only women whose economic status, race, and class put them at the pinnacle of privilege in Europe and America could avail themselves of the new educational opportunities. Many of those women, aware of their groundbreaking position, became advocates for expansion of women’s rights. Access to education created a generation of thinkers who questioned received truth in numerous fields.

One such field was “the classics,” long a prestigious academic arena in which scholars debated the meaning of Greek and Roman myths and literature. Because most



19th-century women were educated at home, they failed to learn enough Latin and Greek for classical study. But a woman scholar soon challenged male hegemony in the study of Greek mythology.

Born September 9, 1850, Jane Ellen Harrison was the first woman classics scholar of renown. Although her primary education was with governesses at her family home in Yorkshire, Harrison showed an early aptitude for languages, ultimately mastering 16. As a young woman, she entered Cheltenham Ladies' College and then the new women's college at Newnham in Cambridge, whose graduates were not granted degrees but "certificates." No college at the time awarded the doctorate to women, although Harrison was awarded several honorary degrees. Later, she was invited back to serve as lecturer at Newnham, a position she held until retirement.

From student days, Harrison made friends among artists and intellectuals. Virginia Wolff was a close friend, and she knew others of the Bloomsbury Group well. Gathering around herself a cadre of brilliant fellow scholars, she helped create the Cambridge Ritualists group. Joined by Gilbert Murray and Francis Cornford, Harrison applied the newly emerging ideas of anthropology to the classics—an interdisciplinary move that was groundbreaking at the time.

Harrison launched her career by lecturing on women's rights. Harrison not only supported women's suffrage, she also used anthropological insights to expand the argument for gender equality. Her lectures on Greek art and mythology drew crowds of women eager to hear her unusual theories. Influenced by the work of the German scholar Johann Bachofen, who in 1861 published the influential and still-controversial book *Myth, Religion and Mother Right*, Harrison argued that one can detect traces of matriarchy in Greek religion.

Bachofen theorized that society passed through several stages, beginning with undifferentiated sexual promiscuity ("hetaerism," derived from a Greek work for "prostitute"), then evolving into a matriarchal social organization based on agricultural mystery religions. From there, society continued its upward (to Bachofen) development through a transitional Dionysian phase into the Apollonian, patriarchal modern world. The influence of Darwin's evolutionary theory is obvious in Bachofen's work, which in turn influenced Frederic Engels's *Origins of the Family, Private Property, and the State*.

Greek mythology and religion were enormously influential in England at the time. Only Rome and its myths held anything near the prestige of the Greeks. For one of the country's first well-educated women to find hints of women's power in the Greek past was nothing short of sensational. In her most important work, *Prolegomena to the Study of Greek Religion*, Harrison reconstructed rituals from artifacts and literature, then analyzed them to understand the parts women played, arguing that women's influence far exceeded that previously assumed. Despite her early devotion to Bachofen's theories, Harrison moved past him, questioning how women's rituals were part of Greek culture, unquestionably a patriarchal society. She served as inspiration and mentor to many later women scholars who explored whether one can detect submerged women's religious realities in patriarchal cultures. Although the structuralist method of the Cambridge Rituals is unfashionable today, Harrison's challenge to examine ritual as well as text remains a useful and potent way of seeing diverse realities within a

culture. Scholars who use postmodern and deconstructionist approaches to myth and ritual, especially approaches that analyze what is missing from a text as well as what is visible, are heirs to Harrison's work.

Harrison retired from teaching in 1922 and died in 1928. Her influence reached beyond the classics into the arts, for she influenced such modernist writers as H. D. (Hilda Doolittle), whose poems on Greek goddesses have inspired many contemporary creative writers.

## LADY AUGUSTA GREGORY: COLLECTING FROM "THE FOLK"

In the middle of the 19th century, wealthy Englishmen enjoyed outings at such mysterious monuments as Stonehenge and Avebury. But they typically ignored the rural people who lived out their lives among such artifacts of the past. Rather than collecting local tales about Stonehenge, "antiquarians" preferred to spin their own theories of why and how it might have been used.

But antiquarian research shifted its focus when a new term, "folklore," was coined by William Thoms. A rush to record tales from the countryside began. As most early collectors worked without recording machines, there were inevitable changes, sometimes subtle and sometimes more so, between the spoken and the written word. In addition, most collectors were men, and most were Christian, leading to errors in interpretation.

Yet the work of Elias Lonnröt in collecting Finnish myths, and of the Grimm brothers in collecting German tales from the women of their family, cannot be overestimated. Because such tales often had roots in pre-Christian cultures, the value to goddess scholarship of folktale collections cannot be overstated. Folklore collecting took place in the United States and in other areas of the globe; such collecting continues even today, although folklore is now an academic discipline rather than the hobby of a few, usually wealthy, amateurs.

Among those early collectors was a rarity: an educated woman whose collection of Irish folklore remains a standard work in the field. Augusta Persse was born on March 15, 1852, the youngest daughter on the huge Roxborough estate near Loughrea in County Galway. Both her father and mother came from the Ascendancy, landed gentry with roots in England rather than in Gaelic-speaking Ireland. Yet Augusta would become one of the most prominent recorders of stories from Irish tradition, even learning the Irish language in order to do her work better.

Augusta was educated at home, where like her later friend, poet William Butler Yeats, she became fascinated by stories told by the family's Irish servants, especially the articulate Mary Sheridan. Augusta, an intelligent and vivacious young woman, made a surprising match in Sir William Henry Gregory, despite being an "old maid" of 28. 35 years older than Augusta and a widower, Gregory had returned to Coole Park, not far from the Persse family, from his position as Governor General of Ceylon (Sri Lanka). Augusta moved to his large Georgian house with its extensive library and began her education in earnest, for her parents had not allowed books in their home.

In addition to their Irish country estate, the Gregorys had a home in London, where they held a weekly salon attended by such dignitaries as Henry James and Alfred Lord Tennyson. They traveled widely. But despite wealth and comfort, Augusta yearned for more. She fell in love with an English poet to whom she wrote a series of scandalous love sonnets—that he published as his own. In Egypt, Lady Gregory became aware of the oppressiveness of colonialism. Inured to it at home, she saw its damaging impact more clearly when abroad. Her first published work was a pamphlet in support of an indigenous uprising in Egypt. But for the next decade, until her husband's death, she wrote only short stories and memoirs.

Lord Gregory's death when Augusta was 40 years old, after only 12 years of marriage, freed her financially, emotionally, and intellectually. Although her first project was editing her husband's autobiography, she soon turned her attention to other projects. Within a year, she had begun collecting folktales from the Kiltartan area, the mythically rich area surrounding Coole Park. Often she relied on women storytellers, where male recorders listened predominantly to male *seanachies* or tale-spinners.

She began to study the Irish language, the better to understand and record folktales. She became a familiar figure on the narrow roads of the west of Ireland, traipsing about in her pony-trap to isolated farms and villages. She encouraged writer friends, including Yeats, to study Irish myths and legends in order to define the emerging nation to itself and to the world. Her many published works include the important *Visions and Beliefs in the West of Ireland* as well as several books of Kiltartan stories.

This period of her productive life came to an end with the founding of the now world-famous Abbey Theater, which Lady Gregory created to promote Irish nationalism. She wrote many plays for the theater, many of them short scenes set around her Galway home. Although her plays are not often performed today, her work in folklore remains a steady source of information for scholars. Not only are they consulted as primary texts, but the collecting of oral tales continues in Ireland and elsewhere, providing narratives with alternative visions of women's roles and possibilities.

Lady Gregory died on May 22, 1932.

## MARGARET MURRAY: "THE FOLK" AS WITCHES

While Augusta Gregory's impetus toward collecting folklore came from her nationalistic vision, a slightly younger woman saw the possibility that such traditions might include evidences of an earlier religion that honored goddesses as well as gods. A trained folklorist, Margaret Murray articulated a theory that remains controversial—that "witchcraft" in Europe was the residue of an earlier pagan religion rather than an aberrant form of Christianity.

Born in Calcutta on July 13, 1863, Margaret Murray was, like many of her class in that era, educated in England. She studied anthropology and linguistics at the University of London while becoming active in the suffragist movement. Late in the 19th century, Murray did archaeological research with the renowned Sir William Flinders Petrie in Egypt, creating an innovative interdisciplinary archaeology for which she

attained some renown. She soon established her reputation in Egyptology, working at Manchester Museum and then at University College of London, where she remained until she retired in 1935.

Her appointment followed publication in 1921 of *The Witch-Cult in Western Europe*, in which she argued that European paganism began in the Neolithic Period (New Stone Age) and continued despite Christianization. The witch-burnings of the Middle Ages, she argued, were the result of exposure of this religion and an attempt by the Church to eradicate it. She developed this theory further in her 1931 book, *The God of the Witches*, in which she connected the Christian image of Satan with the pagan Horned God. Murray's witches practiced in covens of 13, honoring the Horned God and the Goddess. In detecting this alleged underground tradition, Murray was influenced by the renowned mythographer Sir James George Frazer, who defined in *The Golden Bough* a universal religion based on a sacrificed king whose death restored the fertility of the earth. Murray detected this pattern in European rituals, claiming that witches practiced human sacrifice as well as sexual promiscuity.

The influence of Murray's book continues to this day, despite some long-discounted claims. 13-member covens cannot be upheld from the source literature, yet many practitioners of the reconstructivist religion of Wicca assume an ancient origin for the practice. Similarly, whether European witchcraft represented a survival of an "old faith" has been fiercely argued, with some discounting the theory while others find evidence that some beliefs were indeed ancient and possibly shamanic. Nonetheless, because of the influence of Murray's work on Gerald Gardner, who claimed to be a "hereditary witch" and promoted witchcraft (today more commonly called Wicca) as an indigenous pagan religion, Murray's theories remain potent today. As Wiccans acknowledge divinity in feminine as well as masculine form, the influence of Murray's work on goddess scholarship continues, together with the controversies over its genesis.

After her retirement in 1935, Murray continued to be professionally active. She was elected president of the Folklore Society in 1953, at the age of 90. A decade later, she published her autobiography, *My First Hundred Years*. She died later that year.

## TONI WOLFF: PSYCHOLOGY OF "THE FEMININE"

In 1879, what had been a part of philosophical inquiry—the question of how the human mind works—was transformed into a separate science with the foundation of a laboratory for psychological research at Leipzig University in Germany. Germany and its neighbors, Austria and Switzerland, remained at the forefront of the new science as Sigmund Freud developed the theory of psychoanalysis, which applies concepts from theoretical psychology to the healing of mentally disturbed persons. Freud developed the theory of the unconscious, as well as the process of using "talk therapy" to get at unconscious motivations for behavior. His pioneering work drew several brilliant students, including the young Swiss doctor Carl Jung.

After only six years, Jung broke with Freud over their different concepts of the unconscious. While Freud viewed it as a dustbin for the individual psyche, Jung theorized a "collective unconscious" where "archetypes" resided. These archetypes are

generic, universal human forms such as “mother” and “child” that populate individual dreams as well appearing in cultural manifestations like myths and folktales. Freud refused to acknowledge the possibility of such archetypes, much less that they could be a source of religion. Jung, whose championing of the new science of psychoanalysis had been vital to its spread, resigned his posts in Freud’s organization and began to develop his theories privately.

Into Jung’s life came a client, Antonia Anna (Toni) Wolff. She had been born on September 18, 1888 in Zurich, where she lived her entire life. Her family was among the most distinguished in the city; her parents Konrad Arnold Wolff and Anna Elisebetha Sutz had two younger daughters, but Toni was her father’s favorite until his death when she was 22. Knowing of Jung’s reputation and concerned for her grieving daughter, her mother sent Toni to Jung, who at the time was a 35-year-old married man, only recently involved with a young former patient whose dissertation he was advising. He saw in Wolff not only a candidate for psychoanalysis and a potential analyst but an “anima woman,” someone who could reflect his feminine side. The next year, he invited Wolff to accompany him and his wife Emma to the Weimar Psychoanalytic Conference. Within a short time, Jung and Wolff were lovers, in a quite public arrangement. When Jung spoke, Emma often sat on one side with Toni on the other.

Wolff published little, but one important paper framed out her concepts of “feminine archetypes,” a theory often credited to Jung. During her lifetime and later, Wolff’s famous lover has overshadowed her. Wolff filled the role of anima woman admirably for at least a decade, possibly two. As Jung’s assistant, Wolff saw the same clients as Jung did. This close relationship brought Wolff into the bosom of Jung’s family. She often dined with Emma and Carl. Wolff introduced Jung to several important tools for his work, astrology and the I Ching, but she balked at his interest in alchemy.

When Wolff invited a group of students to meet Jung, she effectively ended their affair. The group included 18-year-old Marie-Louise von Franz, who became Jung’s next anima woman and, later, a prominent archetypal theorist on questions of “the feminine.” When Wolff died at 63 of a heart attack, Jung did not attend her funeral. Nor did he mention her name in his renowned autobiography, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*. He destroyed all his letters to her, which had been returned to him upon her death, as well as hers to him. While several works of fiction and plays have been devoted to the relationship, it remains out of reach of the historian.

Wolff’s work has been central to the development of archetypal goddess studies. She divided “the archetypal feminine” into four types: the mother, a type opposed by the “hetaera” (a Greek word for courtesan); and the Amazon, opposed by the “medial woman” (medium or psychic). Wolff argued that each woman had a dominant archetype, with its opposite being submerged or resisted. In this, she refines the idea of “the feminine” beyond a single “great mother” to allow for multiple feminine types. Much contemporary goddess literature is based on this kind of division of archetypal femininity into types. Goddess theorists who describe “the feminine” as an immanent rather than a transcendent force are often influenced by Wolff, either directly or through Jung.

Jungian writing often speaks of “the feminine,” defining it in terms that are arguably culture-bound. “The feminine,” in such theories, is connected to emotion, connectedness, and darkness, while “the masculine” is associated with reason, individualism, and light. The presumption that qualities associated with these genders in European culture are universal has been a continuing source of controversy, with feminists arguing that there is no proof of a universal “feminine” reality. Yet even those who find fault with Jungian essentialism can find inspiration in Wolff’s consideration of the connection between the individual (through dreams, fantasies, and creative work) and the collective (through myths and rituals).

## PHYLLIS KABERRY: ANTHROPOLOGY IS NOT “STUDY OF MAN”

The word “anthropology” translates literally as “the study of man,” with the last word usually interpreted as “human being.” Yet the discipline, which began as a response to European colonization and the perceived need to study cultures with whom colonists came into contact, emphasized the study of men and aspects of culture connected with men rather than women (law and war, for instance, as contrasted with weaving and childbearing).

The discipline itself was not formally established until the early 20th century, but earlier writers and thinkers discussed other cultures, often with the assumption that preindustrial cultures were the same as the European past. These early theorists are now often dismissed as “armchair anthropologists” because they based their works on reading rather than fieldwork, the latter being the mark of an anthropologist today. Among such early writers was Sir James George Frazer, whose multivolume study of fertility rituals, *The Golden Bough*, is replete with references to goddess traditions. He argued for a universal ritual of kingship in which a man serves a goddess to whom he is sacrificed. Among the hundreds of sources he cited, only a few were written by women.

Such “armchair” works tended to presume a universal religious understanding that often reflected the patriarchal monotheism of the writers. However, the concept of cultural relativism began to erode such interpretations. By the beginning of the 20th century, anthropology emphasized fieldwork as its primary method, with months or even years spent among non-Europeans (the more “primitive,” the better) establishing one’s credibility. The earliest field workers were almost without exception men who, in some cultures, were unable to speak to women or to gain access to women’s lives. Even where such access was not restricted, the resulting ethnographic writings tended to focus on men’s lives and interests. Much early anthropological writing revolves around religion, but the work is marked by unexamined presumptions about gender roles. For instance, goddesses are often interpreted as “mother goddesses” even when no reproductive fertility is evident, while gods are typically understood as preeminent even in cultures where goddesses were primary.



The concept of distinct, incomparable cultures was argued by American anthropologists such as Franz Boas, who trained the first widely recognized women anthropologists, Ruth Benedict and Margaret Mead. Early women in the field shied away from the kind of controversy that dogged women like Margaret Murray. It is notable that neither Benedict nor Mead documented any goddess traditions. Such caution did not, however, guarantee academic advancement. Benedict was edged out of a position for which Boas had promoted her, and Mead never held an academic appointment, working at a museum instead.

It was within this context that Phyllis Kaberry entered the field. Born in 1910 in California to British parents, she moved in childhood to Australia, where she attended the University of Sydney, earning her MA in anthropology in 1934. She then departed for London to earn a PhD with a leading ethnologist, Bronislaw Malinowski, at the London School of Economics. Early in her graduate school career, Kaberry did fieldwork in New Guinea, where she studied cross-cultural interactions and legal issues affecting indigenous residents. After finishing her doctoral work, she returned to study an aspect of life connected to women's roles—specifically, diet and nutrition.

But her major work remained in her adopted homeland, for while working on her master's degree she had been encouraged by the important anthropologist A. P. Elkin to do field work in western Australia. There, she sought out articulate aboriginal women to explain their roles in traditional society. The result is visible in her first book, *Aboriginal Women: Sacred and Profane*, published shortly after she received her doctorate, which remains a classic of women's studies in anthropology. Its title refers to the frequent description by male scholars of aboriginal women's lives as "profane" compared to those of men, which were marked by encounters with the "sacred." Kaberry argued that aboriginal women, far from being men's domestic and sexual servants, have active spiritual lives, possessing totems and performing rites from which men were excluded.

Although her work was acknowledged as significant, Kaberry did not find the kind of acclaim that men of her level received. She received a grant to study nutrition in Cameroon, although she had not previously worked in Africa; there her work at revealing colonial bias earned her the esteem and gratitude of the Nso people. From that work, Kaberry developed a book describing the contributions of women to 'Nso society that, although it received positive reviews, was not widely read.

Because of her unpopular emphasis on women's importance in the societies she studied and the sexism in the Australia academic world, Kaberry never worked professionally there after graduate school. She supported herself on grants for over a decade before finding work as a reader in anthropology at the University of London, a position she held until her death in 1977.

Although her work was often marginalized in her own lifetime, Kaberry's approach to anthropological study of women and religion has born fruit in later years. Ethnographies of goddess-honoring societies now typically assume that women have rich spiritual lives. Questions of colonialism, always prominent in Kaberry's work, have also had impact on the field, so that contemporary goddess ethnographers may study a goddess subculture within their own society rather than seeking to do fieldwork in an appropriately "primitive" society.

## DION FORTUNE: A NEW RELIGION

The name by which she is known was not that bestowed on Violet Mary Firth when she was born in the seaside resort of Llandudno, Wales, on December 6, 1890 or 1891. She adopted the pseudonym later in life, deriving it from her family's motto, "Deo, non fortuna" or "God, not fortune." Yet the "god" that Violet honored was a dual divinity that included the goddess, whose image inspired her major works and whose lasting influence is felt on neopaganism today.

A mystical child, Violet saw sights invisible to those around her and spoke of distant lost civilizations. After a breakdown when she was 20, Violet found solace in the study of comparative religions; she joined the newly formed Theosophical Society. After studying with the Irish Freemason Theodore Moriarty, she became active in the London Temple of the Alpha et Omega (originally called the Order of the Golden Dawn), where she met the novelist John Brodie-Innes, whose books revolved around magical themes.

Although she held leadership roles in the societies of which she was a member, Dion Fortune's lasting impact was through her novels. Bringing together personal visions with occult doctrines, she explored themes of magic and women's power in a series of pagan novels including *The Sea Priestess*, which remains an influential statement of witchcraft. The vibrant character of Vivien Le Fay Morgan, the enchanting magician, reveals Fortune's interest in depicting women as sexually active as well as intellectually powerful—not a common vision of women in the early 20th century. Fortune also wrote nonfiction books on magical topics, although these have had less impact on the contemporary goddess movement.

The tension between her creative writing and her religious affiliation came to a head in 1922. Then 32 years old, Dion Fortune had become one of the most publicly prominent members of the Alpha et Omega. Moina Mathers, ex-wife of founder Samuel MacGregor Mathers, accused Dion of revealing secret matters in her books. But that may have been only a precipitating cause, for Dion Fortune was gaining fame, or at least notoriety, for revelations she claimed to receive while astral (out-of-body) traveling. These tensions resulted in Fortune's being excommunicated.

She found a new home in the Stella Matutina, another offshoot of the Golden Dawn that claimed as one of its members the Irish poet William Butler Yeats, a friend of folklorist Lady Augusta Gregory. When Fortune departed the Alpha et Omega, she retained control of a group that she renamed the Society of the Inner Light and ran from Glastonbury, where she lived with her husband Thomas Penry Evans. The organization still functions, although Fortune died of leukemia in 1946.

Many contemporary writers on the goddess derive their ideas from sources similar to hers, a combination of personal mysticism and organized occultism. Indeed, some researchers argue that aspects of contemporary Wicca were deliberately modeled after scenes in Fortune's novels. Although typically rejected by scholars, writings by those personally involved in witchcraft and magic have an enormous public following. In addition, the joining of creative writing to goddess studies has produced a significant body of literature that ranges from popular genre fiction to highly crafted lyric poetry.



## MARY BARNARD: FINDING ANCIENT VOICES

Feminine divinity was not something the long-lived poet Mary Ethel Barnard (December 6, 1909–August 25, 2001) had in mind when she began to translate the great Greek poet Sappho. But her work, and that of others who have brought ancient and suppressed work to public view, has been important to contemporary goddess studies, providing textual evidence of goddess worship. Barnard’s translation of Sappho’s poetry, never out of print, is regarded as the definitive translation of the poet into English. Barnard came to the project as a poet herself, a well-known Symbolist who found in Sappho a poet after her own leanings.

Born in Vancouver, Washington, where she lived most of her life, Barnard graduated from Reed College at the height of the Great Depression in 1932. She went to work immediately for the Emergency Relief Administration, writing poetry in her spare time. Within a few years, she won the prestigious Levinson Award from *Poetry Magazine*, which championed newly emerging voices in Imagism and Symbolism. She moved to New York, where she met renowned poets including Marianne Moore and served as a poetry curator in Buffalo. Her work was widely anthologized and she was in frequent contact with the poet she considered her mentor, Ezra Pound.

After returning to Washington, Barnard was advised by Pound to stimulate her muse by translating—a task that she, who read Greek fluently, took up with passion. She selected for her work Sappho, the only woman still known from among ancient Greek poets. Born on the island of Lesbos in the 7th century BCE, Sappho’s life is virtually unknown, except in the hints she left in poetry. She may have been of an aristocratic family; she may have had a daughter named Cleis; she may have been exiled at some point to Sicily. It is doubtful that she killed herself out of love for a ferryman. It is also unclear whether Sappho, the great Lesbian, was also a lesbian (a term for women-loving women derived from Sappho’s birthplace). However, many of her surviving poems describe passionate feelings toward other women, and her contemporaries described her as involved with women the way Socrates was involved with men, suggesting that she was sexually passionate with other women.

One thing is unarguable: Sappho saw herself as a devotee of the goddess of love, Aphrodite, who appears more often than any other figure in her works. This may be an accident of history, for although Sappho wrote nine books of poetry, virtually all her work has been lost, possibly deliberately destroyed. The only remaining full poem is the “Hymn to Aphrodite,” in which Sappho addressed the goddess familiarly, pleading with her to bring a lover (assumed to be a woman) to her side. Sappho’s other poems exist only in fragments, although an almost-complete poem about aging has recently been discovered. For the rest, Sappho’s work was referred to by other authors, for she was considered one of the greatest poets of her time; some of her extant work survives only in short quotations found in other writers’ works.

However they were lost, her famous poems were indeed lost. Only fragments survive, including those found in an Egyptian rubbish heap, torn into strips as though for wrapping a mummy. This creates difficulties for the translator, who must either expand to fill in lacunae or find other strategies for dealing with phrases that cut off

in the middle and poems with no endings. Barnard used skills honed over many decades to write spare yet passionate renditions that simultaneously captured the brevity and fragmentary nature of Sappho's poems. The result was immediately popular at the time of publication in 1959. Embraced by the emerging women's spirituality and lesbian movements as an inspiring voice, Mary Barnard's Sappho appears as a passionate and sensuous woman with a devotion to a goddess who is both powerful and accessible.

Mary Barnard lived almost 50 years after the publication of her Sappho translations. They remain her best-known work and have inspired other women to translate early writers both for their literary and spiritual qualities.

## MARIJA GIMBUTAS: INTERPRETING ANCIENT LANGUAGE

Born in Vilnius, Lithuania, on January 23, 1921, Marija Alseikait lived through the turmoil of World War II, managing to gain an education and to marry a young architect, Jurgis Gimbutas, before the couple fled to Germany after Soviet occupation of their homeland. There, in 1946, Gimbutas earned a PhD in archaeology at Tübingen University and not long after, accepted an appointment to Harvard's Peabody Museum. During this time, she began to unravel the archaeology of her homeland, developing the "Kurgan hypothesis" that argues that the distinctive burial mounds ("Kurgans") found in Eastern Europe were the artifacts of an invading proto-Indo-European (PIE) culture. To arrive at this hypothesis, Gimbutas used the tools of several disciplines, including linguistics, archaeology, and comparative religions. This interdisciplinary approach was a hallmark of her work throughout her life.

Gimbutas did not start her career searching for an ancient goddess; the facts led her to that conclusion. Those facts were gathered through many years of archaeological research, especially that from 1963 to 1989 when, as a faculty member at UCLA, Gimbutas directed digs at Neolithic sites in southeastern Europe. The resulting finds encouraged her to refine her ideas about PIE culture, which she called "Old Europe." She wrote the definitive work on prehistoric eastern European culture in Bronze Age cultures of Central and Eastern Europe; the book's careful discussion of artifacts established her as one of the field's most important theorists.

However, her later work drew more notoriety than acclaim. She began examining the religion of the people she had been studying for more than two decades. Working without any ideological predisposition, Gimbutas noted the preponderance of feminine imagery in what seemed to be religious objects. From this evidence, she began to theorize that prior to the Kurgan invasion, the Old Europeans had based their religion on a multifaceted goddess. The development of her theory can be seen in the title of her book, *The Goddesses and Gods of Old Europe*, originally published as *The Gods and Goddesses of Old Europe*. Evidence of the primacy of goddesses seemed strong enough to demand the title inversion.

From there, she went on to write a larger, more comprehensive book, *The Language of the Goddess*, which argued that far from being isolated to eastern Europe, the religion of Old Europe stretched into Mediterranean areas where classicists had long presumed the predominance of patriarchy. Gimbutas's groundbreaking theory was supported by an inventive methodology, for rather than limiting herself to languages that can be read today, she argued that the language of symbols in ancient art could be "read" to understand the intentions of the inscribers. As archaeology had long assumed that it was impossible to learn about an ancient culture without written records, this was a radical way of thinking about the past, one that Gimbutas named "archaeomythology."

But critics were more outraged by Gimbutas's claims to have uncovered evidence for a widespread prehistoric religion centered on goddesses than by her unconventional methods. In some cases, critics reacted to ideas Gimbutas had not put forward, such as the idea that ancient society inverted patriarchy, with women taking power in the way men in patriarchies do. The theory of an "ancient matriarchy" had been put forward in the 19th century by Bachofen, who envisioned such a stage of civilization as inferior to patriarchy. But although Gimbutas used that word in some early work, she later saw the potential for misunderstanding and began to speak of "matristic" (mother-centered) or "matrifocal" (mother-focused) rather than "matriarchal" (ruled by women) cultures. Nonetheless, critics continue to claim that there is no evidence for the "matriarchy" they assume Gimbutas spoke of, although even the most critical agree there is evidence for matristic societies.

Gimbutas was undeterred by this intellectual commotion. She continued to gather evidence of religion based on a goddess with many aspects, including birth, death, and sexuality. In the final book she published before her death from cancer, *The Civilization of the Goddess*, Gimbutas argued that across Europe in pre-Indo-European times, a peaceful matrifocal culture had existed whose remnants could be detected in ancient art and architecture.

Although Gimbutas began her career in an academic setting, at the end of her life she embraced, and was embraced by, the women's spirituality community. Although she did not publicly practice any religion, she inspired many leaders of alternative religions, an influence that continues today.

## PAULA GUNN ALLEN: INDIGENOUS WOMEN'S VOICES

Until approximately 150 years ago in Europe and America, women were forbidden to pursue the education that would enable them to make significant contributions to the study of religion, much less to study the unorthodox subject of goddess worship. Even more punitive were educational restrictions on women of color, who were actively discouraged from attaining higher education even when it was technically available to them. Women who slipped through the net and attained an education sometimes seemed unwilling to question the ideologies of the powerful. Thus information about indigenous goddesses, written from the standpoint of those who honored that goddess, is still extremely rare. An exception can be found in the work of Paula Gunn Allen.

Allen, born October 23, 1939, was of Laguna and Sioux heritage, as well as Scottish and Lebanese. Born in New Mexico, she returned there after college to earn a PhD at the University of New Mexico in American Studies in 1976. Then she began researching Native American religions and teaching that subject at her alma mater and at the University of California, both at Berkeley and Los Angeles. A widely published poet and novelist, she also gathered works by other emerging and prominent Native American poets and writers in anthologies that remain important texts today.

At the same time that she was creating a body of literary work, Allen was also studying the religions of Native America. The result was a book of comparative Native religions, entitled *The Sacred Hoop: Recovering the Feminine in American Indian Traditions*, in which Allen argued that Native American religions were often misunderstood by invading Europeans, who projected patriarchal and hierarchical social systems on those they encountered on this continent. In place of such misinterpretations, Allen proposed understanding Native religions as including a powerful goddess, often associated with the earth's abundance. For such statements, Allen was defamed by some other Native scholars, but the book is now required reading in many Native American studies courses, as are Allen's essays arguing that Native religions are falsely characterized as "myths" and "folklore."

Allen's work has had wide-ranging impact on the contemporary goddess movement, not only because she voiced the realities of Native American women whose ideas had been excluded from conversation about spirituality, but because her work encouraged women to return to their ethnic roots and research the goddesses found therein. Allen's death from cancer at the relatively young age of 69 did not end her influence on women interested in how the goddess appeared in the Americas.

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# AFRICA

Among continents, Africa ranks second both in size and in population; only Asia has more land and people. Africa's size challenges researchers of religion and spirituality, as does the depth of its history. Most scientists agree that the human race emerged in Africa approximately 200,000 years ago. All humans descend from a "Mitochondrial Eve," who lived some 140,000 years ago in eastern or central Africa. Other prehistoric women have descendents today, but only this "Mitochondrial Eve" supplied the DNA of our mitochondria.

Great rivers, deserts, mountain ranges, and rainforests divide Africa into regions reflected in the continent's cultures. Speakers of Bantu languages predominate along the Niger and Congo rivers, and in some parts of central and eastern Africa. Nilotic groups make their homes in east Africa. In southern Africa's Kalahari Desert live the Bushmen or San, while Pygmy peoples live nearby and into central Africa. In most of eastern Africa, Arabic influence and language are dominant.

Today, most of Africa is Christian or Islamic; thus this section does not represent the spiritual views of a majority of contemporary Africans. Approximately 10 percent of Africans practice traditional religions; although a statistical minority, these practitioners number in the millions. Traditional religions include the Ifá rituals of the Yoruba in western Africa, the most popularly held indigenous religion in Africa today. Smaller numbers follow the religions of the Fon of Benin and the Ewe of southern Ghana. Very small numbers practice the traditions of the Bushmen and other groups. In North Africa, despite the intense pressure of Islam, some indigenous religious ways can be found among the Berbers of Morocco and Algeria and seminomadic people such as the Tuareg of the Sahara.

Researchers in goddess religion face special challenges in Africa because of the influence of monotheistic religions, the arrival of which was contemporary with European and Arab colonization. In the 19th and 20th centuries, missionaries recorded some myths, possibly misinterpreting information provided by African people. For





**Tassili huntress.** In southern Algeria, in the Tassili n'Ajjer Range, Neolithic petroglyphs, or rock paintings, depict women engaged in hunting and in ritual activities. The art has been dated to 8000–4000 BCE, a time when the Saharan area was a grassy savannah rich with animal life.

instance, sources describe a “high god” who withdrew from humanity to control life on earth from afar; this god strikingly resembles the male god of Abrahamic religions. Yet sources suggest that such divinities were originally female as well as male, dual-sexed or bisexual, or without gender.

African religions often describe a pair of twin primal ancestors, usually a sister and brother. Scholars have written much about the importance of twins in African cosmology, but little attention has been paid to the specific roles of the male and female twins, who may embody an ideal of cosmic balance. Some cultures show evidence of matrilineality in tandem with patrilineality, although scholars typically elevate the latter over the former.

Most African religions have multiple beings of a lesser rank than gods but more powerful than humans. Such a being might be called a “spirit” or an *orisha* (the latter a Yoruba term). Spirits can be harmful, as with a murdered—and thereafter murderous—ghost. More benevolent spirits include ancestors, who become helpers to descendants. Devotion to ancestors is prominent in many African religions. Because ancestors are evenly divided between male and female, female ancestral spirits are celebrated with equal rites.

Using the term “goddess” in describing figures from traditional African religion presents difficulties. Because the Abrahamic concept of divinity is typically abstracted from nature, African religions have been dismissed as “animistic,” as though finding divinity in nature is less developed than abstraction. Such attitudes diminish the roles that natural powers, including the earth, play in traditional African religions. Additionally, the role of ancestors is not well described with the term “goddess,” which can imply an immortal and nonhuman figure. Finally, the distinction between a folkloric or semi-historical figure and a divine one can be difficult to discern; early recorders may have wrongly demoted such female figures, whereas African religion often sees ancestors as becoming godlike figures after death.

African traditional religions are based in ritual and orally conveyed story. Rituals, often elaborate, require the artistic efforts of many community members. Both women and men typically take part, although the common practice of having secret societies means that men and women may not participate in, or know of, each other’s rituals. As traditional religions have given way to Christianity and Islam, many women’s traditions have been lost or survive only in partial form.

Traditional religions are not the only ones native to Africa, for Egyptian religion has deep roots and still-thriving branches. Since approximately 10,000 BCE, people have lived along the banks of the Nile. By approximately 6000 BCE, two large civilizations thrived, the Upper and Lower Kingdoms; although they traded with each other, the kingdoms remained separate for almost 2,000 years. Divinities included many goddesses, in particular bovine divinities who represented an important resource among cattle-herding peoples.

Egypt was unified around 3000 BCE as the Old Kingdom. The pyramids of Giza were built, indicative of a well-developed religious tradition of caring for the dead. An unsettled period followed, called the First Intermediate Period, but stability returned with the Middle Kingdom (2040 BCE). Around 1650 BCE, an invasion briefly disrupted Egyptian life, but establishment of the New Kingdom (1550–1070 BCE) returned Egypt to Egyptian rule.

During the 14th century BCE, King Akhenaton declared that the land would honor only a sun god, Aten, creating what was arguably the world’s first monotheism and denying a place to the female divine. Upon Akhenaton’s death, Egyptian polytheism was restored. Although politically Egypt went into decline in 343 BCE, Egypt continued to have religious influence on the lands around the Mediterranean. Both under Greek rulership and under the Roman Empire, non-Egyptian followers embraced Egyptian goddesses. Divinities such as Isis gained in power and prestige for centuries after the last Egyptian/Roman emperor. After Christianization, some goddess images survived in a Christian context, so the influence of Egyptian goddesses remains active today. Finally, artificial revivals of Egyptian religion have been prominent in European occultism for centuries.

Consideration of African religions would be incomplete without discussion of the African diaspora. The Arabic slave trade was established before the arrival of Europeans, with attendant forcible conversion to Islam. There are no known Afro-Arabic syncretic religions in the manner that there are Afro-Brazilian and Afro-Caribbean religious paths.



With the enslavement of millions of Africans in the 15th through the 19th centuries, people ripped from their religious roots retained and revived their traditions in the New World. Slavery brought Africans into connection with indigenous Americans, some also enslaved, as well as enslaved and indentured Europeans, usually rural poor who sustained pagan traditions. Melded or syncretized African diasporic religions are attested as early as the 1500s.

In Brazil, where almost half the population has African heritage, several syncretic religions emerged. Despite historical outbreaks of persecution, millions of Brazilians follow these religious paths. Afro-Brazilian religions include Candomblé or Macumba/Quimbanda, both based in Yoruba religion, the latter including European witchcraft practices. In Cuba and Puerto Rico, Yoruba *orishas* are honored through the practices of Santería; in Haiti, Voudoun derives from the religion of Benin and from Nigeria. Congo rites, known by the name of their originating location, are also known. These religions are also practiced in the United States. Two lesser-known traditions, the West Indian/Jamaican Obeah and the southern U.S. Hoodoo derive from traditions of African sorcery and magic. In all these traditions, female figures hold power and prestige.

Today, with African traditional religions retaining the devotion of a significant minority of Africans on the home continent, we find an increasing number of adherents in diasporic lands. In addition, African spirituality imbues the Womanist movement, which also draws upon Christianity's social gospel. While distinct from feminist spirituality, Womanist theology similarly seeks to empower women through use of female images of divinity, focusing especially on African goddesses.

## AFRICAN PANTHEON

Abassi Isu Ma. *See Isong.*

**Abenaa**

**Abrewa**

**Abuk**

Acol. *See Abuk.*

Adesuwa. *See Idris.*

**Adoma**

**Agbanli**

Ai-Yak. *See Abuk*

**Aje**

Ake. *See Ala*

Akonadi Accra; *oracles.*

**Ala**

Alafo-fünfün. *See Atage.*

Ale. *See Ala*

**Alyett**

**Amokye**

Ana. *See Ala*

Andriambavirano. *See Andriana*

**Andriana**

**Ara**

Asase Efua. *See Asase Yaa*

**Asase Yaa**

Ashiakle Accra; *wealth; ocean.*

Aso. *See Nsia*

**Asona**

**Atage**

**Atete**

Avrekete Fon; *sea.*

Ayebau. *See Woyengi*

**Ayirol**

Aziri Benin; *wealth.*

**Bayanni**

Bedâwya. *See Darâwîsh.*

Buk. *See Abuk*

**Butan**

Cherop. *See Nagoro*

**Chichinguane**

Dada. *See Bayanni*

**Darāwīsh**

Dodo. *See Darāwīsh*

Dzivaguru *Korekore; earth.*

**Eka-Abasi**

**Fatna**

**Gbadu**

Gleti *Benin; moon.*

Gonzuole *Gangwi; primal woman.*

Hamāma-t-al-Bhar. *See Darāwīsh*

**Idemili**

**Idris**

**Igbaghon**

**Ilâmbé**

Ilankaka *Nkundo; sun.*

Ile. *See Oddudua*

Inaruchaba *Burundi; domestication.*

**Inkosazane**

**Isong**

I-toeram-bola-totsy *Madagascar; loyalty.*

**Iya Nla**

Iya Wa (“Our mother”). *See Iya Nla*

Iyalodé. *See Oshun*

Iye’male. *See Oddudua*

Janāt Jozay. *See Darāwīsh*

Jezanna *Mashona; moon.*

Kahindo *Nyanga; fire.*

Kaikara *Uganda; harvest.*

Ko *Bushmen; hunting.*

Konikoni. *See Nunde*

Langok. *See Nagoro*

**Lueji**

**Mammywata**

Maram. *See Atete*

Maray. *See Darāwīsh*

**Marwe**

Mbango. *See Marwe*

**Massasi**

Massassi. *See Massasi*

**Mawu**

Mbaba Mwana Waresa *Zulu; rain.*

**Mbokomu**

Mbombe *Zaire; elephant.*

Mella *Buhera Ba Rowzi; healing.*

Milango. *See Marwe*

Minona. *See Gbadu*

**Miseke**

Monje *Yoruba; water.*

**Moombi**

**Moremi**

Morongo. *See Massasi*

Motsesa *Mozambique; primal mother.*

Moussou Koroni. *See Nyalé*

**Muhongo**

**Mujaji**

Muzita *Bakongo; primal woman.*

**Mweel**

**Nagoro**

**Nalubaale**

Nalwanga. *See Nyakae*

**Nambi**

Nana Buluku. *See Nanamburucú*

Nana Buruku. *See Nanamburucú*

**Nanamburucú**

Nanan. *See Nanamburucú*

Ngolimento *Ewe; primal mother.*

**Ngomba**

Niniganni *Baga; abundance.*

**Nsia**

Nsomeka *Bantu; abundance.*

Nsongo *Bangala; prophecy.*

**Nunde**

Nyadeang *Nuer; moon.*

**Nyakae**

**Nyalé**

**Nyame**

Nyamitondo *Nyanga; savior.*

**Nyamugondho**

Nyamwanda *Nyanga; rebirth.*

Nyohwé Ananu. *See Mawu*

**Nzambi**

**Qba**

Oba. *See Qba*

Obaneñe. *See Bayanni*

**Oddudua**

Odudua. *See Oddudua*

Oduduwa. *See Oddudua*

**Ogboinba**

**Ogbuide**

**Olókun**

Omelukpagham. *See Omelumma*

**Omelumma**

Onile. *See Oddudua*

Oronsen. *See Oshun*

**Oshun**

Oxun. *See Oshun*

**Qya**

Oyi. *See Woyengi*

Ra-mitovi-aman-dreniny. *See Andriana*

Ranoro. *See Andriana*

Rasoalavavolo. *See Andriana*

Sabulana *Machakeni*; savior.

Saida Zaineib. *See Darāwīsh*

**Sanene**

**Sela**

Selekana *Lesotho*; cleverness.

Senkepenyana. *See Motsesa*.

Sheegesi. *See Oshun*.

Simbi. *See Nyamugondho*

Sitt am-Mandil. *See Darāwīsh*

Sitti Khūdara. *See Darāwīsh*

Songi. *See Nsomeka*

Tamarau. *See Woyengi*

Tangalimbibo Zaire; survival.

Titichane *Ba-Ronga*; cat, ancestral mother.

UNomkuhbulwane. *See Inkosazane*

Vazimba. *See Andriana*

**Wanjiru**

**Woyengi**

Woyin. *See Woyengi*

Yēmoja. *See Yemaja*

Ya Nsia. *See Nsia*

Yansan. *See Qya*

Yasa. *See Yasigui*

**Yasigui**

**Yemaja**

Yemanja. *See Yemaja*

Yemowo. *See Oddudua*

Yewajobi (“Mother of all”). *See Iya Nla*

Ymoja. *See Yemaja*

Zâar LulÂiya. *See Darāwīsh*

**Abenaa** An Akan river goddess, Abenaa (“Tuesday”) is associated with gold, brass, and other symbols of wealth and abundance. Like the similar Yoruba goddess **Oshun**, Abenaa protects children and, because she sees her worshipers as her children, defends them as well. Both priests and priestesses, often herbal healers as well as ritual leaders, serve her. (Bádejo 1998)

**Abrewa** This Akan goddess lived on earth with her many children, but they had little room because the sky was so close. So she hit the sky god with her pestle, which forced him to move away. But then the god was too far, so Abrewa had everyone gather mortars, which she piled atop each other. When only one mortar was needed to reach the sky, the supply suddenly ran out. Abrewa moved the bottom one to the top, but the structure collapsed, isolating people on earth. Abrewa disappeared after founding a matrilineal line of rulers from her eldest daughter **Asona**. Abrewa may be the same as **Asase Yaa**. (Ephirim-Donkor)

**Abuk** She was born very tiny, then put in a pot where she swelled up like a bean. When she was grown, the creator god gave Abuk and her mate Garang only one grain of corn to eat each day. The human race would have starved had Abuk not taken what people needed and ground meal from it. Deng, the rain god, joined with Abuk to bring

abundance. They had three children, two sons and a daughter, Ai-Yak; some narratives offer two daughters for the goddess, Candit and Nyaliep, both young women who drowned and became divine.

The frightening Lwal Durrajok appears in a tale wherein Abuk created people from fat that she softened over fire. She molded individual people and, after they dried and hardened, sent them across the road that connected heaven and earth. But when she went to gather more wood for her fire, Lwal Durrajok made crippled humans that he pledged to fix. Then he boiled a pot of fat, into which he plunged the cripples, who met horrible deaths.

The Dinka, Nuer, and Atuot envision Abuk as the primal woman and divinity of fertility. Her symbols include the moon, snakes, and sheep. Among the Nuer, the first millet of the season, as well as beer and tobacco, were tossed into streams in Abuk's honor. In some Atuot myths, the name of this goddess is given as Acol. (Burton 1981, 1982, Sept. 1982; Cummings; Evans-Pritchard; Lienhardt; Ray 2000)

**Adoma** In Cameroon, this folkloric heroine was an exemplary daughter except for one matter: she refused to marry. This made her parents angry, and she became something of a social outcast as a result. When a festival was held across the Mbam River, all the young people set off to enjoy themselves, so Adoma went along. But when they reached the banks of the river, no one would let Adoma ride in their boats, because she had refused all the young men.

As she sat there glumly, a crocodile urged her to take his hand and step onto his back. When she did so, the crocodile took her below the waves. There he decked her in finery before taking her across the river to the festival. Attired so elegantly, Adoma caught everyone's eye, and men began to compete for her attention. She refused until she felt like dancing, and then took a flute from a bag the crocodile had given her. When she played it, people stuffed money into her little bag. As soon as it was full, it disappeared, then reappeared, empty and ready for more offerings. Meanwhile, back in the river, the crocodile was counting the money, which had miraculously been transmitted to him.

When the party was over, more than one suitor wanted to take Adoma home, but she went back to the riverbank and met the crocodile, who once more took her beneath the waves and decked her out splendidly before taking her to the farther shore. When the girl returned home, her envious older sister decided that she, too, would gain a fortune, so she went to the riverbank. When the crocodile appeared, she told him he was smelly, so he ate her. (Matateyou)

**Agbanli** In Benin, the worldwide tale of the animal bride is told of the antelope-girl Agbanli. When a hunter saw her take off her hide, revealing herself as a young woman, he stole the skin so that he could claim her as his wife. Agbanli agreed, demanding only that he keep the secret of her animal identity. The hunter agreed, and Agbanli went home with him.

The hunter already had a wife, who did not take kindly to the stranger. Every day they argued, and every day the woman said something that showed the hunter had

not kept his promise. Finally, she revealed to Agbanli where her antelope skin was hidden. The girl reclaimed it and returned to the forest.

Later, the same hunter tried to shoot Agbanli in her antelope form. She gestured to him until he recognized her. Having overheard some birds talking about how their excrement, mixed with water, could turn an animal permanently into a woman, the hunter used that magic on Agbanli. Now a woman forever, Agbanli returned to the hunter's home, but not until she had extracted a promise that she would no longer be tormented by the senior wife. (Feldmann)

**Aje** The Yoruba goddess of wealth appears in the form of money. Or she can appear as a five-toed chicken, as she did at time's beginning, when she scratched the earth's hard surface until it became rich soil. In her honor, women leaders are called Aje, a word sometimes translated as "witch," that indicates a special womanly power, especially in market economics or trade. (Beier 1980; Olupona; Sekoni)

**Ala** The most popular divinity of Nigeria's Igbo people is the earth mother Ala, creator of the living and queen of the dead, provider of communal loyalty, and lawgiver of society. She is guardian of morality, on whom oaths are sworn and in whose name courts of law are held. Among her powers is fecundity; she is a benevolent deity, celebrated in the New Yam festival.

Ala's shrine is at the center of a village, where people offer sacrifices at planting, first fruits, and harvest. In the Owerri region, buildings called Mbari honor the goddess. They are never occupied, the ritual of building being more important than the structure. The square Mbari are filled with painted figures of Ala, who balances a child on her knees while she brandishes a sword. Due to poverty and war, Mbari are built less frequently and are smaller than in the past.

As part of Ala's role as maintainer of order, she is the goddess who punishes misdeeds and transgressions against custom. Army ants, who serve the goddess, attack those who break such rules. But first they appear in nightmares so that the wrongdoer might rectify his behavior. (Cole; Ford; Iloanusi; Jell-Bahlsen; Jones; Mbon; McCall; Parringer 1967, 1970)

**Alyett** The ancestral mother of the Nuer people was born from a tree near the Guoal River, called the "river of smallpox" due to the prevalence of the disease in the area. At the beginning of every rainy season, cattle and other animals were sacrificed to Alyett at her sacred tree. (Burton 1981)

**Amokye** Among the Ashanti, Amokye guards the entrance to the otherworld. As she welcomes women who have just died, she demands payment out of the beads that bedeck their burial garments. She is variously imagined as a genial old woman, sympathetic to the newly dead, and as an angry crone who sets obstacles in the way of the latest arrival. (Ford)

**Andriana** The mythology of Madagascar has much in common with that of Indonesia, despite the island's location beside the African continent and the presence of many

Africans there. The islands were settled relatively late, between 200 and 500 CE, by seafarers from Indonesia. At around the same period that Indonesians were settling the island, Africans speaking a Bantu language arrived. Later, Arabs moved from the north. The mythology of Madagascar is thus a rich one deriving from multiple sources.

Among the important mythic figures are the Vazimba or Andrianas, dangerous water spirits who lurked around marshes and streams. One of the most prominent was Andriambavirano, “Princess of the Water,” who originally lived in the sky. Curious about humanity, she turned herself into a leaf and dropped into a lake. A prince locked the strange leaf in prison until Andriambavirano reappeared as a goddess. The children of the prince and the goddess became culture heroes and heroines.

Ranoro is the most renowned spirit-woman today because of her connection with the important Antehiroka clan. When their ancestral father happened upon Ranoro, he was struck by her beauty and immediately proposed marriage to her. She demanded that her new husband never use salt or even speak the word. When he forgot, Ranoro leaped into the water, never to be seen again. A woman bearing her name, a slave with immense magical skill, was known in Madagascar in the early 20th century.

Another Andriana was beautiful long-haired Rasoalavavolo who lived underwater and answered prayers for children, if offered smooth stones and silver jewelry. Some Andrianas bore the name Ra-mitovi-aman-dreniny, “the likeness or equal of her mother.” They also went by the name of “green princesses” for their long green hair, light green skin, and mirrorlike eyes. (Graeber; Ottino; Radimilahy; Silbree)

**Ara** The Ekoi sky-maiden Ara was given to the earthly god Obassi Nsi, while that god’s son went to heaven to live with Ara’s family. Ara arrived on earth with many slaves, for she was not used to working hard. But Obassi Nsi demanded that she carry heavy jars of water long into the night and otherwise perform menial labor. He starved her, he humiliated her in front of his people, and he made her sleep with goats. Soon Ara rebelled. Sent to gather water, she sat down by the side of the stream and refused to return. When she saw a rope hanging from a tree, she climbed it back to heaven. She was found bleeding from one ear where it had been injured as she escaped. Furious, her father Obassi Osaw sent her home to her mother, Akun, who tended her wounds and dressed her in finery. Then Obassi Osaw sent for the son of Obassi Nsi and cut off his ears in punishment for what Ara had suffered. Weeping, his tears mixing with those of the wronged maiden Ara, the boy ran back down to earth. Their tears were the first rain to fall. (Radin)

**Asase Yaa** This Ashanti goddess of agriculture and human fecundity appears as Asase Efua among the Fante and Akan. The two names indicate Thursday (Yaa) and Friday (Efua), the “birthdays” of the two goddesses, on which farmers allow the earth to rest. When Christianity came to western Africa, the issue of which day was sacred posed a problem to those seeking converts. Another difficulty was that this supreme divinity lives and is worshiped in plowed fields, not in heaven or in churches like the Christian divinity. Asase reclaims people at death, and everyone who works a field becomes a co-power of fertility after death. (Ephirim-Donkor; Feldmann; Manyoni; Mbon; Par-ringer 1967, 1970; Pobee; Radin)

**Asona** Eldest daughter of Abrewa, primal woman of the Akan people, Asona was so beautiful that the back of her head was more beautiful than the face of any other woman. When the first gold was found, protected by a venomous snake, Asona said that she would rather die and leave her children with a rich inheritance than live and have them poor. She took the gold from the snake but was fatally bitten. She left her descendents wealthy, and her ambition remains within her family. (Ephirim-Donkor)

**Atage** The goddess of a hill in southwestern Nigeria where an important festival is held, Atage is said to have breasts like large water-storage pots. Such huge breasts suggest that the goddess was connected with fertility, as does the tradition of women praying at her shrine for healthy children. At the end of the dry season, in March, the goddess's priest sets the time of Atage's festival by consulting the Ifá, after which he spends the night naked on the goddess's mountain. Any child born on the day of the festival is named for the goddess and considered her favorite.

Also honored on that day is the goddess Alafo-fūnfūn, "owner of white clothes," who has a temple devoted to fertility near a stream where women pray for children, leaving offerings of kola nuts. In her honor, women dress in white and bathe in the stream. Throughout the festival, people act with abandon, holding images and shouting phrases that evoke Alafo-fūnfūn's sexuality. (Parringer 1951)

**Atete** Ethiopian Atete guarded married women, who left their birth families to move to their husband's village. Rituals associated with Atete require that a pregnant woman return to her home village for her first child's birth. Women from the home village sing and dance for the birthing woman, addressing Atete whose creativity the birth-giving mother recreates. At her feast day in September, a goat is offered to her as a symbol of her reproductive prowess. (Bartels; Jaenen)

**Ayirol** During a terrible drought, the Atuot people of the southern Sudan were forced to desperate measures. Their only well was filled with blood but, when the young woman Ayirol was sacrificed to it, clear water began to gush out, forming a lake that bears her name. When the sun rose, Ayirol's spirit could be seen, hovering on the shore. But when people reached where she had stood, they could not find her. Instead, they found a boat and a spear, as well as edible fish that had never been caught there before. The nearby Shilluk have the same myth, except that they say Ayirol did not die but haunts the surface of the lake. (Burton 1982)

**Bayanni** This Yoruba *orisha*, sister of the thunder god Shango, is called his "crown." She is embodied in the cowrie-shell crowns worn in ceremonies. Little myth is known of her, although one narrative says that she committed suicide after Shango was driven away because of his troublemaking ways. She has been identified with the better-known **Qba**. (Gleason 1987)

**Butan** Among the Batammaliba, the earth goddess Butan was created by the dual-sexed divinity Kuiye. Then Butan created small people to live under the earth. The first women, Kuiyecoke and Puka Puka, never went hungry because Kuiye fulfilled all their



needs. But they grew bored. Their complaints reached Kuiye, who made rivers and created plants, after which people had to draw water and grow food. They work hard, but they are no longer bored. (Ray 2000)

**Chichinguane** A folkloric heroine of Mozambique, Chichinguane was the beloved oldest daughter of the chief's favorite wife. The other wives were envious of the love she received from her father, so they encouraged their own children to persecute her. When the village girls were sent to gather clay for pottery, her sisters made Chichinguane stand in the pit, from which she handed out baskets filled with clay. When they had filled their baskets, the girls ran away, leaving Chichinguane unable to climb out of the pit.

One side of the pit was low enough to allow escape, but it led into the waters of a lake. As night began to near, the desperate girl took that route—only to find herself facing the jaws of a great fish. The fish did not swallow her, but carried her to a beautiful land beneath the lake, where everyone was kind to her.

There Chichinguane lived for many months. But one day, as she was swimming near shore, she saw the same bullying village girls tormenting her little sister. The girl was trying to draw water, but was too small to carry the water jug properly. She sat by the lakeside, weeping helplessly. When her missing older sister suddenly appeared from the lake, the younger daughter looked up in surprise and delight. Chichinguane walked the little girl back to the village, carrying her water jug, then made her promise to say nothing about the visit.

Thereafter, Chichinguane appeared every day to help her sister. Finally, their mother became suspicious and extracted the truth from the little girl. The next time Chichinguane assumed human form, her mother greeted her and begged her to return to human life. She declined, explaining that she was a fish now and well treated by her people. Yet when she returned under the waves, Chichinguane could not shake her homesickness. The fish who had brought her to the lake world gave her a magic wand and delivered her back to her village. There, he told her, she should wave the wand over her scaly body. When she did, the scales fell off, transforming themselves into silver coins. Chichinguane lived in wealth and comfort ever after. (Knappert)

**Darāwīsh** Spirits of fertility to Muslims of the northern Sudan, the Darāwīsh are offered white clothing and white rams as sacrifices. They include Sitti Khuḍara (“green lady”), who always wears green clothing, as well as Saida Zaineḥ and Bedāwya. Similar figures, the Ḥabīsh, take possession of humans, making them dance wildly. They include Dodo, “lady of coffee”; Hamāma-t-al-Bhar, “river pigeon,” a beautiful prostitute; noble and flirtatious Maray; Sitt am-Mandil, “lady of the handkerchief”; Zāar LulĀiya, the guide for newly wedded women; and Janāt Jozay, a double-spirit. (Boddy)

**Eka-Abasi** The Nigerian Annang and Ibibio honor this goddess, whose name means “God-Mother.” The disembodied supreme divinity gives the souls to Eka-Abasi, who places them in wombs. Each woman of childbearing age has her own Eka-Abasi to protect her unborn children. (Mbon)



**Fatna** A folkloric heroine of the Sudanese Muslims, Fatna the Beautiful was a young woman whose parents promised her in marriage, against her will, to her brother. Fatna led a party of seven other young women (possibly her sisters) to escape this despised betrothal. On their journey, they encountered an old man whose skin could be removed if acacia thorns were put on his head. Fatna did so, then used his withered hide as a disguise so that no men would approach her.

After many adventures, Fatna became the personal aide to a prince, who did not discern the beautiful woman under the old man's skin. But when she bathed, she was forced to remove the skin disguise, and a mute servant witnessed it. Fatna was lucky, for the servant was unable to tell anyone. When the prince happened to see Fatna himself, however, he fell in love with her. Challenging her to a game of chance with their hides as the prize, the prince lost twice. Each time, Fatna refused the prize. On the third try, the prince won, and Fatna gave up her disguise to become his wife. (Boddy)

**Gbadu** This 16-eyed spirit, born male and female, lived atop the palm tree that divided earth and sky. When she closed her eyes, she could not open them without help, so her brother Legba climbed the tree each day and helped her rise. Sometimes he opened the eyes on the back of her head, so she could watch in one direction; sometimes, he opened the eyes in front. Gbadu had two daughters, the oldest being Minona, the women's goddess. When Legba slept with Minona, Gbadu grew angry, because he was her lover as well. She demanded Legba go with her to see **Mawu**, who cursed Legba with a perpetually erect penis. (Herskovits and Herskovits)

**Idemili** A primary goddess of the Nnobi Igbo, Idemili lived in lake waters where she appeared in the shape of a mermaid (see **Mammywata**). Her husband was the god Urashi, with whom she formed an image of the perfect couple. Together, they were invoked for healthy pregnancy and other blessings. She was a healing goddess, whose priests and priestesses often served as doctors and herbalists. (Amadiume 1987)

**Idris** The least-favored wife of a king, Idris worked hard but was endlessly tormented by her co-wives and never protected by her distant husband, who barely recognized her. But no matter how many wives he had, the man had no children, because he was sterile. So he found a magician who mixed a potion that would cause all his wives to bear. All the wives were greedy to be the first to bear a child and so gain power and prestige, so they fought each other for the medicine as it was passed around. Idris timidly took the small bit that was left over, which was enough to soon make her round with child.

All the other wives came to labor before she did, and all bore monsters as punishment for their greed. When the time came for Idris to go into labor, she hid in the forest to give birth to a perfect little girl. She knew the baby would be at risk from the jealous co-wives, so she gave it away to a forester. Idris's daughter, Adesuwa, grew up far from her mother's arms.

When she had grown into a young woman, Adesuwa was so beautiful that she attracted the lustful gaze of her own father. But when he tried to make her his wife, she told him the truth: that she could not marry him because he was her father. He

was shocked, for he did not know of her existence. A test was set up to see if Adesuwa could recognize her mother, who would then be lauded above all other wives. The wives were each to prepare a dish and, from them, Adesuwa would select one, thus revealing her mother's identity. The wives set to work cooking magnificent dishes, while poor Idris could only cook a poor dish and serve it in a broken pot. Without hesitation, Adesuwa went to that dish and ate it up, thus recognizing her mother, who was brought into prominence as the mother of the king's only child. (Osoba)

**Igbaghon** The Benin river goddess was once a woman who frightened young men with her sharp intelligence. After her parents gave her to a nearby ruler as a junior wife, she suffered from her husband's cruelty. He set the household against her, but Igbaghon held her head high. One night, sneaking back from a forbidden solitary walk, Igbaghon overheard her husband plotting to have her killed under the guise of sacrifice. She prayed to her ancestors, who turned her into an eagle. She flew away and then, as her talons touched earth, she was transformed into a river. One day a man washed himself without praying first. He was her husband's oldest son, who had tormented her when she was human. She was tempted to kill the man but instead struck him dumb. (Osoba)

**Ilâmbe** A heroine of the Mpongwe people of West Africa, Ilâmbe was the daughter of the least-favored wife of a wealthy man. Ra-Mborakinda neglected Ilâmbe's mother, Ngwe-ÿëg, while favoring his greedy senior wife, Ngwekonde. Because of her apparent integrity, Ilâmbe gained her father's confidence and, when Ra-Mborakinda left for a long trip, he put Ilâmbe in charge of sharing his goods with his family. At this, Ngwekonde saw her chance to punish the girl for gaining her father's favor.

Ilâmbe's father had warned her not to go far from her home, but one day she felt overcome with a desire to walk. As she left the village, no one noticed, because Ngwekonde had enchanted them into unawareness. When the girl was far enough into the forest, Ngwekonde attacked, beating her horribly and leaving her tied to a tree. Miraculously, Ilâmbe survived, but when she came to and managed to wriggle out of her bonds, she had no idea where she was.

She soon found herself at a cozy home in the middle of the forest. Not knowing any other way to live, she set to work making a supper and tidying the place. Then she hid. When the owners arrived, they were amazed to find a warm meal awaiting them. The home was occupied by a group of woodsmen who called out, hoping to lure their benefactor from hiding. But Ilâmbe remained hidden. The next morning, she started work again, only to be surprised by one of the men, left to watch for her. He assured her that they would treat her as a sister, but warned her that she had to watch out for a dangerous bird that flew in every noon looking for someone to kill. For a while, Ilâmbe lived happily and safely with the woodsmen, but then one day the bird arrived at an unexpected hour and killed Ilâmbe. The men, sorrowful at losing their companion, put her in a tree where they could look at her. Her body did not decay, and they continued to give her their love. (Nassau)

**Inkosazane** The Zulu primal being was “the princess,” a goddess of abundance. She invented rites that should be performed by fertile women to ensure the fertility of crops, cattle, and other women. (Ngubane)

**Isong** This “tortoise-shell goddess” of the earth’s fertility was one of the primary divinities of the Ibibio and Ekoi people. Her alternate name, Abassi Isu Ma, has been variously translated as “Goddess of the Face of Love” and “Goddess of the Face of Mother.” (Jones)

**Iya Nla** Among the Yoruba, Iya Nla stands at the center of religious rituals related to fecundity and death, conducted by women initiates whose prayers are especially potent in the danced ritual of Gelede. Like her followers, Iya Nla has magical powers. Despite those powers, Iya Nla could not have a child with her mate, Oluweri, although she had borne many children previously, including the magical *orishas*. An oracle told her to sacrifice corn and clay dishes, then to deck herself with a carved wooden hat and metal ankles. The ritual worked: the goddess was soon pregnant with the joker Efe. Then the goddess had another child, the chubby dancer Gelede. But the children, once grown, could not reproduce until they enacted the ritual dances their mother had performed before their conception. (Lawal)

**Lueji** Among the Lunda and Bemba, Bantu-speaking peoples of central Africa, this moon goddess is embodied in the black stork whose white underbelly looks like the moon when it flies during the night. She represents the dry season and sterility, for in her stork embodiment she controls the seasons, drying up ponds by flapping her wings. She also represents a ritual object, the torch of life that is lit at dawn after a night when young people have been initiated. She is connected with the rainbow. (Bonnefoy)

**Mammywata** A relatively new goddess, Mammywata is a form of the water goddess (see **Yemaja**) honored across coastal and western Africa. Her worship especially thrives in areas of cultural exchange, as in ports and cities. Typically depicted as of foreign origin, her name is a version of the English for “mother of waters.” She has been described as a hybridized goddess, connecting indigenous with imported or foreign influences.

Evidence of Mammywata devotion appears as early as the 15th century, when she was credited with freeing captives from slave ships. This tendency to resist oppression of personal freedom is a common theme in Mammywata legends. Ethnographers observe that contemporary devotees of Mammywata are often nonconforming women, some of them wealthy women traders. In public ritual, Mammywata appears as a woman who loves technology and Westernized foods. In private observances, she is honored at shrines erected in bedrooms. Many Christians regard her as demonic, although a few make room for her as a “saint.” In Islam, she has been defined as one of the nonhuman race called *jinn*. (Jell-Bahlsen; Kaplan; Houlberg; Ray 2000; Olupona)

**Marwe** The Wachanga and Chaga of Kenya tell how Marwe and her little sister were set to guard the family bean garden. Thirsty Marwe walked to a nearby pond for a drink, leaving her sister to watch the beans. While Marwe was gone, a baboon troop descended and devoured the entire crop in front of the frightened little girl.

Marwe, ashamed of losing her family's food supply, threw herself into the pond. Sinking to the bottom, she found a village where she was welcomed and given hospitality. Wise in the ways of spirit people, Marwe refused to eat their food, claiming that people above the waters lived on bitter foods, unlike the tasty meals served beneath.

The old woman with whom Marwe was staying gave her daily instructions, which she disobeyed every day. This drew a little girl who told Marwe to ask to go home, then to obey the old woman's orders. The old woman told Marwe to jump into a pile of manure. She did, and instantly she found herself at home, covered with silver chains and expensive beads.

Another village girl, envious of Marwe's new wealth, imitated her actions. When she arrived beneath the waters, she followed the old woman's orders to the letter—including leaving all the housework to Marwe's helper, the little underwater girl. This child told the visitor to ask to go home, but reversed the advice she'd given Marwe. The girl returned home full of poisonous fire that drove her to drown herself in waters that remain bitter to this day.

In Cameroon, the same story appears, centered on the heroine Mbango. She lived with her aunt and cousin, Milango, both of whom abused her mightily, although there was no cause to insult the hardworking girl. One day, while fetching water, Mbango dropped her calabash in the stream. When she returned, her aunt beat her until she ran out the door and back down to the stream.

There she saw the calabash floating and followed it until she was swirled up by a whirlpool where, instead of drowning, she found a small home in which an old woman lived. The woman invited her in and offered her pig excrement. Being polite, Mbango accepted the generosity and, as she sat to table, found the meal transformed into delicious dainties. She spent three days with the old woman and, when she was leaving, Mbango accepted the gift of three eggs with instructions that she should break them when she returned home. She did, and riches poured out.

The cousin was certain she deserved as much as Mbango, despite being lazy and ill tempered. So Milango threw a calabash in the stream, followed it through the whirlpool, and then sat around the old woman's house refusing to do anything but complain. Nonetheless, the woman gave her three eggs as she was leaving. But when the girl broke them, scorpions and wild cats came out and attacked her and her mother, killing them.

Mbango married a young man and lived richly thereafter. (Matateyou; Parringer 1967)

**Massasi** The Wahungwe of Zimbabwe say that this primal woman was the mate of the first man, who did not know how to have intercourse. Putting oil on his finger, he inserted it into Massasi, whereupon she conceived and bore plants, then died. The man, Mwuetsi, grieved so long that the creator god made another woman, Morongo, the evening star. This woman showed the man how to make love so that she was able

to bear animals rather than plants. In this way, she populated the world. Morongo fell in love with one of her sons, but Mwuetsi refused to leave her alone, finally raping her. Chaos reigned until his children strangled Mwuetsi. (Ford)

**Mawu** With the huge snake Aido-Hwedo, the Fon goddess Mawu created the earth. Because of the snake's shape, the earth has sinuous hills and valleys; mountains, with their veins of metal, came from the serpent's excrement. When she finished her creation, the dual-sexed goddess Mawu decided it was too heavy, so she instructed Aido-Hwedo to coil underneath it and float with it on the cosmic sea. To this day, its movement creates earthquakes. Then Mawu created human beings, using clay mixed with water. When she ran short of materials, Mawu reanimated the dead, which explains why people sometimes look like their forebears. Her first children were twins, Nyohwé Ananu and her brother, Da Zodzi; her next child was dual-sexed like herself, called So; and a later child was the important god Lisa. The twins were sent to the earth to become spirits of water, while So remained in the sky.

When humanity grew arrogant, Mawu retreated to the sky, becoming a distant and unreachable force. Some myths say her trickster son Legba caused her departure. Someone was stealing from her garden, and Mawu demanded to know the culprit. Legba stole Mawu's sandals and walked through the garden at night. The next day, Legba accused his mother of stealing her own yams. Furious and humiliated, Mawu departed.

Later, Mawu sent her son Lisa to teach useful arts to humanity. Because Lisa was sometimes identified with the sun, Mawu was sometimes interpreted as a moon spirit. Other scholars consider Mawu as the supreme deity. Often she is described as dual-sexed, with two joined bodies able to self-impregnate; occasionally, Mawu is described as entirely male. Where only female, Mawu is envisioned as wise, old, and large-breasted. (Booth; Herskovits and Herskovits; Parringer 1967)

**Mbokomu** The primal woman of the Ngombe lived in the sky. Because she bothered the sky folk, she was placed on earth with her two children. Mbokomu planted seeds and made the first gardens. As she began to age, she recognized that the world needed more people. She instructed her children to have sex with each other, and soon a child was expected. But one day, Mbokomu's daughter met a hairy being in the forest. This creature seemed friendly, so she shaved his body until he looked human. But he was a sorcerer, so when the first human was born, witchcraft came to earth as well. (Feldmann)

**Miseke** From Rwanda comes the tale of the magical child Miseke, who was born after her mother prayed for help when her soldier husband abandoned her. Thunder and Lightning answered her prayer, saying that she would be delivered safely, but that she must give the child to Thunder as a wife. The woman was happy to agree, and the child was born healthy and with the miraculous talent of dropping jewels from her lips when she laughed. But when the father returned, he swore he would never give his daughter to Thunder as a bride, so when she came of age, he locked her inside, hoping that she would never be seen.

Miseke grew tired of always being indoors, so she slipped away one day and ran down to the river, where she found other girls playing. Day turned to night, and before the girls could run home, Thunder appeared to demand his bride. One after another, he made them laugh, then rejected them because they did not produce jewels. When he found Miseke, she could not disguise her identity but went with him to his home in the sky. There she bore several children, but finally, because she was so homesick, Thunder sent her back to earth, laden with wealth and surrounded by her children. But she never made it home to earth. Malicious spirits attacked her. Miseke's youngest child ran for help, and she was rescued and taken back into the sky forever. (Ford)

**Moombi** Among the Kikuyu (Gikuyu) people of Kenya, this woman was the ancestral mother. Her husband was Kikuyu, the first agriculturalist, whose brothers Masai and Kamba were the first herdsman and the first hunter. Moombi ("molder" or "creator") had nine daughters but no sons, but after making sacrifice, Kikuyu found nine strong young men to be his daughters' husbands. They were welcomed, provided they were willing to live under Moombi's roof and consider all their children as her descendents. They agreed, and this matrilineal descent continued when the nine daughters moved into their own homes, bringing their children with them and founding the nine chief Kikuyu clans. Among that group, the women took several husbands, until the men revolted. Secretly, they agreed to impregnate all the women at once so that six months later, the women would have difficulty resisting their seizure of power. The men succeeded in changing the name of the primary clan from Moombi to Kikuyu, but the nine clans descended from Moombi's daughters retained their names because they threatened to kill all male children and refuse to have more. (Parringer 1967)

**Moremi** This heroic woman saved her people, at great risk to herself and her family. In early times, when the Yoruba city of Ife was thriving, another town called Ile-Igbo was doing poorly. Neither town knew of the other's existence until a lost hunter from Ile-Igbo stumbled from the forest into the rich fields of Ife. He returned to his village with reports of Ife's wealth, whereupon the leader of Ile-Igbo conspired a plan. His men of Ile-Igbo would dress as spirits of ancestors and raid Ife, stealing food and terrifying the people.

The first raid went off without problems. The people of Ife, frightened at the appearance of the ghosts, ran away and the Ile-Igbo men looted their homes. This happened at intervals until Moremi, an intelligent and courageous woman, realized that their invasions made no sense. Why would ghosts need food? She made a vow at a nearby stream that she would sacrifice her only son if she could save her people, then went to the leader and asked permission to stay behind when the next raid occurred. Reluctantly, he granted it.

The next time ghosts appeared, everyone but Moremi ran away. When the men of Ile-Igbo found her, they did not know what to do, so they brought her back with them as a captive. Their leader, finding her beautiful, made her one of his wives, and so Moremi learned how Ile-Igbo men had been stealing Ife's riches. Then, when the



household had forgotten about her, she dressed herself in rags and escaped as a beggar woman.

It took her many days to traverse the forest, but she was welcomed back to Ife with great celebration. There she revealed what she had learned, and the village prepared itself for the next assault. When the Ile-Igbo men, dressed in their ghostly costumes, again overran the village, the Ife people were ready for them. Turning on them with torches, they set them ablaze. Some died, but others escaped back to their village with the news that their raids on Ife were at an end.

Moremi did not forget her vow. She prepared her beloved son for sacrifice, and with the rest of her people, she led him to the stream where he would meet his death. When they reached the water, a chain came down from the heavens and lifted him up to live as a heavenly being thereafter. Some people refer to Moremi herself as an *orisha*; she has been compared to the virgin **Mary** (see Eastern Mediterranean). (Courlander)

**Muhongo** This queen of the Mbundu in northern Angola was married to king Kitamba, who mourned her incessantly after she went to Kalunga, the land of the dead. He sent a priest to find her. But when the priest reached Muhongo, she was sitting peacefully weaving a basket. The queen told her visitor that the dead join another kingdom and cannot return to earth's surface. The story was carried to the New World during the slave trade, appearing in Haiti, where it was a Voudoun priest who found the dead queen selling coffee beans in the afterlife. (Rosenberg)

**Mujaji** The Rain Queens of the Lovedu bore the name of their primary goddess, whose incarnations they were. These women, highly regarded for political prowess as well as military might, kept their people safe, first from the Zulu and later from the European Boers. A weather goddess, Mujaji controlled storms and floods; those who worshiped her were rewarded with gentle rain that made gardens flourish. (Parringer 1967)

**Mweel** The moon goddess Mweel of the southern African Kuba people was the lover of her brother, Woot, who left their illicit relationship to travel to the east, causing the first eclipse. It was only when Mweel begged Woot to bring back the light that the eclipse ended and normal daylight was restored. (Bonnefoy)

**Nagoro** This young woman was the savior of the Masai and Myot people. She lived in a primal time when volcanoes smoked around the land but, even then, people had fallen away from proper rituals for the divine forces. Men drank too much and ignored the children, who were kidnapped by slave traders and sold away from their homes. Disabled people were cast away, to be killed by wild beasts. The elders, who predicted punishment for such sins, were ignored.

As a result, an immense rainstorm began, one so fierce that it seemed it would never end. But finally the rain eased, and a drought began. A year or so passed. Everything was dying: plants, animals, people. The rivers were just dry sand. And so the elders determined that only one thing could be done: the sacrifice of a human being. But because the people knew they could never sacrifice one of their own children, they

determined to send one to a sacred place where, if the heavenly powers wanted a sacrifice, they would take her away.

There were rigorous demands for a sacrifice. She had to be pure, with living parents and siblings, and of a hardworking family. Cherop was such a girl, and the people settled upon her as the most worthy offering. But Cherop did not fully understand what was demanded of her. Other girls had walked in the sacrificial procession but had not been killed, so she understood the honor of her selection but not the deadly outcome.

With her friend Langok, she ran to tell her boyfriend. When the girls could not find Sigilai, they went off searching, risking their lives as hyenas, lions, and other animals threatened them. When they found Sigilai and told him the news, he determined to protect Cherop by eloping with her. Because she had not yet been initiated into womanhood, they lived as brother and sister until the villagers, realizing where they were hiding, came to get them.

Cherop was attired for the sacrifice in white ostrich plumes and beautiful clothing and renamed Nagoro, “the sacrificed girl.” She held her head high so that her family would suffer no embarrassment as she was led forth. Even when she was left on the dry shores of a former lake to be taken by a man-eating bird, she showed no fear. But before the bird could reach her, Sigilai leaped out. He fought off the bird, using his body to protect his beloved. As he did, rain began to fall. Thus, balance was restored to the world and Cherop lived to bear him strong children. (Koech)

**Nalubaale** The goddess of Lake Victoria in east central Africa is the motherly Nalubaale, whose name means “female deity” in the Luganda language. In that region, bodies of water are often gendered as feminine (see **Abuk**). (Burton Sept 1982)

**Nambi** The first woman of the Baganda lived in the sky but desired an earthly man, Kintu, who had only one cow. She descended to make love with him. When Nambi returned to the sky, her family was appalled that she would love a poor earthling. Nambi’s father Ggulu stole Kintu’s cow, taking it to the sky so that Kintu would starve. But Nambi told Kintu where to find his cow. Kintu traveled to heaven, where Ggulu presented him with herds of identical cattle, demanding that he find his own. With Nambi’s help he identified the beast, but the sky father subjected Kintu to other tests: cut firewood from rock, eat a whole houseful of food, collect enough dew to fill a pot. Kintu passed each test with ease. So Ggulu begrudgingly allowed the marriage.

The sky father also warned Nambi that her brother Walumbe (death) might follow them to earth. The couple left in haste, taking the first animals with them. Halfway down, Nambi realized they had no seeds for edible plants; she stole back to get some. Walumbe spied her and followed her to earth. Now, although humans have food to eat, they also have the unwelcome presence of death. (Feldmann; Ford; Parringer 1967; Radin; Ray 1991, 2000)

**Nanamburucú** To the Fon people, the creatrix Nanamburucú was mother of **Mawu** and Lisa, her son (sometimes called her brother or lover, sometimes a combination of any of these relationships). Her worship was so widely known that it is difficult to pinpoint its source; in some places she was the preeminent deity, while in others she



is less important. In Nigeria, she appears as a world-creator; throughout Yoruba territory, she is the supreme deity. She is also known in Brazil, where she is called Nanan. (Bastide; Barnet; Ford)

**Ngomba** The Bakongo girl Ngomba was fishing one day with three other little girls, who pushed her away because she was covered with sores. So she went fishing by herself, not realizing that a man with murderous intent would follow her. He captured her and took her to his home, where he kept many other prisoners. She promised to be an excellent servant if he would cure her of her sores. When he did so, she was revealed as a lovely young woman, so he made her his concubine. But she was determined to escape from him so, with the other prisoners, she fashioned a flying boat. Distracting the murderer every time he thought about killing her, Ngomba loaded all his riches and the other prisoners on the boat and flew away. Infuriated, he followed her to her village, where he claimed her as his bride. She pretended to be glad to see him, and her relatives went along with the deceit, until they could trick him into falling into a hole where they killed him. (Radin)

**Nsia** The mother of the Ashanti trickster, Ananse the spider, Nsia was offered in partial trade for the stories of the sky god Nyankonpon. Ananse told Nsia about the bargain, but before it could be concluded, he had to capture five other beings, including hornets and pythons. With the help of his wife Aso, whom he had won by trickery, Ananse did so and was rewarded with the stories that were henceforth called spider-stories. (Radin)

**Nunde** The wife of the Benin trickster god Legba took a lover. When Legba discovered this, he demanded to know the reason. Nunde told him that it was because his penis was too small to satisfy her. So he ate a great deal, which made his penis grow, and had intercourse with her while everyone in the village played drums and sang about how large he was. Afterwards, when he traveled, he took her along, so that she could not have other lovers.

Although Konikoni is said to be another name for Nunde, in some narratives she appears as another character, Legba's first wife, with whom Nunde as second wife did not get along. She complained to Rabbit, who went to seek an oracle. When he returned, he told Nunde that she had to make a sacrifice of a goat, a chicken, corn flower, and palm oil, all seasoned with salt and pepper. She also needed a gourd filled with water. When the sacrifice was complete, within three days the women were best of friends. (Herskovits and Herskovits)

**Nyakae** The crocodile goddess Nyakae was the spouse of the high god Okwa and, because people depended upon fish for their livelihood, the source of abundance. A similar goddess, the python Nalwanga, was the divine spouse of the king of Buganda. (Burton 1982)

**Nyalé** In the upper Niger valley, this goddess was the sister of the better-known **Qya**. By touching the four directions, Nyalé brought the four elements into being. Within

her creation was the spirit of moisture, which she fanned until it congealed into earth. Later, Nyalé became the earth goddess Mousso Koroni of the Bambera. She was the color of rich earth, sometimes appearing as a panther or leopard. An ancestral mother, she gave birth to all life after the god Pemba took the form of a tree and penetrated her with his roots. She was goddess of life's passages, who caused girls to menstruate and oversaw initiations. Millet was her favorite cultivated crop; she also ruled wild places. (Gleason 1987)

**Nyame** Among the Ashanti, this supreme goddess was connected with the moon. Early scholars described the divinity as male, but now she is considered female; Nyame may have been a dual-sexed divinity. (Parringer 1970)

**Nyamugondho** This magical woman lived in a lake, where a fisherman hooked her and made her his wife. Immediately, he began to become rich, as cattle appeared from nowhere. But the man undid his own good luck, because he got drunk and abusive, so Nyamugondho left him, walking into the lake with all her cattle. The man rushed to try to stop her, but was turned into a tree beside the lake. Nyamugondho was reborn as Simbi, but when she was again abused, she took revenge by causing an explosion that killed everyone who had injured her. Ultimately she returned to humanity and became a rainmaker. (Burton 1982)

**Nzambi** Selfish women ignored Nzambi, an old woman with a thirsty child, but a man brought her a water-filled gourd. In gratitude, she asked him to join her at the same spot the next day. When he did, he found a lake where there had been fields the previous day. The "old woman," the Bakongo creatrix Nzambi, told him that the selfish women had been turned into fish. No women could eat the fish, which provided food for many men and children. After giving the man gifts, Nzambi went away.

She moved through the land until she was weary. Coming to a village, she called at each home asking for a place to rest. Because she was a dusty stranger, she was turned away until some poor people took her in. She told them to leave immediately and cursed the others to be drowned under the waters of a huge lake.

Nzambi had one daughter, a beautiful girl whom everyone wanted to marry. Nzambi announced that whoever brought fire from heaven would win the girl. The animals cooperated, but Spider delivered the speck of fire to Nzambi. She was ready to award the girl's hand to Spider, but the other animals complained that they had all helped. Nzambi retracted her offer and kept her daughter with her. (Feldmann)

**Qba** Goddess of the African river that bears her name, Qba is an important Yoruba *ori-sha*. Her myth centers on Qba's rivalry with coquettish **Oshun**, Qba's co-wife and her rival. Oshun desired Qba's mate Shango and would stoop to anything to get her way. One day, Oshun told Qba that Shango preferred her recipe for his favorite dish, because she cut off her ears and put them in the dishes. It was only ear-shaped mushrooms floating in the soup, but credulous Qba was fooled.

The next time Qba cooked for Shango, she mixed a whole ear with the food. It gave Shango immense strength, but when Qba took off her headscarf and Shango saw her

mutilated head, he ran away to live with Oshun. When Oshun arrived to gloat, Ọba attacked her, and the two goddesses turned into rivers. (Bascomb; Gleason 1987)

**Oddudua** The primary Yoruba mother goddess is the *orisha* of earth as well as its creator. Her mate is the god Orishanla, younger than she and possibly her son; she is typically depicted nursing a child from elongated breasts. The spot where she descended from the sky is still pointed out in Yoruba territory. Her religion, called Ogoni, devotes itself to maintaining social order. In some myths, Oddudua appears as male or as two-gendered, like **Mawu**, to whom she may be related. (Bastide; Booth; Manyoni)

**Ogboinba** Before this heroine of the Ijaw of Nigeria was born, she and another woman, about to be born as Ogboinba's best friend, asked the primal goddess Woyengi for gifts. Ogboinba wanted psychic powers; her friend, many children. Both had their prayers answered, although by the time they received their results, they had long forgotten what they wished for.

Despite her psychic powers, Ogboinba had no children. She envied her friend the large family that gathered happily around her. So she set off to ask the goddess to make her over as a fertile woman. As she traveled, she grew in power, but she could not command Woyengi. The goddess stripped her of much of her power and set her back to earth, and she hid in the eyes of a pregnant woman, where she can sometimes still be seen. (Beier1966; Okpewho)

**Ogbuide** The Igbo honor a goddess of fresh waters called Nne Msiri, who in southwestern Nigeria bears the name Ogbuide. Oguta Lake, at the confluence of the river Niger with the Urashi river, is the home of this goddess whose multiple names (see also **Idemili**) attest to her continuing prominence and importance. She is a generous divinity who provides sustenance and good luck to her devotees. Should a hungry person come to the lakeshore, Ogbuide provides food. Mother-ancestor of the region's people, she controls the fecundity of the land and water, which nourish the human community. She is beautiful and fecund; she has an especially big head, crowned with dreadlocks that show her unbounded nature. Because she can take life as well as give it, the dangerous python appears as her symbol. (Jell-Bahlsen)

**Olókun** The ocean goddess in the Yoruba Ifá religion, Olókun's name is also used as an epithet of **Yemaja**. She appeared at the beginning of time, ruling the waters and marshlands; the other *orishas* lived in the heavens, above a chaos of water and mist. The god Obatala descended to Olókun's realm and created land. She grew angry that this occurred without her permission, so she flooded everything, killing many people. People performed sacrifices to the heavenly *orishas*, and one descended to dry up the flooded areas.

But Olókun was not easily conquered. She challenged Olorum, the supreme god, that she could best him at weaving. Olorum was concerned, because everyone knew that the ocean's colors were beyond compare. So he sent as his messenger Agemo,

the chameleon, who changed color with every piece of fabric Olókun showed him, forcing the goddess to retire to her limited domain. (Courlander; McClelland)

**Omelumma** With her sister Omelukpagham, this Igbo folkloric heroine was captured and sold into servitude into different villages. But their fates were different. Omelumma's owner saw her worth and made her his wife, while Omelukpagham was sold to an oppressive master. When Omelumma gave birth to a son, her husband bought her a slave to care for it—her own sister. Because of the length of their separation, neither sister recognized the other. Indeed, Omelumma had forgotten the difficulties of her past and was abusive to her servant-sister. But one day when the baby was restless, Omelukpagham sang a song about her life to quiet him. A neighbor, hearing the song and realizing its import, told Omelumma. Thus the sisters were reunited, and Omelumma vowed to be kind to her servants ever after. (Abrahams)

**Oshun** The Yoruba goddess of the river bearing her name, Oshun's domain includes not only the human concerns of family, health, and fecundity, but also the land's fertility and the demands of the spirit world. She animates all other *orishas*; without her, they have no power. As controller of destiny, Oshun rules divination, especially that using cowrie shells. Her connection with the cowries came to her from the important god Obatala. Oshun wanted to know how to use the shells, which Obatala wished to keep secret. When the god of mischief stole Obatala's sacred clothing, Oshun promised she would get it back. She traded sex with the god Eshu for the clothes, then demanded Obatala teach her divination.

Oshun is honored with an annual ceremony called Ibo-Osun. A feast of yams begins the evening, then women dance for the goddess, hoping to be chosen as her favorite. Once selected, the woman serves her community by assisting with family problems and illnesses. Those who wish to have children especially consult Oshun, for she had many descendents, who live along her river's waters. Oshun is the primary divinity of the region of Oshogbo, where she is honored with brass objects as well as jewels and yellow copper. She is a healer, invoked as the one who cures when medicine fails.

The Ijesa country sustains many Oshun traditions. Because there were many women rulers in that area, Oshun takes the form of a goddess of sovereignty, protector of her people, armed with a brass sword. A secret women's society serves Oshun, who is known as Iyalodé, "she who leads the women of the town." (Abiodun; Bádejo 1996, 1998; Bastide; Beier 1970; Courlander; Gleason 1971; Murphy and Sandford; Ogunwale; Ray 2000)

**Oya** This Yoruba goddess rules storms on the Niger River. Her name means "she tore," for her winds tear up the river's calm surface. She is also called "mother of nine," for the nine estuaries of the Niger. Oya is a warrior goddess as well as patron of female leadership.

Her first husband was the blacksmith Ogun, but she took a second, the warrior-thunder god Shango. She made off with the gourd that held his power, and Shango chased Oya as she fled to the place where sky and water meet. He caught her, but she ran to her sister Oloso, goddess of lagoons. Through the world they ran, Oya always

hiding from Shango, until she reached a shrine built for her. Shango forgave Qya, but she still fears him.

Qya was not Shango's only lover. The voluptuous **Oshun** shared his bed, either as junior wife or as mistress. Qya was reduced to begging Oshun to share the secret of her appeal, whereupon Oshun played a nasty trick. She told the senior wife that she used erotic magic, feeding Shango parts of her body so that he would be forever bound to her. Qya tried this, cutting off her ears and hiding her ravaged head with scarves. But Shango was disgusted with the flavor of his food and even more disgusted to see what Qya had done to herself.

The rivals turned into rivers. Where their waters meet, there is always turbulence. When one is crossing the river Qya, one must never mention Oshun, or the river will swamp the boat; the same is true of Oshun, who drowns anyone who speaks of her rival. The story of the amputated ear is also told of **Qba**. Oshun, Qba, and Qya change places in various versions of the myth.

Buffalo horns are placed on her altar, for Qya is a water buffalo when not in human form. Once a hunter saw a buffalo shed its skin, and when the beautiful woman who emerged hid the skin and went to market, the hunter stole Qya's skin and forced her to become his mate. But his other wives teased her about being a buffalo, and in anger, she killed them. She stormed out to the fields to find the man who had betrayed her, but he bought his life with bean fritters, Qya's favorite food.

In addition to bean fritters, those who honor Qya offer palm wine, goat meat, and yams. Wednesday is her holy day, when her followers wear dark red beads to please her. When she enters a dancer, the dance becomes frenzied as Qya swings a sword. Sometimes she dances with arms outstretched to hold off ghosts, for she is the only goddess who can control them. (Beier 1980; Courlander; Ford; Gleason 1987)



**Qya.** Among the river goddesses of Africa, who represent the fertility of the watershed as well as human fertility, is Qya, shown here in a Yoruba sculpture from Benin, carved in the first part of the 20th century; the original can be seen at the Staatliches Museum für Völkerkunde in Munich.

**Sanene** The Yoruba huntress goddess lived in the bush, far from human settlement. She was brave and strong and self-creating. Good hunters are related to her, having been initiated by her daughter Komifolo, a bird deity. (Gleason 1987)

**Sela** In Kenya, the Luyia people say the first woman, Sela, lived in a house on wooden stilts because the earth, in primordial times, was infested with crawling

monsters. Her children, the human race, were bold enough to descend from her hut and live in houses built on the ground. (Parringer 1967)

**Wanjiru** The Akiyuku people tell of a girl who was sacrificed to bring needed rain, and a young man who sacrificed himself to bring her back. During a long drought, diviners, asked to determine what the spirits wanted, said that the girl Wanjiru had to be bought with payment of goats from her parents at a specific place. The next day, everyone who had a goat brought it to the place, where her family stood with Wanjiru. As people began to offer goats to the family, Wanjiru began to sink into the ground. But no rain came, so people came forward with more and more goats.

When she was up to her neck, rain began, coming down in dense sheets. But the family, which stood around her, did nothing to help her, instead taking more and more goats from the people. Because of their greed, Wanjiru sank out of sight.

One young man among the crowd loved Wanjiru, and he was desolated by her loss. He determined that he would retrieve her from the otherworld, so he went to the place where she descended and let himself sink into the ground. When he reached the underworld, he found a naked, sorrowing Wanjiru, whom he carried back to earth. For some time he hid her in his family home, feeding her so she grew splendidly fat and happy. Then he let her family see her and, when they called out in remorse, paid the full bride price for her and made her his wife. (Feldmann; Radin)

**Woyengi** The Ijaw creatrix came to earth where a huge tree grew. Thunder sounded, and a table and chair fell from the sky, together with a stone. Soil appeared on top of the table. Then Woyengi descended. She sat in the chair with her feet on the stone, forming humans out of clay and bringing them to life by embracing them. Once they were alive, Woyengi let them choose if they were to be male or female, rich or wise or fertile, long-lived or not. Each person made the choice and thus, the lives that people lead are chosen before they are born. (Beier 1966; Ford; Mbon; Okpewho)

**Yasigui** Among the Mande, this primal mother was the twin of Ogo, born from a seed that contained all the elements of the universe. Ogo detached himself and, stealing some of the placenta, set off to create the world. Because he had broken the primal unity, his creation was flawed. Ogo thought that Yasigui was with him, so he returned to the sky, where he found that his twin had been given to another god. He then became a strange creature called the “pale fox.”

Creation began anew. From the egg’s shell, a new earth was created, as well as four pairs of twins and all animals and plants. This new earth attached itself to the earlier one, and light burst into the universe. On the fourth day, Yasigui descended in the midst of the first solar eclipse. Yasigui married one of the twins, and after the marriage of a solo person to a twin, single births became the norm, and the previously natural twin birth the exception. In turn, Yasigui married each of the twin men, until the earth’s current order was firmly established. But the universe’s mythic order entailed twin births, which remained spiritually powerful. (Dieterlen)

**Yemaja** The Yoruba goddess of the Ogun river, daughter of the primary god Olodumare, Yemaja married her brother Agangyu. They had a handsome son named Orungan, so handsome that his father died out of envy. The young man raped his mother, who climbed a nearby mountain and died. As she did, 14 gods burst forth from her, including **Oshun** and **Oya**.

Depictions of Yemaja show her with large breasts, because she was mother of so many gods; yet at times, she is described as having only one breast, for which reason she feared marriage. The *orisha* Ogun overheard her worrying about the problem and proposed to her. She agreed, on the understanding that he would never touch her breast. But when Ogun tried to prepare a meal for her, he dropped a pot on the floor. When she came into the kitchen and berated him, he struck her and then, in a clumsy attempt to comfort her, stroked her breast. Immediately, she turned into water.

Yemaja gave birth to all the world's waters and endlessly creates new springs and water sources. At her main temple, she is offered rams, yams, and corn. In the Ifá religion, where Yemaja is goddess of witchcraft, priests carry bell-topped staffs to frighten away Yemaja's servants, who can appear as red-beaked birds. Similar ocean goddesses of western Africa are Dandalunda from Angola and Kaiala from the Congo. (Bastide; Beier 1980; Gleason; Gordon)



# EGYPT

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## EGYPTIAN PANTHEON

Ahemait. <i>See Ammut</i>	Hededet <i>Scorpion.</i>
Ahmose-Nefertari <i>Deified queen.</i>	Hekat. <i>See Hekt</i>
Amaunet. <i>See Ogdoad</i>	Hekau. <i>See Wadjet</i>
<b>Ament</b>	Heket. <i>See Hekt</i>
Ammit. <i>See Ammut</i>	<b>Hekt</b>
<b>Ammut</b>	Heqet. <i>See Hekt</i>
Anket. <i>See Anuket</i>	<b>Heret-Kau</b>
<b>Anuket</b>	<b>Hesat</b>
Anukis. <i>See Anuket</i>	Iat <i>Nursing.</i>
Asbet <i>Serpent.</i>	Imentet. <i>See Ament</i>
Au-set. <i>See Isis</i>	<b>Ipat</b>
Auzit. <i>See Isis</i>	<b>Isis</b>
<b>Bast</b>	Iusaas <i>Creativity.</i>
Bastet. <i>See Bast</i>	Kauket. <i>See Ogdoad</i>
Buto. <i>See Wadjet</i>	Khenset <i>Justice.</i>
Dehenet-Imentet. <i>See Meretseger.</i>	Khnemtet <i>Bread.</i>
Eḥut. <i>See Selkhet</i>	Ma'et. <i>See Ma'at</i>
Edjo. <i>See Wadjet</i>	<b>Ma'at</b>
<b>Ennead</b>	<b>Mafdet</b>
Eset. <i>See Isis</i>	Matit <i>Lioness.</i>
Hathor. <i>See Hathor</i>	Meṭuêret <i>Mehet-Weret.</i>
<b>Hathor</b>	<b>Mehet-Weret</b>
Hatmehyt <i>Fish</i>	Mehetweret <i>Mehet-Weret</i>
Hauket. <i>See Ogdoad</i>	Menkhet <i>Linen.</i>



Mer.sekert. *See Meretseger*

**Meret**

**Meretseger**

Meri. *See Isis.*

Merit. *See Meret*

Mert. *See Meretseger*

Mertseger. *See Meretseger*

Meskhenet. *See Meskhoni*

**Meskhoni**

Muit. *See Mut.*

Mût. *See Mut*

**Mut**

Mut-Bastet. *See Mut*

Muut. *See Mut*

Naunet. *See Ogdoad*

**Nehem-‘auit**

Nebt-ḥet. *See Nephthys*

Nebt-ḥot. *See Nephthys*

Neb-Ti. *See Wadjet*

Nebty. *See Wadjet*

**Neith**

**Nekhbet**

Nekhebet. *See Nekhbet*

Nekhebit. *See Nekhbet*

**Nephthys**

Net. *See Neith*

Nit. *See Neith*

Nrt. *See Neith*

**Nut**

**Ogdoad**

Opet. *See Ipat*

**Pakhet**

Pekhet. *See Pakhet*

Rā.t. *See Raet*

**Raet**

Raettawy. *See Raet*

**Renenutet**

Repit *Year; youth.*

Reret *Hippopotamus.*

Reret-weret *Hippopotamus.*

Saṭet. *See Satis*

Sakhmet. *See Sekhmet*

**Saosis**

Satet. *See Satis*

Sati. *See Satis*

**Satis**

Sekhautet. *See Seshat*

Sekhet. *See Sekhmet*

**Sekhmet**

Selket. *See Selkhet*

**Selkhet**

Selqet. *See Selkhet*

Serket. *See Selkhet*

Serqet. *See Selkhet*

**Seshat**

Sheshat. *See Seshat*

Sopdet. *See Sothis*

**Sothis**

Taûrt. *See Taweret*

Ta-Bitjet *Scorpion.*

Tauret. *See Taweret*

Ta-urt. *See Taweret*

Taurt. *See Taweret*

**Taweret**

**Tayet**

Tayet *Weaving.*

Tefênut. *See Tefnut*

**Tefnut**

Thermuthis. *See Renenutet*

Thoëriiss. *See Taweret*

T-uêret. *See Taweret*

Uadgit. *See Wadjet*

Uatchit. *See Wadjet*

Uazit. *See Wadjet*

Ubastet. *See Bast*

Ueret. *See Taweret*

Urt. *See Wadjet*

Uzoit. *See Wadjet*

**Wadjet**

Wedjoyet. *See Wadjet*

Wepset. *See Wadjet*

Weret-Hekaw. *See Wadjet*



**Hathor.** *One of the most commonly sculpted images of the Egyptian goddess Hathor is the “Hathor column” incorporated into buildings, with the goddess’s head forming the capital or top. Goddess of pleasure, Hathor was one of Egypt’s most popular divinities; images of her remain in situ throughout Egypt but can be seen in many museums as well.*

**Ament** The “westerner,” Ament lived in a tree on the desert’s edge, welcoming the newly deceased with bread and water. Those who took her offerings could never return to the land of the living. (Ellis; Müller; Wiedemann; Wilkinson)

**Ammut** An underworld goddess who was part hippopotamus, part lion, and part crocodile, Ammut ate the souls of the unworthy dead, who were judged by what they did during life and what they left undone. She was feared, but magic could avert her actions. She has been interpreted as a form of **Ma’at**. (Ellis; Faulkner 1990; Wilkinson)

**Anuket** At Aswan, this water goddess was honored as part of a triad with her sister, **Satis**, and her father Khnum. Predynastic but forgotten, she was rediscovered during the Third Dynasty. After a long drought, the king sent a courtier upriver until he found the point of the Nile’s emergence, where Anuket ruled with Satis and **Sothis**. When the king established a priesthood in Anuket’s honor, the drought ended.

Anuket’s name, meaning “embracer,” may refer to the Nile’s two tributaries, imagined as her arms. She was goddess of the river’s annual inundation, and as such was connected with fertility. The Nile floods have been virtually eliminated by the building of dams, including one at Aswan that drowned many goddess temples there.

Anuket’s feast was changeable, because the Nile’s rising was dependent upon weather and rainfall. Her festival involved public rituals, but less formally, people ate fried fish in her honor. Typically fish was a forbidden food, because a fish had eaten the missing phallus of Osiris (see **Isis**), but on Anuket’s feast, eating fish was permitted. (Ellis; Müller)

**Bast** Domesticated between the Old and Middle Kingdoms, cats kept down the rodent population, assuring a stable diet for humans by protecting the stores of grain. Thankful Egyptians cherished their cats, often decking them with golden earrings or other jewelry. When they died, cats were mummified and buried in the vast cat cemetery at Bubastis or at other temples of Bast.

At first she was a lion goddess who symbolized the fertilizing force of the sun’s rays. Later she became a cat carrying the sun, or a cat-headed woman with a lion

breastplate. Bast ruled pleasure and joy. In Bubastis, as well as throughout Egypt, celebrations in her honor were filled with drinking, dancing, singing, and jesting. Hundreds of thousands attended the annual festival in Bubastis, where Bast's temple was situated on an island in the Nile. Worshipers rode ferryboats to the festival, with song and feasting on the way. As the boats passed villages, women revealed themselves and shouted suggestively to those on shore, a custom derived from Bast's self-exposure to the aging sun god Ra, who smiled when he saw the goddess's private parts. (Ellis; Lesko; Scott; Wilkinson)

**Ennead** The nine gods of the ancient Egyptians were personified as a goddess, single or double, who then became mother of all the gods. This primary divinity appeared in many forms, including as both gods and goddesses, depending upon the era and the location within Egypt. (Troy)

**Hathor** Egypt's most popular goddess, Hathor was worshiped for more than 3,000 years. Given the length of her religious prominence, it is not surprising that a profusion of legends surrounded her, or that she was depicted in so many different guises: mother and daughter of the sun, lioness and cow, sycamore and date-palm. As goddess of the underworld, she was ruler of the sky. As patron of foreigners, she was mother of the Egyptians.

Her name means "house of Horus," usually understood to mean the consort of that celestial god. Her festivals were carnivals of intoxication, especially that held on New Year's Day, when Hathor's image was brought from her temple to catch the rays of the newborn sun, whereupon revels broke out—appropriate because Hathor was patron of bodily pleasures. These included music and song; art, cosmetics, and the weaving of garlands; dance, and lovemaking. Many love poems address or refer to her as "the golden one," the goddess who creates and strengthens bonds of affection. She was a beloved goddess to her people, who held fast to her rites long into historical times.

One of Hathor's most familiar forms was the winged cow of creation that gave birth to the universe; she was also depicted as a suckling mother, offering nurturance to her children. The image of goddess as mother connects Hathor with fertility of land and people; in some of her temples, phallic images and figurines of nude nubile women have been found. Because of her connection with cows, Hathor was honored in ritual with bowls of milk, offered as libations and then consumed by the faithful.

Hathor ruled both birth and death. She appeared as seven Hathors who foretold each newborn's inescapable destiny. She also received the dead at the other end of life. As ruler of the underworld, Hathor was called Queen of the West, the direction associated with death. She accompanied her worshipers on their final journey, so rituals to her were part of every funeral.

Hathor had several important symbols. One was the sistrum, a rattle formed in the shape of the ankh, indicating the union of masculine and feminine, that was shaken to welcome the goddess and to drive away evil spirits. Hathor's other major symbol was the mirror. Grave paintings show dancers bearing mirrors performing in Hathor's honor. Mirrors were given as offerings at shrines of the goddess.

Hathor's solar connections were emphasized by her title "eye of the sun." She was originally the sun's eye but left to live in the desert as a lioness. Gods were sent to bring her back, but she was slow in returning. When she did, she was greeted with music and dancing. Some texts suggest that Hathor herself was not involved; rather, her anger split off to become the goddess **Sekhmet**, who was pacified with red beer. Others suggest that Hathor did the killing, stopping only when she was drunk. (Bleeker 1973; Buhl; Ellis; Faulkner 1990; Lesko; Lichtheim 1976; Müller; Parkinson; Pinch 1982, 1993; Shafer; Springborg; Traunecker; Wiedemann)

**Hekt** Frog-headed Hekt represented the embryonic grain that seems to die, then revives, sending forth sprouts. An ancient divinity, Hekt was midwife at the birth of the sun and helped it into the sky each day. At creation she touched lifeless humans with the ankh, causing them to breathe and move. Like other birth goddesses, she was considered a prophet because she saw the life that stretched out before the newborn. In addition, the croaking of frogs predicted rain and the rising of the Nile. Hekt has been defined as a form of **Hathor**. (Müller; Wiedemann)

**Heret-Kau** The name of this obscure goddess seems to refer to her as ruler of the spirit world, suggesting a connection with the afterlife. She was invoked with **Neith** and **Isis**. (Wilkinson)

**Hesat** One of Egypt's numerous cow goddesses, Hesat bears a name meaning "wild cow," and appears to have been connected with those animals. She was the mother of a golden calf; she was later associated with **Isis**. (Wilkinson)

**Ipat** A minor hippopotamus goddess, Ipat was nurturing and protective like the better-known **Taweret**. Although shown as a hippo, she had the feet of a lion; sometimes she had human breasts, engorged with milk. She was honored most in the area of Thebes and may have been the city goddess there. (Ellis; Wilkinson)

**Isis** Greek rulers pronounced the name of Au-set ("throne") as Isis, and so she came to be known throughout the ancient world. The winged goddess was associated with the sky, while her brother/lover Osiris represented the waters of the Nile. The first daughter of **Nut**, Isis was born in the Nile swamps and immediately turned a kind eye on the people of earth, teaching women to grind grain, spin flax, and weave cloth.

The goddess lived with Osiris until their evil brother Seth killed him. Isis cut her hair and tore her robes, then set out in search of her brother's body. In Phoenicia, Queen Astarte hired the pitiable widow as nursemaid. Isis placed the infant prince in the palace fire, where his mother found him smoldering. When she pulled him out, the queen undid the magic of immortality Isis had been working, and the goddess was forced to reveal her identity. The queen pointed out a tamarisk tree that contained the body of Osiris, which Isis carried back to Egypt. But Set found the body and dismembered it.

Isis's search began anew. She found most of the pieces of her beloved, but because she could not find his penis, Isis substituted a piece of shaped gold. She invented the

rites of embalming and applied them to the body. Osiris rose, and Isis conceived a child through the golden phallus. A series of festivals celebrated this story as a symbol of the agricultural cycle, from the Nile's flooding that brought renewed fertility to the land, through harvest and fallow winter. Because of Isis's power in reviving Osiris, she became associated with funerary rites.

In another important myth, Isis gained magical power after she fashioned a poisonous snake to bite the high god Ra. Sickened by the bite, he called for Isis. But the goddess claimed to be powerless unless she knew the god's secret name. Ra hesitated, growing ever weaker. Finally, in desperation, he was forced to whisper the secret word to her. Isis cured him, but Ra had given her power over him. From this myth, Isis became connected with magic.

The religion of Isis outlasted the Egyptian empire, although in altered form. She became the Lady of Ten Thousand Names or Isis Panthea ("Isis the All-Goddess"), identified with many other goddesses. Yet she continued to be honored as a local goddess in Egypt, where many of her shrines were under the control of priestesses rather than priests. Thus Isis was simultaneously local and universal.

Having attained such prominence, Isis continued to have significant religious power after the rise of the Roman Empire; she was one of the most important imported goddesses in multiethnic Rome. A characteristic image of Isis showed her as a nursing mother. This image, popular in Rome in the early Christian era, was adopted by Christians to show the virgin mother **Mary** (*See Eastern Mediterranean*). Although Isis has not been part of any official religion for more than 1,500 years, she has become the center of several revivalist goddess organizations in the last century. (Brandon; Cott; De Horrack; Donalson; Ellis; Faulkner 1968; Frankfurter; Lesko; Lichtheim 1976, 1980; Magness; Meyer; Müller; Tacheva-Hitova; Troy; Wiedemann; Žabkar)

**Ma'at** Goddess of truth, Ma'at took the form of an ostrich feather balanced on the underworld's scales, opposite someone's heart. If the dishes balanced, the heart was light with justice, and the soul would live on. But if the dishes did not balance, the monstrous goddess **Ammut** destroyed the person forever. Sometimes divided into two goddesses indicating natural and moral law, Ma'at has been described as a personified abstraction. But some scholars point to her temples, the priesthood dedicated to her, and the herds of sacred cattle tended in her name to argue that she was an ancient goddess. (Ellis; Faulkner 1990; Müller; Wiedemann)

**Mafdet** The "Lady of the Castle of Life," an early goddess whose symbolic animal has been interpreted as both a cat and a mongoose, was invoked against snakebite. (Müller; Wilkinson)

**Mehet-Weret** One form of the goddess **Neith**, Mehet-Weret also appears as a separate goddess whose name means "great flood," connecting her with the fertilizing waters of the annual Nile flood. She was a cosmic goddess who took the shape of the cow who raised the sun into the sky each day. She was shown as a pregnant woman with huge breasts, or as a cow-headed woman holding the lotus of the world. (Lesko; Müller; Troy; Wilkinson)

**Meret** This water goddess was often described as a double goddess named Merti (“two Merets”) or as southern and northern Merets, both celestial musicians. She created the cosmic order through music. (Lesko; Müller)

**Meretseger** Benevolent and punishing by turns, Meretseger was shown as a coiled snake with three heads (snake, human, and vulture) or as a snake with a human head. She has been called a form of both **Isis** and **Hathor**. (Lesko; Müller; Wilkinson)

**Meskhoni** A human-headed brick or a woman with a brick headdress symbolized this birth goddess, an important household divinity. During labor, women squatted on brick pillows, thus elevating themselves sufficiently for the midwife to catch the child, as the birthing party awaited Meskhoni and the obscure goddess Ermutu. At the moment when contractions began, they appeared and remained through delivery to predict the future of the newborn. Meskhoni’s name means “omen,” and her role extended beyond birth to include setting the course of a person’s life. In Egyptian art, Meskhoni appears as a woman wearing palm shoots on her head; these have also been interpreted as insect antennae and as the shape of the uterus and birth canal. (Müller; Wilkinson)

**Mut** This creatrix, depicted variously as a vulture, a lioness, and a crowned woman, was a punitive goddess in whose temple traitors were burned to death. She was associated with the period preceding the Nile’s annual flooding, when harvest had left the fields empty and the people relied upon stored foods. Her worship, centered at a lake-side temple south of Karnak, was supplanted by that of **Isis** and **Hathor**. She was also connected to **Bast** in the form of Mut-Bastet. Some have theorized that she was an invented goddess, designed as a corollary to the important god Amun, but evidence shows her to be an early divinity of Thebes. (Ellis; Lesko; Müller; Wilkinson)

**Neḥem-‘auit** This goddess of wisdom, originally a distinct divinity, was absorbed into the great goddess **Hathor**. Her name has been interpreted as “she who removes violence” and “she who delivers us from violence,” suggesting a protective divinity. (Müller)

**Neith** One of Egypt’s most ancient goddesses, Neith was historically connected with the Nile delta but had her origin further west, in Libya. Her symbols were a pair of crossed arrows or two bows tied together, so Neith appears to have been a warrior. Later, wearing the double crown of unified Egypt, Neith commanded reverence from her temple city of Sais. In her most important festival, an image of the goddess as a sacred cow bearing the sun was carried through the streets, while lamps were lit in every home in Neith’s honor. Later, Neith assumed attributes of other goddesses, becoming a complex figure especially associated with handicrafts and industry because, at the beginning of time, Neith took up the shuttle, strung the sky on her loom, and wove the world. Then she wove nets and from the primordial waters pulled up living creatures, including men and women. She also wove the shroud and wrapping cloths for the first mummy.



Like other important goddesses, Neith was connected with fertility. She invented childbirth by bringing forth mighty Ra. Neith was a midwife and a healer, both during and after life. During her worshipers' lives, she was responsible for their health, for her priests were doctors and healers. After death, she guarded their remains while welcoming their souls. (Ellis; Lesko; Müller; Troy; Wiedemann)

**Nekhbet** The vulture-headed goddess of the Nile's source, she was creatrix of the region around the city of Nekheb, whence her name; there her original temple has been found at the rich archaeological site of El Kab. After unification of the two lands, Nekhbet became the king's protector. As goddess of the upper reaches of the river, she was called the "twin" of **Wadjet**, goddess of the Lower Nile; together they formed the Neb-Ti, the "two mistresses." (Lesko; Lichtheim 1976; Müller; Parkinson; Wiedemann)

**Nephthys** This Greek version of her name is more commonly used than her original Egyptian name, Nebt-het. She was Isis's sister and opposite: Isis was the force of life and rebirth; Nephthys, the tomb-dwelling goddess of death and sunset, was invoked as queen of night. They had similarly opposite mates. Isis's consort was the fertility god Osiris, while her sister's mate was the evil god Set.

Set was not only wicked but sterile. So Nephthys, who wanted children, plied Osiris with liquor until he tumbled into bed with her. That night she conceived the god Anubis. Set then killed and dismembered Osiris. This proved too much for Nephthys, who left Set to join in her sister's lamentations and helped to restore Osiris to life. (De Horack; Faulkner 1990; Lichtheim 1980; Müller; Troy)

**Nut** First daughter of **Tefnut**, the sky goddess Nut lay across the body of her small brother Geb, the earth, holding him in constant intercourse. But the god Ra disapproved and commanded Shu, their father, to separate his children. Shu hoisted Nut into a great arch, but he was forced to remain forever holding them apart, supporting Nut's star-spangled belly.

Ra cursed Nut, forbidding her to bear children during any month of the year. But the moon god Thoth outwitted the curse, playing a board game with the moon and winning from him five days that float between the years. In these five days, from her brother's seed already within her, Nut produced five children: the sister goddesses **Isis** and **Nephthys**, their mates Osiris and Set, and the god Horus.

Sometimes Nut took the form of a huge cow, as she did when Ra decided to abandon the earth because of human insolence. She knelt so that he could climb on her. Then she leaped into the air, bearing the god until she became dizzy from the weight. Four gods rushed to hold up Nut's body, remaining thereafter as the world's pillars.

Nut was associated with sacred trees, over which the sun rose at dawn. Her special tree was the sycamore, which survives desert environments by reaching into underground water. Certain trees, probably prominent or large ones, were sacred to the goddess; stylized tree branches formed part of Nut's headdress. (Brandon; Buhl; Ellis; Lesko; Müller; Piankoff; Troy; Wiedemann)

**Ogdoad** The Egyptians called these primordial beings that emerged from the abyss of pretemporal waters the chaos divinities. They included four female snakes (or snake-headed women) named Naunet, Kauket, Hauket, and Amaunet. Their companions were four male frogs. Out of their random movements a pattern emerged, which grew increasingly regular until they had brought order out of chaos. (Müller; Shafer; Troy)

**Pakhet** This early lioness goddess bears a name that means “the one who tears” or “the scratcher,” apparently because of her sharp claws. Although the Egyptians had many lion divinities, Pakhet was one of the most aggressive and fearsome. She was especially honored in the desert land of Speos Artemidos (“cave of **Artemis**”), a Greco-Egyptian name that points to the identification of Pakhet with that wilderness goddess. There, a cemetery like that of **Bast** at Bubastis provided a location for burial of sacred cats. Pakhet has been connected with another minor sun goddess, **Raet**. (Ellis; Lesko; Müller; Wilkinson)

**Raet** This sun goddess was the corollary of the sun god Ra. She is frequently conflated with **Hathor**, for both wore between cow horns a solar disc from which the uraeus snake rose, and with the minor goddess **Pakhet**, a lioness-sun divinity. She was celebrated with a festival after the end of harvest. (Ellis; Wiedemann; Wilkinson)

**Renenutet** Invoked as the “mistress of provisions,” Renenutet was a cobra goddess to whom offerings were made for agricultural success. A motherly woman with the head of a snake, she protected vineyards; altars were erected to her during wine-pressing. After Christianity arrived, she was honored as Saint Thermuthis. (Ellis; Leibovitch; Lesko; Müller; Wilkinson)

**Saosis** This Egyptian goddess, sometimes conflated with **Hathor**, took the form of an acacia tree in which both life and death were entrapped. She was considered the female sun, counterpart to the sun god Atum or described as his right hand. (Buhl)

**Satis** “She who runs like an arrow” was an archer goddess who personified the waterfalls of the Nile; she also had cosmic connections, being identified with the star Sothis (Sirius), whose annual rising coincided with the Nile’s flooding. (Ellis; Faulkner 1990; Müller; Wiedemann)

**Sekhmet** Once, the lionheaded sun goddess became so disgusted with humanity that she decided to slaughter the race. Her fury terrified the gods, who deputized Ra to calm Sekhmet down. But she refused to be restrained. Attempting to save the remnant of humanity from the bloodthirsty goddess, Ra mixed beer with pomegranate juice. He set the jugs in Sekhmet’s path, hoping she would mistake them for human blood. She drank herself into a stupor and, when she awoke, had no rage left.

The red drink was thereafter consumed on feast days of **Hathor**, so some interpret Sekhmet as the terrifying side of that pleasure-ruling goddess. Others say that she was the opposite of **Bast**, who embodied the sun’s nurturing rays while the lion Sekhmet represented her destructive drought-bringing potential. Sekhmet represented the



dry desert winds as well, for which reason she was described as breathing fire. She was a martial goddess under whose protection armies marched. Occasionally, she caused plagues, but she was also a healing goddess. Her main center was Memphis, but temples to her were built in many other areas. The minor goddess Shesmetet is thought to be a form of Sekhmet. (Ellis; Faulkner 1990; Lichtheim 1976; Lesko; Müller; Parkinson; Wiedemann; Wilkinson)

**Selkhet** In Egyptian tombs, mourners placed golden figures of guardian goddesses. One was Selkhet, a scorpion goddess of great antiquity who, with the god Qebhsnuf, protected the vessels that held the corpse's intestines. Selkhet offered instructions in the customs of the afterlife. Shown with a scorpion headdress, she symbolized rebirth. (Lesko; Müller)

**Seshat** This goddess was called the “mistress of the house of books,” inventor of writing and secretary of heaven. She was also “mistress of the house of architects,” charged with studying the stars to determine the axes of new buildings. Seshat invented mathematics; she measured the length of human lives with palm branches. Seshat wore the leopard-skin of a priest, with two inkstands slung over her shoulder. (Müller; Wilkinson)

**Sothis** The star now called Sirius (the “dog star”) was the goddess Sopdet or Sept to the Egyptians, better known under her Greek name of Sothis (“soul of **Isis**”). Her mate was Sah (the nearby constellation of Orion) or the obscure god Khnum, with whom she was consort together with **Anuket** and **Satis**. In predynastic times, she was honored as a cosmic cow goddess. Later, she was connected to the annual inundation of the Nile, which occurred when Sothis appeared at dawn on the eastern horizon, and the Egyptians hailed the start of a new year. Because Osiris was vitally connected to the Nile flooding, Sothis became connected to that god's sister-lover Isis.

The openings once described as air vents in the Great Pyramid have been shown to be alignment points that bring the light of Sothis into the pyramid's interior, because Sothis was envisioned as assisting in the rebirth of the dead; Isis, too, did this when she resurrected her brother Osiris. The goddess was depicted as a horned girl wearing a five-pointed star. (Ellis; Wilkinson)

**Taweret** This early mother goddess was a pregnant hippopotamus with human teats and a woman's wig, standing on her hind legs and carrying the scrolls of protection. She carried a crocodile on her back or in her arms, and bared her teeth, a signal of protective maternity. She was called upon in childbirth for protection. Pots made in her shape were common, with the spout formed by the goddess holding up a breast from which fluid poured. Taweret was a popular goddess during the Ptolemaic period and Roman occupation. Her worship has been dated until the 5th century CE. (Ellis; Frankfurter; Müller; Springborg; Wiedemann; Wilkinson)

**Tayet** The Old Kingdom goddess of weaving, Tayet was considered the king's mother because she wove his clothes as well as the bandages in which his body was

mummified. She was often connected to the more powerful weaving goddess, **Neith**. (Lesko; Wilkinson)

**Tefnut** Taking her name from the dew, this goddess was associated with the mountains from which the sun rises. She was the first female being, one of a pair of twins spat out by the male god Atum. Sometimes, as a cow, she was a form of **Neith**; sometimes she was lion-headed, suggesting a similarity to **Bast** or **Sekhmet**. As a divinity of death, she represented the moist atmosphere of the lower world. (Müller; Troy; Wilkinson)

**Wadjet** The vulture goddess of lower Egypt and the Nile delta, she joined with **Nekhbet** to form the “two mistresses” of the land, the Neb-Ti (Nebty), a political symbol of Egyptian unification. Inscriptions called her the “great enchantress”; she was associated with the uraeus or snake-crown, the symbol of sovereignty. As Weret-Hekaw, “great of magic,” she had oracular powers, for which reason she figured in many funeral scenes and prayers. The Greeks called her Buto, after one of her important shrines. (Bosse-Griffiths; Faulkner; Johnson; Lesko; Müller; Wiedemann)

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# AFRICAN DIASPORA

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## AFRICAN DIASPORA PANTHEON

Abe. *See Agwe*

**Adja**

Agbê. *See Agwe*

**Agwe**

**Aida Wedo**

Amine *Perfume*.

Ayida Wedo. *See Aida Wedo*

Aziri. *See Ezili*

Babá. *See Obatallah*

Baluande. *See Ymoja*

**Calunga**

Candelaria. *See Oya*

Caridad del Cobre. *See Ezili, Oshun*

Centella. *See Oya*.

**Domici Wedo**. *See Aida Wedo*

Erzulie. *See Ezili*

**Ezili**

Freda. *See Ezili*

Iansa. *See Oya*

**Icú**

Iemanjá. *See Ymoja*

Imanje. *See Ymoja*

Kalunga. *See Calunga*

**Kouzinn**

Lasiren. *See Ezili*

Lasyrenn. *See Ezili*

Madame Saint Urzulie. *See Ezili*

Maîtresse Espagnole. *See Ezili*

**Maman Brigitte**

Maria Dolorosa. *See Ezili*

Nanan. *See Nanan Buluku*

**Nanan Buluku**

Nananbouclou. *See Nanan Buluku*

**Oba**

**Obatallah**

Obba. *See Oba*

**Ochumare**

**Oddudúa**

Olla. *See Oya*

Omela *Earth*.

Osan-quiriñan. *See Obatallah*

Oshoon. *See Oshun*

**Oshun**

Our Lady of Blessed Sacrament/Mercy.

*See Obatallah*

Our Lady of Hope. *See Ochumare*

Our Lady of Immaculate Conception.

*See Ymoja*

Our Lady of Montserrat. *See Yegguá*

Our Lady of Sorrows. *See Ezili*

Our Lady of the Rosary. *See Calunga*

Oxun. *See Oshun*

Oxun-marê. *See Ochumare*

**Oya**

Saint Anne. *See* **Nanan Buluku, Ymoja**

Saint Barthomew. *See* **Ochumare**

Saint Catherine. *See* **Oba**

Saint Catherine. *See* **Oya**

Saint Emilius. *See* **Nanan Buluku**

Saint Expeditius. *See* **Agwe**

Saint Patrick. *See* **Ochumare**

Saint Rita. *See* **Oba**

Saint Theresa. *See* **Oya**

Virgin of Regla. *See* **Ymoja**

Yansá. *See* **Oya**

Yansan. *See* **Oya**

**Yegguá**

Yemanjá. *See* **Ymoja**

Yembó. *See* **Ymoja**

Yemmú. *See* **Oddudúá**

**Ymoja**

**Adja** This Haitian *lwa* (the Voudoun term for a divinity or spirit) deals with everything having to do with herbs and drugs. She appears to have descended from an ancient Yoruba goddess; she kidnaps people whom she wishes to endow with medicinal knowledge. When she possesses a worshiper, the person eats broken glass from medicine bottles. (Courlander 1944)



**La Sirena.** *The image of the siren is common in Haitian folk art, representing African water goddesses who arrived in the western hemisphere with enslaved Africans who maintained but adapted their religious traditions. A figure of both beauty and threat, the water goddess remains popular in African diaspora communities today.*

**Agwe** This ocean goddess, originally from Benin, is prominent in African diaspora religions, appearing in Brazilian religion as Abe and in Haiti as Agwe. In Haiti, when Agwe dances, she moves her hands as though swimming. She is often conflated with **Oshun** or **Ymoja**. (Bastide; Dunham; Herskovits; Simpson)

**Aida Wedo** The African primal snake is honored in Haiti as Aida-Wedo, the companion of the most popular god, Damballah-Wedo, also a serpent. She rules fire, water, wind, and the rainbow. When she appears in ritual, she slithers across the ground wearing a jeweled headdress and a white dress. The *lwa* Domici Wedo is her daughter or co-wife. (Courlander 1944)

**Calunga** Originally a Bakongo sea goddess, Calunga is well known in the New World, especially in Brazil, where an image of her is carried in carnival processions. As spirit of death, she is called Our Lady of the Rosary. Her symbol, the cross, indicates her ability to pass between worlds. (Bastide; Kiddy)

**Ezili** The Haitian *lwa* of sensuality, Ezili is generous to the point of extravagance with her

worshippers and expects the same in return. So they bestow costly gifts on her: pink and blue gowns, perfumes, and powders. She is a beautiful yellow-skinned woman, very flirtatious and charming. When she appears in ritual, she has unbound hair; her altar bears a comb and lipstick. One of her symbols, the pierced heart, points to the pain of separation that lovers endure. In keeping with this, dancers who embody her often weep copiously. Called Our Lady of Sorrows (*Mater Dolorosa*), Ezili can be a triple divinity or a trinity of sisters. The distinction between Ezili and **Oshun** is unclear. (Bastide; Bellegarde-Smith; Brown; Courlander 1944; Houlberg; Marks)

**Icú** Frightening Cuban goddess of death Icú guarded Shango, lover of **Oya**. But **Oshun** determined to free him, luring Icú into a night of drinking that ended with the death goddess proposing a sexual encounter with Oya, who used the occasion to attack Icú. But Oshun was not rewarded with intercourse with Shango, who remained true to Oya. Icú lives in bottles, which is why they must remain capped. (Lachantañéré)

**Kouzinn** The Haitian *lwa* of commerce and finances, Kouzinn is generally honored with her consort, Azaka, but has importance herself as a representative of women's commerce and financial acumen. (Brown)

**Maman Brigitte** A Haitian spirit of death, she owns all cemeteries, particularly those in which the first body interred was a woman. Her children are the spirits who outline, dig, and mark graves. She is the mother of many important *lwa*. (Courlander 1944; Mettraux)

**Nanan Buluku** In the African diaspora, the important African goddess **Nanamburucú** continues to exert influence. In Cuba, she corresponds to the Virgin of Mount Carmel or to Saint Emilius. In Brazil, she became St. Anne, honored by followers wearing red, white, and blue beads. She is senior wife to the primary god, Oshala, whose other wife is **Ymoja**. Oldest of the water-*orishas*, she is celebrated on Saturdays, when she dances carrying a curved broom. (Bastide; Courlander 1944; Lachantañéré; Landes)

**Oba** The African goddess **Oba** migrated with her people to Cuba. When Oba possesses a dancer, she wears a scarf that hides one ear and must be kept from any dancer who embodies **Oshun** because of rivalry between the two. Oba is syncretized with Saints Catherine and Rita. (Barnet; De La Torre; Lachantañéré)

**Obatallah** This dual-sexed creatrix is among the four great divinities of Brazil, the others being **Oshun**, **Oya**, and **Ymoja**. She is also found in Cuba as the most powerful of the feminine spirits, a warrior-lover connected with rivers and their fertilizing power; she is called Our Lady of Mercy or of the Blessed Sacrament. Her color is white, her domain everything pure and unsullied. Yet she was earthy as well as celestial. She once slept with a boatman in exchange for his services, thus conceiving her son, the god of fire and chaos, Shango. (Barnet; Lachantañéré)

**Ochumare** The Yoruba goddess of the rainbow, in Cuba, was Catholicized into Our Lady of Hope. She appears in Brazil as an increasingly popular divinity, sometimes transformed into a male saint, Barthomew or Patrick, but as often into a form of the Virgin **Mary** (see Eastern Mediterranean). (Bastide)

**Oddudúa** This Cuban *lwa* was created right after the world began, to be the mate of the primary divinity, Obatalá. The pair immediately began to conceive *orishas* or divine powers. Various traditions say that this divinity was the male part of Obatalá, while the female part was known as Yemmú; or that Oddudúa was the younger brother of Obatalá. She is not greatly honored in ritual today, and so a clear explanation of the complexity of her identity may have been lost. (De La Torre)

**Oshun** The African river goddess Oshun is one of the most important Afro-Caribbean goddesses, her devotees numbering in the tens of thousands. As in her homeland, the water goddess Oshun is a spirit of sensuality and passion. When she possesses dancers, their movements are those of a woman who loves to swim, who makes her arm bracelets jangle, and who admires herself in a mirror.

Wife of the old diviner Orúmbila, Oshun suffered because her sexual appetite outstripped her husband's. Finally she found herself in the presence of Ogún, a god with a wide reputation as a seducer. But just one night with Oshun changed him. He wished to enjoy her forever, but she returned to her husband while continuing her affair with Ogún. Her husband set parrots to watch her, but Oshun fed them, so the birds lied about her whereabouts. But the diviner suspected the truth and undid the drug Oshun used, so the parrots told the truth and her affair was ended.

Oshun also had an affair with turbulent Shango. It began because, at rituals, Oshun always attracted attention with her sensual dancing. Sometimes she selected a handsome man to take home. One night she conceived a passion for Shango, the best drummer a dancer could desire, but he refused her. When finally he succumbed to her seduction, he still verbally rejected her. But when he fell from popularity, she was the one who accompanied him, giving up rich possessions to do so.

In Brazil, Oxun is goddess of waters; she is depicted wearing jewels, holding a mirror, and waving a fan. Her altars hold copper bracelets and fans, as well as dishes of Omuluku (onions, beans, and salt). She rules love, beauty, and flirtation.

In Cuba, Oshun is Our Lady of La Caridad del Cobre, patron of the island and special goddess of Havana. Cuban worshipers see her as a beautiful mulatto woman, sensual and graceful, affectionate and charming. Honey and gold are among her attributes; yellow is her color, the peacock her bird, and a small brass bell the sound that summons her. Her "paths" or various identities are many, including Akuaro, the charitable; Alolodi, the deaf homemaker and embroiderer; Aña, the drummer; Awé, the sorrowful; Dokó, patroness of sex; Edé, the elegant hostess; Fumiké, provider of fertility; Funké, the old teacher; Kayode, the partier; Kolé, the powerful but impoverished sorcerer; Moro/Kari, the scandalous one; Sekesé, the serious one; and Yumu, the warrior. Oshun includes pregnancy among the areas she rules; she protects both women and unborn children. She is patroness of prostitutes, especially in her identity as Panchágara, who dances to lure money out of men's hands. Other *caminos* or paths



of Oshun include elegant Yeyé Cari, a mermaid; Oshun Kolé, a bird goddess who favors domesticity; Oshun Ololodí, a diviner; the aged and rich Oshun Yumú, who lives underwater; and Oshun Ibú-Aña, queen of the drums.

In Trinidad, Oshun appears dancing very sweetly, often balancing a full jug of water on her head. She can also demand rituals beside a river, where she will offer food that is then shared with the attenders. Her symbols are the anchor and wineglass, she wears blue and white, and she is connected with St. Philomena. (Barnet; Bastide; De La Torre; Lachantañeré; Murphy and Sandford; Olmos)

**Oya** Oya, a stern mistress connected to the realm of the dead, is one of the most powerful African diaspora goddesses. On her holy day of Wednesday, her followers wear dark red beads and offer her palm wine, goat meat, and yams. When she enters a dancer, the dance becomes frenzied as Oya swings a sword or a flyswatter. Sometimes she dances with arms outstretched to hold off ghosts, which she controls. In Brazil, where she is one of the primary divinities, she is called Yansan, patron of bisexual men because she herself is a “man-woman.” Wife and possibly sister of the thunder *orisha*, Shango, Yansan is a fierce warrior; some scholars see them as a single two-sexed being. When a powerful enemy brought Shango near death, Oya revived him with her own energies, on the agreement that he would become her mate. He agreed, but she then posted the death spirit *Icú* at their bedroom door so that he would be too frightened to think of spending time with other women. Finally **Oshun** freed Shango by seducing **Icú**, but Shango still preferred Oya. A storm goddess who also rules fire and lightning, she is served by a crowd of wild spirits. She is identified with St. Barbara.

Patron of justice and memory, she is often pictured holding a flame. She is a heavenly being, ruling the lightning and wind (whence her name Centella, “lightning”), as well as the rainbow with its seven colors. She corresponds to the Virgin of Candlemas or of Mount Carmel. In Trinidad, Oya lives in the breeze; when she possesses a worshiper, she dances vigorously, holding her left ear to hear the wind. Green and red are her colors; her day is Friday; corn is offered to her. She is assimilated to St. Catherine. (Barnet; Bellegarde-Smith; De La Torre; Gleason 1987; Houlberg; Lachantañeré; Landes; Mettraux; Mischel; Olmos)

**Yegguá** In Cuba, this *lwa* appears dressed in pink and white. But her appearances are few, for not many women open themselves to her. If they do so, they must lead a celibate life; should they try to marry, they are miserable. Yegguá is connected with Our Lady of Montserrat and deals primarily with death and the dead. (Barnet)

**Ymoja** When Ymoja lived on earth, she caught a spark falling from the heavens in her outstretched apron and found it to be Shango, god of fire, whom she raised as her son. He was a demanding child, always wanting food or drink or entertainment and even, in one fit of temper, a secret divination tool that belonged to **Obatallah**. Ymoja tried to steal it but failed, and Obatallah forced her into servitude. Later, Ymoja found herself aroused by her adoptive son and, when he rejected her, began to masturbate publicly until he satisfied her need. This was the world’s first incest.

In Cuba she is Yemayá, appearing in a skirt with seven flounces; her colors are blue and white, symbols of the seawater that she controls. She wears beads: seven blue ones alternating with seven white ones; her skirts are also blue and white, representing the ocean's waters and the foam of its waves. When she dances, she can be wild or calm; sometimes she rolls her body like the sea's waves. Goddess of intelligence and motherliness, of reason and intellect, she is syncretized with Our Lady of Regla and **Mary** (see Eastern Mediterranean) under her title of Star of the Sea.

In Brazil, she is called Yemanjá or Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception. She is ocean goddess of the crescent moon; her followers wear crystal beads. On February 2, crowds gather on the ocean beaches to offer her soap, perfume, jewelry, and fabric that, together with letters bearing requests to the goddess, are thrown out to sea. She often appears as a mermaid, for which reason she is conflated with **Ezili**.

In Trinidad, Yemanjá is entirely benevolent. When she appears in ritual, she seems to be rowing a boat while sitting on the ground and sliding forward. Her symbols are a gourd full of water and an oar; her feast day is Thursday; and her colors are watery blue and white. She is assimilated to St. Anne. (Barnet; Bastide; De La Torre; Gates; Gordon; Lachantañeré; Landes; Mischel; Olmos; Omari)

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# EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN

No area holds more significance to the question of women and religion than the eastern Mediterranean, where the world's three monotheisms were born. Judaism, Christianity, and Islam are called Abrahamic religions because all claim descent from the patriarch Abraham. All are based on a single, male god. No other world religions have so thoroughly denied the possibility of goddesses. No parallel religion based on a single goddess, exclusive of a male divine figure, has been found.

In addition to the region's Abrahamic traditions, Zoroastrianism influenced western religious thought. While monotheistic, it acknowledged semidivine females. Finally, the dualistic philosophy called Manichaeism originated in this area and gave rise to Gnosticism, with its feminine matter and masculine spirit. Although giving primacy to spirit, and thus by implication to the masculine, the Gnostic worldview does acknowledge the power of the feminine. Finally, a short-lived monotheism devoted to the god Aten is considered in the section on Africa.

Disinterested scholarship about this region is rare, with many scholars serving as apologists for religious orthodoxy, especially when texts are considered the literal word of God. Challengers often find themselves under attack by conservative scholars. Given the masculinist bias of the region's religions, this especially affects those researching suppressed goddess traditions. It also impacts those exploring alternative views of, and roles for, women in monotheistic religions.

The region offers a plethora of texts and monuments. Because writing was invented in the region in the 4th millennium BCE, multiple texts can be compared and contrasted. Many, inscribed on clay tablets, suffered breaks at important places; presumptive renderings can be impacted by scholarly bias. Varying translations can yield dramatically different myths and names. Taken together, the depth of history, number of texts, and bias among interpreters make this a challenging region of study for those interested in goddess religion.



**Lilith.** The famous image known as “Queen of the Night” is typically described as the spirit-woman Lilith; some scholars believe the figure represents the important Mesopotamian sex and battle goddess Ishtar or her sister, the underworld queen Ereshkegal. This pottery image, from Babylon in approximately 1800 BCE, is part of the collection of the British Museum.

Standing between the continents of Africa and Asia, the eastern Mediterranean has been a cultural crossroads since the beginning of historical times. As empires rose and fell, their religions gained and lost power, with some divinities surviving in altered form. Urban culture began early in the region, with centralized governments supporting temples and other religious institutions. These civilizations are typically named for their most important city, as in the Sumerian, named for the city of Sumer. Yet rural populations worshiped in ways that sustained different myths and rituals, some of which entered into the mainstream. For these reasons, the eastern Mediterranean presents a complex picture to the scholar of religions.

The region, shaped like a backwards letter “C,” is called the Fertile Crescent. The northern portion, once known as Asia Minor, was homeland to the Hittite and later the Persian Empire. To the southeast was Mesopotamia, where important cultures flourished along the Tigris and Euphrates rivers. Along the southeastern shores of the Mediterranean stretched lands known from the Bible. Further south, along the Persian

Gulf, was the source of the Islamic religion. Each of these regions will be considered in turn.

In Anatolia, in approximately 7000 BCE, a city was established of great significance in goddess studies. Çatal Hüyük reveals human occupation almost 9,000 years ago. Among the finds were statues of stout female figures in postures suggesting religious meaning. The theory offered by early excavators, that Çatal Hüyük was a pacifist agricultural community, has been challenged, as has the presumption the female images reveal a religion centered on a goddess. But the importance of that unnamed goddess in the region remains unquestioned.

No one knows when, why, or how early Anatolian civilizations declined. By 2500 BCE, the Hurrian culture grew to prominence. These Hurrians were aggressively expansive, controlling land as far as Egypt and Iran. One of its major outposts was the city of Mitanni, in what later became Mesopotamia. The empire declined by 1300 BCE. Some texts name Hurrian goddesses, but information is minimal.

The next important power was the Hittites, an Indo-European group that entered the region around 2000 BCE. Moving from the north, possibly from Bulgaria and the Ukraine, the Hittites settled in Anatolia among the Hattian people. The Hittites organized their religion around a sun goddess whose earthly embodiment was the queen. Within a few hundred years, the Hittites had established themselves around Hattusa (Boğazkale, Turkey) and began to conquer surrounding lands. At its greatest extent, the Hittite Empire reached to Egypt. For five centuries, Hittite fortunes advanced and declined, until by 1200 BCE they had virtually disappeared.

South of Anatolia was Mesopotamia, the land between the waters of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers (today's Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, and eastern Syria). In prehistoric times, the area was settled by agriculturalists who settled in water-rich areas that include the traditional site of the biblical Garden of Eden, just east of Baghdad. Near Baghdad was Babylon, an empire divided between Akkad to the north (which included Babylon, Nippur, and Kish) and Sumer to the South (which included Ur and Uruk). Akkadian and Sumerian religion had much in common, but different names were given to divinities, which over time developed significant differences in myth and ritual. The southern, Sumerian culture later evolved into what is known as Chaldean, centered near today's city of Basra.

From Mesopotamia came some of the most impressive ancient religious texts, including the *Epic of Gilgamesh* (c. 2000 BCE), as well as the poems of the first known poet, the priestess Enheduanna. Many texts, written in a wedge-shaped alphabet called cuneiform, survived, and new finds occur regularly. European scholars of the 18th and 19th century often compared Mesopotamian texts with the Bible, which continues to some extent today. The presence of powerful goddesses in the Babylonian pantheon, as well as the extent of available texts, has led to significant literature on this subject.

Also located in Mesopotamia was the legendary Assyrian civilization, not to be confused with present-day Syria. Emerging as a regional power in the 14th century BCE, the Assyrians expanded their empire for almost 800 years. Among the many goddesses of this culture, Ishtar of Ninevah stands out, not only because of the significance of her temple but also because of her appearance in many texts and inscriptions. Like earlier empires, the Assyrians could not hold their large territory, and the united Medes

and Babylonians defeated the Assyrians in 612 BCE at Ninevah (today's Mosul). The Babylonians did not enjoy power for long, for their empire was shortly in decline. In 539 BCE, the Babylonian empire was defeated by the newest imperial power, the Persians under the control of Cyrus.

The Medes retained power longer, through an alliance with other Persians. In the second millennium BCE, an Indo-European people had migrated into Mesopotamia, dividing soon into Persians and Medes. The first soon became subject to the Medes who controlled today's Iran, known as Media to the Greeks and later established an empire (modern Azerbaijan and parts of Afghanistan); they are among the ancestors of today's Kurdish people. The Medes and Persians joined again to form the Achaemenid Persian Empire. Although Persian expansion ended at the battle of Marathon, the empire remained an important regional power.

During this period, reorganization of native religion into Zoroastrianism began. Once the predominant religion of what is now Iran, Zoroastrianism has declined to minority status since the rise of Islam. According to the 10th–6th century BCE sage or prophet Zoroaster, the sole god was Ahura Mazda, the uncreated creator known through seven emanations, of which several are feminine. Ahura Mazda's creation includes only what is orderly, with the rest being the work of Angra Mainyu, the force of evil whose domain includes such natural processes as decay. The sacred texts of the religion are collected as the Avesta, oral texts transcribed in the early centuries CE; among them, the most sacred texts are called the Garthas, claimed as the words of Zoroaster himself. A generally anionic religion based on a male supreme deity, Zoroastrianism leaves little space for the feminine.

The Achaemenid Persian Empire came to an end in 331 BCE, when Alexander the Great swept through the land. But Alexander's vast empire could not be sustained, and within a few hundred years another Persian culture, the Parthian, took control. During this period the sage Mani articulated his philosophy. Born in Babylon in the 3rd century CE, Mani claimed to bring together diverse religions into complete truth. That truth was based in monotheism, which Manichaeism transformed into a dualistic vision of spirit in endless struggle against matter, gendered respectively as masculine and feminine.

The empires of Mesopotamia extended into lands now occupied by Palestine, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria. There, Judaism and Christianity were born. In this "Holy Land," archaeology finds evidence of settlement as early as the 7th millennium BCE. But whereas the books of the Jewish Bible describe a religion monotheistic from the start, archaeology unveils a different history. Digs at Jericho and other sites, often centering upon "tells," or earthen hills above settlements, show a religion involving a primary goddess. Hundreds of images of her, sculpted in clay, have been found.

This region, the homeland of the Israelite peoples, was also home to the Canaanites, a term that was never clearly defined. Ancient sources use it to refer to non-Israelites. The Hebrew scriptures describe all goddesses as foreign or "Canaanite" imports, but archaeological finds suggest that goddesses existed in the earliest Israelite religion. Although evidence for a consort to the high god YHWH has recently become more widely known, conservative Jewish and Christian theologians argue that monotheism was a cornerstone of the religions.

Part of conservative reluctance to accept archaeological testimony for an Israelite goddess stems from a belief that the Bible is the revealed “word of God.” This leads to belief in the historicity of every detail of the scriptures. But contemporary biblical scholarship has found evidence of different authors of the primary books, the Pentateuch. When archaeological finds are compared with scripture, the historicity of scripture is called into question. Especially important are finds from Ugarit, a city whose domain lasted from the 14th to the 12th centuries BCE. In 1928, the hill that covered the ancient city center, now called Ras Shamra, was excavated and texts found that provided information about goddesses previously known only from biblical sources. The Ras Shamra texts changed the scholarly view on the role of goddesses in the area’s ancient religion.

The Ugaritic culture was not the only one considered “Canaanite” in the Bible. That label also referred to the Phoenicians, who spoke a Semitic language like Israelites and Ugaritic peoples. From 1200 to 900 BCE, these impressive navigators established trading centers in today’s Lebanon and Syria. Their sailing prowess made them wealthy, and they created distant settlements to support their enterprise. The most famous, Carthage, was well known for its war with the Roman Empire. Important goddesses are known both in the Phoenician homeland and in Carthage.

The final culture represented in this region is that of the peoples of the Arabian deserts. In early times, a minority of Arabs converted to monotheistic religions such as Zoroastrianism, but most continued traditional ways including goddess worship until the coming of the prophet Mohammed in the 7th century CE. The youngest of the Abrahamic religions, Islam is most rigorous in excluding the feminine divine.

Recently, feminist scholars and the faithful have sought ways of accommodating Abrahamic religions to women’s desires for more inclusive religion. In Jewish tradition, midrash, or commentary, reinterprets scripture to connect it with changing times. In addition, alternative liturgies acknowledge the feminine divine. Similarly, Christian women seek ways to include the feminine, including honoring the virgin Mary in controversial ways.

Fundamentalist worshipers often deplore such efforts. Thus for some women, finding room for feminine divinity means leaving monotheistic religion entirely. Some become secularists, but others search for new religious affiliations. Given the large number of former adherents of Abrahamic religions in new religious movements, figures such as Asherah and Mary have been claimed as goddesses by heterodox worshipers.

## EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN PANTHEON

A *Chaldean*; moon

Ašrat. *See* **Gubarru**

Adamu *Chaldean*; matter.

Adath *Canaanite*; womanliness.

Agašayam. *See* **Ishtar**

**Àisha Qandisha**

Aja. *See* **Ishtar**

Aka *Anatolian*; mother.

**Aktab-Kutbâ**

Ala Nur *Turkish*; ancestral mother.

Alitta. *See* **Didō**

Al-Karisi *Turkish*; nightmares.

**Allani****Al-Lat**Ameretat. *See* **Ārmaiti**

An.Zu Assyrian; chaos.

**Anāhitā****Anat**Anatu. *See* **Ishtar**

Antum Akkadian; sky.

Anunitu. *See* **Ishtar**

Ararat Anatolian; mountains.

**Araru**Ardvi Sura Anāhitā. *See* **Anāhitā**Arinna. *See* **Wurusemu****Ārmaiti**Aruru. *See* **Araru****Ashi****Ashnan**Ashratu. *See* **Athirat****Ashtart****Astarte****Atargatis****Athirat****Aya****Ba'alat****Banit****Bau****Belit-Ilani****Bêlit-Seri**

Beruth Phoenician; earth, city of Beirut.

Biskra. *See* **Iṣhara**Bohu. *See* **Araru**Bu'ān Dokht. *See* **Anāhitā**Caelestis. *See* **Tanit**Ceto. *See* **Atargatis**

Daganzipa Hurrian; earth.

**Damkina**Dea Caelestis. *See* **Tanit**Dea Syria. *See* **Atargatis**Derceto. *See* **Atargatis****Dido**Dilbat. *See* **Ishtar**Elissa. *See* **Dido****Ēni Mahanahi****Ereshkegal**

Eshara Chaldean; fecundity, war.

**Fatima**

Firanak Persian; maternity.

**Gatamdug****Geštinanna****Gubarru****Gula**Ha-Kuthbay. *See* **Aktab-Kutbâ**

Halmasuit Hittite; sovereignty.

**Hannahanna**Harimtu. *See* **Ishtar**Haurvatat. *See* **Ārmaiti****Hebat**Hepat. *See* **Hebat**Hepit. *See* **Hebat**

Husbishag Semitic; death.

Hutellura Hittite; fate.

Hutellura. *See* **Hutena****Hutena**Iahu Anat. *See* **Anat****Inanna****Inara**Irnini. *See* **Ishtar****Iṣhara****Ishtar**Istustaya. *See* **Hutena****Jahi****Jēh**Kadesh. *See* **Qudšu**

Kadi Babylonian, Assyrian; justice.

Kalisha Arabian; purity.

**Kamrusepa**

Kara-Kura Turkish; nightmare.

Kathirat. *See* **Kotharat**Kattahziwuri. *See* **Kamrusepa**Khebe. *See* **Kubaba**Khipa. *See* **Kubaba****Ki**Kilili. *See* **Ishtar**Kir-gu-lu. *See* **Ishtar****Kotharat****Kubaba**Kutbai. *See* **Aktab-Kutbâ**

Lada Anatolian; earth.



Lahāmu. *See* **Ti'âmat**

Lahar. *See* **Ashnan**

Lamamu *Chaldean; matter.*

**Lelwani**

Lisina *Mesopotamian; donkey.*

Malinya. *See* **Ēni Mahanahi**

Mami. *See* **Ninmah**

Mamitu *Chaldean; ancestral mother.*

**Manāt**

Mu' Allidtu. *See* **Myllitta**

Mulitta. *See* **Myllitta**

Mummu Ti'âmat. *See* **Ti'âmat**

**Myllitta**

**Nammu**

**Nanâ**

**Nanshe**

Nidaba *Sumerian; calculation, writing.*

**Nikkal**

Ninbahar “Lady potter”; *See*

**Ninhursag**

Nindim “Lady fashioner”; *See*

**Ninhursag**

Nindinugge *Babylonian; abundance.*

Ninegalla. *See* **Ishtar**

**Ningal**

Ningikuga. *See* **Ningal**

Ningirim. *See* **Ninurra**

Ninhurra. *See* **Ninhursag**

**Ninhursag**

**Ninkasi**

**Ninlil**

**Ninmah**

Ninmu. *See* **Ninhursag**

Ninsar. *See* **Ninhursag**

Ninshebargunu. *See* **Ninlil**

Ninsun. *See* **Ninsûna**

**Ninsûna**

Nintur “Lady birthing-place”; *See*

**Ninhursag**

**Ninurra**

Ninziznak “Lady of embryo”; *See*

**Ninhursag**

**Nisaba**

**Nungal**

Nungal *Prisons.*

Orore *Chaldean; creation.*

Padriya *Ugaritic; lightning.*

**Paghat**

Papaya. *See* **Hutena**

Pidray. *See* **Nikkal**

Qadeshu. *See* **Athirāt**

**Qudšu**

Ri *Phoenician; moon.*

Roshanak. *See* **Anāhitā**

**Rūdābah**

Sahirtu. *See* **Ishtar**

Sarbanda. *See* **Ishtar**

**Sauska**

**Semiramis**

**Sertapsuruhi**

**Shamaili**

**Shamhat**

**Shapash**

**Shataquat**

Shemiram. *See* **Semiramis**

**Siduri**

Sirîs. *See* **Ninkasi**

Spako *Persian; wolf ancestor.*

Spendarmat. *See* **Ārmaiti**

Spendta Armatai. *See* **Ārmaiti**

Sunna *Semitic; irrigation.*

Talliya *Ugaritic; dew.*

**Tanit**

Tashmetu. *See* **Banit**

**Ti'âmat**

**Uttu**

**Uzza**

**Vashti**

**Wurusemu**

Ybrdmy. *See* **Nikkal**

**Yimāk**

**Zarpandit**

Zib. *See* **Ishtar**

Zurru. *See* **Ningal**

**Àisha Qandisha** Arabic people in coastal Northern Morocco pictured this *djinniya* (female spirit) with a beautiful face, pendulous breasts, and goat legs. She was wanton and free, seducing young men, despite having a *djinn*-consort named Hammu Qaiyu. She may have been a water goddess, for a possible translation of her name may be “loving to be watered,” although the “water” in question may have been semen. This figure has been connected with **Astarte**, who had a consort Haman; the route of transmission to North Africa was likely through Carthage, where Astarte had a temple, to Carthaginian colonies in Morocco. The bedouins of the Beni Ahsen, living on the site of the ancient Carthaginian colonies, were especially prone to visitations by Àisha. (Fernea and Malarkey)

**Aktab-Kutbâ** Until the middle of the last century, this goddess’s name was lost, but the “divine scribe” was rediscovered through inscriptions and texts found in the great Nabataean city of Petra in southwestern Jordan, famous for its stone-cut buildings. Little but her name, which hints at her role, survives. She has been connected with the better-known **Uzza**. (Milik and Teixidor; Strugnell)

**Allani** This Hurrian goddess was sun goddess of the netherworld. When gods visited her realm, they feasted on cattle and fat-tailed sheep, while long-fingered Allani served them wine. In the Ugaritic pantheon, a similar goddess named Arsay was daughter of the god Ba’al and consort of Nergal, god of the underworld. (Albright 1968; Gurney; Hoffman)

**Al-Lat** This word appears as a title for several goddesses including **Asherah** and **Athirat**. More importantly, it is the name of the pre-Islamic Arabic goddess who formed a divine trinity with **Uzza** and **Manāt**. Al-Lat is “the goddess,” a name grammatically parallel to Allah, “the god.” Some have theorized that she was his consort, as divinities of this area typically had consorts (see **Asherah**).

With her companions, Al-Lat appears in the “satanic verses” cast out of the Qur’an. According to a legend considered heretical by devout Muslims, Mohammed attempted to convert the people of Mecca, where his family, the Quraysh, controlled an important shrine. But the people of Mecca were devoted to their female trinity, the “daughters of Allah.” The prophet spoke a verse, included in the Qur’an, that reads: “Have you considered al-Lāt and al-‘Uzzā, and Manāt, the third, the other?” But then the satanic one tempted him to utter a strange second sentence that includes a word that defies translation: *Gharānīq*, a word that appears nowhere else but has been translated as “cranes” and “swans.” The “satanic verse” says: “These are the exalted cranes whose intercession is to be hoped for.”

Legend says the Meccans understood this to mean that their religion would be respected. Later, the angel Gabriel showed Mohammed that the verse was satanically inspired, and it was replaced by a command to ignore the goddesses: “They are but names you have named, you and your fathers. God has sent no authority for them.” The insult understood by some Muslims when the “satanic verses” are discussed arises from the belief that the Qur’an is the literal word of God, revealed through his prophet; by contrast, the Bible is understood to have been written by men.

Most of what is known about the early Arabic divinities derives from inscriptions, rock art, and reports from outsiders. All reveal the prominence of Al-Lat from the 6th century BCE to the rise of Islam. She was the central goddess of the important city of Petra in southwestern Jordan, as well as at Mecca, where 360 goddesses were worshiped at the sacred stone, the Ka'aba. Her religion was strong among non-urban people, especially shepherds, who associated Al-Lat with Venus, the morning star. Whether she was the "eye goddess" associated with images of staring eyes is not established.

Al-Lat was worshiped at Ta'if near Mecca in the form of an uncut block of white granite addressed as "My Lady." The Quraysh circled the stone chanting verses that, according to the medieval *Book of Idols*, were almost identical to the "satanic verses." Some sources contend that the stones representing this goddess and her sisters were retained at Mecca and still form part of Islamic reverence. Medieval Jewish sources speak of the Black Stone, carved with ancient symbols, that was set backwards into the Ka'aba so that the writing was not visible.

In South Arabia, this goddess's name survived after Islamicization to indicate the sun, suggesting that Al-lat was a solar goddess. Under the influence of other religions, she became identified with the earth. As an earth goddess, Al-Lat was considered unshakable and immovable. Al-lat's connection to **Astarte** has been examined by some scholars but the issue is unsettled. Similarly, the connection of this Arab goddess and the Chaldean goddess of death, Allat, is not established. (Q'ran 53:20; al-Kalbi; Bodington; Jobling; Langdon 1931; Lichtenstadter; Petty; Rabinowitz; Septimus; Stuckey 1998)

**Anāhitā** Arēdvī Sūrā Anāhitā ("humid, strong, immaculate one") was a ruling deity of the pre-Zoroastrian Persians. She embodied the physical and metaphoric qualities of water, the fertilizing force that flowed from her supernatural fountain in the stars, formed at the beginning of time after Ahura Mazda had subdued the powers of evil. By extension she ruled semen, thus human generation. She was a protective mother to her people, nurturing them while defending them from enemies.

In statuary, Anāhitā was the "golden mother," arrayed in golden kerchief, square gold earrings, and a jeweled diadem, wrapped in a gold-embroidered cloak adorned with 30 otter skins. She drove in a chariot drawn by four white horses that signified wind, rain, clouds, and hail.

In Armenia, she was Anahit, "golden mother," representative of womanliness in Zoroastrianism. Two annual festivals celebrated her, one requiring the sacrifice of a heifer, a parade to a nearby river, and a feast at which the goddess's golden image was crowned. Cows may have been sacred to her; ancient writers record seeing untended cows branded with her crescent moon. (Ananikian; Carnoy 1916; Dexter; Hanaway; Malandra.)

**Anat** This preeminent Ugaritic goddess appeared under four aspects: warrior, mother, virgin, and wanton woman. The final category has led her to be dismissed as goddess of fertility, but her domain was more far-reaching. A contradictory figure, "Mistress of All Gods" yet a virgin, Anat was both creatrix and bloodthirsty killer.

For centuries, Anat was paid little attention by scholars, perhaps because she appears infrequently in the Bible (where she is confused with **Asherah**), and few other texts were devoted to her. This changed in 1928 with the finding of the Ras Shamra texts, a group of early ritual poems centered on Anat. The goddess's origin is debated. She was not known in Babylon and, although sometimes described as Hittite, little proof exists to support that theory. Most likely, Anat was a Semitic goddess whose worship extended across the region.

As goddess of desire, Anat appears as the favored sex partner of her brother Ba'al. Their appetite for each other was prodigious; in one case Anat found Ba'al hunting, after which they copulated 77 times. For this occasion, she took the form of a cow, and the progeny she bore were oxen and buffalo. Recently, feminist scholars have challenged the conventional understanding of Anat's incestuous relationship with Ba'al, interpreting this as referring to Anat's power over animal reproduction.

Anat's rage for blood was noteworthy. When her brother waged a victorious battle, Anat ordered a celebratory feast on the heavenly mountain, to which she invited the defeated. Anat painted herself with rouge and henna, then entered the hall and closed the doors. She slew everyone in sight, wading knee-deep in blood and strapping dismembered bodies to her waist.

Anat once coveted a magnificent bow owned by the hunter Aqhat. When he refused her gifts, Anat pledged to take the bow by force. First she pretended to have forgotten her dispute and offered to teach Aqhat her hunting secrets. Although the text is damaged and the full story is lost, Anat then apparently took Aqhat's bow, as well as his life. As hunting was associated with males in Ugaritic culture, Anat crosses gender boundaries in this story.

Anat later fused with Asherah, a less noticeably contradictory goddess who was originally her mother. But her worship had already traveled from Ugarit to Egypt, where she was honored by the Israelites (see **Anat-Yahu** in Christian, Jewish). There she was honored both in public observance, in temples dedicated to Anat and Ba'al, and in private, as names like Bent-Anat, "daughter of Anat," suggest. She was especially worshiped in Memphis, where she was identified with **Isis** (see Egypt). (Albright 1941, 1968; Cassuto; Cornelius; Cross; P. Day 1992; Freedman; Gibson; Hooke; Kapelru; Langdon 1931; Oden; Petty; Pritchard 1943, 1969; Stuckey 1993; Van der Toorn 1992)

**Araru** A story parallel to the Hebrew creation narrative was found on a Akkadian cuneiform tablet with a Semitic translation, but the goddess Araru appears as creatrix. It describes a time before the sky and earth existed, when a stream ran down the center of the universe. A god, Meridug, created dust, out of which the human race was formed. Then Araru brought life to the new beings. She was depicted bearing shafts of lightning. The same goddess appears as creatrix in the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, forming the image of the universe in her mind to create it. (Bodington; Graves and Patai; Pritchard 1969; Temple; Ward)

**Ārmaiti** In pre-Zoroastrian Iran, Ārmaiti was preeminent, an earth goddess who ruled reproduction, fructification, and destiny; later, she was demoted to a daughter of Ahura

Mazda, the Zoroastrian high god, as Spendta Ārmaiti, “holy devotion,” or in shortened form, Spendarmat or Spendarmad. Of the seven aspects of Ahura Mazda, three were feminine: Ārmaiti and the sister divinities Haurvatat (“integrity”) and Ameretat (“immortality”), who ruled the physical as well as the spiritual manifestations of these qualities. In some myths, Ārmaiti created the first humans, suggesting a derivation from an early creatrix. (Ananikian; Azarpay; Dexter; Hinnells)

**Ashi** The Zoroastrian goddess of life’s pleasures was Ashi, whose name means “reward,” for such pleasures were believed a reward for moral action. Daughter of the high god Ahura Mazda and Ārmaiti, Ashi was goddess of a happy domestic life. (Malandra)

**Ashnan** The Sumerian goddess of grain and her friend Lahar, goddess of cattle, had to provide food and drink for the gods. But they got drunk instead, so humanity was created to take up the slack. Some texts tell of a time before Ashnan and Lahar had descended to earth, when naked humans grazed on grass and drank from streams. When the goddesses brought food and the civilizing power of clothing, people were saved from their barbaric life but became exhausted at the effort civilization entailed. (Hooke; Kramer 1961, 1979; Pritchard 1969)

**Ashtart** In several texts from this region, including the important Ras Shamra texts, a goddess of this name is mentioned, connected with the typical consort of **Anat**, Ba’al. She is described as a fertility goddess, to whom propitiatory offerings were made. The name was known as well in Egypt, where she often appeared mounted or bearing weapons. The plural form, **Ashtoreth**, is better known. (Pritchard 1943)

**Astarte** Astarte is a Greek transliteration of the name of a Semitic goddess whose worship appears to have been widespread, although confusions between Astarte and the similarly named **Anat**, **Asherah** (see Christian and Jewish), and **Atargatis** have led scholars to question the extent of this goddess’s power. In addition, Astarte has so many similarities to **Ishtar** that it is occasionally difficult to distinguish them.

As the morning star, Astarte was robed in flames, armed with a sword, and bearing quivers of death-dealing arrows. But as the evening star, Astarte descended to the underworld to reclaim a lost lover, causing human and animal copulation to cease until she returned. Her colors were red and white; in her honor the acacia tree produced flowers in these colors, so she called it her emblem. She loved the cypresses of her country, the stallions that she rode, the first fruits of the harvest, the firstborn of the womb, and bloodless sacrifices. In some images, Astarte stands small-breasted and naked on the back of a lioness, with a lotus and a mirror in one hand and two snakes in the other. Other goddesses of the region, however, are also seen astride lions, so some “Astarte” figures may represent other goddesses. Her temples were typically situated in high places, where stones were anointed during her ceremonies.

Inscriptions and texts with Astarte’s name have been found in Egypt, Sidon, Philistia, Cyprus, and Phoenicia. She has been identified as an antecedent of **Tanit**; she may have developed into **Aphrodite** (see Greek). Whether Astarte is connected to **Al-Lat** is

debated. Whether she is the “Queen of Heaven” warned against by Jeremiah is similarly an unsettled question; generally, she appears in the Bible as **Ashtoreth**. Of the important goddesses of the eastern Mediterranean, Astarte is paradoxically both well known and obscure. (Albright 1968; Binger; Brenner and Fontaine; Cornelius; J. Day 2000; Gibson; Heimpel; Kapelru; Oden; Patai 1990; Petty; Pritchard 1969; Stuckey 1993)

**Atargatis** No one is certain of the original name of this Syrian or Aramaic goddess. She was called Derceto, a Greek translation of her name. Ceto appears as another variant. In Rome, the term *Dea Syria* (“the Syrian Goddess”) described Atargatis. Some philologists suggest that the goddess’s original name (which appears to mean “divine Ata”) was related to **Ishtar** and **Astarte**. Finally, a late cult of Atargatis associates her with **Aphrodite** under the name **Hagne** (see Greece).

The Nabataeans, who built the impressive rock-cut city of Petra in today’s Jordan, especially honored Atargatis. A wealthy and cosmopolitan people, their domain stretched along the trade routes between Arabia and Syria. Although their origins are clouded, modern commentators consider them to be Arabic. Like other pre-Islamic Arabs, they centered their religion on the feminine divine.

The spirit of fertilizing moisture, Atargatis descended from heaven in the form of an egg, from which she emerged as a mermaid. Beautiful and wise, she roused the jealousy of a rival who cursed her to love a beautiful youth. She bore **Semiramis**, placed her in the wilderness with doves to feed her, then threw herself into a lake to become the omnipotent fish mother. In honor of her, the Syrians refused to eat fish or doves. Atargatis appeared in other guises as well: as a vegetation goddess who protected cities; as a sky goddess with eagles around her head; as a dolphin-crowned sea goddess. Her sanctuaries were centered on fish-filled ponds, where doves roosted in sacred trees.

During the Roman era, priests worshiped Atargatis in ecstatic dances. At the shrine in Hieropolis founded by Semiramis, eunuch priests served the image of a fish-tailed woman, according to Lucian. An Assyrian queen, Stratonice, dreamed that she must rebuild Derceto’s temple and set off with a man named Combabus to execute the task. Knowing the queen’s reputation, Combabus castrated himself and left his genitals, preserved in honey, with the king. When the queen fell in love with Combabus, he revealed his mutilation, which did not dissuade her from desiring his constant companionship. When the jealous king sentenced the eunuch to death, Combabus called for the sealed box to prove his innocence, then returned to the goddess’s shrine to become its priest. (Bikerman; Hinnells; Langdon 1931; Lucian; Oden; Petty; Smith)

**Athirat** In the Ras Shamra texts, the primary goddess was Athirat, also known as **Al-Lat** (perhaps the Arabic goddess of the same name); occasionally she was called Qadeshu (“holy woman”). Ruler of Tyre, Sidon, and Elath, Athirat is considered the Canaanite form of **Asherah**, although some scholars consider them separate figures. Athirat was depicted as a naked, curly-haired goddess riding a sacred lion, holding lilies and serpents in upraised hands. Because of her title of “Lady of the Sea,” early scholars described her as a goddess of water. Her connection with the ocean is also



suggested by the location of her shrines at coastal towns. But contemporary scholars question that assumption, as texts connect her with the land, especially the steppes and mountains.

Athirat was preeminently a spouse goddess, connected to human and animal reproduction. The Ras Shamra texts show her as consort of the primary god, El, and head of a pantheon that included their 70 divine children. Some texts suggest estrangement between El and Athirat, which may record a period when the main god was changing but the primary goddess remained the same. Later, she appeared as a protector of her children, who were threatened by Ba'al and his sister **Anat**.

A Mesopotamian goddess, similar or identical to Athirat, was Ashratu, who appears in a narrative in which she attempted to lure the storm god into her bed; he refused and reported the matter to Ashratu's consort, who killed dozens of her children. This story does not appear in the Ugaritic material. It has been argued that Ashratu is a different goddess from Athirat, or a goddess descended from the same original source who developed differently. (Becking et al.; Lipinsky; Mastin; Petty; Pritchard 1943)

**Aya** This obscure early goddess is known from Akkadian texts, where she appears as a star goddess connected with sexuality. Because she was described as a spouse to the sun, she may be a consort goddess, also suggested by the fact that she is invoked as "the bride." (Pritchard 1969; Roberts)

**Ba'alat** Her name meant "Lady" or "Our Lady" and is equivalent to that of the god Ba'al ("Lord"). Chief Phoenician deity of the city of Byblos, she was sculpted as a heavily-built naked woman whose hands supported her mature breasts. When dressed, she was a stylish matron in a shoulder-strapped tight robe and an elaborate Egyptian hairstyle. The Sumerians called her the "wise old lady" of the trees; this connection of goddess and tree was common in the area. (Albright 1920; Pritchard 1969)

**Banit** An obscure Babylonian goddess, Banit bears a name that has been translated as "creatrix" and as "beautiful one." Biblical authors said that she gave her name to Babylon, but that is linguistically unlikely. She is known from inscriptions from the city of Syrene, but does not seem to have been a Syrian goddess. As a consort goddess of an unnamed god, Banit parallels the similar relationship of the little-known goddess Tashmetu; indeed, Banit may be an honorific title of Tashmetu. (Bible, Kings 17:30; Van der Toorn)

**Bau** This Babylonian goddess gave her name to the king of Lagash; upon taking the throne he became Ur-Bau, "man of Bau." Her name has been interpreted as "giver of vegetables," showing power over the fertility of the fields. She also ruled human reproduction. Later texts merged Bau with **Gatamdug**, then with **Gula**. (Barton; Prince 1907)

**Belit-Ilani** A Babylonian title meaning "mistress of the gods," Belit-Ilani was the name of the evening star of desire. Some consider it a title of **Astarte**, some of **Ninlil**.



The title is inscribed on portraits of a woman who bears a babe that she suckles while blessing the child with her right hand. (Barton)

**Belit-Seri** In Babylonian theology, she was the scribe of the afterlife who recorded all human activities. Lady of underworld wilderness, she squatted in front of the queen of the dead to call out judgments on the lives of the newly deceased. The name is sometimes given as a title to **Geštinanna**. (Barton; J. Day; Pritchard 1969; Sandars)

**Damkina** In Akkadian, this name means “lady of earth.” One of the early divinities of the Mesopotamian pantheon, she was the consort of the heaven god Ea and mother of the hero Marduk (see **Ti’âmat**). (Jacobsen; Pritchard 1969)

**Dido** A Carthaginian queen seduced and abandoned by the wandering Trojan Aeneas, Dido killed herself rather than face public dishonor as a ruler whose wishes could be flouted. But behind this legendary figure is another, for Dido was also the founder of Carthage, who killed herself rather than being taken captive. Did Dido live for many centuries and commit suicide twice? That would be necessary to incorporate all the events of “Dido’s” life into one story. More likely, the name was a title held by several queens.

The first Dido, originally Elissa (“goddess”) of Tyre, discovered that her brother had murdered her husband, so she quit her homeland with a retinue of 80 women. Dido traveled to North Africa and purchased a hide’s worth of land, then cut the hide into strips and claimed all the land they surrounded. Her city, Cartha-Elissa, flourished, but its queen killed herself when a neighboring king threatened war unless she slept with him. The sacred grove of Elissa remained in the middle of Carthage until the Romans obliterated the city. The most famous Dido was Carthage’s queen when the Trojan hero Aeneas arrived in search of a land to settle; she entertained him, became his lover, and killed herself when he abandoned her. (Honeyman; Virgil)

**Ēni Mahanahi** In Anatolia, this was the name given to a goddess known to the Greeks as **Leto**, mother of **Artemis**. As Artemis was also a goddess of human and animal birth, her “divine mother” Ēni Mahanahi would presumably have had more cosmic duties. She may thus be described either as goddess of the land and its produce, or as ruler of the universal force of life. She is connected with a warrior goddess, Malinya, of whom little is known. (Bryce)

**Ereshkegal** In Sumerian and Babylonian theology, a huge black-haired woman slept naked in a palace of lapis lazuli, drawing the dead to herself. Ereshkegal ruled the wilderness at the world’s end, surrounded by rainbow gardens. Those who came to her had to divest themselves of all that pertained to earthly life. In art, Ereshkegal appeared as a lion-headed woman suckling lion cubs. She was also shown in a boat, kneeling on the horse of death and traversing the boundary river between her world and ours, gazing toward the offerings that the living place on its shores. She appears most famously in the myth of **Inanna**. (Dalley; Harris 2000; Hooke; Jacobsen 1976; Langdon 1931; McCall; Sandars; Walls; Wolkstein and Kramer)

**Fatima** The daughter of Mohammed is not a goddess in Islam, any more than **Mary** is a goddess in Christianity. However, each of these women occupies a unique position in their patriarchal religions, as figures to whom power is granted similar to that held by goddesses in polytheistic cultures.

Fatima (“shining one”) was married to Ali, a cousin of the Prophet and one of his early followers. The marriage was not a happy one, and Ali threatened to take other wives, but Mohammed discouraged it because he loved his daughter deeply. She returned the love, staying close to him despite her marriage and taking care of him after he was wounded in the battle of Uhud.

Fatima and Ali had two sons, Hassan and Hussayn. When her father died, he told her that she would be the first to join him in paradise. Fatima’s husband Ali expected to succeed the Prophet as leader, but conflict broke out almost immediately with Abu Bakr. Fatima sided with her husband but died almost immediately, leaving orders that upon her breast should be placed a tiny box holding a contract, written in green ink, that offers directions for the salvation of all Shi’ites. Thus green is an emblematic color of Shi’ite Islam, whose people honor Fatima more actively than do the neighboring Sunnis.

Fatima holds quasi-mythic status as mistress of waters (thus the Q’ranic verse, “Water is the source of all life,” is held to refer to her) as well as mistress of salt. She is known as the Eternal Weeper, for she so deeply mourned her father’s death as well as that of her sons, killed in internecine battles. In paradise, Fatima’s tears gain the attention of Allah, who grows angry at her suffering. For this reason, she is called Mistress of the House of Sorrows.

Shi’ite Muslims believe that Fatima has a role during the day of judgement, when she will hold her sons’ bloody garments as she judges all women. Although they will hold onto her cloak as they attempt to pass from the desert to eternal life, only those who wept for Fatima’s sons will pass, while their enemies will fall to everlasting death. (Sered 1991; Young)

**Gatamdug** Goddess of the city of Lagash, where she was counselor to kings and interpreter of dreams, Gatamdug was assimilated into the healing goddess **Gula**. As an independent goddess, she controlled the entrance of semen into the womb. (Barton; Frymer-Kensley)

**Geštinanna** Around the figure of the dying god Dumuzi we find the trinity of **Inanna**, Ninsun, and Geštinanna, the god’s lover, mother, and sister, respectively. Tortured by nightmares, Dumuzi brought the dreams for interpretation to Geštinanna, who realized her brother was under attack by demons. Dumuzi fled, swearing Geštinanna to secrecy. The demons arrived, attacking Geštinanna, who remained steadfastly silent. Nevertheless, the demons found Dumuzi, hiding in his sister’s sheepfold. He was carried to the underworld; Geštinanna set off in pursuit, and the siblings were reunited. Whether the pair returned to life or not is an unsettled question. Sources prior to the late 20th century agree that Dumuzi returned to life, but some later scholarship claims his resurrection was a false projection from Christian material. However, other contemporary

scholars find evidence of rebirth for Dumuzi, if not Geštinanna, in the literature. (Barton; Frymer-Kensley; Jacobsen 1976; Pritchard 1969; Sandars; Yamauchi)

**Gubarru** A Sumerian goddess associated with the mountain god Amurru, Gubarru appears to be the same goddess found in the Akkadian language as Ašratum; that name, in turn, has been argued to be the same as **Athirat**. Gubarru was known as **Bêlit-Seri**, “lady of the steppes,” a term used of several other goddesses. Thus while Gubarru’s name is known, her identity is not established. (Binger; Livingstone)

**Gula** The Akkadian and Babylonian “great physician,” Gula could inflict and cure disease; she was shown with the eight-rayed orb representing the body’s heat that sustains and can destroy life. She took over attributes of the lesser goddesses **Bau** and **Gatamdug**, whose worship faded; sometimes she was called Gula-Bau.

Gula lived in a garden at the world’s center, where she watered the tree that forms its axis. The moon-man, her consort, stood in the sky over the tree, from which Gula plucked fruit to offer her worshipers. A dog accompanied her, symbol of her control over health and death. Dog skeletons have been found in her temples, suggesting that they lived on the temple grounds. In some carvings, Gula was depicted raising both hands in the air in an attitude of worship. (Frymer-Kensley; Gurney; Langdon 1931; Livingstone; Pritchard 1969)

**Hannahanna** An important Hittite myth says that the fertility god Telipinu once disappeared. Water ceased to flow; animals ceased to bear; the milk of human mothers dried up. Gods and humans searched everywhere, but even the wind god could not find Telipinu. Food became scarce. Then Hannahanna, queen of heaven and mother of all, had an idea. While other gods mocked, she instructed a bee to find Telipinu, then sting the god awake, for it was clear that he must be sound asleep to have missed the commotion of the searchers.

The bee flew until exhausted, but in a village so tiny that previous searchers had overlooked it, she found Telipinu asleep. She stung him mightily. Telipinu awoke in a rage, destroying everything within reach. But Hannahanna was ready. She sent an eagle to fetch the god and, with the help of maidens bearing sesame and nectar and accompanied by the enchantments of **Kamrusepa**, Hannahanna removed the god’s fury, and fertility returned to the world.

Several texts suggest that it was Hannahanna herself who disappeared, leaving the earth in distress and the crops threatened. When she was gone, logs would not light on the hearths, cows did not tend their calves, and mothers ignored their children. But when the goddess returned, all was restored to order. (Deighton; Gurney; Hoffman; Hooke)

**Hebat** Originally the presiding goddess of the Hurrian pantheon, she later merged with the Hittite sun goddess **Wurusemu**. She was named in one text that invokes “the sun goddess of Arinna, my lady . . . In the Hatti country thou bearest the name of the sun goddess of Arinna, but in the land which thou madest, the cedar land, thou bearest the name Hebat.” She was depicted as a distinguished, well-dressed matron, wearing

a crown, jewelry, and fancy shoes, standing on a lion. Little is known of her mythology except a fragmentary narrative in which she hid from a monster that threatened her. (Akurgal; Gurney; Hoffman; Laroche)

**Hutena** With her twin sister Hutellura, this Hittite goddess of fate derived her name from the verb for “writing.” The goddesses appeared at birth to forecast an infant’s life; they may have been seen as creating the child’s life. In Hattian, their counterparts were the goddesses Istustaya and Papaya. (Gurney)

**Inanna** The greatest goddess of Sumer, the southern part of Babylonia, was Inanna; in the northern region, the figure became **Ishtar**. While similar, these goddesses differ in some aspects and are thus separately discussed. However, some scholars refer to this figure as Inanna-Ishtar to emphasize their identity.

Inanna’s most famous myth began when she entertained two suitors, the farmer Enkidu and the shepherd Dumuzi. Both brought her gifts; both wooed her with flattery. Her brother urged the farmer’s suit, but Dumuzi’s soft woolens tipped the scales, and he became the goddess’s favorite. But soon Dumuzi grew arrogant, for which he would ultimately pay.

Inanna decided to visit the underworld. She arranged with her prime minister, Ninshuba, that if she did not return within three days and three nights, he would stage mourning ceremonies and would appeal to the highest deities to rescue her. Then Inanna descended. At the first of the underworld’s seven gates, the gatekeeper demanded part of Inanna’s attire. So it was at each gate. Piece by piece, Inanna gave up her jewelry and clothing until she stood naked before **Ereshkegal**, who turned eyes of stone on the goddess from the upper world.

At that Inanna lost all life and hung as a corpse in the realm of death. When Inanna failed to return, Ninshuba did as instructed. Enki, the goddess’s father, came to her aid. Fashioning two strange creatures, Kurgurra and Kalaturra, from the dirt beneath his fingernails, he sent them into the afterlife with food and water to revive Inanna.

But no one could leave the underworld unless a substitute was found. So demons followed the goddess as she ascended to her kingdom, grabbing each god they met. Inanna freed each one in turn, remembering good deeds they had performed. But when Inanna reached her holy city, Erech, she found that Dumuzi had set himself up as ruler in her stead. Angered at his presumption, the goddess commanded that he become her substitute. Luckily for Dumuzi, **Geštinanna** won back his life from Ereshkegal for half of each year.

Dumuzi was not Inanna’s only lover. She had an affair with the hero Enmerkar, who took her to his city of Erech, later to become her most important shrine. But Inanna proved fickle, abandoning Enmerkar in his time of need and returning only after he begged her to do so. While the goddess did not object to giving her favors, they could not be taken; when the gardener Skukalletuda raped her, she killed him.

Mesopotamia’s most famous epic begins when the goddess was walking along the banks of the Euphrates River. There she noticed an uprooted tree. She rescued the tree and brought it to Erech, where she replanted it with the intention of making a throne from its wood. But the demon goddess **Lilith** had taken up residence in the tree’s roots,

as had a snake and a magical bird. Inanna called upon the hero Gilgamesh for help. He killed the snake and frightened away both the bird and Lilith. Then Gilgamesh grew haughty and began to suppress the city dwellers, for which reason his magical implements fell into the underworld, beginning the epic that bears the hero's name.

Gilgamesh further insulted the goddess when she saw him arrayed in fine clothes and proposed that he marry her. He not only refused but reminded her that her earlier lovers had come to grief. The offended goddess begged her father to give her the bull of heaven to use against Gilgamesh. Despite its size and strength, the hero killed it, shocking both the goddess and her women worshipers. Gloating over his strength, Gilgamesh failed to realize that his offenses against the gods would cause his downfall, which took the form of the death of his companion, the wild man Enkidu. Afterwards, Gilgamesh went on a quest to find the herb of immortality, a quest that led him to **Siduri**.

While Inanna's loves constitute an important part of her mythology, some myths show her active in other ways. She brought civilization to this world by stealing the Tablets of Destiny from their original owner, the god Enki. They were his treasures, which he kept to himself. But Inanna took pity on humanity and traveled to her father's hall, where she was welcomed with food and wine. Enki loved his daughter's company so much that he took cup after cup from her and then promised her anything she desired. Instantly Inanna asked for the Tablets of Destiny. Too intoxicated to object, Enki agreed.

Inanna immediately set sail for Erech. Awakening the next day, Enki regretted his rash action. By the time he caught up with her, Inanna had gained the safety of her kingdom, and even the seven tricks Enki played on her did not regain his treasures.

Some of the most important Sumerian literary products were devoted to Inanna or created for her rituals. The earliest poet known by name was Enheduanna, daughter of King Sargon of Akkad, who wrote of Inanna as both loving and destructive goddess. The works of this significant poet were lost for millennia, but a cache of 3 long poems to the goddess and 42 temple hymns were found in excavations of Ur in the 1920s, providing scholars with important information as to Inanna's character and worship.

Inanna represented fertility and the abundance of grain in the storehouse; she also represented war, as the protection of assets from potential invaders. She was embodied in the star Venus, which appears with the sun at morning and evening; as goddess of lovers, Inanna was especially connected with the evening star. (Barton; Dexter; Enheduanna; Frymer-Kensley; Hallo and Van Dijk; Harris 1991; Heimpel; Jacobsen 1976; Kramer 1961, 1969, 1979; Langdon 1914, 1931; Pritchard 1969; Sanders; Stuckey 2001; Wolkstein and Kramer)

**Inara** In Hittite myths, inherited from their Hattian predecessors, this goddess rescued humanity, which was threatened by the dragon Illuyuksa. The goddess filled vessel after vessel with liquor, inviting a man named Hupasiyato to set them as bait for the dragon. That night Inara rewarded the human's industry by sleeping with him. The next morning the pair found the dragon and her children unconscious from intoxication, easy to slay.

As a reward, Inara installed the man in a splendid house on a high cliff, where they lived in pleasure until the goddess was called on a journey. Inara instructed her

paramour not to gaze out the window while she was away, but after 20 days he disobeyed. Seeing his human wife and children outside, the man grew suddenly homesick for mortal company. His complaints angered Inara when she returned, and she dispatched him to the underworld for disobedience.

The story of the destruction of the dragon of darkness was celebrated each new year by Inara's worshipers at the feast of Purulli. A man enacting the part of the goddess's human helper may have met his death after spending the night with a priestess, although this common early interpretation of the texts is now debated. Inara appears to have been similar to Greek **Artemis**, a huntress who lived in wilderness areas, although she has also been interpreted as a goddess of sovereignty. (Gurney; Hoffman)

**Isjara** This Hurrian goddess gave her name to a mountain; she was also the source of a disease that bore her name (perhaps indicating a tumor or raised area of skin). A magical tablet from Carthage may identify her with **Hebat**. The name was also born by Babylonian **Inanna** in her rarely seen motherly aspect. The name appears in various Mesopotamian texts invoking the goddess as guarantor of oaths and mistress of oracles. (Enheduanna; Levi Della Vida; Roberts)

**Ishtar** In the northern Babylonian kingdom of Akkad, Ishtar stood at the head of the pantheon. Because the Akkadians took over the lands and traditions of earlier Semitic people, Ishtar acquired attributes of earlier goddesses after conquest of their peoples. Among the nearby Assyrians, who also honored her, Ishtar was important, though less prominent. The goddess may have originally been paired with a similarly named consort, Ashtar, later absorbed into the goddess.

Ishtar grew mightier as lesser goddesses were assimilated into her, becoming only titles: Aja, a dawn goddess associated with eastern mountains; Anatu, a cosmic divinity, possibly Ishtar's mother; the Akkadian light goddess Anunitu; the war goddess Agašayam; Irnini, goddess of Lebanon's cedar-forested mountains; Kilili or Kulili, the desirable woman symbolized by windows and birds; Kir-gu-lu, the rain-giver; Sahirtu, sender of messages between lovers; and Sarbanda, force of sovereignty.

Ishtar was a complex, sometimes contradictory goddess. She was depicted as a fertile mother holding out her massive breasts, yet she was also violent and destructive. She was the ever-virgin warrior, but also a wanton lover. Like Inanna, Ishtar loved a vegetation god who died and was reborn. Like Inanna, Ishtar descended to the underworld. Texts imply, but do not clearly state, that Ishtar was inspired by her desire to free her lover Dumuzi. But Dumuzi (also transliterated as Tammuz) remained in the land of death, and the goddess took a new consort each spring.

Ishtar ruled the moon. She also owned the morning and evening stars, symbols of the warlike and lustful energies of the feminine. As the morning star Dilbat, Ishtar hitched her chariot to seven lions before setting off to hunt animals or humans. As Zib, the evening star, she was adored by women as the "glad-eyed Ishtar of desire, the goddess of sighing." She was called Harimtu, "harlot of heaven," and was depicted dressed like a prostitute. Because goddesses in this region were typically provided with consorts, the Assyrians linked Ishtar with their primary god, Assur. (Ananian; Craig; Dalley 1991; Frymer-Kensley; Harris 1991; Heimpel; Jacobsen 1976;



Kapelru; Langdon 1914, 1931; McCall; Petty; Prince 1910; Pritchard 1969; Rodney; Sandars; Temple; Walls; Yamauchi)

**Jahi** According to Iranian mythology, this demonic woman roused from sleep the spirit of conflict, Angra Mainyu, ending the primordial peace. She had to shout three times, so fearful was Angra Mainyu of the powerful Ahura Mazda. Finally he rose and kissed her, changing his form from a lizard to a handsome man. Energized, he set about making evil in the world. The Persian menstruation spirit, she was perceived as a *drujs* or demon that urged men to evil deeds. (Boyce; Carnoy 1931)

**Jēh** Jēh was the Indo-Iranian first woman, called the “queen of all whores” because she arrived at the creation with the devil already in tow and had intercourse with him immediately. She represented not only women’s sexuality, in an obviously derogatory fashion, but the temptation of religions other than Zoroastrianism. Because of her lust, Jēh was cursed with menstruation, which she transmitted to her descendents. (Boyce)

**Kamrusepa** This Hittite goddess of magic assisted **Hannahanna** in restoring the earth’s fertility. When the god Telipinu arrived raging in heaven, she used her magical powers to tame him. Several texts about Kamrusepa contain magical formulae that employed such obscure items as the fire of the steppe and the wheat of irrigation. She ruled chanting, healing, and ritual purification. Her name in Hattian was Kattahziwuri. (Deighton; Gurney; Hoffman; Hooke)

**Ki** The Sumerian earth goddess was the original female principle of matter, twin to An, the heaven god; both were born of the primal goddess, **Ti’āmat**. Ki lost stature as her son Enlil took power from her. Even her name was stripped from her when she was identified with **Ninhursag**. (Kramer 1979; Langdon 1931; Sandars)

**Kotharat** The goddesses of this name appear in Canaanite scripture as daughters of the new moon and prophetic forces. Through their efforts, they could bring fertility to young couples. They may also have been guardians of nubile young girls. Called the “wise goddesses,” they set the bride-price for every woman, including the mighty Ishtar. (Gibson)

**Kubaba** An ancient Hattian goddess, Kubaba was the mountain mother from whom **Cybele** (see Southeastern Europe) derived her name. Later writings called her Queen of Kargamis, after a Hittite metropolis; there she was called Khipa or Khebe, then Kubabas, and finally Kubaba. Mounted on or between two lions, Kubaba links the unnamed mother goddess of Çatal Hüyük with Cybele. (Garstang; Gurney; Mellart 1989; Vieyra)

**Lelwani** The Hittite (possibly originally Hurrian) earth goddess, at whose shrine near Babylon the festival of Inara was celebrated, was identified in Hittite treaties with **Ereshkegal**. (Deighton; Macqueen)



**Manāt** With **Al-Lat** and **Uzza**, this goddess of fate and time formed the ancient Arabian religious trinity. Her worship stretched across Arabia; she may have been the eldest of the Arabic goddesses. Her principal sanctuary, the shrine of Qudayd, was located between Mecca and Medina. Her ritual entailed a pilgrimage to places of spiritual significance, at the end of which pilgrims shaved their heads and worshiped at Manāt's shrine, an uncut black stone demolished by Mohammed's son Ali under his father's orders. Mohammed also gave Ali the shrine's treasures, including two jewel-studded swords, one of which was later famous as "the Sword of Ali." (al-Kalbi; Langdon 1931; Rubin)

**Mylitta** The name of this goddess, Mulitta or Mu'Allidtu, was Hellenized by the Greek historian Herodotus when he described how her Babylonian priestesses, burning incense and wearing wreaths around their heads, awaited strangers with whom to perform sacred rites of love. Mylitta's worshipers bobbed their hair at puberty and offered up their youthful locks, following that by offering their bodies in sexual rituals with others. At her shrine beside the sacred spring of Afka, these women set up booths or camped in the green groves, enjoying intercourse with those who came to them.

Among the most controversial questions about religion in the eastern Mediterranean is that of so-called sacred prostitution. Ancient authors claimed to have witnessed women offering their bodies to strangers in goddess temples; the Hebrew Bible refers to male prostitution as part of the non-Israelite religion. Many contemporary scholars find little evidence for sex as a religious practice in the region, describing earlier writers as engaging in fantasy rather than proper interpretation and, especially, claiming that the theory of "cultic prostitution" is demeaning to women. Yet others continue to find evidence of sexual rituals in honor of goddesses and interpret them as honoring women's sexuality. (Herodotus; Lerner; Qualls-Corbetter)

**Nammu** The earliest Sumerian goddess, Nammu was embodied in the abyss from which the universe emerged. She gave birth to gods including **Ki** and then assisted **Ninmah** in forming the human race. When **Ashnan** failed to provide food for the deities because she was drunk, Nammu's son Enki created mankind to serve the immortals. Nammu lost status as her powers were transferred to Enki. She may be the original of **Ti'âmat**. (Brandon; Hooke; Kramer 1979; O'Brien; Pritchard 1969)

**Nanâ** This early Arabic goddess was associated with the planet Venus. In the city of Uruk, she was honored together with **Inanna**, also associated with Venus. Unlike other goddesses, she appears to have retained her own identity rather than being absorbed into Inanna, but little is known of her independent worship. Nanâ was also an old Babylonian name for **Ishtar**. Ishtar's worship as Nanâ was long-lived, for the Assyrian conqueror Assurbanipal, sacking the Elamite capital of Susa in 636 BCE, discovered an image of the goddess that the Elamites had carried off 1,635 years earlier. Taking on the aspects of the Iranian goddess **Ārmaiti**, Nanâ survived even later, appearing as a funerary goddess. (Azarpay; Barton; Gurney; Heimpel; Pritchard 1969)

**Nanshe** This Babylonian water goddess was honored each year with a flotilla of boats. In Lagash, the flotilla joined a sacred barge bearing the goddess's image, and the procession floated about as Nanshe's worshipers reveled. A wise goddess, she was an interpreter of dreams and omens. She served each New Year's Day as the judge of each person's activities during the preceding year; she assured that widows and orphans received the care they needed. (Kramer 1979; Pritchard 1969; Roberts)

**Nikkal** In Canaanite scripture, this lunar goddess ("clear lady") was betrothed to the moon god Yarikh through the efforts of the god of summer, Khirkehib. Yarikh offered an impressive bride price of gold and silver, as well as jewels, for the hand of the goddess. When Khirkehib suggested other available goddesses, two daughters of Ba'al named Pidray and Ybrdmy, the moon god rejected them and said his heart lay only with Nikkal, after which the couple was wed. (Gibson)

**Ningal** This Sumerian goddess, daughter of the reed goddess Ningikuga, was courted by the moon god, Nanna, who brought necklaces of lapis lazuli and turned the deserts into orchards. He gathered birds' eggs for her and promised to milk all her cows. Their marriage was fruitful, with **Inanna** being their eldest daughter. The high priestess of Nanna incarnated the goddess, sharing the title of Zirru with her. Her duties included attending to the goddess through daily offerings of food and beer. (Jacobsen 1976; Wolkstein and Kramer)

**Ninhursag** The Mesopotamian goddess of birth lived with the god of wisdom, Enki, with whom she had a tempestuous relationship. In Dilmun, where Ninhursag and Enki made their home, there was no age or death, no sickness and no barrenness. But the land was dry until the goddess pleaded with Enki for something to drink. He answered her prayers with an abundance of sweet water that made the land prosperous and its residents comfortable.

Once this was done, the primal deities turned to reproducing themselves. One day Ninhursag's belly swelled up. Nine days later the goddess Ninsar ("plant woman") was born. Enki seduced his daughter, who bore Ninhurra ("mountain woman"). Enki slept with his granddaughter, who bore **Uttu**, the spider goddess of weaving. Enki wanted her too, but her mother said she must demand a bride-price of cucumbers, apples, and grapes. Lustful Enki granted them, and Uttu agreed to occupy his bed.

From their affair sprang eight different kinds of plants. But Enki ate his offspring as quickly as they appeared. Furious Ninhursag leveled so terrible a curse at him that he fell down, stricken in eight parts of his body with eight diseases. The other gods grew concerned as Enki weakened, but the goddess refused to heal him. Finally, when Enki was a breathing corpse, the deities prevailed on Ninhursag to cure him.

The goddess agreed to a compromise: she would create eight tiny goddesses who would control the health of Enki's afflicted parts. If they chose to, they could do the healing. The little goddesses set to work, and Enki was soon well again. Some texts differ on the means of curing, saying that Ninhursag cured Enki by placing him, together with the plants that had sickened him, in her vagina, whence he could be reborn.

Ninhursag gained her name, which means “lady of foothills,” from her son, the storm god Ninuta, who built a mountain in her honor and named her for it. Because of the abundance of wildlife in the hills, she was a goddess of animals, both wild and tame. Ninhursag has been interpreted as a later form of **Ki**. (Barton; Brandon; Carnoy 1916; Frymer-Kensley; Hooke; Jacobsen 1976; Kramer 1961, 1979; Langdon 1931; Pritchard 1969; Young.)

**Ninkasi** The Sumerian goddess of intoxicating fruit, especially grapes, had as her consort a god whose name meant “good vinestalk.” Their seven children included Siris, goddess of beer, called the “drink of the mountains” because it was believed to be the preferred intoxicant of less-civilized hill-dwellers. Ninkasi lived on a mythical mountain, Sâbu (“drink wine”), from which she dispensed her gifts to humanity. Ninkasi has been described as another form of **Siduri**. (Albright 1920; Pritchard 1969)

**Ninlil** Represented by serpents, mountains, and stars, Ninlil was the city goddess of Nippur, whose prince ruled as her consort. She was a goddess of grain and the wealth it provides; her mother was the goddess of barley, Ninshebargunu. As **Ishtar**’s worship spread across Babylonia, Ninlil became identified with her, ultimately losing her identity. Some texts describe Ninlil as mother of the god Ninurta, who built a stone levee to control the flow of the Tigris River and bestowed the name of **Ninhursag** on his mother; other sources consider them separate.

Various texts describe Ninlil’s mating and maternity. In one, Ninlil was bathing at a lonely spot when the god Enlil took advantage of the solitude by raping the virgin goddess. (In another version of this myth, Ninlil’s mother Ninshebargunu told her daughter how to conceive by the god: to walk along the river until she found a place to bathe and then do so, knowing that she would attract Enlil.) The other deities banished Enlil to the underworld. But Ninlil, having conceived, followed Enlil.

The child in Ninlil’s belly was the moon. If born in the underworld, he would remain there for eternity. When her time came, Ninlil performed magic: she bore three shadow children, one each for herself and Enlil and one for their child, each to remain perpetual hostages to Ereshkegal. Then, still pregnant, she climbed to earth with Enlil. Thus was the moon god Sin born. (Barton; Frymer-Kensley; Jacobsen 1976; Kramer 1961; Pritchard 1969)

**Ninmah** The creator of humanity was the lapis-crowned Sumerian goddess Ninmah. A potter, she mixed clay to form images of herself, placing seven on her right hand and seven on her left. Between the rows, Ninmah set a baked brick. She uttered life-giving incantations over the clay images, and they sprang to life: those on her right hand as men, those on her left as women. Delighted with her creations, Ninmah called the gods to celebrate. Soon the goddess began drunkenly playing with remnant clay, creating barren women, eunuchs, and four other unrecorded human types. This excited Enki, her consort, who decided to display his creativity. He was too drunk: up from the ground wobbled a crippled, retarded man. Horrified, Enki begged Ninmah to correct it, but the creatrix could not change what already existed.

Sumerian women invoked Ninmah's name during childbirth; she was especially kind to those birthing second children, hence her titles Mami ("mother goddess") and, in Sumerian, **Ninmah** ("lady mother"; also an early goddess of birth or an epithet of **Ki**). It has been argued that she is the same goddess as **Ninhursag**.

As Ninmah's worship traveled across the Mediterranean, she became less a gentle earth mother, more a warrior goddess of private property. As owner of the earth, she demanded that a corner of every field be left wild; if this were done, she would protect against bad crops and covetous neighbors. In later times, Ninmah was portrayed standing or riding on fierce lions, bejeweled with the riches of her people. When she reached Rome, she was the image of the warrior **Bellona** (See Rome) and was transformed into Mah-Bellona. (Brandon; Dalley 1991; Jacobsen 1976; Kramer 1961, 1979; Livingstone; Pritchard 1969; Roberts)

**Ninurra** The Sumerian goddess of pottery-making, Ninurra was clearly a goddess in early texts but was later transformed into a male god. A similar transformation happened to the goddess of magic, Ningirim, who had domain over magical incantations in earliest times, but this power was transferred to male gods and Ningirim faded away. (Frymer-Kensley)

**Ninsûna** The "lady of wild cows," this goddess gave birth to two important figures: the hero Dumuzi, beloved of **Inanna**; and Gilgamesh, who spurned Inanna and was punished for it. She bore several kings as well, sometimes assuming human form to do so. In the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, she appears as Rimat-Ninsun, the "revered cow" and "wise custodian of knowledge," who interpreted her son's dreams and offers sacrifices to assist him. (Jacobsen; McCall; Temple.)

**Nisaba** "She who teaches the decrees" of divinity to humans, Nisaba brought literacy, accounting, and astrology to a Sumerian king on a tablet inscribed with the names of beneficent stars. An architect, she drew up temple plans. She was also an oracle and dream interpreter. The most learned of deities, this snake goddess also controlled the fertility of fields. (Frymer-Kensley; Horowitz; Kramer 1979; Pritchard 1969)

**Nungal** The Sumerian goddess of prisons had domain over those who failed water ordeals designed to determine guilt on the final day of judgement. If, after having been thrown in water, the accused floated, he was released as innocent; if he sank, he was pulled into shore and handed to Nungal, who put him in her prison until his heart was clear and pure, whereupon he was released to the gods. (Frymer-Kensley)

**Paghat** Little is known about this Ugaritic heroine except that she figures in narratives concerning **Anat**, who had Paghat's brother Aqhat killed because she coveted his prize bow. Her father, Danel, tried to dissuade her from taking vengeance, but she would not be stopped. Although the end of the story is missing, apparently Paghat succeeded not only in avenging her brother but also in restoring him to life. (Cassuto; Pritchard 1969)

**Qudšu** “Holy one” was a title used in Ugaritic texts to refer to **Athirat**, although in other texts the goddess in question was **Anat**. Under this title the goddess was depicted as riding a lion; the position of her outstretched hands suggests that she was offering something. But the title can sometimes indicate a goddess, as in Egypt, where Qudšu was depicted nude, astride a lion, carrying snakes and flowers; she has been defined as a Hittite goddess, despite her non-Hittite name. She appears to have been an independent goddess in some places, a goddess-title in others. (Ackerman 1993; Binger; Brooks); Cornelius; J. Day 1986; Lerner; Petty; Pritchard 1943)

**Rūdābah** In the *Sha-Nameh*, a compilation of Persian poetry on mythological themes, Rūdābah was an exquisitely beautiful heroine—more beautiful than the sun, her body like rubies, her hair like amber. Falling in love with a man named Zal, she wandered to his camp, pretending to gather roses. Captivated by her, Zal agreed to a night of love. She prepared by decorating her palace with brocaded hangings, placing vats of fragrant flowers throughout it, and perfuming it with amber. When he arrived, Rūdābah made him pledge he would never raise a hand to her before she welcomed him to her bed. (Carnoy 1931)

**Sauska** A Hurrian divinity, Sauska’s winged beauty seduced even monsters. When the sea-monster Hedammu threatened the world, she arrayed herself in finery and went forth to do battle. Sedating the monster with a love potion, Sauska may have killed him, although the text is broken and therefore unclear. The kings of Anatolia served her, and she commanded them through dreams, oracles, and augury of female soothsayers. Sauska may be a form of **Hannahanna**. (Gurney; Hoffman)

**Semiramis** Whether this legendary figure represents a goddess or a human woman has long been in dispute. One of the earliest western writers to record the Semiramis legend, Ctesias, assumed she was a disguised form of an historical queen, Sammuramat, who ruled from 812 to 783 BCE in Babylon or Syria. It has also been argued that Semiramis was merely an Assyrian noblewoman.

There is evidence of an early Semitic goddess, Shemiram (possibly “famous one”), who developed into Semiramis. Lucian supports the likelihood that this is the name of a goddess, saying she was worshiped at a temple where water was brought twice annually from a distant source and poured into a channel. This goddess may have once been named Simi. Some have argued that she was originally a Semitic goddess named Shemira whose shrines were called Shemiramoth.

Her legend says that she was the daughter of the Syrian goddess **Atargatis**, who left her in the desert to be raised by doves. When she grew up, she attracted the attentions of Prince Omnes. After they married, he remained so infatuated with her that, when Semiramis decided to become queen of Babylon with a second husband, Ninus, Omnes committed suicide. He was not the only man destroyed by love for Semiramis. Unwilling to share her life with a man, she took handsome soldiers to bed and had them killed afterward. Across western Asia, “mounds of Semiramis” are said to be her lovers’ graves.

Semiramis was a great builder, especially of earthworks; many towns were named for her. Throughout Iran and Iraq, she was said to have built many important structures. In Armenia, Semiramis fell in love with the sun. When he did not return her affection, Semiramis attacked him with a huge army. The queen took the day, and Er, the sun, was killed in the battle. But then Semiramis repented her fury and begged the other gods to restore the sun to life. (Dalley 2005; Lucian; Sayce; Smith)

**Sertapsuruhi** The daughter of the ocean in Hurrian myth, Sertapsuruhi gave birth to a monster serpent, Hedammu, who was discovered by the goddess **Sauska**. She told her brother, the hero Tessub, about her discovery, but he became withdrawn with fear, so Sauska took action, seducing the monster and defeating him. (Hoffman)

**Shamaili** Heroine of an Afghani folktale, Shamaili was the daughter of an oppressive king who confined her in a labyrinthine house, intending to kill any suitor who could not locate her within the maze. Seven sons of a neighboring king wanted to marry Shamaili, but the first six lost their lives trying. Finally Jallad Khan hid himself in a sculpture that was taken to the princess's bedroom. As she slept, he slipped out and exchanged rings with her. When Shamaili found the new ring, she was both excited and frightened. Speaking to the statue, she asked it to become her husband. At that, Jallad Khan came forth and slept for 10 nights with Shamaili, after which he demanded her hand from her father. (Kraft)

**Shamhat** A hero of the *Epic of Gilgamesh* was the wild man Enkidu, an animal-like being who ate grass with the gazelles and bathed with the herds. Created by the goddess Aruru as a warrior, Enkidu seemed untamable. But the prostitute Shamhat initiated him into sexual pleasure, mating with him for six days and seven nights. At the end, the wild man was so tame that animals ran away from him and Enkidu, fully human, sat at Shamhat's feet to gain instruction in civilization. (Harris 2000; Walls)

**Shapash** In the ancient Near East, the sun was more often female than male, and Shapash was her name in Ugaritic mythology; whether this was a title of **Asherah** is not determined. In the Ugaritic *Epic of Ba'al*, Shapash retrieved the fertility god's plaything from the underworld and seems associated with that realm. Shapash served as a messenger of the gods because she traveled easily across the face of the earth. Although it has been established for a half-century that Shapash was a goddess, the assumption that solar deities are always male leads even recent scholars to call Shapash a god. (Ackerman 1992; Binger; Gibson; Pritchard 1969; Roberts)

**Shataquat** In Ugaritic mythology, this goddess of healing saved King Keret from an illness brought on by his betrayal of promises to **Athirat**. The text both begins and ends with the illness of the king. At the beginning, he was ill with grief over losing his family. But the high god, El, appeared to him in a dream and told him to threaten a neighboring kingdom. Making vows to Athirat for success, Keret followed El's instructions and, when offered riches to deter the invasion, demanded instead the princess Huriya. Their marriage ceremony was blessed with good omens, but Keret failed



to fulfill his vows and fell desperately ill. The land, too, fell ill; rain failed to come and the harvest was threatened. Keret sent for his sister, Thitmanat, who made sacrifices for the health of the land and its ruler. From this effort, Shataquat came flying over a hundred towns to get to Keret's side. Her presence drove away death, and the king was cured. (Hooke)

**Siduri** When the hero Gilgamesh sought treasure at the world's end, he found this veiled woman in a bejeweled vineyard, watered by four streams. There, Siduri sang of the fleetness of time and the pleasures of life, telling Gilgamesh to dance and play. He refused, demanding instead directions to death's ferryman. Siduri told him, but Gilgamesh's search did not end well. (Albright 1920; Harris 2000; Jacobsen 1976; Pritchard 1969)

**Tanit** The seagoing Phoenicians made much of their wealth transporting tin, used in making bronze, from Cornwall in England to the smelters of the eastern Mediterranean. Because they needed a refueling base for the long journey, they established the city of Carthage. There, the primary divinity was Tanit, whose name may have been a title of **Astarte**, although the identification is debated; some scholars maintain that the original of Tanit was **Anat**. Tanit may also have been an indigenous goddess of the Berbers whose identity meshed with an immigrant goddess.

The winged goddess with a zodiac around her head, holding the sun and moon, was a sky goddess; she was also depicted with doves and holding a scepter. Her image was the triangle, the "sign of Tanit." According to the Christian writer Tertullian, Tanit especially ruled the rains; prayers to her relieved droughts. That her worship remained after the fall of Carthage to Rome in 146 BCE can be assumed because the 4th century Christian apologist Augustine speaks of her declining power. (Cross; J. Day 1986; Ogden; Petty.)

**Ti'âmat** Before our world was created, there was Ti'âmat, dragon woman of bitter waters, and her mate Apsu, god of fresh water. Some early texts say that Ti'âmat gave birth to two divinities, Lahmu and the goddess Lahamu, whose names refer to silt, the first bits of created matter. These twins mated to produce the horizon, the heavens, the earth, and finally the winds and storms. The Babylonian epic *Enuna Elish* says Ti'âmat herself gave birth to monsters and storms. Finally, gods came forth from the womb of Ti'âmat, including the heaven god, An, and his consort **Ki**. The gods set up house in another part of the universe, where their noise disturbed Apsu. He approached Ti'âmat with the suggestion that, because she had created them, she could do away with the gods. Ti'âmat refused.

The gods got wind of the conversation and killed Apsu. At that Ti'âmat exploded and, with Kingu, her firstborn son, attacked the gods. They waged a battle that goes on to this day, with the hero Marduk each year swallowed by the enormous dragon. In some stories, Ti'âmat became a civilizing fish mother. But other myths say that Marduk killed his mother in the battle. Her body fell into the lower universe, one half becoming the dome of heaven, the other half a wall to contain the waters. Her right eye became the Tigris River, while the left became the Euphrates. Her ghost wanders the



world as a camel. (Brandon; Harris 2000; Horowitz; Jacobsen 1968, 1976; Langdon 1931; Livingstone; McCall; Sandars)

**Uttu** The Sumerian goddess of weaving was the descendent of **Ninhursag**. Advised to demand bridal gifts before sleeping with her ancestor Enki (as her mother, grandmother, and great-grandmother had done), Uttu did so, becoming the first “married” woman in the pantheon. But she had difficulty bearing a child, which Ninhursag had to remove from her womb. Afterwards, Enki gave her domain over women’s crafts. In her role as goddess of weaving, Uttu was the weaver of the world. (Frymer-Kensley; Pritchard 1969)

**Uzza** One of a trinity of goddesses worshiped in pre-Islamic Mecca, Uzza (“the mighty”) was goddess of the morning star. Early in Islamic history, Mohammed’s soldiers destroyed Uzza’s sanctuary of acacia trees, centered on a sacred stone representing her, south of Mecca. The Prophet himself had honored this goddess in his youth, offering her a white sheep. His family, the Quraysh, practiced ritual circumambulation to the goddess.

With **Al-Lat** and **Manāt**, this goddess composed the “daughters of Allah.” She was considered the most recent of the three, associated with oracular pronouncements. But monotheistic writers connected her, as they did other goddesses, with evil; the early Christian writer Jerome specifically described Uzza as a form of the fallen angel Lucifer.

Uzza’s name was borne by the Prophet Mohammed’s paternal uncle, ‘Adb al-‘Uzzā, also known as Abū Lahab. As a member of the Quraysh clan, he, like Mohammed, had roots near Mecca and Uzza’s sanctuary. According to Islamic tradition, Aflah b. al-Naḍr al-Shaybanī, who tended Uzza’s shrine, despaired that it might go unattended after his death. Mohammed’s uncle ‘Abd al-‘Uzzā promised to tend the shrine but changed his loyalty to Allah when Mohammed conquered the land. The sanctuary of Uzza was destroyed shortly after the fall of Mecca in 629 CE.

Two sons of ‘Abd al-‘Uzzā had married Mohammed’s daughters Ruqayya and Umm Kulthūm. But ‘Abd al-‘Uzzā ended those marriages because of Mohammed’s rejection of the three Arab goddesses when the “satanic verses” were replaced by verses that specifically denounced them. In retaliation Mohammed prayed that a lion would kill one son, and shortly thereafter the young man was mauled. Abū Lahab died shortly thereafter, and his wife, a high-ranking noblewoman, was condemned as a “wood-carrier,” apparently a reference to part of Uzza’s rituals.

The campaign against Uzza included a raid upon her sacred trees, which were cut down one after another. When the third was cut, a woman with disheveled hair appeared, to be cut in half by one of Mohammed’s warriors. (al-Kalbi; Heimpel; Rubin; Septimus)

**Vashti** A minor Elamite goddess appears in the Book of **Esther** as a queen of the Persians and the state’s high priestess. A diplomat and daughter of a king, Vashti was married to a fool who drunkenly demanded that she appear before his friends naked. She refused. But an Israelite adviser, intent upon replacing Vashti with a woman of his

tribe, urged the king to sentence her to death. The uprising that followed was only put down when Esther ascended the throne. (Esther 1:10 OAA; Clay; Ginsberg VI)

**Wurusemu** This Hittite goddess was better known as the sun goddess of Arinna, after a city that may have been the location of a solar shrine. She was called Estan (later a god's name), or Wurusemu, an untranslated name; she is identified in one text as identical with the Hurrian goddess Hepat. Her shrines were carved on rock outcroppings; upright stones were engraved with sun signs in her honor. At Yazilikaya, near Boghazkoy, an impressive shrine shows a parade of divinities headed by Wurusemu astride a lioness and crowned with solar rays. Two identical smaller female figures follow her, perhaps her daughter Mezulla and granddaughter Zuntehis. Metal statues show the goddess in a gracious open posture, a winged sun as headdress.

As fate goddess, she allotted each person what he or she deserved. The gods received their power from her, in return for which they opened and closed the door of heaven as she passed. Her servants were the fortunetellers Istustaya and Papaya, who divined the length of a king's reign or a worker's hard life by their magic mirrors and spindles.

As fate goddess, the sun was queen of the dead, to whom funeral services were offered. Conducted by old women, the funeral started with sacrifices of ox and goats; fiery offerings went on overnight. Then, at dawn, women quenched the fires and drank to the soul of the dead. A human figure made of fruits was placed on the pyre and filled with food and drink. The priestess balanced gold and silver with mud, calling out to Wurusemu to offer salvation to the deceased.

Her consort was the weather god; her rituals were performed by a high priestess, who also ruled the country as queen. The sun goddess was ruler of the heavens. Reflecting her status, the early Hittite queens were substantial rulers. (Gurney; Macqueen)

**Yimāk** Iranian legend says this primal woman mated with her brother, Yima. Yima gave Yimāk to a demon and married one of that devilish breed, creating races of monsters. In Zoroastrianism, the legend was connected with the human twins Mashya and Mashyōi, who resisted the need to populate the earth for 50 years, after which they had intercourse and created the human race. Alternatively, they were joined to become a plant, from which 10 fruits were born, becoming the 10 kinds of humans. (Carnoy 1916, 1931)

**Zarpandit** "Silver-shining" or "seed-creator" was a Babylonian pregnant goddess who was worshiped each night as the moon rose. She was the consort of the hero god Marduk. (Mastin; Pritchard 1969)

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# CHRISTIAN AND JEWISH

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## CHRISTIAN AND JEWISH PANTHEON

**Agrath Bath Maḥalath**

Anima Mundi *Gnostic; world soul.*

**Anat-Yahu**

Ardat Lîlî. *See Lilith.*

**Asherah**

**Ashtoreth**

Balkis. *See Bilqis*

Bilhah. *See Rachel*

**Bilqis**

Black Madonna. *See Mary*

Broxa. *See Lilith*

**Deborah**

**Dinah**

**Esther**

**Eve**

**Gomer**

**Hagar**

Hawwa'. *See Eve*

**Hokmah**

**Idith**

Ishah. *See Eve*

Itha-Ba'al. *See Jezebel*

I-zeval. *See Jezebel*

**Jezebel**

**Jocebed**

**Judith**

Keturah. *See Hagar*

Labartu. *See Lilith*

**Lailah**

Lamasthu. *See Lilith*

**Leviathan**

Lîlîtu. *See Lilith*

**Lilith**

**Maḥalath**

**Ma'acah**

Makhut. *See Matronit*

**Mary**

**Mary Magdalen**

Mary of Magdala. *See Mary Magdalen*

**Matronit**

**Miriam**

**Naamah**

**Rachel**

**Rebecca**

**Ruth**

**Sarah**

Sarai. *See Sarah*

Sheba. *See Bilqis*

**Seila**

**Shekinah**

Sophia. *See Hokmah*

**Susanna**

**Tamar**

**Torah**

Umayra. See **Bilqis**

Waliha. See **Idith**

Wisdom. See **Hokmah**

Zilpah. See **Rachel**

**Zipporah**

**Zuleika**

**Agrath Bath Mahalath** This queen of 180,000 demons drove her chariot on Wednesdays and Fridays, hunting down anything that moved. On other days, the rabbis were able to constrain the wanderings of this “spirit of uncleanness.” (Ginsberg V; Patai 1990)



**Asherah.** Ceramic figures like this, called “Asherah” images, are frequently found in the eastern Mediterranean soil. It is not known if the goddess intended was indeed Asherah, said to have been the spouse of JWHW, or another deity; the images, however, appear to have been crafted for use in the home rather than in public temples. This image was excavated at Tell el-Duweir and dates to the late 8th century BCE.

**Anat-Yahu** In the Egyptian city of Elephantine, texts describe the worship of the goddess Anat-Yahu, or “Anat consort of Yahu” (YHWH), who may be the same as the “Anat of Bethel” named in the same text. Scholars theorize that in northern Syria, powerful YHWH was absorbed into the pantheon. As gods required consorts, he was provided with similarly powerful **Anat**, who moved with her worshipers to Egypt. (Brooks; Kapelru)

**Asherah** The name of this goddess, found in inscriptions and scriptures, appears as Asherah and as **Athirat** (both with variants). This section will deal with the appearance of the goddess in Hebrew scripture; see Athirat for her Ugaritic form.

Whether the Israelites worshiped a goddess is a much-debated question; whether that goddess was named Asherah is similarly debatable. For centuries, scholars argued that Asherah was a term (found more than three dozen times in Hebrew scripture) indicating a cultic object. But in 1929, Ugaritic texts were discovered that proved the existence of a goddess of this name.

The name probably derives from a root word meaning “straight,” referring to posts and trees that were her image. Another proposed meaning is “spouse,” pointing to her preeminent role as consort goddess. The character and powers of Asherah are vague, coming down through Hebrew writings documenting suppression of Canaanite religion. Some texts, perhaps deliberately, confused Asherah with **Astarte**. Asherah’s religion proved difficult to eradicate. Often banished, it reemerged just as often, giving rise to another wave of reforms. Nor was her worship restricted to the

margins of society. Even King Solomon sacrificed to Asherah “on the high places,” as well as building temples for other divinities.

Solomon was not the only early Hebrew ruler to honor Asherah. Manassah erected an image of Asherah in the temple, and **Ma’acah** made an image of the goddess. Zealots took the life of **Jezebel** on the charge of “harlotry” during religious festivals. Hebrew scriptures describe the removal of Asherah’s image from the temple, suggesting that it was normally kept there. Thus Asherah has been connected with kingly sovereignty, perhaps as an image of the queen mother. Other scholars believe Asherah was as a household goddess, worshiped by women seeking healthy children; inscriptions to the goddess from men seem to argue against that limitation.

Asherah was unquestionably revered among the Canaanites. Whether she can be considered part of early Hebrew religion is debated. Scholars who believe that inscriptions indicate Asherah was YHWH’s consort date Hebrew polytheism to as late as the 8th century BCE. Those who refute this claim interpret the inscriptions as referring to poles erected in Hebrew temples, a Canaanite ritual for the goddess unexplained as a way of honoring an otherwise aniconic male divinity. In her temples, worshipers erected pieces of wood called *asherim* (plural of Asherah); this ritual may derive from an ancient cult of tree-worship.

In the home, a legless woman-shaped clay figurine, with a base for insertion in an earthen floor, represented the goddess. As Asherah is typically shown with full breasts, sometimes holding them out to the viewer, she may be the divinity called El Shaddai, “the one with breasts,” a term usually translated as “the Almighty” and said to refer to YHWH. It is not clear whether Asherah is the “Queen of Heaven” referred to by Jeremiah, declaiming against rituals in which women “bake cakes for the Queen of Heaven.” Cakes were known in Mesopotamia as offerings for **Ishtar**; along the Euphrates, molds have been found of an ample-figured goddess, which may have been used in making ritual cakes. (Ackerman 1992, 1993; Albright 1968; Becking et al.; Bible, Jeremiah, 1 Kings, 2 Kings; Binger; Brenner and Fontaine; Cassuto; Cornelius; J. Day 1986, 2000; P. Day 1989; Dever 1984; Freedman; Frymer-Kensky; Gibson; Hadley; Kirsch; Kletter; Lutzky; Maier; Margalit; Mastin; Oden; Ogden; Olyan; Patai 1965, 1990; Petty; Pritchard 1943; Skipwith; Stuckey 1993)

**Ashtoreth** This word from Hebrew scripture has given rise to considerable scholarship. While not clearly a proper name, *’astharoth* appears in contexts that suggest a goddess. She has been described as a divine ancestor of early Semitic peoples; the Phoenicians used her name as a generic goddess title. The likely name of the primary Israelite goddess was **Asherah**, of which this word is a variant, with the insinuation of the word “shame.” The name has also been interpreted as a reference to **Astarte**. (Brenner and Fontaine; J. Day 1986; Frothingham; Kapelru; Patai 1990; Pritchard 1943; Skipwith)

**Bilqis** The legendary Queen of Sheba appears in Hebrew scripture, the Q’ran, and the folklore of Arabia and Africa. In the first, she arrived in Jerusalem, having heard of the wisdom of King Solomon. After testing him with complex riddles, she declared herself satisfied and returned to her own land. In the Q’ran and in Islamic legend, Bilqis’s

mother was Umayra of the *djinn* race. Raised among her mother's people, Bilqis joined humanity as a young woman. A nearby king made a habit of raping a new maiden each week and, hearing of Bilquis's beauty, arranged to have her. But when he came, she cut off his head, then convinced his followers they should revolt against him. When they agreed, she went into her palace and returned with the king's head, which she held up as proof of loyalty to their cause.

Solomon learned of the queen's amazing wealth, which intrigued him enough to invite her to his court. But she sent back a present instead. Three times this happened, but finally she came to Solomon's court, where she was converted to Islam and became his consort. Solomon tested the queen with magical tricks, forcing her to reveal her *djinn* descent by lifting her skirts to reveal hairy feet. (Bible, 2 Chron., 1 Kings; Brenner 1994; Q'ran 27-18-42; Stowasser; Toy.)

**Deborah** A prophet, Deborah selected the unlikely Barak, "the ignoramus," to lead the Israelites in battle. He refused until she agreed to accompany him. A poet and a judge, she sat in the open air dispensing judgments and composing poems. The verse attributed to her is one of the oldest in the Bible. (Bible, Judges; Camp and Fontaine; Kirsch)

**Dinah** Mother of the last matrilineal Israelite tribe, the daughter of Leah was changed from male to female in her mother's womb when her mother, pitying her childless sister, prayed that her child be female rather than her seventh son. Her father Jacob kept Dinah in a chest whenever possible suitors were in sight, so that she could not meet an uncircumcised man. Nonetheless, while out with friends Dinah stumbled upon a group of dancers. One of them, prince Shechem, won her heart and slept with her. The Israelites objected to Dinah's marriage to a man from an uncircumcised tribe, so Shechem's people agreed to forfeit their foreskins. While the men were recovering, the Israelites massacred the tribe, taking away Dinah, pregnant with a daughter. Interpreters vary in their sympathies, some finding Dinah a self-assured woman whose independence was thwarted after she chose the wrong lover, others seeing her as a victim of rape rightfully avenged by her kinfolk. (Bible, Genesis; Camp and Fontaine; Kirsch; Sheres)

**Esther** Many scholars believe that this Israelite heroine was **Ishtar** in thin disguise. Whether the book of Esther, recorded in the 3rd or 2nd century BCE, should be part of scripture has been argued since the early years of the Common Era. The only book in which YHWH's name does not appear, it also does not include references to prayers, the law, or the covenant. Instead, the book relates the story that a Persian queen, **Vashti**, and her prime minister, Haman (an Elamite god), were replaced by a pair of Israelite cousins, Esther and Mordecai (a name that resembles the Babylonian hero Marduk, cousin of **Ishtar**). The story, used to support the celebration of the Jewish feast of Purim, describes how Esther replaced Vashti as queen of Persia. (Bible, Esther; Hoschander; P. Day 1989)



**Eve** Eve was created simultaneously with Adam, says one Biblical verse, although a later one says she was created from his rib. Some scholars contend that the conflicting stories represent a hidden tradition of Adam's earlier wife (see **Lilith**), while others find evidence of two differing creation stories.

Eve lived in paradise with Adam until, tempted by a serpent, she broke YHWH's commandment, eating fruit from the Tree of Life, which she offered to Adam. With one bite, they realized they were naked and clothed themselves with leaves. Knowing their sin, YHWH cast them into the outer world, where they had to toil for food. Eve was cursed with pains of childbirth; in addition, Eve and her children were condemned to die.

Behind this disobedient temptress stands another figure. Genesis calls Eve the first man's *'ezer*, a word usually translated as "helpmeet." But the masculine word is read, in other biblical contexts, as "instructor," suggesting an earlier and more prominent role for this wifely figure. Eve has many traits in common with goddesses of the region; some parts of her story echo myths of the Israelites' neighbors.

In documents from Nag Hammâdi in Egypt, hidden during the early years of the Christian era and rediscovered in 1945, Eve was created from the earth by the god Ialdabaoth, at the same time that Adam was created. Eve knew a secret: a word of knowledge that gave them power threatening to God. Punishment for this knowledge was separation from each other spiritually. But a new and androgynous Eve was born from **Hokmah**; called "life's teacher," she was sent to save the lost world.

In Jewish legend and Kabbalistic writings, similarly unorthodox images of Eve appear. In one story, Paradise was divided, with Eve serving as mistress of west, south, and female animals, while Adam ruled north, east, and males; another text says Adam consorted with animals until Eve was created. The serpent put poison in the forbidden fruit, which caused Eve to menstruate for the first time. After Adam's fall, she promised to stand up to God for him, but he spoke first and blamed her.

Jewish folklore says that Adam did not trust Eve with the truth about YHWH's prohibition; instead, he told Eve that YHWH had forbidden them to touch the Tree of Life, which would kill them. The serpent shoved Eve against the tree; she brushed against it; Satan argued that YHWH had lied. Seduced by reason, Eve ate the fruit.

The scriptures tell little about the life of Adam and Eve after paradise, but Jewish legend describes seven days of lamenting in which the couple engaged before they were forced into their new world. Legend claims Cain and Abel were conceived by Eve in intercourse with the serpent, whom she believed an angel. Eve, a prophetess, foresaw the death of her younger son. Some legends say the brothers argued because both wished to mate with Eve, there being no other women at the time; other tales say that Adam decided which sisters the boys would marry, giving Cain the less beautiful one. When Cain killed Abel, Adam withdrew from Eve, leaving himself open to the wiles of Lilith, who slept with him and conceived demon children. Only being shamed by his daughters-in-law drove Adam back to Eve's bed. Ultimately the couple conceived 30 pairs of twins. After almost a thousand years, Adam lay near death, and Eve prayed that half his illness would come upon her. She traveled to heaven, winning YHWH's pity. Although Adam still had to die, YHWH promised Eve that he would be reborn. After Adam died, Eve taught her children the first grave rites.

In Islam, Eve (Hawwa') appears as primal mother, wife of the prophet Adam. Formed from Adam's crooked rib, Eve was auburn-haired and black-eyed, pale and very plump. But she did not tempt Adam to eat the apple. Rather, the Q'ran suggests that Adam was the first to bite the fateful fruit after being tempted by Iblis (Satan). Later interpretation emphasized the sexual nature of the fall, with the first humans' genitals becoming visible to them after eating of the tree. (Arthur; Bible, Genesis; Bird; Brandon; Ginsberg, I, V; Hooke; Meyers; O'Brien; Otwell; Patai 1990; Q'ran 7:19–23, 2:30–39, 15:26–43, 20:115–124, 28:71–85, 7:19–23, 2:30–39, 15:26–43, 20:115–124, 28:71–85; Stowasser; Young)

**Gomer** The words of the late Israelite prophet Hosea attract considerable attention from feminist scholars. The prophet married Gomer, whom he beat and rejected. Although traditionally read as an allegory of YHWH's relationship to his chosen people, who "whored after false gods" (see **Asherah**), the human story describes domestic violence. Gomer, often described as a prostitute, may have been a woman who believed in other divinities, a belief considered equivalent to "harlotry." After Gomer bore children to Hosea, he withheld food and water. Broken by abuse, Gomer gave up her "harlotries." Then, in a passage of disputed meaning, YHWH told Hosea to buy a woman who had no other lovers; whether that woman is different from Gomer, or whether Gomer recovered from his attack and their relationship was reconstituted, is unclear. (Bible, Hosea; Brenner 1995; Weems)

**Hagar** Hagar was an Egyptian woman given to **Sarah** as a slave, then to her husband Abraham as a sexual companion, because Sarah had passed the age of childbearing. Hagar grew disrespectful to Sarah once pregnant with the patriarch's heir. Hagar fled into the desert, but an angel told her to return, promising that her descendents would be numberless. Years after Hagar had borne Ishmael, Sarah gave birth to Isaac. When Ishmael was 15, Sarah saw him playing with his brother Isaac and, for unclear reasons, cast out Hagar and Ishmael forever. Abraham agreed to the banishment when YHWH said Hagar and Ishmael would survive their second wilderness sentence. In some traditions, Abraham married Hagar, under the name Keturah, after Sarah's death. In other legends, Keturah was a different woman, whose six sons were entrusted with magical secrets, including the names of demons who served them.

Despite the tradition that Hagar was the mother of the Arabic people, the Q'ran says little about her. Islamic legend fleshes out the picture of a young mother exiled to the desert, where she had to fight for survival and, succeeding, made it possible for her son Ishmael to become the ancestor of the prophet Mohammed. Ishmael rebuilt the Ka'aba, Islam's holiest place (see **Al-Lat**), with his father Abraham. Some Islamic tradition claims that female genital removal began with Hagar as a way of eluding Sarah's jealousy about her relationship with Abraham. Originally Hagar may have been a mountain goddess; her son's name means "the goddess's favorite." The Christian Paul linked her with Mount Sinai in Arabia. (Bible, Genesis; P. Day 1989; Ginsberg, I; Kirsch; Q'ran, 2:124–129; Stowasser)

**Hokmah** YHWH had Hokmah (“wisdom”) from the first, and almost from the first this quality became a functional goddess, perhaps taking over the attributes of early Israelite goddesses such as **Asherah**. Some contend that Hokmah was always allegorical, but in Proverbs and in Ecclesiasticus, she makes strong claims to a separate identity from YHWH. Her separateness was clear in the 11th century CE, when the Spanish Arab scholar Ibn Hazm noted that she had the powers of a goddess. Recently, many scholars have agreed with that insight. The earliest creation of YHWH, Hokmah was also his favorite. Hokmah cast her shadow on the primeval waters, stilling them. Hokmah gave consciousness to humankind, for humans crawled like worms until she endowed them with spirit. Hokmah even called herself YHWH’s playmate. This figure and that of the **Shekinah** softened the patriarchal religion of the Jews with a semidivine femininity.

Some scholars find Egyptian influence in Hokmah’s iconography, especially when she is envisioned as winged (see **Isis**). By the time of Hellenistic Judaism (1st century BCE), Hokmah appeared as a figure in her own right. She became more and more clearly personified, even splitting into positive (“Wisdom”) and negative (“Folly”) aspects. In Christianity, where she is known as Sophia, Wisdom’s femininity remained palpable. The early church father Justinian built an enormous church dedicated to Hagia Sophia, “divine wisdom,” in the capital of the eastern Roman Empire, Constantinople (Istanbul). She appears as a powerful woman, hands upraised, glowing with light, throughout the Greek Orthodox world. (Arthur; Bible, Prov., Ben Sirach, Enoch; Wisdom of Solomon OAA; Brenner and Fontaine; Camp; Meyendorff; Pagels)

**Idith** The story of Sodom and Gomorrah does not provide a name for Lot’s wife, but Jewish legend calls her Idith, while Islamic traditions give her name as Waliha. When YHWH sent angels to Lot’s home to warn him of coming destruction, the depraved residents demanded sexual access to them. Lot offered his virgin daughters. The offer was refused, and the next day Lot and his family set off for safety. One married daughter was not warned, and Idith looked back for her; she was turned into a pillar of salt. Later, believing themselves alone in the destroyed world, Lot’s daughters gave him enough wine to make him delirious and then had intercourse with him to become pregnant. (Bible, Genesis; Stowasser)

**Jezebel** Her name appears today as a synonym for “harlot,” but the Jezebel of scripture was never accused of selling sexual favors. Rather, she was a powerful queen who worshiped a goddess, possibly **Asherah**, in the face of an increasingly patriarchal religious establishment.

In her native Phoenician tongue, Jezebel was Itha-Ba’al, “woman of Ba’al”; her father, king of the Sidonians, was a priest of Ba’al. (Some sources consider Jezebel an ancestor of **Dido**, queen of Carthage.) In the scriptures, Itha-Ba’al was changed to I-zeval, “woman of excrement,” by writers intent upon defaming her; this became Jezebel in Greek.

Jezebel married the Israelite king Ahab, who built temples to Ba’al and put up an Asherah pole, offenses the Bible claims were worse than an earlier king using his children’s bodies as foundation sacrifices. Ahab called for a contest between

Elijah, prophet of YHWH, and 450 prophets of Ba'al and 400 of Asherah. When the prophet of YHWH won, those of Ba'al were murdered, but nothing is said about Asherah's prophets, leading some interpreters to believe that the contest was between male gods only.

This did not result in Jezebel's death, which came because she forged letters that led to the murder of an Israelite whose vineyard Ahab coveted. For this, both Ahab and Jezebel were murdered. Jezebel "painted her eyes, adorned her head, and looked out the window," a typical pose of the goddesses of love. From that window, she was thrown to her death. The common vision of Jezebel as a promiscuous woman has no basis in scripture. (Ackroyd; Bible, 1 Kings, 2 Kings, Revelation; Brenner 1994; Bronner; Patai 1990)

**Jocebed** Despite Pharaoh's command that Israelite children be killed, the mother of Moses hid her child in a rush boat, where he was found by Pharaoh's daughter. When she could not nurse him, his sister **Miriam** brought forth the midwife Jocebed, who was thus able to nurse her own son. When Moses led his people to Palestine, Jocebed accompanied him, entering the Promised Land at the age of 250. (Bible, Exodus; Ginsberg, II, III)

**Judith** Familiar as this heroine may be through literature and art, Judith's story does not appear in the Bible but in the Apocrypha, 15 books of the late centuries BCE and the early CE period that were not included in the Bible. Typically described as a work of fiction, the story describes how, in the 12th year of his reign, the Assyrian king Nebuchadnezzar attempted to draft his subjects into a war that they saw no reason to support. In anger, Nebuchadnezzar sent the general Holofernes to punish those who refused to serve his will. As he marched through the land, nations fell before him, either defeated or submitting in fear. When he reached the lands of Israel and Judah, however, the people prepared for war rather than surrender. Holofernes camped with his armies and prepared for slaughter, as he had done with other nations.

But a beautiful and wealthy young widow, Judith, whose husband had died of heat-stroke during the barley harvest three years previously, decided to take matters into her hands. She took off the garments of widowhood and arrayed herself splendidly in jewelry and a tiara, then packed wine and cakes and set out for Holofernes' camp.

Telling the guards that she would share secret information about how to defeat her own people, Judith lied to the general that the Israelites were out of food and water and would be easy to defeat, because they had broken their contract with YHWH, their god. She then asked to be allowed to camp with them, a request that was willingly granted. For three days she camped with the enemy, and Holofernes finally grew eager to find a way to sleep with her. Thus lured into her tent, Holofernes drank overmuch and fell into a stupor. His servants, seeing him in her bed asleep, assumed that he wished for privacy and withdrew. Then Judith took the general's own sword and decapitated him, putting the head in her maidservant's food bag. Then, as usual, she and her maid went out to the desert to pray at midnight, using this ruse to escape from their enemies and bring the good news to their own people. After this exemplary heroic act, Judith lived peacefully, never remarrying, until the age of 105. (Judith 1–16 OAA)

**Lailah** According to Jewish legend, this “angel of night” gathered up sperm from a woman about to conceive and brought it to YHWH, asking for its fate to be determined. After God decided whether the person was to be rich or poor, gifted or dull, he commanded a soul to enter the sperm, which Lailah then carried to the womb. (Ginsberg, I)

**Leviathan** According to Jewish legend, Leviathans ruled over the creatures of the sea. But because the combined strength of two Leviathans was so immense, YHWH killed the female. The remaining beast became God’s companion. The Leviathan’s ultimate end will be at the last hour, when he will be killed and served as a delicious treat; the female Leviathan, preserved in brine, will be simultaneously placed on the table. Other legends say that this snake-shaped monster was the daughter of **Lilith**. (Ginsberg, V)

**Lilith** Although never mentioned in the Bible, the Israelites and other Eastern Mediterranean people recognized Lilith for millennia. She was first mentioned in Sumerian texts of the mid-third millennium BCE, including in the *Epic of Gilgamesh* where she appears occupying a tree planted by kindly **Inanna**. Banished, she lived in deserts and other desolate places.

Her name, from the Sumerian “Lilîtu,” refers to a wind spirit; she appears in Babylonian myth as one of a group of storm spirits that also included Ardat Lili (Lilith’s handmaid, mother of demons) and the male Irdu Lili. Lilith may have connections with Babylonian Labartu, a child-killing spirit who spread plague as she suckled dogs and pigs. She infected children when possible but attacked adults as well, drinking their blood and consuming their flesh. To avoid her, parents hung up plaques or amulets bearing Labartu’s name. The demon, thinking them signs of reverence, went elsewhere.

Jewish legend held that Lilith was Adam’s first wife, created simultaneously with him. (Variants say she was created before him; or after him, from the slime of the earth; or much later, as the twin of the evil Samael.) When Adam suggested they make love, Lilith enthusiastically agreed. But when he instructed her to lie beneath, she refused, pointing out that they had been created equally and should mate so.

Lilith went to YHWH and tricked him into revealing his secret name. Once she had power over YHWH, Lilith demanded wings, on which she flew to the western deserts. There she had orgies with elemental spirits, producing demon children. Adam was provided with a new mate, but he and **Eve** soon fell from YHWH’s favor. As penance, Adam vowed to avoid the pleasures of marriage for a century. Then Lilith took her revenge. Each night she came to Adam and had dream intercourse, capturing his emissions to form demon babies. One of these was the evil Samael, whom Lilith took as her playmate and companion.

Lilith had luxurious hair and arching wings, with talons instead of feet. Her unearthly beauty was dangerous to young men, who lusted after her and pined away, never to be aroused by mortal women. Lilith threatened children as well, for she had power over all infants in their first week, all babies on the first of the month and on Sabbath evenings, and all children born of unmarried people. Mothers protected their

young by hanging an amulet marked “Sen Sam San”—for the protective angels Sensenoi, Samangelof, and Sanoi—around the child’s neck.

When Lilith came to steal a child, it was usually at night, when the babe was tucked in crib or cradle. Because she liked her victims smiling, she tickled the infant’s feet. When it giggled, Lilith strangled it. Mothers hearing their children laughing in dreams, or noticing them smiling as they slept, hit the baby’s nose three times to drive Lilith away. When not stealing children, Lilith lived in Shinar, often defined as Babylonia, probably a mythic wilderness where jackals and hyenas hunted. Although typically described as a solitary being, Lilith sometimes appears as multiple beings, the Lillin.

In Kabbalah, Lilith was the mate of Samael, who continually attempts to debase the pure **Matronit**. Samael and Lilith were sexually awakened when Eve bit into the apple and caused strife on earth thereafter. Other sources declare that Lilith’s consort was the demon Asmodeus. The confusion about the name of Lilith’s mate may stem from there being more than one figure of this name.

Each year, Lilith spends the Day of Atonement in the desert screaming with **Maḥalath**. Yet despite her depraved nature, she became the mate of YHWH, who was forced to take her as bride when the temple of Jerusalem was destroyed. At the same time, Lilith’s demon mate Samael was able to sexually degrade the pure **Shekinah**. But at the end of time, order will be restored and Lilith will die as the divine YHWH and Shekinah are reunited. (Dan; Ginsberg, I; Kramer 1979; Langdon 1931; Patai October–December 1964; Shearman and Curtis; Wolkstein and Kramer)

**Ma’acah** Two royal women of Judah, both mothers of kings, bore this name. Biblical lineage lists provide not only the names of kings but also those of their mothers, indicating the importance of this role. Queens, as wives of kings, had little power, but as a king’s mother, a woman achieved influence and privileges.

The first Ma’acah was a wife of King David. The second, her namesake, brought the worship of **Asherah** back to Jerusalem. Her fanatic son Asa cast out the images, including burning one made by his mother whom he deposed at the same time. Asa’s son Jehoshaphat continued the purge, but the Asherah religion would not die; upon Jehoshaphat’s death, his successor restored Asherah to the temple where it remained for 50 years. (Bible, 2 Chronicles, 1 Kings; Brenner 1994; Patai 1965)

**Maḥalath** In Jewish legend, queen Maḥalath commanded 478 bands of dancing demons. On the day of judgment, she will march them into the desert to meet her rival **Lilith** in fierce combat. Maḥalath, a compulsive dancer, will whirl and gyrate in an attempt to terrify her enemy. Legend does not predict the outcome of the conflict. Her daughter was **Agrat Bat Maḥalath**. (Ginsberg, I)

**Mary** Never considered divine, the virgin Mary nonetheless served in a goddess-like capacity within Christianity until the Reformation; she is still revered by Catholics. Although barely mentioned in scripture, Mary became a popular figure in early centuries, when many extra-scriptural legends grew up around her. Some became so much a part of Marian imagery that many of the devout would be surprised to learn that there



is no Biblical basis for them; these include the story that Mary's childless mother was told by God that she would bear a child and that Mary remained a virgin after giving birth. Even the now-doctrinal belief that Mary was assumed bodily into heaven has no Biblical basis. Legends, some directly traceable to goddess myths, helped Mary grow in power.

If the scriptures did not provide a full biography for Mary, later writers filled in the gaps. Born of an aged, pious, but infertile couple, Anna and Joachim, Mary was sent at the age of three to live in the temple; at the time of her dedication, she danced with joy and was fed by angels. At puberty, Mary vowed perpetual virginity, so her parents betrothed her to an elderly widower, Joseph in Nazareth. Yet Mary became pregnant after an angel visited her and gained her assent (*fiat* or "let it be"). Joseph, suspecting that another man had impregnated her, withdrew but was visited by an angel who attested to Mary's innocence.

When the Roman rulers called for a census of the residents of the empire (not attested in any Roman documents), Mary and Joseph set out for his ancestral home of Bethlehem. There, unable to find lodging, Joseph installed Mary in a stable, where she gave birth with miraculous ease; her hymen remained undamaged, so that she lived thereafter as a virgin. Three wise men found them by following astrological indications, bringing gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. When the violent Roman puppet-ruler Herod learned that the king of the Jews had been born, he killed all male babies under the age of two; luckily, angels warned Mary and Joseph, who fled to Egypt with the newborn. After Jesus's ministry began, Mary interceded at a wedding feast in Cana, asking that he help the host who had run out of wine; this provided the occasion for Jesus's first public miracle. She appeared at the Crucifixion, one of the few to remain faithful to Jesus until his death. She lived in Ephesus afterwards. When she died there, her body was taken to heaven so that, like her son, she never decomposed.



**Mary.** From a mosaic in the Archbishop's Chapel in Ravenna, Italy (11th century CE), this image of the virgin Mary shows her wearing the garb of a bishop. Such images have been used to urge inclusion of women in the clergy of the Catholic Church; whether women served as clergy in the early church is a matter of sustained controversy.



Such legends have many sources. Some scholars contend that early Christianity contained female-oriented rituals that used iconography derived from ancient goddess religions. The excesses of Mary's followers brought warnings from church officials that she was not a goddess. The Kollyridians, deemed heretical by the early church fathers, honored Mary as divine. In addition, the Montanists believed that Mary was an image of the feminine divine, also pictured as the Holy Spirit. With prophetesses Maximilla and Priscilla, Montanus conducted emotional worship services that resembled ancient goddess rites. The Montanists were declared heretics in 177 CE.

As Christianity spread, Mary took on the identity of regional goddesses. In Europe, Mary appears as the Black Madonna. Usually found in churches, these images are sometimes said to have been altered by fire. At other times, no explanation is given for the dark visage. As black is connected with the soil, the darkness of these madonnas suggests an ancient heritage in emblems of fertility.

Because she was mother of Jesus, recognized as a prophet in Islam, the Q'ran mentions Mary several times. Several verses focus on her relationship with her guardian, the prophet Zachariah, of the line of Solomon. He was married to Elizabeth, Mary's maternal aunt (sometimes described as Mary's sister). Elizabeth's unborn child jumped when Mary appeared to tell Elizabeth the news that she was bearing Jesus. Later verses describe the birth of Jesus to the still-chaste Mary and uphold Mary's virginity as an example of faithfulness to god's will. Islamic tradition offers additional details about Mary's life. She was born of an aged woman, Anna, who saw a vision of a dove nursing its young and was inspired to sleep with her similarly aged husband, Amram, at which time she conceived. Because he assumed the child would be male, Amram dedicated it to God, who accepted the dedication even though the child was female. When Amram died, Zachariah became the young woman's guardian. Under his tuition, she grew up in the temple, praying constantly in a locked room to which only Zachariah had a key. When he visited her, she gave him fruit out of season, whereupon he conceived John "the baptist" upon his wife Elizabeth. Later traditions name the angel who accompanied Mohammed, Gabriel, as the one who brought the news of her pregnancy to Mary.

Today, Mary is honored on important feast days that replaced earlier pagan festivals. She is omnipresent at Christmas, December 25, when the Madonna is a common image; the feast replaced winter solstice festivals including Roman Saturnalia. The Purification, celebrating the ritual by which Mary was "made pure" after birth, was fixed on February 2, an important Celtic feast; Mary is honored as "Queen of the May" on May 1, another Celtic feast. The Assumption is celebrated on August 15, taking the place of earlier harvest festivals. (Bible, Matthew, Mark, Luke, John; Corrington; Harrington; Q'ran, 19:2–15, 21:89–91, 3:38–41, 19:16–35; Sered 1991; Stowasser; Taylor; Weigle; Warner; Young)

**Mary Magdalen** Christian scripture describes a prostitute who washed the feet of Jesus; it also describes a woman named Mary Magdalen who was among Christ's disciples. Her name appears to refer to a town called Magdala, but no such place existed. Some consider her the same as Mary of Bethany, although that is a minority view. Magdalen was a witness to two important moments in the Christian scripture: she

stood at the foot of the cross, and she was the first person to see the empty tomb and to know Jesus had risen from the dead. Thus she is both important and elusive in the Christian story.

The figures of prostitute and Magdalen were conflated early. Soon, Mary Magdalen was imagined retiring to the desert to become a hermit, praying ceaselessly for forgiveness. This Magdalen was honored as St. Mary Magdalen, patron of contemplatives, converts, druggists, and reformed prostitutes. Church sources disagree about her life after the resurrection, some saying that she traveled to Ephesus with **Mary** and died there, others claiming she converted southern France, where her head rests as a sanctified relic in La Sainte-Baume.

Other versions of the Magdalen's life appear in apocryphal writings. The Gospel of Macian describes Jesus casting out seven demons from Mary Magdalen, while the Gospel of Peter describes her as a "myrrh-bearer" who went to Christ's tomb after his burial and discovered the absence of his body. Mary Magdalen is especially important in the writings of the Gnostics, an early Christian sect who described the world as a battle between light and darkness. The apocryphal Gospel of Philip called the Magdalen the "companion" of Jesus. Such texts have led to an unorthodox tradition that Mary Magdalen was the wife of Jesus. This has been joined to the Provençal legend that Mary Magdalen escaped to southern France after Jesus's execution and bore his child there.

Arguably the most important Magdalen text is the Gospel of Mary, found in 1896 in Egypt. This text describes Mary Magdalen as a bearer of secret knowledge that parallels the Gnostic vision of the soul entrapped in flesh. Little evidence shows how widely known the Gospel of Mary was in early Christian times, but the views it contains are unorthodox in today's Christianity.

Recent feminist interpretations of Mary Magdalen depict her as a priestess of the Canaanite religion, ritually "wedded" to Jesus but actually serving ancient goddesses; or as the "Holy Grail" of British legend, interpreted as the Magdalen's body. Both extrapolations from minimal scriptural sources emphasize the Magdalen as a sexual woman, thus balancing the motherly but sexless virgin Mary. (De Boer; Fiorenza; Haskins; Jansen; Marjanen; Meyer; Pagels; Warner)

**Matronit** In the Kabbalah's esoteric Judaism, we find two demigoddesses formed by analyzing the mystic name of God, YHWH. The Y of YHWH became the Father, and the first H the Mother. These two produced W, the Son, and finally a second H, the blameless Daughter, Makhut or the Matronit. These children were born attached back to back but were separated soon after birth.

However abstract the analysis that produced her, the Matronit soon became a lively personage. Lowest of the 10 mystic emanations of the male godhead, she was the only one human senses could perceive. Jacob married her, although the marriage remained unconsummated until he joined her in the afterlife. Moses mated with the Matronit in physical form after separating from **Zipporah**. After his death, the Matronit flew his body to a secret burial place. But her usual lover was her brother, with whom she cohabited in the temple on Friday nights and for whom Solomon built a special bed-chamber in the temple at Jerusalem. Jewish couples were encouraged to have

intercourse on Fridays in emulation of the sacred couple. In this way, the Matronit is conflated with **Shekinah** as the Sabbath bride.

Whenever the children of Israel fell into sin, the king mated with **Lilith** while the demon king Samael had intercourse with the Matronit, taking the form of a snake to do so. This rape continues until the Day of Atonement, when a scapegoat hurled off a cliff attracts Samael's attention as it falls to its death, burdened by the people's sins. Thereupon the Matronit reunites with her kingly husband. This figure may derive from **Ishtar**, **Inanna**, or **Anat**. (Patai Summer 1964)

**Miriam** The greatest woman prophet of Jewish tradition, she began to foretell the future at five, when she began working with **Jocebed** as a midwife. She foresaw the birth of her brother Moses and knew he could be saved if placed in a reedy basket in a river. Her prophetic gift was matched by her genius for poetry; Miriam's song celebrated her people's escape from Egypt's pharaoh. Like many prophetic females, Miriam was associated with water. Her name seems to be derived from *marah*, "bitter water," and she sang her most famous poem after crossing the Red Sea. She gave her name to the spring that burst forth from the desert rock struck by Moses. But Miriam sided with **Zipporah** when the latter complained that Moses's divine revelations had led to his abandoning conjugal duties. A furious YHWH spit in her face, and Miriam grew leprous for seven days, during which time the Israelite people would not leave the spot of Miriam's confinement. (Bible, 1 Chron., Deuteronomy, Exodus, Micah, Numbers; Ginsberg, II 250–269)

**Naamah** In ancient times this word, which means "pleasant," was used of **Astarte**. But Jewish legend gives the name to a demon queen so beautiful that angels could not resist her. She seduced them with her sweet cymbal music; once they became aroused, she stole their semen to form demon children. In some interpretations, she was Noah's wife; other writers say she was the wife of a demon, Shamdan, and mother of devils. Like **Lilith**, Naamah strangled sleeping babies, but she much preferred to lure men from their appropriate mates. In the Kabbalah, she lived in the sea, where monsters, infatuated with her beauty, pursued her constantly. (Ginsberg, V; Patai 1990)

**Rachel** The Canaanite Rachel brought her family's teraphim (household gods) when she joined the household of Jacob. Jacob had loved her for many years but was forced to marry her older sister Leah first. Rachel became Jacob's second wife, sharing him not only with Leah but also with the servants Zilpah and Bilhah. Together, the four women are considered the matriarchs of Israel; although Jewish law defines heritage matrilineally, none of these foremothers was Israelite.

As befitted her status as favored spouse, Rachel gave birth to the favored sons, Joseph and Benjamin. Rachel prophesied the birth of her second son, but was cursed for pridefully saying, "I will bear another son," rather than praying that it might occur. She bore one son more but died in labor. Because her own childbearing history was so difficult, Rachel aided barren, pregnant, and birthing mothers; even today, her tomb is a site of pilgrimage. (Brenner and Fontaine; Patai 1965; Sered 1986)

**Rebecca** The counterpart of **Sarah**, she was the mother of Jacob and Esau. Like Sarah, she was prescient, had an unearthly beauty, and lived under a magical cloud that never left her tent. Like Sarah, she lived with a man who, in times of danger, pretended she was his sister. A shrewd mother who favored her younger son over her older one, Rebecca engineered the famous birthright-stealing episode whereby Jacob snatched Isaac's blessing from Esau. (Ginsberg, I)

**Ruth** One of the greatest matriarchs of Jewish tradition is loyal Ruth, a Moabiate woman married to an Israelite man, Boaz. Her story appears to have been written in approximately 400 BCE, during a period when intermarriage with neighboring peoples was discouraged; as such, the heroic figure of Ruth stands in opposition to contemporary regulations. Her story may have originally been a folktale absorbed into scripture; it parallels to a great extent the narrative of another matriarch, **Tamar**, and deals with fertility, sex, and death.

Ruth's story begins with a famine that forced the family of Israelite Elimelech to move to the barren land of Moab. There the sons, Machlon and Lilion, married women of the region. Machlon's wife was Ruth ("friend"), who was soon widowed; Machlon's father and brother also died, although the texts provide no reason. Ruth's mother-in-law, Naomi ("gracious"), wished to return home but was concerned for the welfare of her young daughters-in-law. Ruth refused to leave Naomi, uttering the famous words now often used in marriage vows, "whither thou goest, I will go." She promised Naomi that they would stay together until death, and "Where you die, I will die. That is where I will be buried."

So the women returned to Bethlehem, Naomi's home, where they found the barley harvest in progress. Ruth set to work gleaning, picking up bits missed by the reapers. There she was noticed by an elderly, childless landowner, Boaz. Naomi, noticing Boaz's interest, urged Ruth to seduce the wealthy but elderly Boaz ("strength"). So she dressed alluringly and went to Boaz's bed during the festival of harvest. The next day, Boaz took Ruth in a levirate marriage (marriage to a widow of childbearing age by a relative, although there is no evidence in the text that Boaz and Naomi were related). He then went to the city gate and proclaimed that Naomi's husband's property was for sale; when a relative came forward, Boaz said that impregnating Ruth to assure continuance of the family was required, and the interested party withdrew. Boaz thus took Ruth as his wife, and they became the great-grandparents of King David. (Bal; Shearman and Curtis)

**Sarah** The first and greatest Israelite matriarch, Sarah was a Chaldean princess who bestowed wealth on Abraham by marrying him. Sarai, as she was originally named, was brilliantly beautiful and ageless. Her loveliness was such that, when she and Abraham moved to Egypt, Pharaoh sent armed men to steal her. Sarah lied to Pharaoh, describing Abraham as her brother, so that the king appointed Abraham to a position of honor and wealth. The king even gave Sarah his own daughter, **Hagar**, as a slave. But when the king tried to sleep with Sarah, an angel crippled him with leprosy. To free himself from the disease, he gave Sarah back to Abraham.

Sarah did not bear a child until she had lived nearly a century. Sarah laughed in disbelief when YHWH told Abraham she would bear a child. Rather than exhausting her, the birth of Isaac rejuvenated her. Unearthly radiance shone from her face; a miraculous cloud marked her tent. She held conversations with YHWH.

A minor figure named Sara appears in the noncanonical book of Tobit as a woman married seven times. On each wedding night, a demon killed the bridegroom. Tobias, who desired Sara, learned from an angel to burn the innards of a fish, the odor of which would drive away the demon, then to pray to YHWH before making love to Sara. These precautions proved successful, and Sara was freed from the demon's clutches. (Bible, Genesis, Tobit; Ginsberg, I; Kirsch; Teubal; Van der Toorn 1994)

**Seila** Daughter of the careless warrior Jephthah, this Israelite maiden was sacrificed because her father promised to kill the first thing he met upon returning home from a battle. To celebrate her father's success, Seila met him on the road, dancing to the sound of her timbrel. Rather than break his vow, Jephthah decided to kill his daughter. Seila uttered a famous lament, weeping that she would die a virgin. Then she asked for two months to wander in the wilderness with her women friends. Her death did not go unavenged: Jephthah was cursed by YHWH and died by dismemberment.

Her name is not recorded in the Bible, where she appears only as "Jephthah's daughter," but comes from an anonymous 1st-century commentator known as Pseudo-Philo. A passing biblical reference tells of an annual festival celebrated by the Israelite women in honor of this heroine, but nothing more is known of the ritual. (Bible, Judges; P. Day 1989; Fuchs; Kirsch)

**Shekinah** The Talmud tells us that human senses cannot perceive YHWH, but that we can see, hear, and touch his Shekinah. This word, meaning "emanation," is feminine in gender and, like **Hokmah**, took on a feminine personality as a disputative but compassionate demigoddess who argued with God in support of his creatures. The Kabbalah describes the loving marriage between YHWH and Shekinah as culminating in a mystical sexual union, replicated when devout followers enacted that union on Sabbath eve. She is often conflated with another important Kabbalistic female figure, the **Matronit**. (Kirsch; Patai 1990)

**Susanna** The story of the falsely accused beauty, Susanna, appears in the apocryphal scriptures, where she was described as beautiful and completely loyal to her husband, Joakim. But several elders who frequented their house became obsessed with her beauty and decided to find a way to rape her. The opportunity arose when, believing the garden to be empty on a hot day, Susanna bathed in cooling water. The hidden elders leapt forward and threatened her, but Susanna called for help loudly. Finding her in this compromising position, naked and accused of having been entertaining a lover in the garden, Joakim went along with the demand that she be put to death for adultery. But a young man, Daniel, believed in Susanna's innocence and trapped the elders into revealing their plot. The elders were put to death for bearing false witness, and innocent Susanna went free. (Susanna 1 1–63 OAA)

**Tamar** Three Biblical figures bear this name. One was a Canaanite woman who out-lived several Israelite husbands. Her first, Er, was born of a Canaanite mother and an Israelite father, Judah; he offended YHWH and lost his life. Under the law of levirate marriage, it was the duty of the next brother, Onan, to impregnate her, but he “spilled his seed upon the ground,” which denied offspring to Tamar who might threaten Onan’s inheritance. Because of this offense against custom, YHWH saw to it that Onan died.

The next oldest son was too young for intercourse, so Tamar remained a marginalized widow. When this seemed likely to become permanent, Tamar wrapped herself in a veil worn by prostitutes. She positioned herself at a crossroads where she knew Judah, whose wife had died, would pass. Judah desired the disguised Tamar, but she withheld her favors until Judah offered her his signet ring and staff, promising that she could redeem them for a kid from his herds. Conceiving a child, Tamar returned to her father’s household where she arrayed herself again in the garments of a widow.

Judah sent the promised kid to the crossroads, but no harlot could be found. Soon, however, news came that Tamar was pregnant. He demanded she be returned to his household for execution. When she came, Tamar bore the signet and staff of Judah, which shamed him into accepting her offspring as legitimate. Tamar is named as one of the four female ancestors of Jesus, along with **Ruth**, Bathsheba, and Rehab.

Another Tamar was the sister of King David’s beloved son, Absalom, and half-sister to Amnon, who lusted after her. Pretending to be ill, he called for her to bring him food and drink, but once they were alone, he raped her. When David did nothing to punish the crime, Absalom tricked Amnon into attending a banquet, where Absalom’s men killed the rapist. Finally, another Tamar was Absalom’s daughter. (Bible, 1 Chron., Genesis, Matthew, 2 Samuel; Binger; Bird; Brenner and Fontaine; Brooks; Kirsch)

**Torah** In the Hebrew language, the word for “law” is feminine. As a result, Torah grew to have a mythic presence. Although never deified, she sometimes functioned as a goddess. Her temperament was judicious and fair. Early in the Creation, she admonished YHWH not to create humanity for a short woeful life. After YHWH convinced Torah that repentance was possible, she ceased her protest. (Ginsberg, I)

**Zipporah** The Midianite Zipporah could only wed a man who could touch a man-eating tree. Moses survived the tree’s attack, but Zipporah’s father Jethro threw him into a deep pit. The girl liked Moses’s looks, so she secretly fed him for seven years, then suggested to her father that if Moses could survive such an ordeal, he must certainly be a man of miracles. Moses, emerging hale and well-fed, became Zipporah’s husband.

Later, she had to save him from death again. A power (possibly YHWH, or an angel in his service) tried to kill Moses while the family slept. Suspecting that Moses was threatened because their firstborn son, Gershom, had not been circumcised, Zipporah grabbed a stone and performed the operation, thus freeing Moses from YHWH’s attack. (Bible, Exodus; Kirsch; Shearman and Curtis)



**Zuleika** This passionate woman is referred to as “Potiphar’s wife” in scripture, although her own name is given as Zuleika in Jewish and Islamic legend. She fervently desired the Israelite prince Joseph. To show her friends how unnerving Joseph’s beauty was, she threw a banquet. At each place, she set knives and oranges. When Joseph entered, the guests lost awareness of anything but him; the table ran with blood and orange juice while the guests felt no pain, entranced by Joseph’s presence. Afterward they sympathized with the woman’s passion. Zuleika tied Joseph down while she fondled herself; he still rejected her advances. Zuleika then accused Joseph of attempted rape, and Joseph was thrown into prison and whipped. (Bible, Genesis; Ginsberg, I; Q’ran 12; Stowasser)

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# CHINA

China reaches from desert to tropics, from mountainous west to coastal east. Its culture represents an equally diverse ethnic background. China's earliest civilizations were not the highly centralized bureaucracies of later Chinese life, nor were their mythologies the highly structured regimes of later centuries. Rather, eastern continental Asia was home to indigenous people whose mythologies were absorbed into the developing religions.

Among these ethnic groups, women held considerably higher status than in later times. Women shamans mediated between this world and worlds beyond. Commentators note connections between the word for shaman and those for "mother," "dance," "fertility," and "egg." Thus, the woman religious practitioner may be symbolically implied in myths where she does not appear. The role of women as religious leaders did not survive into historical times in China, although they did so in Korea. Despite some similarity, China and Korea are discussed separately here.

Aboriginal Chinese religion forms the basis for Taoism and Confucianism, both properly called philosophies rather than religions. Taoism reached back to China's shamanic roots with its emphasis on the balance of feminine (*yin*) and masculine (*yang*). Taoism's traditional founder was the sage Lao-Tzu of the 6th century BCE, author of the important *Tao-te Ching*. As Taoism became the religion of choice for imperial China, its pantheon began to reflect the social organization of earthly life, resembling a bureaucratic hierarchy complete with monthly reports to superior gods and annual performance reviews.

The ideas of Confucius, a sage of the 5th century BCE, became the basis for an ethically sophisticated way of life. The abstractness of the Confucian way gave rise to few myths, although it provided rituals celebrating seasons and ancestral powers. Rather, Confucian ideas were appended to extant myths, producing in some cases a disjuncture between mythic action and its interpretation, or ancient myth was recast as history.



**Guanyin.** *The quiet dignity of the Chinese bodhisattva of mercy, Guanyin, is shown in the “moon and water” posture. The large painted wood sculpture depicted here can be seen in the Nelson-Atkins Museum in Kansas City.*

In the 3rd century CE, Buddhism arrived from India by way of Tibet and Afghanistan, bringing many vivid mythic figures. Few were feminine, but the most powerful female figure in China, **Guanyin**, derives from this religious tradition. Originally male, Guanyin continued China’s long tradition of balancing masculine and feminine energies, for although she was the singular female figure among Buddhist divinities, her power exceeded those of most male figures.

Despite the imperial strength of China, evident in such public works as the Great Wall, the court did not dictate all religious ways. Messages alternative to the mainstream religion were found in two places: in the residue of indigenous religions, as in the folktales and folkways of ethnic groups like the Miao; and in the religious myths of neighboring peoples, the Turks and Manchus as well as those frequent invaders of the middle kingdom, the Mongols.

In addition, the nearby kingdom of Korea kept its women’s shamanic tradition alive into the present. Such shamans come from two traditions. Southern-tradition shamans

derive their powers from matrilineally inherited access to spirits. Northern shamans are self-selected by “spirit sickness” before being initiated by a practitioner. Located historically in the territory that is now North Korea, this tradition is now predominant in Seoul, to which many northern shamans fled to escape Communist suppression of their craft.

Persecution of shamans is nothing new in Korea. Its strategic location between China and Japan led to invasion and occupation by both. When the Chinese brought Confucianism and later Buddhism, they tried to eliminate the native religion. Shamans survived marginally as healers, because no provision had been made to train doctors. But in 1409 CE, all shamanic books were burned; in 1472, the shamans were driven from Seoul.

The *mudang* survived, going underground until the end of colonial rulership. That did not, at first, bring much change. In the North, dictator Kim Il-sung made it his mission to end all religious practices save a token Buddhism. Shamanism in Communist Korea ended with the flight of *mudang* to Seoul, when they formed the basis of South Korean shamanism. The new Korean democracy did not welcome the refugee shamans with open arms. But the Fifth Republic, dedicated under its 1980 constitution to preserving Korean cultural heritage, permits public announcement of rituals; dedicatory rituals led by *mudang* have opened several skyscrapers in Seoul. Yet, like Native American tribal dances, these public performances, while they indicate the end of the darkest days of persecution, do not mean the new government supports the old religion.

## CHINESE, MONGOL, AND TAIWANESE PANTHEON

Ala Nur *Alan Qo'a*

Alan Nur. *See Alan Qo'a*

**Alan Qo'a**

Altan-Telgey. *See Etugen*

Angyr-Ala. *See Kang-kys*

Baosi. *See Pao Sze*

**Billkis**

**Bixia Yuanjun**

Ch'ang Hsi. *See Changxi*

Ch'ang-hsi. *See Changxi*

**Ch'ang O**

Chang-O. *See Ch'ang O*

Ch'uan Hou. *See Tien-Hou*

Chang E. *See Ch'ang O*

**Changxi**

Chang Xi. *See Changxi*

Changyi. *See Changxi*

Chen taihou. *See Linshui*

**Chhit-niu-ma**

**Chhng-Bú**

Chiang Yuan. *See Jiangyuan*

**Chih Nu**

Ching Wei. *See Nü Chi*

Chun T'i. *See Tien-Hou*

Ciji furen. *See Linshui*

Danai furen. *See Linshui*

Dong Mu *Chinese; east.*

Doumu. *See Ma-tsu*

E Wang. *See Ehuang.*

**Ehé Tazar**

Ehé Ureng Ibi. *See Ehé Tazar.*

**Ehuang**

**Emegelji Eji**

**Etugen**

Etügen Eke. *See Etugen*

Etüken. *See Etugen*

**Feng Pho-Pho**

**Fubao**

Fu-Pao **Fubao**

**Gaomei**

**Guanyin**

Han Ba. *See Nu Pa.*

Heng E. *See Ch'ang O*

Heng O. *See Ch'ang O*

Henge. *See Ch'ang O*

Hengnge. *See Ch'ang O*

He Xiang. *See Ho Hsien-Ku*

**Ho Hsien-Ku**

Ho Shiangu. *See Ho Hsien-Ku*

Ho Sien Ku. *See Ho Hsien-Ku*

**Hou Ji**

Hou Ji *Food.*

**Hou-T'su**

Hou Tu. *See Hou-T'su*

**Hsiao Ming**

Hsi Ho. *See Xihe*

Hsiao Ming *North.*

Hsi-Ho. *See Xihe*

Hsi-Ling Shih. *See Ts'an Nü*

**Hsi Shih**

Hsi Wang Mu. *See Xiwang Mu*

Hsü. *See Xihe*

Hsüan Mu. *See Tien-Mu*

**Huang Chü chih shih**

**Huaxu**

Itoga. *See Etugen*

Itügen. *See Etugen*

**Jiandi**

Jiang Hupo *Chinese; tiger, shaman.*

**Jiangyuan**

Jokwa. *See Nüwa*

**Kang-kys**

Karbyn. *See Kang-kys*

Kian Yuan. *See Jiangyuan*

Kuan Shih Yin. *See Guanyin*

Kuan-shih-yin. *See Guanyin*

Kuan Yin. *See Guanyin*

Kwannon. *See Guanyin*

Lan Tstai-Ho. *See Ho Hsien-Ku*

**Lao-mu**

Lei Tsu. *See Tien-Mu*

Lei Zu *Thunder.*

Lei Zu. *See O Nü*

Lim B'ek. *See Ma-tsu*

Lin Jiuniang. *See Linshui*

**Linshui**

Li Sanniang. *See Linshui*

Lung Nu. *See Guanyin*

Má-chó. *See Ma-tsu*

**Mah Ku**

Ma-t'ou Niang. *See Ts'an Nü*

**Ma-tsu**

Ma-tsu-p'o. *See Ma-tsu*

Mazu. *See Ma-tsu*

Mei Chou. *See Tien-Hou*

**Meng-Jiang Jyu**

Miao Chen. *See Guanyin*

Miao Shan. *See Guanyin*

Miaushan. *See Guanyin*

Mieh. *See Nü Chi*

**Mifei**

Mo Yeh. *See Moye*

**Moye**

**Mulan**

Na Bo Hmo Ntse. *See Ntse*

**Na Bo Nok'o**

Na Bo Nok'o *Miao; sun.*

Nainiang furen. *See Linshui*

Natigay. *See Etugen*

Niduyan. *See Emegeljĭ Eĭĭ*

**Ntse**

**Nü Ch'i**

Nu Ba. *See Nü Pa*

Nü Ch'ou chih shih. *See Nü Chou*

**Nü Chou**

Nu Gua. *See Nüwa*

Nügua. *See Nüwa*

Nu Kua Shih. *See Nüwa*

Nu Kwa. *See Nüwa*

Nü Mie. *See Nü Ch'i*

**Nü Pa**

**Nü Shih**

Nü Shih *Aphrodisiac*

Nu Wa. *See Nüwa*

**Nüwa**

**Nuxiu**

**O Nü**

Ötygen. *See Etugen*

**Pao Sze**

Quan Am. *See Guanyin*

Quanim. *See Guanyin*

**Ren**

Ruobin. *See Mifei*

Saiyn-Uran. *See Kang-kys*

Seiobo. *See Xiwang Mu*

Shenmei. *See Nüwa*

Shi Chung *Chinese; warrior maiden.*

Shijia Furen *Chinese; shaman-woman.*

**Shui-mu Niang-Niang**

Shuntian Shengmu. *See Linshui*

Si Wang Mu. *See Xiwang Mu*

**Sun Pu-erh****T'ai-hsüan Nü****T'ai-yin Nü****T'ai Yuan**

Tamaya. *See Ts'an Nü*

**T'ang Kuang-chen**

Teng Pi Shih. *See Hsiao Ming*

Thi Kinh. *See Guanyin*

Tian-hou. *See Tien-Hou*

Tianxian YunUu Bixia Yuanjun. *See*

**Bixia Yuanjun**

Tî chih erh nü *Chinese; storm twins.*

T'ien Fei. *See Ma-tsu*

T'ien Hou Niang Niang. *See Tien-Hou*

**Tien-Hou**

T'ien-hou. *See Tien-Hou*

**Tien-Mu**

T'ien Ssu. *See Ts'an Nü*

T'ing Yao *Chinese; ancestor.*

Tou Mu. *See Tou-Mou*

**Tou-Mou****Ts'an Nü**

Tsi-Ku *Chinese; toilet; prophecy.*

T'u-shan. *See Tushan*

**Tushan**

Uluken *Mongol; fire.*

**Wa****Wengu****Wu Lo**

Wu-sheng lao-mu. *See Lao-mu*

Xi He. *See Xihe*

**Xihe**

Xi Mu *Chinese; west.*

**Xiwang Mu**

Xiwangmu. *See Xiwang Mu*

Yang Su. *See Ho Hsien-Ku*

**Yaoji****Yin Wu-Ch'ang**

Yunhua Furen. *See Yaoji.*

Zhi Nu. *See Chih Nu*

Zhunti. *See Ma-tsu*

**Alan Qo'a** The ancestress of the Mongol hero Činggis Khan was visited nightly by a shiny yellow man who descended through the smoke-hole, rubbed his stomach, then turned into a yellow dog. This visitor fathered five sons. One day their mother gave them arrows to break. Although they could break single arrows, none could break five held together. Thus Alan Qo'a showed her sons the necessity of cooperation. Another Mongol ancestral mother, Ala Nur, gave birth after encountering a lion. (Bon-nefoy; *SH*)

**Billkis** The Uighur, a Chinese minority people, tell of the princess Billkis, who began at the age of eight to embroider a veil for her wedding. It took eight years, so when Billkis turned sixteen, the beautiful veil was finished. She told her father that the man who could understand her veil would become her husband, for he would be able to read her innermost thoughts. One after another, princes came and looked at the veil, but all they saw was embroidered silk. They could not interpret Billkis's designs.

Finally, a ragged young man discerned the veil's meaning. In the swirls of color, he saw a mountain, on which a witch stood guard over a green bird. His interpretation was correct, but Billkis then wanted him to get the bird for her. Asking only for the pearl she wore in her right ear, he set off.

Finding the mountain, he climbed to the top, where he discovered the green bird and the witch. Calling for the pearl to help him, he threw it into the air. There it glittered so strongly that the witch had to cover her eyes, allowing the hero to capture the bird and escape with it. This heroic action satisfied Billkis that the young man was her intended mate, but her father was horrified that she would not marry wealth. The king set impossible tasks for Billkis's beloved, saying he would cut off the lad's head if anything went awry. Instead, Billkis and her lover escaped on the green bird and lived happily together. (He Liyi)

**Bixia Yuanjun** This mountain goddess, honored by women through the early part of the 20th century, represented untamed femininity, sometimes perceived as dangerous. Midwives and healers were devoted to her, as were young wives. Both rich and poor worshiped her, with as many as 47 festivals offered in her honor, most significantly her birthday, celebrated with a month of drumming and chanting. (Ferguson; Pomeranz)

**Ch'ang O** The Chinese moon goddess originally lived on earth, where her husband was the archer Yi. She wed unhappily, after Yi killed her brother and shot an arrow into her hair to show that her life was in his control. Because of his skill, the gods gave Yi the elixir of immortality, which Ch'ang O found and drank. Then she fled to the moon, where she begged the moon-hare for protection. The hare breathed out a strong wind, and the pursuing Yi was unable to mount to the sky. Ch'ang O remained in the moon, transformed into a toad. (Birrell 1993; Saso; *CCM*)

**Changxi** Changxi was distinct from **Ch'ang O**, although the two moon goddesses may have originally been the same. Changxi was mother of the 12 moons, each a different shape, that daily crossed the sky. She was an important early goddess demoted to a minor position. (Birrell 2000; Bonnefoy; *CMS*)

**Chhit-niu-ma** In Taiwan, this collective of birth goddesses protected children. Their festival was celebrated on the seventh day of the seventh month, when people vowed to do good works. On a child's 16th birthday, prayers thanked the Old Maids' protection through the dangerous years of childhood. The beloved weaving goddess **Chih Nu** shared the festival. Some stories say she lived with her six unmarried sisters, connecting her with this collective. (Saso)

**Chhng-Bú** This Taiwanese spirit kept babies from crying at night or contracting childhood illnesses. To invoke Chhng-Bú's aid, parents filled bowls with rice and with unsalted fried pork. The offerings were placed in the crib to nourish the bed spirit. (Saso)



**Chih Nu** One of China's most beloved goddesses wove the iridescent seamless robes of the divinities. Every year, she came to earth on the seventh day of the seventh month. On one descent, Chih Nu fell in love with the cowherd god; she spent so much time with him that the heavenly robes began to tatter. The chief god moved Chih Nu to one side of the heavens and her lover to the other, allowing them one night together each year. That evening, magpies built a footbridge for the reunion. If it rained, the magpies were stranded on earth, and the lovers remained separated. Their annual mating was celebrated by women who floated dolls down streams while praying for healthy children, and by girls who played divination games. (Birrell 1993; Bonnefoy)

**Ehé Tazar** The Mongol primal goddess Ehé Ureng Ibi existed from primordial times as the mate of the creator god, but little is said of her role in creation. Another goddess, Ehé Tazar, appears in myth as the earth mother, who asked the high god Esege Malan for the sun and moon. Although he agreed to give them to her, he could not get the luminaries down to the earth's surface. But he convinced the hedgehog god Esh to come with him to heaven to discuss the matter. When Esh got there, however, the high god's swan-shaped daughters laughed at him, whereupon he grew furious and withdrew to wreak havoc on earth. As he was doing so, some of the high god's servants overheard him speculate about why Esege Malan did not ask the earth goddess for things equally impossible, like an echo and the warm air of summer. They returned to heaven with this information, whereupon Esege Malan descended and asked for the two items in return for the sun and moon. Ehé Tazar could not capture them, and so the sun and moon remained hers, and Esege Malan henceforth owned the echo and summer breeze. (Curtin)

**Ehuang** This daughter of a river god shared a husband with her sister, Nüying. When he died, Ehuang drowned herself in sorrow. The story may have descended from a tradition of human sacrifice in which women shamans sacrificed themselves to prevent famine from drought or other natural disaster. (Strassberg; Yüan)

**Emegelji Eji** The earliest Mongolian shaman offered his deceased mother sacrifices; she became "oldest grandmother" who had charge of the dead. She could be protective or destructive, depending on circumstances. She was also known as Niduyan, "shaman woman." (Heissig)

**Etugen** The Mongol earth goddess derived her name from the holy mountain Otuken. Her people honored her by eating clay obtained from sites called "earths of strength." Etugen, who may have been a collective of 77 goddesses, caused earthquakes by shaking to eliminate impurities. Her connection to the earth goddess Altan-Telgey is unclear. (Bonnefoy; Heissig)

**Feng Pho-Pho** Riding herd on the winds, the old woman Feng Pho-Pho had a tiger for a steed and clouds for her road. She brought calm days when she rounded up the winds and stuffed them into the bag she carried over her shoulder. Sometimes described as a male divinity, she may have been dual-sexed. (Werner)

**Fubao** Many cultures ascribe a miraculous conception to culture heroes, and China's Yellow Emperor was no exception. His mother, a well-traveled intellectual, sat outdoors one spring night watching an unearthly light play across the sky. Soon Fubao found herself pregnant. Her child Huang-Ti gestated for two years—another common phenomenon among heroes, who often spend more time than usual in their mother's wombs. (Bonnefoy)

**Gaomei** Originally a Chinese goddess whose name (“first mother”) suggests a creatrix, Gaomei was transformed into a male divinity. Her name is sometimes translated as “Great Matchmaker,” suggesting involvement with human fecundity. Her spring festival was dedicated to rituals for healthy offspring. As she was connected with a magical mountain also associated with **Nüwa**, these figures may be the same. (Bonnefoy)

**Guanyin** Buddhism came to China in approximately the 1st century CE, via Tibet, bringing the merciful male bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara, who became feminized by the 12th century, perhaps because mercy was not typically connected with the masculine (*yang*) force but with the feminine (*ying*). Guanyin may have absorbed the iconography of an earlier goddess, perhaps Tibetan **Tārā** (see India) or the indigenous holy girl Miao Shan.

Guanyin originally lived on earth as princess Miao Shan. Her father had prayed for a son to inherit his throne, and Miao Shan's birth disappointed him. She yearned to become a Buddhist nun, but her father wanted her to marry a wealthy man, so he imprisoned her. So she meditated and prayed, becoming yet more saintly. Next, her father put her in a convent where he instructed the nuns to humiliate her with menial work. Again, Miao Shan seemed unaware of discomfort. Furious, the king ordered his daughter killed, but a tiger took her to the underworld where she saw condemned souls weeping. When she begged the king of the dead for mercy, many souls were freed.

After a lifetime of helping others, Miao Shan's final act was one of forgiveness. Her murderous father fell ill and was told by a Buddhist monk to find his daughter. When he sent servants to her, she cut off one hand and one eye, and instructed that they be taken to the king. But the king was only half cured. So the servants came back, and Miao Shan offered up her other hand and other eye. He fell down in remorse for all he had done, and Miao Shan was restored to perfect health. After that, she received illumination.

But Miao Shan refused to become a near-divine *bodhisattva*. Instead she retained her human form, promising to stay on earth until everyone attained enlightenment. Simply to utter her name assured salvation from physical and spiritual harm. Even better was the observance of Guanyin's testimony of peace and mercy. Her devout worshipers eat no flesh and do no violence to other beings. Guanyin's birthday is celebrated in midsummer, when offerings of flowers and fruit decorate her altars.

Guanyin's statues show her dressed in flowing garments and decked with golden necklaces, attended by the dragon-girl Lung Nu. Often she holds willows or jewels; she makes symbolic gestures of generosity and the banishment of fear. She also

appears as a temple-guardian, with 1,000 arms or 1,000 eyes, always alert. Such statues were designed as guides to meditation, but the most effective meditation was repetition of Guanyin's name.

Guanyin has for centuries been an important symbol of compassion, honored not only in China but also in Japan (where, as Kwannon, she is pictured as male) and Southeast Asia. In Vietnam, where she is called Quan Am, she lived on earth as the girl **Thi Kinh** (see India). Outside her homeland, Guanyin is honored in immigrant communities who bring her images and traditions to their new homes. This diaspora has led to an increase in non-Asian worshipers of Guanyin, including many Americans drawn to Buddhist philosophy and practice. (Blofeld; Chamberlayne; Dudbridge; Kinsley; Liu; Overmyer 2002; Palmer and Ramsay; Paper; Shahar and Weller; Sommer; Tay; Waley)

**Ho Hsien-Ku** The hairless maiden Ho Hsien-Ku, one of the Eight Taoist Immortals, dreamed that she could gain eternal life by eating mother-of-pearl. When she did, she passed through solid objects and traveled at impossible speeds. She wandered about gathering flowers and herbs, especially mugwort. Ho Hsien-Ku never died but lived in the heavens with **Xiwang Mu**.

Another of the Eight Immortals, Lan Tstai-Ho, had indeterminate gender. Various described as a woman and as dual-sexed, Lan Tstai-Ho dressed as a woman but had a male voice. She became a street musician who always dressed in blue and wore one shoe. One night, intoxicated, she threw away her clothing and was lifted to heaven on a stork's wings or a cloud. Afterward, she brought delight to heavenly gatherings, always carrying her flute and a basket of fruit. (Liu)

**Hou Ji** The Chinese goddess of millet was one of the primordial deities, the one who taught humans how to recognize food plants and to prepare them for consumption, as well as how to prepare it for sacrifices of gratitude for the earth's abundance. Although her name can indicate either a male or female divinity, Hou Ji was typically shown as a goddess, as women were connected with the fecundity she symbolized. In the late Chinese pantheon, Hou Ji was minister for agriculture. (Birrell 2000)

**Hou-T'su** As did most other recorded cultures, the Chinese saw the earth as a female divinity ("Empress Earth"), patron of fertility, worshiped until this century on a square marble altar in the Forbidden City, whereon the ruler offered sacrifices each summer solstice. (Birrell 1993)

**Hsiao Ming** Goddess of the north, "bright evening" was the daughter of the obscure goddess Teng Pi Shih and sister of Chu Kuang ("torch glare"). The two sisters may be early goddesses of moon and sun, respectively. (CMS)

**Hsi Shih** A Taoist story tells of the greatest spy of her time, a noblewoman called Hsi Shih who conspired with the minister Fan Li to free her country from oppressive rule. The noble ruler Yu Chien succumbed to arrogance and challenged a nearby lord, thereby losing his own kingdom. Held hostage, Yu Chien began to give way to the

lures of luxury and despair. But Fan Li helped him remember that he was a king, even in captivity, and between them they plotted to escape. Their plans were greatly helped when the beautiful noblewoman Hsi Shih volunteered to become a courtesan and to seduce Yu Chien's captor. In this way, she was able to learn about the army's strength and its strategies over the next months. After Hsi Shih negotiated the release of Yu Chien, the three traveled safely back to their country and won back the lost territories. Then Hsi Shih and Fan Li left the dangerous world of the court to go into business, with such success that they are considered the patrons of entrepreneurship. (Wong)

**Huang Chü chih shih** The "corpse of the giant yellow woman" appears briefly in the *Classic of Mountains and Seas*, an early Chinese text, although little is said of her except that she lived in the wild lands to the west. She was connected to **Ch'ang O**, the moon goddess. (CMS)

**Huaxu** This heroine was one of many legendary women who became pregnant under unusual circumstances. In Huaxu's case, she found a giant footprint in a marsh, home of the dragon-shaped thunder god, who fertilized her through the footprint. Huaxu gave birth to the serpent-bodied god of the heavens, Fuxi, mate of the creator goddess **Nüwa**. The same story is told of the ancestral mother of the Zhou clan, **Jiangyuan**. (Bonney; Yüan)

**Jiandi** Chinese ancestral mothers found unusual ways to get pregnant, and Jiandi ("bamboo-slip maiden"), ancestral mother of the Yin clan, was no exception. Walking with two companions, she felt a need to take a bath. She and the other maidens found a nice pool and, descending into it, refreshed themselves with its water. While bathing, Jiandi saw a swallow lay an egg, which she picked up and swallowed whole. Shortly afterwards, she found herself pregnant, and the child she bore was the heroic ancestor of the Yin family, one of whose clan names (Zi, "swallow") recalls the myth of Jiandi's miraculous conception. Some legends say that Jiandi shared her husband, King Gao Xin, with her sister Jian Pi. (Birrell 2000, Bonney; Yüan)

**Jiangyuan** Like other Chinese ancestral mothers, Jiangyuan ("Jiang the Originator") was a virgin mother, impregnated by stepping into the toe of a giant footprint. She painlessly and bloodlessly bore a child who was the ancestor of the Zhou clan. (The same story was told of **Huaxu**, mother of the heaven god Fuxi, who stepped in the footprint of the thunder god and became pregnant.) Thinking the child would be unlucky due to its strange conception, Jiangyuan exposed him on a roadway, but cows came and gave him milk. She then tried to leave him in a forest, but woodcutters found and rescued him. She put her child on an icy lake, but birds nested around him and kept him warm. Finally, she accepted him as her son. Several texts describe Jiangyuan as on her way to sacrifice to the Great Matchmaker, **Gaomei**, when she found herself with child. (CCM; Birrell 1993, 2000; Bonney; Mackenzie; Sommer)

**Kang-kys** Abak-Möge, the father of this Mongolian warrior, was dissatisfied when a mere girl was born, rather than the son he desired. In retaliation against Kang-kys's

mother, he set off to seduce Saiyn-Uran, the wife of his greatest enemy. But Saiyn-Uran served Abak-Möge strong drink. While he lay passed out, his enemies raided his home, enslaving Kang-kys's mother, Angyr-Ala. But an old serving woman, Karbyn, hid the infant, and then brought her up as a warrior.

The girl hunted, while the old woman kept house. Kang-kys turned away men, until she gained a reputation as a spirit-woman. But one day, horsemen kidnapped Karbyn. Kang-kys dedicated herself to finding the woman who had raised her. Magical helpers provided her with arms and a horse so that she could gather her father's people and drive out the invaders.

Her enemy magically turned into a fox, which Kang-kys pursued. Just as she shot, an eagle swooped down, and the arrow pierced it. The eagle turned into a handsome man, who married Kang-kys. One last adventure awaited her: to find her mother and father and return with them to lead a happy life in their homeland. (Van Deusen)

**Lao-mu** In the White Lotus tradition of Buddhism, Lao-mu was the great mother, honored with chants that call her “oh great Buddha” and “venerable mother.” Ignorance caused those on earth to believe themselves separated from her, so she sent down masters to teach them how to attain unity with her. Through the middle of the last century, Chinese residents in Singapore honored Lao-mu by practicing rigorous vegetarianism and sexual abstinence. Called Wu-sheng lao-mu (“venerable mother who was never begotten”), she was the mother of **Nüwa**, who with her brother gave birth to millions of children. (Overmyer 1976)

**Linshui** The powerful goddess Linshui was reputedly born in either 766 CE or 904 CE and declared a goddess in the 13th century. She was originally the shaman Chen Jinggu, conceived when her barren mother, Lady Ge, swallowed the blood of **Guanyin**, which had accidentally splashed onto a leaf. Lady Ge ingested the leaf, and she was instantly pregnant. When she gave birth, perfume and music filled the air. The child showed clairvoyant abilities at age four and learned to read at seven. From birth, she was devoted to Guanyin.

The girl was fated to marry Liu Qi, the reincarnation of a man who had attempted to gain Guanyin in marriage by throwing silver dust at her. Most of the dust struck her hair, turning it white, but some fell into a river, where it became a destructive serpent. This serpent was Chen Jinggu's enemy throughout her life. As a teenager, Chen Jinggu learned shamanism from a renowned magician, after which she became more famous than her teacher. With her sister-shamans Lin Jiuniang and Li Sanniang, she worked for healing and order. She was also a warrior who had mastered the martial arts. The stars of Ursa Major formed her sword, and she bore a serpent-headed whip when she rode into combat.

Chen Jinggu fought the magical serpent three times. The first time, the serpent transformed itself into the semblance of the queen and threatened the king. Chen Jinggu cut it into three pieces and hid them in widely separated locations. One part escaped, so Chen Jinggu had to fight it again. Finally the snake's head, disguised as a beautiful woman, forced Lui Qi into sex.

Chen Jinggu decided to marry Lui Qi, something she had previously refused to consider. When she was pregnant, drought struck the land. Because a pregnant woman could not shamanize, she performed an abortion on herself. She hid the fetus, intending to re-impregnate herself after rain had come. But while she was ritually dancing, the snake attacked her child and ate it. In retaliation, Chen Jinggu killed the serpent, but she herself died of a hemorrhage. Then, in the afterlife, she retrieved her child's soul and made him a god.

Chen Jinggu is worshiped in the town of Daqiao, where her mummified body rests, together with the remains of the serpent. Her worship continues in Taiwan, brought there by migrants. In both places she is regarded as a protector of women and children. (Shahar and Weller)

**Mah Ku** The original figure of this name was a goddess of the east, associated with time's passage. Later, the name was associated with a Taoist sage, daughter of a corrupt official who stole his people's food while demanding they work all night. Skilled in imitating animals, Mah Ku crowed like a cock at midnight, and the soldiers ended the day's work at that point, giving the exhausted workers several hours of sleep. This went on until Mah Ku's father realized that the project was falling behind. Laying in wait, he discovered his daughter giving the signal, captured her, and tied her up in her room. But before he could punish her, she escaped. Hiding in the wilderness, she met a sage who taught her the secrets of immortality. (Cahill 1993)

**Ma-tsu** The Taiwanese island of Ma-tsu was named after this goddess of land and sea. She was holy from her earliest days, reading scripture by the age of eight and having clairvoyant visions. Once she dreamed that her fishermen brothers were drowning. But they returned home safely, because as her brothers reported, Ma-tsu had appeared from nowhere to calm the waters. When she was 16, a spirit taught her magical incantations, permitting her to control the weather. Before being taken up to heaven, she performed miracles, including subduing demons and feeding her starving parents from the flesh of her leg.

Seafaring people cherished her, calling her T'ien Fei and **T'ien Hou**. The second name may refer to a separate figure, associated with the Buddhist dawn goddess Zhunti and the Taoist north-star goddess Doumu. Ma-tsu is honored on the mainland, but less devoutly than on Taiwan, where she remains one of the most popular divinities. (Boltz; Irwin; Ruitenbeek; Sagren; Saso)

**Meng-Jiang Jyu** This Chinese folktale heroine was born in a miraculous way. Two neighboring families, both of them childless, found a watermelon exactly halfway between their homes. Within it was a magical girl, whom the families decided to raise jointly, bearing the names of both families, Meng and Jiang. Meng-Jiang was a good girl who made both sets of parents happy. When she came to marry, she was lucky enough to find a young man from the village who cherished her. All went well until one summer day, when the emperor's soldiers came and conscripted Meng-Jiang's husband to build the Great Wall. He had no choice, so he went to the west.

Months passed and, worried that her husband would be cold without his winter clothes, Meng-Jiang set off to find him. She walked and walked, asking everyone for her lover, but each village sent her further. She almost drowned crossing the Yellow River, but the river god became sympathetic to her cause and saved her. Finally, she reached her destination, only to find that her beloved husband had died and his bones had been interred somewhere in the Wall. She cried out to heaven, and the Wall collapsed—revealing thousands of bones. How could she find her husband's? Recalling their vow to be blood of each other's blood, she bit herself and, bleeding, walked among the bones. The bones of her husband recognized and absorbed her blood, so she was able to give them a proper burial. (Chin et al.; Sanders; Thompson)

**Mifei** Daughter of the god of the east, Mifei drowned in the Lo river, of which she was then made tutelary goddess. She had been gathering mushrooms and feathers on the riverbanks with her attendants when the river god saw her and fell in love. In order to keep her to himself, he drowned Mifei as she crossed to the other shore. But he was a fickle lover who soon left the girl to seduce other women.

Mifei appeared through historical times on the riverbanks, luring men and causing them to fall in love with her. A famous poem of the 3rd century BCE, by Qu Yuan, addressed her as the “bright fairy” who always turned away her suitors, no matter how rich their offerings. Whether this fairy woman represents a vestigial early goddess or a late allegory is not clear. (Cahill 1985; Liu; Schafer; Yüan)

**Moye** Threatened with death unless they forged a perfect sword, the smith Moye and her husband Ganjiang set to work. First Ganjiang gathered iron and gold from five mountains and ten directions, but he was unable to use the metals until Moye remembered that transformation requires sacrifice. She ordered 300 young people to operate a bellows while she leaped into the furnace. A famous sword bearing her name was cast from the resulting metal. (Bonney)

**Mulan** When Mulan was a girl, the imperial army took away one man from every family. Because Mulan's elderly father was the family's only male, the forces planned to take him, until Mulan appeared dressed as a boy. She became a renowned warrior and, finally, a general. When she had been victorious over the empire's foes, she returned to her family home where, as her men celebrated, she withdrew and dressed herself again as a woman. Her men-at-arms were stunned to realize that their brilliant general was a woman. (Liu)

**Na Bo Nok'o** A confusing tale of the Ch'uan Miao, ethnic people of southern Szechuan, tells of a woman of this name who sewed up the sky and then brought out the “sister sun,” a sun goddess who had to go through a cave before coming out into the sky. (Graham)

**Ntse** Among the Miao, this ancestral goddess gave birth to the first people when, after a flood, only a brother and sister were left alive. They entered a drum and were carried



up to the sky. When they returned to earth, they had to mate in order to repopulate it. (Overmyer 1976)

**Nü Ch'i** The priestess Nü Ch'i guarded sacred places between two rivers. She was connected to several other obscure figures: Nü Mieh, the girl destroyer who lived in the western wilderness; and the blazingly hot Nü Chi'en. Although only a vestigial myth describes her significance, Nü Chi was an important early creatrix. (*CMS*; Yüan.)

**Nü Chou** The old woman Nü Ch'ou periodically sacrificed herself so that waters would never rise above the land. Her crab-like body resulted from these self-immolations, from which she returned with deformed hands. She always wore green, to signify the rebirth that occurred from her sacrifice. (Birrell 1993; *CMS*; Strassberg)

**Nü Pa** This goddess dried up rivers, sending famine and disease to the people of the watershed. When her father fought the war god, Nü Pa was his secret weapon, for she destroyed the rain god. But the effort trapped her on earth, where her anger brought pain to humans. She could be sent away with rituals and prayers that asked, "Goddess, go north." (Birrell 2000; Yüan)

**Nü Shih** "Girl corpse" has little place in Chinese mythology except as the source of an aphrodisiac plant called the dodder, a parasitic plant in the morning glory family, into which she was transformed when she died. Anyone who ate the dodder plant would become immediately sexually irresistible to others. Nü Shih was said to live in the central part of the world. (*CMS*)

**Nüwa** Nüwa, mate and sister of the heavenly god Fuxi, was depicted with him as snakes with entwined tails. Because of the depth of her marriage bond, Nüwa was hailed as the Divine Matchmaker Shenmei. She was a force of reproduction, able to create the universe through self-transformation, with 10 gods being born from her intestines.

Nüwa made the first human beings in her own image from Yellow River clay. At first, she carefully molded them to look like her, but with legs instead of a dragon's tail. Finding this tedious, Nüwa dipped a rope into clay and shook it so that drops splattered onto the ground. Thus two types of beings were born: from the molded figures, nobles; from the clay drops, peasants.

When a dragon shook heaven out of alignment, she restored order by melting multi-colored stones to rebuild the sky. She found pebbles from the Yellow River and the Yangtze in five primary colors, so that heaven's arch would include all necessary elements. She melted these pebbles together, then mended the sky so that the damage cannot be seen. Finding other problems caused by the dragon's rebellion, Nüwa set about correcting them. She cut off the toes of a giant tortoise and used them to mark the compass's points; she burned reeds to ashes, using them to dam the flooding rivers. She also established marriage rites so that children would be raised well. She invented the flute, for which she is considered goddess of music. Order restored, Nüwa retreated to the sky, or perhaps disintegrated into 1,000 sprites that remain on earth. Among

Chinese immigrants to Japan, Nüwa was known as Jokwa. (Birrell 1993, 2000; Bonnefoy; *CCM*; *CMS*; Ferguson; Irwin; Jungsheng; Overmyer 1976; Schafer; Yüan)

**Nuxiu** The ancestral mother of the Chin people, who gave their name to China, she miraculously became pregnant when she ate an egg dropped from the sky by a black bird. The child born from this pregnancy was the first ruler of the Qin dynasty. The story is almost identical to that told of another ancestral mother, **Jiang**, except she conceived in a magical mulberry forest while Nuxiu was weaving when she was granted the magical impregnating egg. (Bonnefoy)

**O Nü** An early goddess described in the Chinese text *Classic of Mountains and Seas*, O Nü was the daughter of Lei Zu, the thunder goddess. Her name means “lovely girl,” and she was the mother of a hero. Another figure of this name also goes by Yüan-fu (“liaison wife”) and was the mother of culture-bringing gods. (*CMS*)

**Pao Sze** This dragon maiden was born when a box of dragon foam fell open at the king’s court and a black lizard crept out, impregnating a local girl by the touch of its scaly skin. When the girl abandoned the strangely conceived Pao Sze, a childless couple found her and were delighted to have a child to rear. But they heard that the court magicians had discerned the existence of the dragon’s daughter, so they escaped with her to the nearby kingdom of Pao, where they offered the child to the king, who reared her to become his consort. In doing so, he set aside his first queen, Chen, and their son, installing Pao Sze’s son as crown prince instead.

Pao Sze was beautiful but strangely sad. The king tried everything to bring a smile to her lips, although she constantly warned him not to do so. With a practical joke, he forced her to laugh, but the joke turned serious when an enemy invaded the unprepared palace and killed the king, taking Pao Sze prisoner. They could not hold her, for she turned into a dragon and escaped. (Liu; Mackenzie; Visser)

**Ren** A Chinese folktale tells of a girl named Ren who met a handsome but poor boy named Zheng. She invited him into her charming home at the edge of town, and then into her bed. The next day, he tried to find out more about her, but the shopkeepers told him there were no houses where he had been, just a wilderness filled with foxes. When he saw her again in the market, she hid from him, for she was ashamed that he knew her secret. But he was persistent in courting her, and so they married. He prospered and became rich. Years later, Zheng wanted Ren to travel to the capital with him, but she refused, saying it would be bad luck. He teased her into going against her instincts, but along the way hounds set upon the two. Instantly Ren turned back into a fox and tried to outrun the dogs, but they caught her and ripped her to shreds. Zheng never forgot her, nor did he marry again. He spent the rest of his years grieving for his beautiful fox wife. (Liu; Sanders)

**Shui-mu Niang-Niang** Although most river divinities in China were male, there are exceptions, including Shui-mu Niang-Niang, “old woman of the waters,” who ruled the region around the old city of Ssu-chou, which sank beneath her waters in

1574 CE. She had threatened it for years and regularly flooded it, but the people did not move. Even a special request by the Lord of Heaven did not change her mind. He tried to trick her out of her attempts to flood the city by sending a magical donkey to drink her pails of water, but she saw through the ruse and knocked over one bucket, which was filled with the water of several great lakes. The lake that now covers the city is called Hung-tse. (Werner)

**Sun Pu-erh** Called a goddess in some Taoist texts, Sun Pu-erh was the only woman among the seven most renowned Taoist masters. She was wed to Ma Tan-yang (sometimes called her brother), with whom she lived a celibate life so that both could attain immortality through the secret alchemy of desire. When even that nonsexual relationship stood in her way, she threw cold water into a wok full of hot oil and did not step back when the oil flew everywhere. Her beauty thus defaced, she was accepted into the highest ranks of alchemical students and learned to unite yin and yang within her.

Disguised as a madwoman, she then traveled the countryside, begging for food and sleeping in caves. But despite her disguise, she attracted the attention of two rapists who tried to assault her. As they moved toward her, the heavens opened and huge hailstones fell down, incapacitating the instigator while leaving his more reluctant companion untouched. News of the heavenly protection spread, and from then on Pu-erh lived peacefully and safely, concentrating on her spiritual practices. (Sommer)

**T'ai-hsüan Nü** A woman of magical powers, this Taoist sage decided to study magic after it was predicted that she would have a short life. A widow with one son, she devoted herself to the occult arts until her son was old enough to have his own family. Then she went into the wilderness to refine her craft. She was able to melt snow with a glance, to cause avalanches with a wave of her hand, and to blow out forest fires with her breath. She lived for 200 years before flying into the sky and becoming a heavenly immortal. (Wong)

**T'ai-yin Nü** Because she could not find a teacher of the arts of immortality, T'ai-yin Nü set out to learn them for herself. She worked in a wine shop while she studied and watched for a teacher. Finally she met a man who spoke in mystic riddles. She closed up her shop and went to his hermitage, where he shared the secrets she had hoped to learn. But it took many years before she could make the elixir of immortality. Although she was over 200 years old when she drank it, she still looked like a young woman. (Wong)

**T'ai Yuan** This Chinese saint lived on clouds high in the mountains and remained celibate until the age of 40, by which time she had become androgynous as well as ethereal, living only on the nourishment provided by drinking cloud-vapor. A beam of light, wandering by, saw the shining "Great Original" and penetrated her uterus. Twelve years later T'ai Yuan gave birth, through her spinal cord, to a heroic child who became the ruler of the underworld. (Colegrave)

**T'ang Kuang-chen** When T'ang Kuang-chen was small, she attracted the attention of the immortals. They offered her the chance to live in the heavens, but she declined because she had to care for her mother. With magical pills provided by the immortals, she lived for years without feeling heat or cold, hunger or thirst. When her mother died, T'ang Kuang-chen mounted a giant toad and rode away to heaven. (Wong)

**Tien-Hou** She was born Mei Chou, the sister of four sailors. One day she fell into a trance that frightened her parents. They tried everything to break the spell and at last succeeded, much to Mei Chou's anger. Soon afterward, three brothers returned home with the news that the fourth had been lost at sea. They too would have drowned, they said, had not their sister walked across the water to save them. Mei Chou was elevated to heaven as Tien-Hou, Empress of Heaven. Not to be confused with **Xiwang Mu**, Tien-Hou was an ocean goddess who rode across the sky on clouds, consulting her wind servants to find sailors in danger and hastening to their rescue. Her associate was Chun T'i, all-knowing Taoist goddess of light who was depicted with eight hands, two of which held the sun and the moon. (Ferguson; Irwin)

**Tien-Mu** To make lightning, this Chinese goddess flashed two mirrors at each other; from their intersecting rays, lightning shot out. She was depicted wearing bright robes of blue and green, red and white. Her companion was the thunder goddess Lei Zu, who brought silk cultivation to China. (Birrell 2000)

**Tou-Mou** The Chinese goddess of the polestar, the "Bushel Mother," was the judge of all peoples, keeping records of their lives and deaths. In addition, she was heaven's scribe, keeping a tally of all the divinities, their duties, and their various estates in the nine heavens. Both Buddhists and Taoists honored her. She is the Taoist parallel to the Buddhist divinity of mercy, **Guanyin**, for she was said to look upon human failings with a sympathetic heart. She was depicted seated on a lotus throne, with three eyes to see everything and eighteen arms to offer aid. (Werner)

**Ts'an Nü** A family whose father had been missing for a year promised a young daughter to whomever could bring him home. A horse did so, and the parents felt they should keep their vow, but the girl refused. When the horse demanded payment, the father shot and skinned it. But as the girl walked past the horse's hide, it spirited her away. Days later, the hide was found beneath a mulberry tree; the girl, turned into a silkworm, was spinning silk threads. Shortly thereafter the parents saw their daughter flying on the horse through the sky, having become a goddess for her invention. Another tale says that a legendary empress, Hsi-Ling Shih, invented silk and the culture of silkworms, which she taught to her people. (Miller)

**Tushan** This earth goddess plays a lesser part in Chinese mythology than does her daughter, whose name is not recorded. Tushan's daughter was an eager wife to Yu, a great human leader; she was the first poet to compose love songs. Tushan and her daughter are sometimes confused in the texts, which refer to Yu having relations with Tushan herself. (Birrell 1993; Bonnefoy)

**Wa** According to Chinese writings from the 1st century CE, this was the name of a divine woman who, in ancient times, “produced the ten thousand beings through metamorphosis.” It is difficult to tell exactly how this creator goddess populated the world—whether she was transforming parts of herself into other beings, or transforming rocks, clay, or other substances as mother goddesses in other cultures prove wont to do. Her name appears as a syllable in **Nüwa**, another creator goddess. She may also be the same as the goddess sometimes called **Gaomei**. (Bonnefoy)

**Wengu** The beautiful Bai woman Wengu was as hardworking as she was pretty. Many young men in her region looked at her with thoughts of marriage, but one poor but loyal man, the woodcutter Xiana, won her heart with his beautiful singing. Whenever he passed her home, carrying wood to market, he would sing the most lovely songs, and soon Wengu arranged to meet him near the place called the Bottomless Pond, a clear deep pool. There they exchanged words of love and pledges to marry.

But a tyrannical ruler, hearing of the beautiful girl, decided to take Wengu as his concubine. He found her home and murdered her father when he tried to protect her. Wengu fled to the Bottomless Pond, where she met her assailant with firm resolve. Despite his attempt to win her, first with bribes and then with torture, she refused to agree to go with him. Nonetheless, the tyrant took her prisoner and dragged her off to his palace.

Xianga heard of the kidnapping and bravely found his way to the tyrant’s palace, where he secretly freed Wengu. They ran for safety, but soon the tyrant’s soldiers were in hot pursuit. Capturing the couple on the edge of the Bottomless Pond, the soldiers prepared to take them back, Wengu to be raped, Xianga to be executed. But the couple turned and leaped into the pond, drowning almost immediately. The people, finally enraged by the tyrant’s abuse, rose up and killed him. And the next day, from the center of the Bottomless Pond, two butterflies flew out, then hundreds more. Afterwards, the pond was called the Spring of Butterflies, which to this day is always surrounded by the flashing wings of butterflies. (He Liyi)

**Wu Lo** This goddess, who looked like a cat wearing earrings, offered fertility to women who approached her. Most girls conceived after visiting her. She also endowed visitors with sexual charisma so that they were irresistible to lovers. (*CMS*, 267–8)

**Xihe** There were once 10 suns that appeared, one after the other, in a 10-day cycle. Each day, Xihe bathed one of them, then hung him in a mulberry tree to dry. It was difficult to remember in which order to bathe the suns, so Xihe established the calendar. But the multiple suns broiled the earth. The archer Yi brought down nine of the suns, leaving only the one whose chariot was driven by Xihe herself. Late Chinese mythology turned this goddess into two male gods, Xi and He, and put them in charge of the Board of Astronomy. Another goddess, whose connection with Xihe is unclear, is the similarly named Hsü (“exhalation”) who lived in the west where she received the setting sun. (Birrell 2000; Bonnefoy; *CCM*; *CMS*)

**Xiwang Mu** In 1986, an archaeological find excited scholars of mythology: figurines from Liaoning Province that looked like a goddess described in old Chinese texts, pregnant and surrounded with dragons, birds, and tortoises. The figurines have been dated to 3000 BCE. Since that find, scholars have examined early writings to find suggestions that Xiwang Mu may descend from the most ancient cultures of China, although her period of greatest fame was the T'ang dynasty (618–907 CE), when she was the most significant Taoist goddess.

In her most ancient form, Xiwang Mu was a wild-haired human-faced female with tigers' teeth and a leopard's tail. She lived in a cave where three-footed birds fed her and from which she sent forth disease and death. She controlled the world's water, withholding or loosing floods at her will. This early form of Xiwang Mu has been interpreted as a goddess of wilderness. She has also been called a goddess of shamans, because of the headdress and tigers' teeth she wore, both associated with shamanic costume.

Later, Xiwang Mu appeared as a beautiful ageless woman dispensing peaches that, mixed with ashes of mulberry trees, cured human disease. She lived with her sister, attended upon by the deities of immortality. On remote Jade Mountain, Xiwang Mu lived in a golden palace where every 3,000 years, she threw herself a birthday party. On that occasion a peach tree ripened, providing the fruit of immortality. Three green birds and a nine-tailed fox served her. Her messenger was the bluebird and her familiar, the long-lived tortoise. Depictions of Xiwang Mu from the 4th century CE show her acting like human royalty.

Xiwang Mu was the goddess of female energy, the essence of *yin* and the ruler of individual female beings. As goddess of the west, she was associated with the setting sun, the waning moon, the year in autumn, the death of a soul into afterlife. Imported to Japan, this goddess was called Sieobo. (Bonnefoy; Cahill 1986, 1993; Ching and Guisso; CMS; Dubs; Ferguson; Irwin; Wu.)

**Yaoji** Also known as Yao-Ji and Yao-chi, this goddess, “Jasper Lady” or “Turquoise Concubine,” was a happy girl who died young and, rather than descend to the underworld, reincarnated herself in a tree that bore fruit that made beautiful anyone who ate it. She was worshiped in the form of a sacred rock at the summit of the Mount of the Sorceress (Mount Wushan), where she could be seen as the mist rising from the mountain at dawn. When it rained on Mount Wushan, it was said to be Yaoji's tears, as she wept for her brief life. According to legend, a king encountered her in a dream, revealing not only her name but also the location of a plant to be used in love magic. She was also called Yunhua Furen, “Blossoming Lady of the Clouds.” She was probably a Taoist invention rather than an indigenous goddess. (Birrell 1993; Kaltenmark; Schafer; Yüan)

**Yin Wu-Ch'ang** If one died after the age of 50, the deceased's name was recorded on the heavenly rolls by this goddess or ghost; her consort wrote down the names of those who died before that age. (Katz)

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# KOREA

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## KOREAN PANTHEON

Aerang. *See Arirang*

**Arirang**

Aryong. *See Aryong-Jong*

**Aryong-Jong**

Byul-Soon. *See Hae-Soon*

Dae-Soon. *See Hae-Soon*

GungHee. *See MaGo*

**Hae-Soon**

Hogu. *See Mama*

**Huang Jini**

**MaGo**

**Mama**

No-Il Ja-Dae *Toilet*.

**Pali Kongju**

Pari. *See Pali Kongju*

**Ryuhwa**

**Samsin Halmoni**

Sansin Halmoni. *See Samsin Halmoni*

SoHee. *See MaGo*.

T'ang Kum Agassi. *See Samsin*

**Halmoni**

**Ungnyeo**

Ungnyo. *See Ungnyeo*

Unje. *See Yŏ-sansin*

Yonggungbuin *Ocean*.

**Yŏ-sansin**

Yuhwa. *See Ryuhwa*

**Arirang** Beautiful Arirang, daughter of a magistrate, attracted the obsessive interest of her father's servant Hong Ki Sam. He bribed her nurse to lure her to a secluded spot, where he sprang upon her. When Arirang fought him, Hong Ki Sam stabbed her to death and hid her body in a bamboo grove. Her grieving parents, unable to find their daughter and unaware that she had been murdered, left the area.

The new magistrate died on his first night in Arirang's old home. Rumors spread that her ghost had frightened him to death. The post stood vacant until a young man agreed to take it on. His first night he encountered a ghost with a knife protruding from her breast. Although frightened, the young magistrate noticed Arirang carried three red flags with her. The next morning, he asked whether there were anyone in the village



**Mudang.** *Thousands of women shamans called mudang still celebrate the ancient religion of Korea in danced rituals called kuts. This image of a dancing mudang comes from an 1805 painting by Shin Yumbok. Persecuted for many centuries, the religion of the mudang survived into the present.*

named Hong Ki Sam, which means “three red flags.” He was summoned, and Arirang’s still-bleeding body was discovered in the bamboo grove. The story, altered to disguise the original rape theme, became a popular folk song. (Tae-Hung Ha)

**Aryong-Jong** “Lady of Dragon Palace” controlled the rainfall. In times of drought, shamans poured water through a sieve on the parched soil so that Aryong-Jong would open the clouds. (Grayson 2001)

**Hae-Soon** This sun goddess lived with her mother and two sisters in an isolated valley. One morning the mother went to market, warning the girls not to open the door, for the land was full of tigers. But the woman was eaten by a tigress, who then tried to pass herself off to the children as their mother. The girls ran out the back door and climbed a tree. The tigress followed them but couldn’t see their hiding place, discovering them when they giggled. She demanded they come down, but they refused. She tried to climb the tree but could not.

So she got an axe to carve steps into the tree. Terrified, the children called to heaven for help. As the tigress reached the treetop, the girls grabbed a heavenly golden chain. The tigress called for help, and a rotten straw rope descended. She grabbed hold, only to be smashed to death when the rope broke. In heaven the girls were given duties:

Hae-Soon, to ride the sun, Dae-Soon, the moon, and Byul-Soon, a star. (Kim Yol-gyn; Zong In-Sob)

**Huang Jini** The daughter of a dancer and a nobleman, Huang Jini was raised to be artistic and cultured. Engaged to a young nobleman, she was heartbroken when his parents objected to a half-noble joining their family. So she became a renowned entertainer, taking her former fiancé as her first lover. She lived a long and illustrious life, writing poetry and composing songs about her triumphs and tragedies. (Tae-Hung Ha)

**MaGo** One of the oldest Korean texts, the *BuDoZhi* (City of Heaven's Ordinance), describes the world as created by MaGo, mother earth. Dating to the 4th century CE, the *BuDoZhi* was written by Bak-Zhe Sang, a scholar and librarian of the Silla dynasty, as part of a comprehensive encyclopedia of scientific and cultural knowledge. The book was hidden for centuries, until it was rediscovered in the early 20th century by a descendent of the author, Bak-Gum. After 30 years of effort, he was in the process of publishing it when war broke out. In a refugee camp, Bak-Gum wrote down what he had memorized and published it by mimeograph. Most of the copies disappeared, but one was retranslated into modern Korean in 1986.

It tells how, in the time before time, only music existed. From this sound came forth MaGo and the City of Heaven's Ordinance, her material essence, of which human cities are but a pale echo. MaGo was beyond all dualities. She gave birth parthenogenetically to GungHee ("vault lady") and SoHee ("nest lady") who each gave birth to four children, two sons and two daughters. These divinities were charged with maintaining heavenly order through musical tones. MaGo then pulled her city into the water beneath the heavens, where it spread through the clouds and created matter. The city began to rotate, and through the combination of motion and music, the earth came into being.

But this universe was not stable; it disappeared suddenly and just as suddenly reappeared. To stabilize the universe, MaGo ordered her grandchildren to give birth to humans. The children of GungHee and SoHee paired up and each created six children, in pairs of male and female. Within a few generations, 3,000 descendents lived in the goddess's city, all sages who could hear the tones of heaven. They lived on the pure water of MaGo's streams, until a man named ZhiSo ate grapes that hung over his balcony. After that, the people ate the beautiful fruits of the city and, as a result, grew teeth and developed poisonous saliva. Death came to the heavenly city from ZhiSo's action, for shame of which he departed with the other flesh-eaters and hid in the wild world outside.

But some of the outcasts came back and, trying to find a way back into the city, diverted the streams that fed its residents. The city's leader taught the people how to live on kudzu and sent them out of the city. MaGo set to work with her two daughters to repair the damage. But as they diverted heavenly streams to cleanse the city, the overflow fell to earth and caused a flood that destroyed many of the city's former inhabitants. After this, MaGo retreated from humanity. Whether this text indicates a goddess-centered ancient religion in Korea is a subject of scholarly dispute. (Yun 2003)

**Mama** The smallpox goddess left spirit footprints, which appeared as pimples, on the bodies of those she visited. If children talked while in the grip of fever, it was her voice. The ritual to send away Mama began five days after infection, when poxes appeared. Clean drinking water was employed to ritually welcome her spirit. Conducted by a woman shaman, the preventive ceremony continued through the 12th day, when the patient was no longer in danger; then Mama was sent away on a mugwort mount. (Covell 1983)

**Pali Kongju** This princess was the ancestor of all shamans. Her story began when her father, King Upbi, decided to marry despite predictions of misfortune. When she was born, seventh in a steady line of daughters, he demanded she be thrown into the ocean—whence her name, “princess thrown away.” The weeping queen put her in a jewel box that soldiers threw into the sea, where golden turtles rose to carry it away. The princess was brought to shore where she was adopted by a peasant couple. She grew to be a happy, loving daughter.

Meanwhile, the king and queen were stricken with a wasting illness from which diviners said they could only recover if Pali Kongju brought medicinal water from the Western Sky. Dutiful Pali Kongju set out and found the ugly guardian of the well of heaven, who told her he would give her the water in return for money. The princess had no money, so she married the god and bore him seven sons. Finally, he gave her the water, and she set off for home.

She came too late, for her parents’ funeral was underway. Desperate with grief, she sprinkled them, which brought them back to life. They wished to shower her with gifts and love, but she realized that duty demanded she return to the world beyond so she could help others in need. Taking her seven sons, she disappeared. This story is found in parts of China, where there was an ancient tradition of women shamans, as well as in Korea. Alternate versions describe Pali Kongju’s first shamanic journey as to the underworld in search of her dead brother, whom she brought back to life. (Carpenter; Covell 1983; Lee)

**Ryuhwa** Her jealous father, the god of waters, held Ryuhwa captive in a small room so that no man would have access to her. But sunlight entered her room and impregnated her. From this intercourse, she laid an egg, which her father threw to a dog. The dog would not eat it, so the man gave it to a pig, which refused it. He tossed it onto a road, but horses walked around rather than crush it. He abandoned it in a field, but birds sheltered it with their wings. Giving up, he gave it back to his daughter, who hatched it into the archer god Cumong. (Grayson 2001)

**Samshin Halmoni** Three goddesses of birth were celebrated at birthday parties with offerings of steamed rice, wine, and soy sauce, laid out like a dinner. When a woman wished to conceive, she shared rice with a recently delivered mother or wore a piece of cloth that had been placed on a coffin. At times, these grandmothers were converted to male “buddhas” in paintings, but oral tradition said they were born as triplets from one mother, T’ang Kum Agassi, a shaman descended from the heavenly powers.

Seduced by a monk, she was threatened by her brothers with death for dishonoring the family. She gave birth in a cave and was freed by her mother. (Covell 1984; *KF*)

**Ungnyeo** The bear-woman Ungnyeo lived in the mountains with a tiger. Both prayed to become human and were answered with a thundering voice that instructed them to eat 21 garlic cloves and stay out of the sun for 21 days. Eating the garlic was easy, but staying in a cave for three weeks was not. The tiger did not even make it to the half-way mark before he bolted into the sun. But the bear remained in the cave and, when she walked out, she had become a beautiful woman. But because she was not born human, she could find no husband. Finally she caught the attention of Han Woon, the king of spirits. His breath caused her to conceive, and she gave birth to the first king of Korea. (Carpenter; Grayson 2001; Olmstead)

**Yŏ-sansin** These mountain spirits guarded specific hills and mountains, which bore their names. Few Korean mountains carry male names, suggesting that such eminences were understood as female. Mount Unje was ruled by the spirit of the same name, to whom prayers were offered during droughts, so that clouds would gather on her heights. Some stories say that Lady Unje was a queen who, after giving birth on the mountain, was transmogrified into a spirit; women seeking aid in conceiving a son prayed to her. Another tale said she lured a monk into her sanctuary by causing a stream to become a torrent. She appeared as a giant and made the monk her lover. From their union she bore eight daughters whom she trained as healers. (Grayson 1996, 2001)

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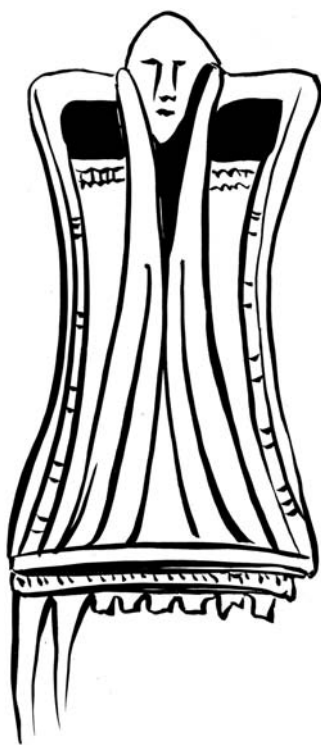
# CIRCUMPOLAR

The vast circumpolar north is home to many distinct cultures. While rich with food during the brief summers, the land is harsh in winter, when animals must be hunted under an omnipresent threat of severe weather. Circumpolar cultures center on the need for humans to stand in right relationship with nature, often embodied in a divine “food-dish,” a goddess who provides nourishment for humanity.

The circumpolar people also share a tradition known by the Siberian Tungus word *shaman*. Shamanism is found in many cultures, but the circumpolar lands are home to the unique form whereby shamans are called by an initiatory experience. As part of initiation, the shaman-to-be encounters and often “marries” spirits that agree to be guides. Thereafter, the shaman serves as healer and visionary leader.

Women as well as men have historically gone through the challenging, often dangerous process of initiation. However, many modern commentators discount women practitioners as anomalous. Yet male shamans often practice wearing women’s attire, while women shamans rarely engage in similar cross-dressing. In addition, the religion of shamanism emphasizes the importance of goddesses or female powers. Shamans visit the food-giving goddess, appeasing her when humans break spiritual laws. She especially needs to be propitiated when animals have been needlessly or cruelly killed.

In the tripartite shamanic world, humans live in the middle world, from which a river descends to a lower world inhabited by immortal women. From the middle world rises a tree whose branches reach the upper world. Souls perch there until it is time for rebirth, when they drop through smoke holes into tents, enter the hearth fire, and find a ready womb. Shamans rise into the upper world to reclaim lost souls, travel through the middle world to see distant events, and descend to the lower world to reaffirm the order of creation. The lower world is home to goddesses and ancestral mothers, which



**Eskimo Comb.** Most art from the challenging arctic environment is small and portable, as is the case of this comb in the shape of a female figure from the Thule culture of Greenland, approximately 1000 CE, from the collection of the Eskimo Museum in Churchill, Manitoba. A major deity among these arctic people was the “food-dish” provider of abundance, *Sedna*, who lives under the ocean and requires the services of shamans to comb her hair.

causes Russian theorists to hypothesize that ancient Siberian culture was mother-centered. Western researchers remain unconvinced but do not contest the importance of female divinities among the Siberians.

Given the vast geographical areas in question and the many different languages spoken, the circumpolar people should not be considered as having a single culture or religion. Northern Asia is home to five distinct cultures: Finno-Ugric, Altaic, Turkic, Tungus-Manchu, and Paleo-Arctic. The influence of Buddhism, Manichaeism, and Islam on these peoples has meant the loss of some goddess traditions, but a number remain accessible in folklore and ritual.

In North America, the common term “Eskimo” covers many cultures, including Inupiaq (northern Alaska), Yu’pik (southwestern Alaska), Siberian Yu’pik or Yuik (Gambell Island, Russian far east), and Inuit (Canada); the last is sometimes incorrectly used as a generic term, in the way “Eskimo” used to be. Most groups traditionally earned their living from the sea, for while the land is quite barren, the seas teem with fish and mammals. Thus the food goddess was envisioned as living below the ocean. The vision of a divine clan mother, found in Siberian cultures, appears lacking.

Arctic life was ruled by a series of taboos that have, in recent years, been typically forgotten or ignored. No longer are women required to live separately after giving birth or to abstain from meat for a year afterward. But while Christianization resulted in persecution and suppression of native religions, recent years have brought some recovery. At the same time, interest in shamanism by people of other traditions has led to some commercialism, a trend often rejected by traditionalists.

## CIRCUMPOLAR PANTHEON

**Aakuluujjusi**

Aiviliajq. *See Sedna*

Aiviliayog. *See Sedna*

Ai-Willi-Ay-O. *See Sedna*

Ajy-Khotyn. *See Ajysyt*

Ajysit. *See Ajysyt*

**Ajysyt**

Ajysyt-Ijäsit-Khoten. *See Ajysyt*

Ak D’aiyk *Altaic; heavens.*

Akna *Inuit; childbirth.*

Akycha. *See Malina*

## **Albys**

Altyn Tondy ot Änä. *See Poza-Mama*

Ämägändär. *See Emengender*

## **Anoritoq**

## **Apasinasee**

## **Arnakuak**

Arnarkuag(s)sak. *See Sedna*

## **Asiaq**

Avilacoq. *See Sedna*

Ayisit. *See Umaj*

Aywilliayoo. *See Sedna*

Ayyst. *See Ajysyt*

## **Bugady Enintyn**

Bugady Musun. *See Bugady Enintyn*

Chanyai. *See Yiniangawgut*

## **Chiti khys**

## **Chuginadak**

## **Dja minju**

## **Dunne Enin**

Dunne Mushunin. *See Dunne Enin*

Ella. *See Sila*

Emengen. *See Emengender*

## **Emengender**

Hila. *See Sila*

Idliragijenget. *See Sedna*

Imap ukua. *See Sedna*

## **Irdlirvirisissong**

## **Irt**

Ja minju. *See Dja minju*

## **Ja-Neb'a**

## **Kadlu**

## **Kaja é**

## **Kasum Naj-Ekva**

Katlas-Agke Mansi; *fate.*

## **Kigvalu'uutchik**

## **Koko**

## **Kunananguaq**

Kutug-a. *See Poza-Mama*

Kweetoo. *See Kadlu*

Kyz Änä. *See Poza-Mama*

## **Malina**

Manzan Görmö Buriat; *birth, breast-feeding.*

## **Miti**

## **Mou-Njami**

Naran-Gohon Buryat; *ancestral mother.*

## **Navarana**

Navarana āluk. *See Navarana*

Nerrivik. *See Sedna*

Niviarsiang. *See Sedna*

Nuliajok. *See Sedna*

Nuliajuk. *See Sedna*

Nuliyaoq. *See Sedna*

Örekänner. *See Emengender*

Öreköndör. *See Emengender*

Ot Änä. *See Poza-Mama*

Ötükan. *See Umaj*

Otukan. *See Umaj*

Otuz Paštu ot Änä. *See Poza-Mama*

## **Pinga**

## **Poza-Mama**

Pu'gud-emei Yukaghir Siberian; *sun.*

Pukimna Igulik; *land animals.*

Pukkeenegak Inuit; *clothing making.*

Qatum. *See Umaj*

## **Qiporquat**

Sabaga Yakut; *fire.*

Sakhala Buriat; *fire.*

Sana. *See Sedna*

Sangia-Mama. *See Ja-Neb'a*

Savssuma Arnarssua. *See Sedna*

## **Sedna**

Selči Šyt Emysyt. *See Ylynda Kota*

Sengi-Mama. *See Ja-Neb'a*

Seqineq. *See Malina*

Serxineq. *See Malina*

## **Sigvana**

Sidne. *See Sedna*

## **Sila**

Siqiniq. *See Malina*

## **Sklúmyoa**

## **Sug Eezi**

Tñe-ceivune Chukchee; *dawn.*

Takanakapsulik. *See Sedna*

## **Tayune**

Teterka. *See Kasum Naj-Ekva*

Tootega Inuit; *water.*

## **Tu-Njami**

Tutigak. *See Malina*

**Umaj**Umay. *See Umaj*Utagen. *See Umaj*Vut-Imi *Khanty*; creator.**Yiä-il****Yiniangawgut****Ylynda Kota**Ymai. *See Umaj***Yumima**Zonget *Mansi, Khanty*; animals, birds.

**Aakuluujjusi** The Inuit creatrix made animals from her clothes. First she set her trousers on the ground, creating caribou; waving her hand, she gave them tusks. When she threw her jacket down, it turned into a walrus; she placed antlers on its head. The animals kept attacking people who tried to hunt them, so Aakuluujjusi made some revisions, swapping horns and tusks. The walrus were now perfect, but the caribou were too quick for human hunters to catch. So Aakuluujjusi turned their belly-hair around. Afterwards, that hair caught on the wind and slowed the creatures down. (Bonnefoy)

**Ajysyt** Among the Siberian Yakuts, this birth goddess kept keep laboring women safe and breathed souls into the newborn. Women held secret ceremonies glorifying Ajysyt after a birth. For three days the birthing woman remained sequestered with women friends; a man's presence would have been sacrilege. Then the midwife tied straw from the birthing bed atop a tall tree. Ajysyt was also a divinity of domestic animals, whose safe birthing was necessary for human survival. (Levin and Potapov; Motz)

**Albys** This fearsome spirit of the Tuvan, a Turkic Siberian people, appeared as a long-haired woman with no back. She lurked in lonely places, singing to attract people, after which she drove them mad. (Van Deusen 2004)

**Anoritoq** The only son of this Eskimo woman used to cut off the hands of members of his own hunting party, to keep them from catching game. In retaliation, they killed him. This left Anoritoq with no hunter in the family, so she asked the hunters to bring her the fetus of the next pregnant bear they killed. They did so, and Anoritoq raised it as her own child. When the bear was ready to hunt, the village hunters killed it. Anoritoq turned to stone with grief. A variant tale says that Anoritoq asked the bear people for a stepchild, which they gave her. When the bear was grown, she marked it with soot so that the hunters would not mistake it for another bear, but they killed it anyway. She sang "a bear, a bear, a bear," over and over until she turned to stone. People rubbed animal fat on that stone when they wished to hunt bears successfully. (Holtved)

**Apasinasee** Once, the Inuit of Hudson Bay say, a haughty young woman refused all the men in her village until her father angrily suggested that, considering her behavior, the family dog was a proper mate. The next day the dog disappeared, and a handsome young man dressed in dog-skin clothing arrived and slept with Apasinasee. Soon the young woman gave birth to a litter of puppies, so noisy that Apasinasee's father carried parents and children across the river.

Apasinasee's father provided for them, sending meat tied around the dog's neck until, tired of the effort, he substituted rocks and the dog drowned. Left without support, Apasinasee sent her children away. One group traveled inland, where they became giants; another, living on the coast, became dwarfs. Some she put into a ship; they disappeared. A few stayed, becoming the Inuit.

Another story says that ancestral mother Uinigumasuittuq bore puppies to the family dog and, when her father drowned him, instructed her half-dog children to kill their grandfather; then she sent them away so they would not be killed in retaliation. She packed the first puppies into a boot and sent them south, where they became the white people. The others became ancestors of the native peoples. She stayed in the area, refusing human suitors but finding a second husband among the sea-birds. Some scholars connect this story with **Sedna**. (Kroeber; Motz)

**Arnakuak** This shaman woman could change her shape at will, so she became a man in order to seduce her daughter-in-law, Ukuamak. When the two ran off together, Arnakuak's son followed them and killed his mother. (Rink)

**Asiaq** In Greenland, this mother of weather determined when and how much snow would fall. Shamans called upon her in spring, for if ice did not break up in timely fashion, migrating sea mammals could not return. If she was happy, Asiaq sent rains to melt the spring ice. (Osterman)

**Bugady Enintyn** Her name, to the Siberian Evenki, combines "sky" with "universe" and "homeland." Mother of the clan, Bugady Enintyn lived beneath sacred rocks or in the roots of sacred trees, sometimes in the shape of an elderly woman, sometimes as a reindeer or elk. Another goddess, Bugady Mušun, was the mother of animals, envisioned as a very old, strong woman or as a huge female elk or reindeer. She was worshiped at rocks shaped like petrified animals. (Bonnefoy; Malandra; Nahodil)

**Chiti khys** This mountain spirit of the southern Siberian Khakass people was once a mountain who fell in love with another mountain named Mindir ("hail"). But the larger mountain Ir taskhyl ("man mountain") wanted her for himself. She refused, and in retaliation Ir taskhyl hit her so hard that she broke into seven pieces. The mountain called by her name today has seven peaks. (Kazachinova and Van Deusen)

**Chuginadak** The Aleuts said that Mount Cleveland was once a woman who refused to marry any man except one who shot rosy finches. Chuginadak walked across water until she came to a village where she saw the man she wanted. She called to him, and they embraced. When they parted, the man lay dead.

Chuginadak retreated to a cave to mourn. When the village chief found the body of his son, he enlisted several old women to divine the murderer. Then he sent armies of warriors and magical spirits against Chuginadak, but no one could conquer her. Finally, a fox spirit convinced her to explain her deed. When Chuginadak did so, the chief realized that she loved his son. He danced and sang until the body rose up. Then

the old chief passed on his leadership to his son, and Chuginadak became his wife. (Jochelson)

**Dja minju** The Enet earth goddess turned so fast that people were dizzy. A council was held to settle the problem, and Dja minju suggested dropping heavy stones around the world. The rocks became mountains, which slowed the earth. After this, Dja minju created genitals for the first man and woman. As such, she was the goddess of child-birth; women desiring offspring carried egg-shaped stones that represented her. (Dioszegi and Hoppal)

**Dunne Enin** To the Siberian Tungus and Evenks, Dunne Enin ruled clan territory. Whenever camp was broken, she received an offering of old cloth, a bit of ribbon, or a broken bowl. Women asked her permission when a new camp was established, a new tent erected, or a new fire lit. She set rules of community behavior and enforced them by withholding game. Should Dunne Enin be offended by human behavior, an individual offered black and white ribbons on trees near the tent. If this offering did not satisfy Dunne Enin, a shaman traveled to her, begging that she look kindly on her children. At first she resisted, but she released the food animals if **Bugady Enintyn** agreed. (Bonney; Malandra; Michael)

**Emengender** Among Altaic peoples, limbless images of Emengender were made from everyday materials such as cloth or wood, with a rudimentary face and eyes made from beads. Women kept these figures near them when they gave birth, for children were stillborn or blind without Emengender's help. People also prayed to the figures in cases of illness or danger. Among Yakuts, the dolls appeared on shamans' costumes. (Dioszegi; Motz)

**Irdlirvirissong** The crazy cousin of the sun goddess **Malina**, this clownish dancer lived in the sky with the moon. She kept dogs who waited for people to die so they could eat the intestines. When shamans came to visit the moon in trance, she tried to make them laugh until they dried up inside, after which she ate them. (Kroeber)

**Irt** A mountain spirit of the Siberian Khakass people, Irt had red-brown hair that she wore in two braids. In place of legs, she had snakes, so she was considered the protector of reptiles as well as of rivers. (Kazachinova and Van Deusen)

**Ja-Neb'a** To Siberian Samoyeds, Ja-Neb'a was mother of animals and of humanity. Among the nearby Udegeis, the same goddess was Sangia-Mama; among the Nasnai, Sengi-Mama. Statues of these goddesses were covered with blood of animals to encourage her to provide more game. (Dioszegi)

**Kadlu** When she was a girl, the Eskimo thunder goddess played so noisily that her parents told her and her sisters to go outside. There they invented a game in which Kadlu jumped on hollow ice, causing thunder; Kweetoo rubbed flint stones together



to create lightning; and another sister urinated so profusely that she created rain. Transported to the sky, the girls lived in a whalebone house, wearing no clothing but blackening their faces with soot. They hunted caribou, striking them down with lightning. In some areas, women averted thunderstorms, or created them, by leaving offerings for the trinity of weather goddesses: needles, bits of ivory, old pieces of sealskin. (Holtved; Rasmussen 1921)

**Kaja é** The sun goddess of the Siberian Enets and Nenets was a maternal force who retreated every winter to a home beyond the horizon. White reindeer with spots on their sides, sacred to the goddess, were permitted to graze freely until they died. If someone grew ill, a reindeer was sacrificed and its head hung across the room from the sickbed. (Dioszegi and Hoppal)

**Kasum Naj-Ekva** The ancestral goddess of the Siberian Mansi wore pendants in the form of birds, which jingled as she walked. Massively powerful, she could kill six opponents at one blow; she was also a magician known for the strength of her curses. Two suitors wooed her. She lived with one for a time, then abandoned him and their daughter, whom she turned into a mountain. Then she lived with the other, but discovering that they were siblings, left him. Honored as a bird goddess, her image was embroidered on pillows for protection. (Dioszegi and Hoppal; Motz)

**Kigvalu'uutchik** Among the Inupiaq of Alaska's Kobuk river, Kigvalu'uutchik was a girl who, watching migrating geese, yearned to follow them to their southern home in autumn. When she grew into a lovely young woman, Kigvalu'uutchik was kidnapped by two male geese who had seen her watching them. She traveled with the geese but was never one of them, for she missed her human family. A kindly old goose told her the secret of escape: she had to find a piece of driftwood that water had hollowed out and use it as a boat to float home. He warned her to stay in the hollow log for four days after she reached her village, for she would still be under the power of the geese.

She followed the old goose's instructions, escaping when she saw the geese turning themselves into people near a big ice floe. It took her a long time to find the hollowed-out driftwood, and a long time to float home. Once there, she warned her now-elderly parents not to touch her, or she would not be able to return to humanity. Although they cried and cried, they followed her instructions. So she was able to return to human form after her sojourn with the geese. (Swann)

**Koko** Wild hairy people called *kelye* lived in the mountains, said the Siberian Chukchi, and one of them kidnapped the young widow Koko when she was picking berries. Koko was forced to live with the woman *kelye*, who went naked despite the cold. Kept in a rock cave, Koko murmured her name to herself to keep a sense of her humanity. After some time, the *kelye* told Koko that she had once been human and had been held captive until she became covered with hair. Taking pity on Koko, the *kelye* let her return to her village, where she found her baby son grown into an elderly man. (Van Deusen 1999)

**Kunananguaq** In Greenland, this little orphan girl lived with a foster mother who disliked her. When the villagers were moving to their summer home, the woman told Kunananguaq that some skin-stretchers had been left behind. When the obedient girl ran to get them, her foster mother jumped in her skin boat and rushed away. When Kunananguaq came back to the seashore, there was no one left to carry her to the summer village.

She built herself a little hut but soon began to starve because there was little to eat except rotten food from the village dump. One day a seabird came ashore and called to her. When she walked to the water's edge, it transformed itself into a kayak and took her away. The bird took her to her old villagers' new home, where it left her with the advice not to immediately rush into town but to stand on the hill above, shading her eyes and looking down. The little girl did so, and after a time the villagers came up to bring her down and to make a home for her. (Osterman)

**Malina** In Greenland, the sun goddess was once a young woman, Malina, who lived with her brother Aningak. Once, when playing a game in darkness with other young people, Aningak grew aroused by his sister and had sex with her. This happened again, and Malina became curious about her lover's identity. She darkened her fingers with soot and, the next time Aningak seized her, covered his face with stains. Then Malina lit a handful of dry moss and saw her stained brother.

He also lit a tuft of moss, but there was no flame, only embers. Still aroused, he chased her. When he had almost caught her, Malina cut off a breast and threw it at his feet. Then she rose into the sky, becoming the sun. Her brother, the moon, continued to pursue her, but the sun always rose higher than he could reach.

Malina raced through the sky dressed in white reindeer leather, chasing seals on the Arctic Sea. Aningak ran after the sun, making himself thin from exertion in the process. Once a month he disappeared, traveling from the sky to hunt enough seals to grow fat again. Malina shared a house with her brother at mid-sky, but because summer is always full of light and winter without it, she never had to see him.

The sun goddess was, together with **Sedna**, one of the most common figures in circumpolar mythology. Her myth varies slightly, but always includes incest. In Canada, the incest was deliberate and the couple fled out of shame when discovered. Along Alaska's Kobuk River, the sun was seduced while secluded with her first menstrual blood, while in another story the incest occurs between a foster mother and son. In Point Barrow, Alaska, the sun-woman appears as a beautiful woman with a skeletal back. In some instances, both partners knew the other's identity and moved to the sky to continue their relationship. Along the Bering Strait, the sister rose to the sky in order to nurse her brother. But typically the relationship was based on ignorance on one hand, deceit on the other, with the sun woman enjoying her partner while ignorant of his identity. The story contains a cosmic myth, for it was to the moon man that shamans traveled when they ventured to the upper world. But he was a threatening spirit, for which reason shamans often traveled in pairs. (Chapman; Giddings; Holtved; Irimoto and Yamada; Kroeber; Osterman; Rink; Sonne; Thompson; Weyer)

**Miti** Among the Siberian Chukchi, Miti created people by tossing stones on the earth where her husband, Raven, had thrown twigs to make reindeer. When she had made herders, she gave them shelter by making huts from moss, placing fire within them, and throwing them to earth. (Van Deusen)

**Mou-Njami** Among Siberian Uralic speakers, this earth goddess carried an uncountable number of eyes within her. When females became pregnant, Mou-Njami provided eyes for the offspring. Because of the sacredness of eyes, hunters were forbidden to injure those of their prey, whose eyes had to be cut out and buried as an offering to Mou-Njami. She looked like a huge green animal, for grass was her fur. Because soil was her skin, her people never cut into it with knives. Needless digging and even driving of fence posts was forbidden. (Dioszegi and Hoppal)

**Navarana** This Polar Eskimo woman married the wrong man. As soon as they moved in together, he began to torment her. He constantly poked and prodded her, deeply enough to cause pain. She complained, but he would not cease injuring her. Finally she walked away, back to her parents' village. There she told her brothers how she had suffered, and they went back to teach her husband a lesson.

When they got to his home, the husband took a long time coming out to greet them, and when he did, he was shorter than they remembered. He would not talk to them, so they beat him to death, only to find that they had beaten a dog, dressed in the husband's clothing. The husband crept from the house and attacked the brothers and killed them. A variant version of the story says that the man had stolen his wife by killing her kin, then cut off the woman's arms to keep her from attracting another mate. Such violent stories may have been related as cautionary tales that helped young women realize the possibilities of violence in intimate relationships.

In a similar story, a woman named Navaranaāluk left her cannibal relatives to marry a man whose family did not eat human flesh. She was never comfortable in her new home, however, and decided to set a war in motion. Visiting her native village, she wore mittens on her feet instead of boots, so that her relatives would believe she was being treated with disrespect. As she had hoped, they launched a raid on the other village and killed all the women except three, who escaped by hiding. When the men of the village returned to discover the carnage, the surviving women told the sorry tale. To prepare for a return raid, the women made so many stone-headed arrows that they wore the flesh off their fingers. But their weapons proved successful, as the men killed all the men of the invaders' village and took their women as wives, killing only the destructive Navaranaāluk. (Holtved; Rasmussen 1921)

**Pinga** Although the most widespread Inuit food goddess was envisioned as living beneath the sea (see **Sedna**), the inland Eskimo said the goddess Pinga created and controlled land animals, especially the caribou upon whose migrations the food supply depended. She has been described as identical to **Sila**. (Merkur; Motz)

**Poza-Mama** Among Siberian peoples, this goddess lived in the hearth fire, keeping the family intact and, through her warmth, alive. The Ulchi spit the first mouthful of

every meal into the fire as a prayer for food; the Khakass used the same ritual to honor the braided-haired goddess. The Negidals kept pictures of the fire goddess Kutug-a next to the hearth, revering the spot. Among the Shors, fire was Otuz Pastu Ot Ana, “thirty-headed Mother Fire,” and Altyn Tondy Ot Ana, “Mother Fire in her golden coat.” The Altai called her Ot Ana, “Mother Fire,” and Kyz Ana, “Virgin Mother,” because she perpetuated herself without a male. She was responsible for all family members, living and dead, for she lit the way to the afterlife.

Ot Ana was envisioned as a very old woman hunching protectively over the hearth. Not only did Ot Ana give life; she sustained it, as goddess of animals. The hearth-fire led hunters to game by creating maps of their location in the coals or by sputtering significantly. Fire also was used to purify traps and hunters’ clothing, for which Ot Ana was rewarded by gifts of fat or alcohol. (Bonnefoy; Dioszegi)

**Qiporquat** Although her husband, Qissuk, was a great hunter, he was also a violent man who beat Qiporquat regularly. She ran away each time, but each time he lured her back with gifts and sweet talk. He began to sleep with her clothing as a pillow, so that she could not run away from him. But she hung herself to escape. When he found her body, two walruses came after him and killed him. (Holtved)

**Sedna** Beside the Arctic Ocean, a widower lived with his daughter, Sedna, a young woman so beautiful that all men sought to live with her. But she found none to her liking. One day, a seabird came to her and promised her a soft life in a warm hut full of bearskins and fish. Sedna flew away with him but, finding her home a stinking nest, regretted her rejection of humanity. That was what she told her father a year later. Anguta put his daughter in his kayak to bring her home. Perhaps he killed the bird husband first; perhaps he just stole the bird’s wife, but in either case the vengeance of the bird people followed him. The rising sea threatened death.

As they struggled, Anguta realized that flight was hopeless. He shoved Sedna overboard. Desperate, she grabbed the kayak. Her father cut off her fingers. She flung her mutilated arms over the skin boat’s sides. Anguta cut them off, shoving his oar into Sedna’s eye before she sank into the icy water.

At the bottom of the sea, she lived as queen of the deep, mistress of death and life, the “old food dish” who provides all the nourishment that humans need. Her amputated fingers and arms became fish and marine mammals, which she offered to people if they accepted her rules. For three days after their death, the souls of her animals remained with their bodies, watching for violation of Sedna’s demands. Then they returned to the goddess, bearing information about the conduct of her people.

This myth has many variants. On the western coast of Hudson Bay, Nuliayoq was an orphan whose villagers moved to another place. They were leaving her behind when she jumped onto one of the departing boats. But she missed her footing and drowned, becoming the controlling spirit of marine life. Nuliayoq made her home in a warm heavenly land, where souls of good people and of suicides traveled to play ball with a talking walrus skull; these games flitted across the sky, visible as the aurora borealis. When not in her heavenly home, Nuliayoq guarded animals and fish, waiting at the entrances to inlets and rivers to punish anyone who flouted her fishing and

hunting regulations. She was not especially friendly to humans, who had rejected her when she lived on earth. But she could be generous when humans showed appropriate behavior.

Sedna was concerned with taboos, the breaking of which created disunity between the cosmos and humanity. She was especially concerned with the special ritual demands of each gender. For men, this had to do with reverence towards animals they killed for food. For women, secrecy about menarche or abortion was outlawed. Breaking such taboos meant Sedna's hair grew full of parasites. Because she had no hands, she could not comb them out. When the pain grew too terrible to endure, she stopped permitting sea animals and fish to swim close enough to be captured. If Sedna's stumps began to ache, she punished humans by sending sickness, starvation, and storms.

The sea mammals returned only after a shaman traveled to Sedna's home, crossing an abyss in which an ice wheel turned slowly. Then a caldron of boiling seals blocked the way. Finally, a narrow ledge led to a house of stone and whale ribs where Sedna dragged along the ground with one leg bent beneath her. A horrible dog guarded her, said by some to be her husband. Should the shaman pass all these dangers and ease Sedna's pain, the goddess permitted him to return, bearing the news that Old Woman had forgiven her people.

Although the figure of a supreme food-providing goddess might seem to indicate that individual women were revered, this was not always the case. A male shaman might return from his trance with word that a member of the community, often a woman, had to be punished for an infraction. These could include hiding a stillbirth or an abortion, touching meat while menstruating, or other infringements of strictures about women's reproductive functions. Such scapegoating positioned male hunters as successful unless interfered with by women or marginalized members of the group. As in other cases, the existence of a preeminent female divinity did not necessarily mean religion did not sometimes oppress women.

Although Sedna was often described as a pan-Eskimo divinity, there was less evidence about her in Asia and Alaska than in eastern Greenland and Canada, although the story of the woman with an animal husband appears widely. Some theorists assert that Sedna's original homeland was the area around Hudson's Bay, where the name Sedna and its immediate variants are found. (Bierhorst; Boas 1887, 1894; Burland; Holtved; Hultkrantz; Lantis; Paper; Porterfield; Rasmussen 1921, 1930; Smith; Sonne; Thompson; Wardle)

**Sigvana** Among the people of Tikiġaq village (now known as Point Hope, Alaska), this woman refused to marry a monster spirit (*anatkuaq*). The monster stalked her through the village, but she always stayed one step ahead of him. Finally, he put a spell upon her so that overnight she became a toothless old woman with white hair. Her parents, horrified at the transformation, begged her to marry the spirit, who would then take the spell off her and make her young as she had been. They called to the *antakuq*, who came into the house and watched as a seal came forth from the ancient flesh of the woman, then merged with her again. Only after that did he free her from his curse and marry her. (Swann)

**Sila** The force of nature's laws, Sila is imagined as feminine although no myths personifying her are extant, only verbal formulae such as "Sila will keep her eye on you." She created the world when rocks fell from the heavens and humans grew up like plants. The people lived in darkness but did not die naturally. Finally a flood came and drowned most of them. Two women among the survivors argued, one saying that people should remain in darkness but live forever, the other saying that people needed both light and death. They buried the dead people, but they kept coming back as ghosts until a woman told them to stay dead. Then light came to earth, brought by the presence of death. The old women who created the world order may be personifications of Sila, otherwise known only through her creation.

Several theorists position Sila as the supreme divinity in Inuit religion. Others argue that evidence for a supreme being comes after colonization and is therefore suspect. Similarly, the question of whether Sila is masculine or feminine presents difficulties, for evidence is found of both genders. On Nunivak Island, Sila is definitely female. Among the Caribou Eskimo, she is envisioned as mistress of the animals and has a maternal quality.

Although the word Sila can be interpreted to mean "air," the meaning extends to all that supports life. Sila is important to the shaman, for once she recognizes the shaman, Sila becomes a conduit for prophecies and visions. Sila has been described as identical to **Pinga**. Alternatively, Sila has been seen as an aspect or form of **Malina**, whose connection to the shaman's role is well established. (Merkur; Sonne; Rasmussen 1929, 1927)

**Sklúmyoa** The "spirit of the universe" to the people of Nunivak Island, off the western Alaskan coast, created the world from the lining of her fishskin parka. Two boys were lost on the Arctic Ocean and, when Sklúmyoa heard the younger one crying, she came to rescue them. She tossed bits from inside her parka to the ocean, where they grew into Nunivak. She threw down more frayed bits that turned into plants and animals. Then Sklúmyoa turned the crying boy into a girl, so that she could bear children. Sklúmyoa may be the same figure as **Sila**. (Bierhorst)

**Sug Eezi** This Khakass mermaid emerged from water, naked and combing her long golden hair with a golden comb. Riverbanks and the banks of lakes were good locations to leave offerings to her, because they form the boundary between her world and ours. (Van Deusen 2004)

**Tayune** Among the Canadian Inuit, this folkloric heroine escaped from a brutal husband by walking away across the tundra, determined to die in the snow rather than endure his abuse. But she was saved by a strange circumstance. Finding some caribou meat stashed by hunters, she ate enough to continue her journey and found herself walking onto a foot-shaped hill with five toe-mounds. Unknown to her, this was the body of the giant Kinak who, when he awoke and found her sleeping on him, took pity on Tayune and invited her to live in his huge nose, in a little hut built from hairs plucked from his beard. There she was kept warm by his breath and recovered her strength. Homesick at last for human company, she decided to return to her village,



strengthened by the giant's promise of continued protection and made wealthy by the furs that he gave her.

Upon her return, Tayune's husband was respectful for a time, but soon he fell into his old ways. As he beat Tayune, she screamed for help. Immediately it began to snow; then a whirlwind came down and swept the abusive husband away. Kinak, who had caused the storm, did not intend to kill the husband. He gave him shelter in his nose, as he had with Tayune, and only asked that the husband not enter his giant mouth. But the man refused to respect the giant, so Kinak spit him all the way to the stars. Then the giant disappeared from view, although he can sometimes be sensed when his warm breath melts the snow in the middle of winter. (Riordan)

**Tu-Njami** The Siberian "Mother Fire" looked like a small naked girl but was strong enough to protect the whole family. She was a goddess of purification and healing whose special concern was the removal of disease and filth. Tu-Njami also ruled birth, for she gave birth to daughters on every twig in the fire. (Bonnefoy; Dioszegi and Hoppal)

**Umaj** Almost all cultures in Russian Siberia worshiped a birth goddess. The Khakass believed Umaj lived in the placenta; among the Shors, she was the protector of newborns. As Umay, the Mongol earth goddess controlled human fertility from the placenta. As Qatum or "empress," Umaj was embodied in human queens. Umaj may be the same goddess as "Ot'ukan, "female shaman." (Bonnefoy; Dioszegi; Van Deusen 2004)

**Yiä-il** Among the Altaic Buryats and Dolgans, every shaman had a Yiä-il, or "animal mother," who appeared at significant times. First she appeared when the potential shaman was an infant, nursing the child from her breasts. She appeared at the point of initiation and finally at the shaman's death. She might look like a caribou, or she might assume the guise of unknown species. Without Yiä-il, no one could gain shamanic power. (Motz)

**Yiniangawgut** Among the Koryak of Kamchatka, this powerful primeval woman was the object of competition between Raven and Little-Bird, both of whom sought her in marriage. To find out the better mate, she challenged her suitors with the task of mending a break in the sky. Raven was terrified by the heights, but Little-Bird mended the tear with some fat and won Yiniangawgut's hand. But Raven chewed up the sun, leaving the earth in darkness.

Yiniangawgut's sister Chanyai created the world's rivers through singing, so that there was enough water to drink, but the people still suffered from darkness. Yiniangawgut went to Raven's house to trick him into letting the sun out. She tickled him until he was roaring with laughter, then had intercourse with him. When he awoke, she pointed out that his home was missing important utensils, like plates, which she had at her home. Then she stuck his head on a roof so that it became a new sun. (Swann)



**Ylynda Kota** The Selkup old woman of heaven sent souls to earth, wearing the form of birds, to incarnate as humans. She was one of several important Selkup goddesses, including the ruler of snakes, Selči Šýt Emysyt, and the goddesses of sun and fire. (Dioszegi)

**Yumima** Because this Chukchi woman had an impatient husband, she lived in misery, always fearing harsh words and ill treatment. But one day as she was walking on the tundra, she saw a beautiful home. Finding its door open, she went inside and was overwhelmed by its cleanliness and beauty. In a corner, a lamp was burning, but it was a magical lamp, burning beads rather than oil. She popped a bead into her mouth but, hearing footsteps, was forced to hide. Someone entered, and seeing the light flickering because it was missing a bead, spoke to the lamp, which replied that Yumima was hiding in the house.

Yumima found that the home belonged to a helpful woman magician who, after she had replaced the stolen bead in her magic lamp, told Yumima that thereafter, as long as she was very slow in responding to her husband, he would be happy with her. Yumima went home and followed the magician's instructions. She moved very slowly whenever her husband made demands, and as a result, he grew very happy with her and she lived in peace with him thereafter. (Van Duesen 1999)

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# INDIA

India and the surrounding region attracts scholars of goddess religion because it is home to one of the most long-standing, continuous, and vital traditions of goddess worship in the world. Hinduism offers a complex pantheon of goddesses found in ancient literature and archaeological remains and still revered by millions of people. The prominence of goddesses in Indian religiosity raises questions regarding the relationship between the divine females and human women. Among India's regional and cultural variations, scholars have traced correlations between the social roles and status of women and goddess worship. That is, the oppression of women is strongest in areas where Islam has the deepest footprint, followed by areas that worship a male deity. Women have more parity where a divine couple is worshiped and the fullest social, cultural, political, and religious roles where a goddess reigns supreme. The relationships between the empowering images of goddesses and human women on the Indian subcontinent is an area that is receiving increasing scholarly attention and yielding to increasingly sophisticated analysis and nuanced understanding.

This section deals with female figures of India and neighboring regions whose indigenous goddesses were subsumed into Hinduism. Buddhism is discussed despite being non-theocentric, for Buddhism includes regional goddesses that have survived in disguised form. The same is true of Jainism. Finally, indigenous goddesses who were never absorbed into the Hindu pantheon are examined. As the region is home to over 100 spoken languages, the complexity of the region's religion cannot be overstated.

An early civilization, centered on the cities of Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro in Pakistan, ended in approximately 1700 BCE. The cities, lost for millennia, were rediscovered and excavated in the 1920s. Statues of obviously divine female figures led scholars to theorize that the civilization recognized a powerful goddess and to question whether a substrata of imagery from this period was carried forward. Evidence for survival includes styles of jewelry and attire, found on Indus Valley figures, still worn by Indian women, as well as continuities in the treatment and adornment of the female figure in the art of India to the present day.



**Durgā.** From the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York comes this 14th–15th-century Nepalese image of Durgā, who killed the threatening demon Mahisha at time's beginning. The original sculpture is inlaid with precious stones, indicating the importance of this protective goddess to her people.

There is evidence that Indo-Europeans, who moved into the Indian subcontinent in 1500–1200 BCE, brought a religion that was strongly patriarchal despite the presence of goddesses. Because their arrival coincided with the decline of the Indus Valley culture, scholars debate the degree to which the two were connected. Until recently, the Indo-Europeans were described as invading the Indian subcontinent, but contemporary thought suggests a gradual migration with assimilation of earlier peoples. Earlier worship may have continued, as deposits of goddess figurines in riverbeds from this era suggest.

The first records of Hinduism date from this time. Called the Vedas (“knowledge”), they were in Sanskrit, one of the oldest Indo-European languages; originally oral, they were transcribed long after their composition. The world’s oldest known religious text, the *Rg Veda*, consists of hymns and liturgical verses, including some dedicated to goddesses that are still worshiped on the Indian subcontinent. Three other texts constitute Vedic literature, two consisting of verses from the *Rg Veda* arranged for ritual purposes while the last, the *Artharva-Veda*, introduces new deities and a body of magical knowledge and related techniques. It is not clear whether the goddesses that appear in these texts were Indo-European imports or, more likely, figures incorporated from the indigenous pantheon.

Later texts include the Upanishads (8th–6th centuries BCE), philosophical texts that form the basis of what is known as Vedānta, an orthodox doctrinal formulation of

Hinduism, as well as of Buddhism and Jainism. This literature is mystical and metaphysical and does not address deities and their worship. Thus goddesses are rare in this literature. The *Purāṇas*, however, offer elaborate narratives, theologies, and liturgies of divinities. There is no exact Western equivalent to this nonliturgical literature that includes myths of non-Indo-European people as well as folktales and genealogies. By the time of composition (beginning in the 6th century CE), goddesses were gaining significance in the Hindu pantheon. Although most of the *Purāṇas* are dedicated to male divinities, their consorts play important roles. Important Puranic narratives for goddess scholars are the *Bāgavata*, which tells stories of the god Vishnu's many consorts; the *Srimad Devī Bhagavatam*, which tells of Durgā; the *Devī Mahatmya*, which describes Devī and her aspects; and *Padma Purāṇa*, which introduces many goddesses. Artistic evidence similarly attests to increasing public importance of goddesses who had previously been honored privately, even secretly. Although some appear as generic "earth goddesses," the specific features of later-known divinities are discernable. Thereafter, goddess imagery in art became more clearly developed. Finally, two epics are notable: the *Ramayana*, relating the tale of Rama and his love for Sītā; and the *Mahābhārata*, devoted to Draupādī and her five husbands. Various minor texts describe aspects of various Hindu goddesses or offer instructions for their worship. After the classical *Purāṇas*, literature devoted to goddesses proliferated, especially in Tantric literature, which in some cases is devoted to a divine couple but in most instances grants primacy to the female energies of creation, casting male deities as the creations of their female consorts.

From the 7th century onward, Islam began to have impact on Indian and Southeast Asian religion. The religion arrived through trade and, later, through Syrian and Persian invasion. Because Islam denies pictorial representations of divinity, northern India suffered a wholesale iconoclastic destruction of temples, images, monasteries, and libraries, with no distinction made between male and female "idols." In a few cases, traditional rituals continued, with their basis in goddess religion ignored or disguised. What survived were smaller outlying temples, including goddess temples centering on sacred rocks, which Muslims either did not find or did not regard as icons, and the village goddess shrines, which blend in with the landscape.

From 1858 to 1947, much of the Indian subcontinent was under English control. This had less effect on religion than did earlier invasions, for British colonialism generally focused on economic exploitation rather than religious conversion. The coincidence of this with the rise of the folklore movement in Europe meant that "tribal" material was recorded and published. The British also conducted major archaeological investigations in India, unearthing statuary no longer in worship that has helped to reconstruct the religious history of the country. In addition, British occultists found India fascinating, predominantly studying Brahmanic traditions. Later, some Indian patriots connected Hinduism with national identity, which led to the division of the country into India (officially secular) and Pakistan and Bangladesh (Muslim), and to continuing sectarian conflict today.

Outside India, Hindu goddesses are found in Bali and Java, where Hinduism melded with indigenous religion. In addition, two religious descendents found widespread adherence both within and outside India. The first to emerge was Jainism, a radically

pacifist, egalitarian, ascetic sect founded in the first millennium BCE. Although there are no goddesses in Jainism, there are important female *devas* or celestial beings.

Hindu and Jain philosophy constellated during the Upanisadic period, as did Buddhism, all in a crucible of mutual conversation and influence Buddhism began in the 5th century BCE, possibly in the kingdom of Kapilavastu, now the border of India and Nepal. Despite being formally nontheistic, Buddhism can be called functionally patriarchal, for its leaders are traditionally male. In Tibet, where Buddhism melded with the native Bon religion, female figures remain important. In Burma, rituals involving recognition of *nats* or spirits survive; in Thailand, domestic cults related to matrilineal spirits continue.

Hinduism as exported beyond India tends to be of the “great” tradition, connected with India’s upper castes who have greater social and even physical mobility than do lower caste people. As a result, traditions of Vedānta and Yoga are known throughout the West. However, some goddesses with roots outside the Vedic tradition, such as Kālī, have found distant adherents. Employment of Hindu goddesses as archetypes for psychological states has given rise to controversy among scholars and practitioners, some of whom decry the practice as dishonoring the original religion, while others welcome the connection of ancient goddesses with contemporary worshippers.

Finally, a form of worship known as Tantra finds expression in Hindu, Jain, and Buddhist traditions. Often misunderstood as a sexual practice in the west, Tantra envisions the world as balanced between Śakti (feminine power) and Shiva (masculine essence). Although early missionary and colonial scholars claimed that Tantra debased women, recent feminist work has called those assumptions into question.

## HINDU AND BUDDHIST PANTHEON OF INDIA, NEPAL, AND TIBET

Abgurati. *See Hārītī*

**Abhramū**

Ādimāi. *See Mari*

**Adītī**

**Adya**

Aindrī. *See Indrāṇī*

Aiyai *Tamil; hunters.*

Alakhani *Tribal; vegetation.*

**Alakṣmī**

**Ali**

**Amba**

Amba *Earth.*

**Ambikā**

Amman. *See Grāmādevatā*

**Ammavaru**

Andal. *See Goda*

**Ankamma**

**Annadai**

**Annapurṇā**

**Apsarās**

Apsarāses. *See Apsarās*

Aramati *Hindu; earth, devotion.*

**Aranyāni**

**Ardhanarīnara**

Arundhatī *Star, wifely devotion.*

Asrapas. *See Ḍākinī*

**Astangi Devi**

**Avidya**

**Bagalāmukhī**

Baghini. *See Ḍākinī*

**Bahucharā**

Baishno Devī. *See Vaiṣṇo Devī*



**Bai Tanki****Baṇḍamma**Banka-Mundi *Khond*; hunting.Bardaichila *Tribal*; storms.**Basmoti**Basu Mata *Tribal*; earth.Basundhara. *See Vasudhārā*Bavāniyamman. *See Māriyammān***Behmata**Behulā. *See Manasā*Bela Pinnu *Tribal*; earth.Bentakomari *Tribal*; water.Beti Bidyarsin. *See Bijaldai Kaniya***Bhagavati**Bhairavī *Fire*, passion.**Bhārat Mātā****Bhavani****Bhogavati**Bhṛṅkuṭī *Buddhist*; benevolence.Bhu. *See Bhudevī***Bhudevī**Bhūmi. *See Pṛthivī***Bhuvanésvarī**Bidhata *Hindu*; fate.**Bijaldai Kaniya**Bijli *Tribal*; lightning**Bisal-Mariamna****Bomong**Bong. *See Bomong*Boomadevī. *See Bhudevī***Brag-srin-mo**Brahmanī. *See Matrikas*Brinda. *See Vrinda*Budhi Pallien *Tribal*; forest.**Budi Ma**Buri Thakurani. *See Budi Ma***Butani-butki**Cāmuṇḍa. *See Matrikas***Caṇḍī**Caṇḍikā. *See Chinnamastā*Chigum-Erum. *See Nimibatapa***Chinnamastā****Churalin****Cundā****Daini-API****Dakadidi****Ḍākinī**Dakshinakālī. *See Bhairavī***Dānu****Depum****Devaki****Deval Devī****Devasmitā****Devayānī****Devī**Dhara *Hindu*; fate.Dharani. *Lakṣmī*Dhuli Nagin. *See Kansa Nagin***Dhūmāvati****Dīrghajihvī****Dītī**Dongar *Tribal*; hills, forest.Dorak. *See Nimibatapa***Draupadī**Drogma. *See Hārūtī***Ḍuinyo****Durgā**Durgāamma. *See Erukamma*Durpattimai. *See Mitki***Eling-Llitung-Tune****Erukamma**Esekandoma-Jaima *Tribal*; seduction.Gandhavati. *See Matsya***Gaṅgā****Gaurī****Gāyatrī**Ghaghrabudi. *See Budi Ma*Ghar-Jenti *Tribal*; good fortune.**Girdoli****Goda**Gondindevī. *See Mitki*Gongadai. *See Naddidai***Gōpīs****Grāmadevatā**Grihalakṣmī. *See Lakṣmī***Halia**Hada Bai *Tribal*; wealth.Haimavati. *See Pārvatī***Hanai****Hārītī**

**Hathay**Hathi-Dhara-Buri. *See Budi Ma*Holī. *See Holikā***Holikā**Hotrā. *See Ilā***Ilā****Indrāṇī**Indu-ja. *See Narmadā*Jagaddhātṛī “World nurse”; *See***Bhuvanésvarī**Janaki. *See Sītā***Jaṅguli**Jatra Budi. *See Budi Ma*Jayā. *See Chinnamastā*Jayalakṣmī. *See Lakṣmī***Jayamālā**Jonmati. *See Tansirjō*Jvālāmālīnī *Tantric, Jaina; fire.***Jyeṣṭhā**Ka Blei Synshar *Tribal; primal mother*Kadhiravati. *See Mahīṣi*Ka Ding. *See Ka Sgni***Kadrū****Ka Iam****Kaikeyi****Kaitab****Kālī**Kālīka. *See Matrikas*Kamadamana. *See Kāmadhenu***Kāmadhenu****Kāma-Kalā****Kamakhsya**Kamala. *See Lakṣmī*Kamésvarī. *See Tripura-sundarī*Kanaka Durgā. *See Erukamma*Kanaka Mahlakṣmī. *See Erukamma***Ka Nam**Ka Ngot. *See Kaikeyi Ka Iam***Kansa Nagin****Kantarupi**Kapilā. *See Kāmadhenu*Kapila. *See Durgā***Karni****Ka Sgni**Kātāyanī. *See Durgā*Ka Um. *See Ka Sgni*Kaumārī. *See Matrikas***Kayum**Khadoma. *See Ḍākinī*Khri hawani. *See Pārvatī***Khupning-Knam****Klu-mo**Korravi. *See Koṭavī***Koṭavī**Kottavai. *See Koṭavī*Krittikas *Hindu; Pleiades.***Kubjā****Kuhrami****Kujum-Chantu**Kumari. *See Durgā*Kunchamma. *See Erukamma***Kundalinī Devī****Kuṇṭī****Kurumba**Kushmandi. *See Ambikā*Lajja-Gaurī. *See Pārvatī***Lakṣmī****Lalitā**Laxmi *See Lakṣmī*Lilā. *See Mahīṣi***Lha-Mo**Lomi. *See Hanai***Madhighariani**Mahadevī. *See Devī*Mahamāyā. *See Sūtāla*Mahésvarī. *See Matrikas*Mahī. *See Ilā***Mahi****Mahiṣi****Mainakini**Makaravaktra. *See Ḍākinī*Malikapuruthamma. *See Mahīṣi***Manasā****Manōdari****Mari****Mārīcī**Mariḍamma. *See Erukamma*Mariṣa. *See Apsarās*Marisha. *See Apsarās***Māriyammān**

Marro. *See* **Ḍuinyo**  
 Mata. *See* **Sītāla**  
**Matrikas**  
**Matsya**  
**Māyā**  
 Meenakshi. *See* **Mīnakṣī**  
 Mekhala-Kanya. *See* **Narmadā**  
**Menā**  
**Mīnāchīammān**  
**Mīnakṣī**  
 Mindhal *Hindu*; stone.  
**Mitki**  
**Miyolangsangma**  
**Mohinī**  
 Motini. *See* **Apsarās**  
**Mrityu**  
 Mudāmā *Hindu*; snakes.  
 Mukdi *Tribal*; ancestral mother.  
**Muthumāriammān**  
**Naddidai**  
**Nāginīs**  
**Naina Devī**  
**Nandā Devī**  
**Narmadā**  
 Natai Caṇḍī. *See* **Caṇḍī**  
**Nidrā**  
 Nīlamma. *See* **Erukamma**  
**Nimibatapa**  
**Nippong**  
**Nirantali**  
**Niṣṛti**  
 Nunui Nanokhi. *See* **Kamakhsya**  
 Padma. *See* **Lakṣmī**  
**Padmāvatī**  
 Padmāvatī *Tribal*; ancestral mother.  
 Palden Lhamo. *See* **Lha-mo**  
 Panbijiya Rani. *See* **Bijaldai Kaniya**  
 Panthoibi. *See* **Pārvatī**  
**Parṇāsavarī**  
 Parooa *Tribal*; kidnapping.  
**Pārvatī**  
 Pathwari *Hindu*; pilgrimage.  
 Paulomī. *See* **Indrāṇī**  
**Pedammā-Mariammā**  
 Peddong-Nane. *See* **Eling-Llitung-Tune**

Phojou. *See* **Kamakhsya**  
**Phoureima**  
**Pidari**  
 Pollamma. *See* **Erukamma**  
**Ponniyammān**  
**Prajñāpāramitā**  
**Prakṛti**  
 Pramlocha. *See* **Apsarās**  
**Prapañcésvarī**  
**Prṭhivī**  
 Puloma. *See* **Holikā**  
 Pyḍamma. *See* **Erukamma**  
**Rādhā**  
 Rāgiṇī. *See* **Pārvatī**  
 Rājarājésvarī. *See* **Tripura-sundarī**  
 Raj-Kumari. *See* **Durgā**  
 Raṇasthā. *See* **Chinnamastā**  
 Rana Caṇḍī. *See* **Caṇḍī**  
**Rangada**  
 Raṇotkṇṭhā. *See* **Chinnamastā**  
 Ranu Bai *Hindu*; fertility.  
**Rātri**  
**Reṇukā**  
**Rohinī**  
 Rokimē *Tribal*; rice.  
 Roop Kanwar. *See* **Satī**  
 Rupasi. *See* **Budī Ma**  
 Śabalā. *See* **Kāmadhenu**  
 Saccikā *Jain*; victory.  
 Śacī. *See* **Indrāṇī**  
**Śakti**  
 Samai-ma *Hindu*; fertility.  
**Samjñā**  
 Sanjna. *See* **Samjñā**  
 Sansari Devī *Hindu*; protection from illness.  
 Saptā Kannimaars. *See* **Ponniyammān**  
 Saptā-Mātṛkās. *See* **Matrikas**  
 Saptashringi *Hindu*; wilderness.  
**Sarada Devī**  
**Sarameya**  
 Saranya. *See* **Samjñā**  
 Saranyū. *See* **Samjñā**  
**Sarasvatī**  
 Sarpamatar. *See* **Kadrū**

**Satī**Sāvitri. *See Shatarupa*Sedi. *See Kayum***Śedi-Bakup**Sharanda Devī. *See Sarada Devī***Shatarupa**Shitala. *See Sītāla***Sichi****Sītā****Sītāla**Siddha-Senani. *See Durgā.*Simhavaktra. *See Ḍakinī*Singhini. *See Ḍakinī***Sitātapatrā**Śodaśī. *See Tripura-sundarī*Somadhbhava. *See Narmadā***Sonwari**Sri. *See Lakṣmī***Srid-Icamp'hrul-mo-che****Śrīmati**Śrīvidyā. *See Tripura-sundarī***Subbu-Khai-Thung****Sujātā****Sukanyā****Surabhi**Suradevī *Hindu; wine.***Sūryā**Swaha *Hindu; fire.***Swasthānī****Taleju**Taller Muttai *Tribal; earth.***Tambaku****Tansirjo****Tārā****Tārāka****Tārī**Tashi Tseringma. *See Miyolangsangma*Tāvārātī. *See Pārvatī***Thabaton**Thakurani *Tribal; earth, smallpox.*Thurgai. *See Mīnāchīammān*Tīj *Hindu; happy marriage.***Trikalā**Triktā Devī. *See Vaiṣṇo Devī***Tripura-sundarī**Tulsi. *See Vrinda***Tushu**Uday Mangal Caṇḍī. *See Caṇḍī*Ugratārā. *See Tārā***Umā****Urvaṣī****Uṣas**Uṣṇīṣasitātaptrā. *See Sitātapatrā***Uṣṇīṣavijayā****Uyugsum****Vāc**Vāgésvarī “*Speech mistress*”;*Bhuvanésvarī***Vaiṣṇo Devī****Vajrayoginī**Vajra-yoginī. *See Chinnamastā***Vallī**Vallī *Tamil; doe.*Vana Durgā. *See Budi Ma*Vārāhī. *See Matrikas*Vāriṇī. *See Chinnamastā*Vasanta. *See Sītāla***Vasudhārā**Vasūrimāla. *See Manōdari*Vijayā. *See Chinnamastā*Vinata. *See Kadrū***Vindhyavāsini****Virāj**Viraj. *See Sarasvatī*Vriddheshvari. *See Budi Ma***Vrinda****Yakṣī****Yamī**Yamini. *See Yamī***Yasoda****Yeshey Tsogyal**Yidrogma. *See Hārūtī*Yoganirāṭa. *See Chinnamastā***Yoginī****Yuk**Zumiang-Nui. *See Subbu-Khai-Thung*

**Abhramū** The original female elephant could change shape at will. But Abhramū's tribe lost its wings when, moving slowly across the sky, the flying elephants grew weary. When they alighted in a tree, their weight broke the branches. An ascetic meditating beneath was unharmed, but falling branches crushed his students. When the sage cursed the elephants, their wings dropped off. Elephants have been earthbound ever since, trapped in the shapes they were wearing during the unfortunate encounter. (Zimmer 1946)

**Adīti** An early Indian goddess, Adīti embodies whatever transcends measurement. Her mother **Shatarupa** divided herself into 13 bodies so that the world might become quickly populated. Adīti, first of these forms, gave birth to 12 Adityas, one for each month. Or she may have had one son, Varuna, so splendid that his presence hurt her eyes; she divided him into 12 parts. Or she had seven normal sons, then gave birth to an egg that rose into the sky to become the sun. She also gave birth to Vishnu (occasionally said to be her consort), Indra, and others. (Berkson; Daniélou 1964; Dexter; Dimmitt and van Buitenen; Ions; Jamison; Kinsley 1986; Pattanaik)

**Adya** In folk tradition in Andhra Pradesh, this is the name of the primal being, born from water as a nubile maiden. As soon as she emerged, she felt sexual desire, so she became a bird and laid three eggs on the cosmic lotus. Only two hatched. From one came all of the earth and sky, while from another came the three primal gods. Adya nursed Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva until they were old enough to mate, then decked herself in flowers and invited them to make love with her. Only Shiva was willing to do so, but he asked the boon of having a third eye. But in granting that boon, Adya lost her youthfulness and became an old woman. Her desire drained off into her divine children, and Adya became a warrior who attacked and killed demons. See also **Pedammā-Mariamā**. (Foulston; Pattanaik)

**Alakṣmī** Sister and opposite of **Lakṣmī**, Alakṣmī represents all that is difficult about human life. Depicted as an old woman accompanied by crows, Alakṣmī travels with hunger, pain, and privation. During her sister's festival of Dīvalī, Alakṣmī appears with bands of evil spirits; for three days, people light lamps to exorcise them. Annually in rural Bengal, a straw image of Alakṣmī is created and destroyed, and an image of lakṣmī put in its place. (Kinsley 1997; Pattanaik; Sharma)

**Ali** This warrior woman had no time for assignations with men, but the hero Arjuna desired her. Disguised as a swan, he sneaked into her tent, but she recognized the deceit and cast him out. Then he took the form of a serpent and raped her while she slept. The result of the rape was a forced marriage. (Pattanaik)

**Amba** In southern India, Amba is "Mother Earth." Possibly pre-Indo-European, this mother goddess was assimilated to other Hindu divinities, among them **Durgā**, **Pārvatī**, and **Umā**. Into modern times she was honored near Jaipur with dawn sacrifices of black goats. A temple to Amba Bhai, one form of this goddess, can be seen in Kolhapur, in the southwest of Maharashtra province. Built in the 10th century CE, it was

badly damaged by Muslim invaders in the 14th century and has never been completely restored, although it was substantially repaired in the 1700s. Images of dancing celestial maidens (see **Apsarās**) deck the temple, which has separate sections dedicated to the goddess as **Lakṣmī**, **Kālī**, and **Sarasvatī**. (Berkson; Daniélou 1964; Dehejia; Gupta; Narasimhan; Pattanaik)

**Ambikā** After **Durgā** destroyed the buffalo-demon who threatened the world, devils still lurked about. So the goddess **Pārvatī** sent forth her feminine power, which appeared as Ambikā, “Little Mother,” a surpassingly beautiful woman who lured the demons to their deaths. First she told them she had made a vow never to sleep with anyone who could not defeat her in battle. When the demons approached, she killed them with a supersonic hum. Then she transformed herself into **Kālī**.

Jainism, despite being originally a religion without personalized gods, accepted goddesses as *śasana-devatas*, guardians of the faith. Among these, Ambikā (under the name of Kushmandi) was one of the most popular. Women who wish to bear sons invoke this goddess because of her association with fertility. (Cort; Dehejia; Dimmitt and van Buitenen; O’Flaherty)

**Ammavaru** This creatrix produced three eggs at the dawn of time, each holding one of the great gods (see Adya for a similar myth; she may be the same goddess as Ammavaru). To populate the earth, she intended to have intercourse with her three sons, but two refused. The third agreed, naming as his price the goddess’s third eye, wherein her power rested. When the goddess gave up that eye, her son killed her. She returned in shattered form as the multiple village goddesses called the **Grāmadevatā**. The same story is told of **Pedammā-Mariammā**. (Foulston; Kinsley 1986; Whitehead)

**Ankamma** In the region of Telugu-speaking people in Andhra Pradesh, central India, this goddess was the central mythic figure. Conveyed through an oral tradition only recently transcribed, her tales constitute an important part of the region’s ethnic heritage. Her major temple is found in Kārempūḍi, where a pierced wall allows the goddess to look out at passersby. (Roghair)

**Annadai** The earth goddess of the Bagai tribe of central India descended from the heavens in order to make the land fertile. When she arrived, she took root like a plant. When shaken, she produced grains that were sown and grew into food crops. She grew fat until cut down by 12 men who offered some of her body, the kernels of grain, back to the goddess. (Jayakar)

**Annapurṇā** This ancient goddess may be an Indian version of the rice goddess found throughout Asia (see Southeast Asia, **Dewi Shri**). A common household deity, often depicted enthroned and feeding a child from a full ladle, Annapurṇā is especially significant in Benares, where a harvest festival honoring her is called Annakuta, “food mountain,” because a mountain of rice and sweets fills her temple. A form of **Durgā** or **Devī**, Annapurṇā is a mountain goddess, with four mountains bearing her name in central Nepal. (Bernbaum; Hamilton; Larson et al.)

**Apsarās** When the Hindu gods churned the primordial ocean, the famously wanton dancers called Apsarās emerged, large-hipped and languid, with soft inviting eyes. As forces of desire, they could be tempting or threatening. One famous Apsarā, Motini, was imprisoned by a demon who convinced her she was his daughter; when a human hero appeared, she escaped her erstwhile father and, transforming herself into a fierce warrior, protected her beloved in battle. Another Apsarā, Rambha, offered a garland of flowers (symbol of her readiness to have intercourse) to a sage, who passed it along to the god Indra. Indra, playfully drunk, put it on the trunk of an elephant, which dropped it in the road, where a horse walked on it. The sage put a curse on Indra that caused **Lakṣmī** to return to the primordial ocean of milk, which had to be re-churned to bring the universe back into being.

The Apsarā Pramlocha was sent by Indra to seduce a sage who had kept his semen within his body for years, thus being close to escaping from the wheel of reincarnation. She brought him such pleasure that he felt that he had lived a century in one night. But, when the night was over, he grew furious at losing his spiritual power. As the pregnant Pramlocha ascended into heaven, her perspiration impregnated the trees, which gave birth to a beautiful woman named Mariṣa, whose son established human civilization. (Dimmitt and van Buitenen; Jayakar; Pattanaik; Pintchman 1994; Whitehead)

**Aranyāni** In the *Rg Veda*, this invisible goddess can be heard by travelers passing through her forests, who think they hear either screaming or bells tinkling. Although generally kind, she can kill if provoked. Aranyāni is a goddess of earth's abundance, offering nuts and berries to those who come near. She may be related to the nature goddesses called **Yakṣī**. (Kinsley 1986)

**Ardhanarīnara** This name, which means “half goddess, half god,” is especially used of **Pārvatī** with her consort Shiva, but may also be used of **Prakṛti** and her mate Puruṣa. Sometimes the divinities are depicted as two bodies joined in sexual intercourse, while at other times there is a single body, male on one side, female on the other. The *Purāṇas* say that the divinity came into being when the primary god, Brahma, meditated on the image of Shiva mating with his female half, at which moment Ardhanarīnara burst into being. From this time onward, humans and other animals have reproduced through sexual intercourse. (Dimmitt and van Buitenen)

**Astangi Devi** Among the Dewar of central India, the wind impregnated virginal Astangi Devi with the sun god Suraj and the moon goddess Chandra. Because at that time, humans ate only twigs, Astangi invented rice, bamboo, and other plants to feed her twins something more nourishing. But an envious man set fire to her fields. Putting them out, Astangi let sparks fly into the heavens, which became the stars. She sent her children to live in the sky, patting her daughter on the cheek and leaving marks visible on the moon's face. (Elwin 1949)

**Avidya** This obscure goddess hides within herself a dual-sexed god who created the world by dancing. Bedecked in a skull-necklace, she is said to rule the throat chakra,



one of the points of energy on the human body. Representing ignorance, she is distinct from illusion (**Māyā**), the latter being a more cosmic force. (Daniélou 1964, 2007)

**Bagalāmukhī** This Tantric goddess was born when Vishnu undertook austerities to save the universe from destruction. When he prayed to **Tripura-sundarī**, she brought forth Bagalāmukhī, who frolicked in a lake of turmeric until the storm died down, thus preserving the world. Another myth says she protected the world from a demon. Although she intended to kill him, he fell down in worship, an action that saved his life. A final narrative says she was formed when **Pārvatī** grew tired of waiting for her consort, Shiva, to feed her. She ate him, but he forced her to regurgitate him and transformed her into Bagalāmukhī. Bagalāmukhī grants magical powers to her worshipers, who experience them as innate skills. These include the power to paralyze others, whether through force or by immobilizing them with love. (Kinsley 1997)

**Bahucharā** In an attempt to save herself from rape, this heroine cut off her breasts and, bleeding to death, cursed her attacker to impotence. Terrified, the rapist begged for mercy, so Bahucharā mitigated the curse: he would thereafter dress in women's clothing and serve as her priestess. She remains the special goddess of homosexual men and transgendered people in the state of Gujarat, including the priests called *hijrās*. Worshiped in a shrine where her only representation is a vulval triangle, she is sometimes seen as part of a trinity, with her two sisters who also killed themselves rather than submit to rape. (Pattanaik; Jayakar; Young 2004)

**Bai Tanki** Disease, say the Agaria of central India, came into the world because men tried to rape a girl. Bai Tanki, a hardworking and pretty virgin, was gathering wood when the men threw her to the ground. As each one tried to rape her, a disease struck. The penis of one discharged a foul fluid, another found himself covered with itching sores, another could not maintain an erection. But one young man managed to rape the girl despite her magical protection. She dissolved into a stream of water that spread disease all around the world. (Elwin 1949)

**Bandamma** This regional goddess of Andhra Pradesh is celebrated in a great festival just before the monsoons cool the land, when her worshipers offer tribute to the goddess in hope that she will protect them from disease. The week-long festival offers the goddess entertainment in homes, then leads her to the fields where sacrifice is offered. The goddess is embodied in a square-headed armless statue. (Tapper.)

**Basmoti** Among the Parenga of Orissa, this earth goddess ate so much at a feast that she started to vomit. From her vomit, seven girls and five boys sprang forth. The girls were every kind of rice and millet, which now bear their names, just as their mother gave her name to a kind of rice. With their brothers, the seven sisters descended to the earth and brought abundance. (Elwin 1954)

**Behmata** Goddess of fate in northern India, she sat by the side of the sea making marriages by twisting rope and tossing the ropes into the waves. When two ropes sank, the

marriage was doomed to be short and unhappy, but if they floated across the waves, the marriage would be long and happy. (Wadley)

**Bhagavati** Kerala's most important goddess, Bhagavati may have developed from the Tamil war goddess Korravai (see **Koṭavī**). A benevolent virgin mother, Bhagavati has little mythology except the story that, as the warrior Bhadrakālī, she banished a demon king. Thousands of temples are devoted to Bhagavati as an earth goddess. As such, she reincarnates as a lower-caste man, who lives in the temple and serves as an oracle. Similarly, in ritual reenactments of the goddess's victory over the demon, men enact the goddess's role, dressed in artificial scarlet breasts. In Cochin, pilgrims annually desecrate the goddess's shrine with stones and curses, which provides immunity from disease for a year. In her Chengannur temple, Bhagavati is depicted as a young woman dressed in a white cotton shift and a silk sari. The image irregularly menstruates, with red stains found on its shift, whereupon the temple is closed for three days, after which the goddess's image is bathed. The stained petticoat is an object of devotion. In addition to being a name, Bhagavati, meaning "Holy One," or "Divine One," is a common goddess epithet in India. (Caldwell; Dehejia; Gentes; Hawley and Wulff 1996; Pintchman 2001)

**Bhārat Mātā** "Mother India" was the creation of Sarala Devī, who in 1903 organized the first festival to this neo-goddess. A nationalist artist depicted the subcontinent as a four-armed goddess dancing on lotus flowers. The image became an icon in the struggle for independence from the British Empire. The power of the new goddess sustained itself after independence. Pilgrims to her temple in Hardwar find a huge map of India and an image of Bhārat Mātā holding milk and grain. She remains a popular goddess to whom temples are still built, including a temple complex erected after the 1983 All-India Sacrifice for Unity. That festival brought an image of Mother India around the country for six weeks. In some cases, devotion to Bhārat Mātā has been connected with anti-Muslim agitation. (Dehejia; Hawley and Wulff 1996; McDaniel 2004; Ramaswamy; Subramaniam)

**Bhavani** "Bestower of existence" is a wilderness goddess from the Osmanabad desert. Without consort or children, she represents that area's stark earth as well as being the primary goddess of the warrior people called the Marathas. As Tulja Bhavani, she was important in the 17th century, when she presented a sword to the local ruler with instructions that he should treat invading Muslims the way the goddess **Durgā** had treated the buffalo-demon. The king was successful at driving the invaders from the land, after which many temples were built to Bhavani. (Daniélou 1964; Dehejia; Gupta, Sanjukta; Kinsley 1986)

**Bhogavati** According to Puranic literature, this princess unwittingly married a snake disguised as a man. Learning the frightening truth, she did not turn away from him but remained his loyal wife. When her husband later learned that his form came from a curse that could be undone should a virtuous woman bathe him in a sacred lake, he

asked Bhogavati to perform the service. When she did so, her husband revealed himself as a handsome prince. (Pattanaik)

**Bhudevī** A form of the earth goddess, Bhudevī's myth tells how, floating on the cosmic sea, she was attacked by a demon. Vishnu, hearing her cries, leaped into the ocean in the form of a wild boar, goring the demon into releasing Bhudevī. As the couple rose together into the light, they embraced, and Bhudevī's womb swelled with life, for the god had impregnated her with hills and valleys. Into the new earth Vishnu plunged his tusks, filling it with seed. As a result of this mating, Vishnu was named guardian of the earth.

Vishnu also wed Lakṣmī, but the two wives fought constantly. Once, he was given a magical tree that both wives wanted. When Bhudevī received the tree, she used the gift to taunt Lakṣmī. So Vishnu decreed that the tree would only bloom on the side facing Lakṣmī's home. When Lakṣmī teased Bhudevī about the beautiful flowers, Vishnu further decreed that the flowers would bloom only when he was making love with Bhudevī.

At one point, Bhudevī grew angry at humanity for being ungrateful to her. Seeds became sterile, and no plants bore fruit. Famine struck. Vishnu demanded that Bhudevī return fruitfulness to the earth, but she turned herself into a cow and ran away. He pursued her, but when captured she remained adamant in her refusal. To bring back the goddess's affections, Vishnu promised to protect her from greed. He agreed to teach proper techniques of agricultural economy to the people. With that pledge, Bhudevī returned. (Ngaranjan; Pattanaik)

**Bhuvanésvarī** The Tantric goddess Bhuvanésvarī was born as the world was created from **Tripura-sundarī**. Bhuvanésvarī represents the tangible world. The universe arises from her, rests on her, and disintegrates into her. Crimson-faced and three-eyed, crowned with the lunar crescent and with jewels, her hair black as bees, Bhuvanésvarī is so beautiful that Shiva created his third eye so that he would have more enjoyment in viewing her. She too has three eyes, to watch over her world. One of her major symbols is the yonic triangle, a symbolic representative of the female genital region, for she is the essence of woman's reproductive power. She controls all phases of creation, from emergence through maintenance to final destruction. (Kinsley 1997; Pintchman 2001)

**Bijaldai Kaniya** Among the Baiga of central India, this lightning spirit was held captive by a young man. Escaping, she became lightning flashing across the sky while he, shooting his arrows at her, made the sound of thunder. The Dhanwar of the same region say that Bijaldai Kaniya was born from a lovely fat woman named Panbijiya Rani, a virgin, who was impregnated by the wind and who, burned black as her daughter exploded out of her, became the leaf-scorpion.

In another version of her tale, told among the Dewar people, Bijaldai Kaiya was born from a virgin, Beti Bidyarsin, who was impregnated by the seed of a king who masturbated while admiring her bathing in a river. She shone so brightly at birth that she was enclosed in a bamboo reed so that her brilliance would not blind her potential

husband. When he had married her, however, he ignored the instructions not to open the bamboo reed until he was safely at home. Tearing it open along the way, he freed Bijaldai Kaiya, who ran away from him into a bamboo grove, where she continues to live, always hunted by her thwarted husband. (Elwin 1949)

**Bisal-Mariamna** A brass pot full of water, called an “eye-mirror,” symbolizes this Mysore goddess of sunlight. Into the pot, worshipers put pepper leaves and coconut flowers; a small metal mirror leans against it. One of seven sister goddesses, Bisal--Mariamna is worshiped in an unroofed shrine into which sunlight pours. (Whitehead)

**Bomong** The cosmic goddesses of the Minyong were Bong and Bomong. Daughters of earth and sky, they glowed from birth, growing brighter and brighter under the care of a treasured nurse. They loved her so much that when she died, they died too. In the darkness that followed, earth’s creatures grew afraid. Thinking that the nurse had stolen the light, they dug up her body. But it had rotted away except for the eyes, which held images of Bong and Bomong. The people, thinking they had the goddesses back, took the eyes to a stream and washed them. Then a carpenter carefully cut the images from the reflecting eyes, and the two girls jumped back to life.

The people did all they could to keep the goddesses. But Bomong ran away into the sky. Her brilliance made the earth crack. Bong followed her, shining brightly but not unbearably. People fainted from the heat, so they sent a frog to kill Bong. He shot her twice, and she fell dead. Her body lay until a rat dragged it to Bomong who covered herself with a rock in sorrow. A rat, a bird, and a cock went to find Bomong, who said that she would never return until her sister was revived. In reanimating the goddess, a carpenter made her smaller so that she could become a moon. (Elwin 1958, 1955 NEFA)

**Brag-srin-mo** The Tibetan ancestral goddess encountered a monkey in yogic meditation. Becoming sexually aroused, she encouraged him to mate with her. He claimed a vow of chastity, but **Tārā** explained that his cooperation was necessary for people to be born. Thereafter, Brag-srin-mo bore six little monkeys. When she fed them special food, they lost their tails and fur and became human. (Bonnefoy)

**Budi Ma** This name or title means “ancestress” or “old woman” and refers to many goddesses of Bengal: Vana Durgā, tree goddess; Rupasi, the sheora tree; Hathi-Dhara-Buri, the elephant-catching old woman; and the ancestral goddesses Jatra Budi, Buri Thakurani, and Burhi Mai. As Ghaghrabudi, this goddess was discovered in 1956 in the form a group of egg-shaped stones revealed when floods uprooted an old tree. She is also called Vriddheshvari, “aged goddess,” when adopted into Brahmanical cult, where she is honored as the smiling, bejeweled nurse of the universe.

She is often worshiped in aniconic form, embodied in a stone or a tree, to which offerings are made of flowers and animal meat. Her rituals entail dancing and, occasionally, ascetic practices like body piercing. Where her worship is active, villagers mark New Year’s Day by donning new formal clothes to perform their daily tasks. As an aged and revered old woman, she is distinct from the Brahmanic goddesses,

who tend to be young and beautiful. Although often shown singly, she is also worshiped together with her consort, the “old man.” (McDaniel 2003, 2004)

**Butani-butki** The chili pepper, according to the legends of the Gadaba of Orissa, was originally a girl with a very bad temper. She cursed at anyone who tried to be friendly to her. After she died and was cremated, a bit of bone was left over from the pyre. A shaman planted the shard, from which the first chili plant grew. (Elwin 1954)

**Caṇḍī** In ancient India, the moon was a male divinity named Chandra. But **Durgā** had a similar name, Caṇḍī. The similarity gave rise to the idea that the moon was a goddess, or a god one month, a goddess the next. The goddess lodged herself in rocks, which are displayed on wooden thrones. Hunters carried a rock sacred to Caṇḍī in order to find game. Caṇḍī had multiple aspects, being connected with forests, rivers, and humans under different titles. (Dehejia; Sanjukta Gupta; Kinsley 1975, 1986; Manna; McDaniel 2003, 2004; Zimmer 1946)

**Chinnamastā** Hindu images show a naked dancing woman cutting off her own head with a sword. Spouts of blood pour from her severed neck into her three-eyed head, which she holds in one hand, and into the mouths of two dancers near her. Sometimes she is shown having intercourse with a god (usually Shiva) while she self-decapitates, or standing on the love god Kāmā as he satisfies his consort Rati. Devotees of Tantra display this image to represent both the control of sexuality and its active celebration.

Chinnamastā came into being when **Pārvaṭī** grew sexually aroused while bathing, a moment of impurity that turned her skin black. Her handmaids, Jayā and Vijayā, grew hungry as they waited for her to finish bathing, so she tore off her head to feed them. Other versions of the story say that she was engaged in intercourse with Shiva, producing the two attendants Dākī and Vāriṇī as he ejaculated into her. She later fed them by cutting off her head. Yet another version has her excited by battle and that she cut off her own head when there was nothing else left to attack.

Chinnamastā is associated with the practice of yoga. The subjugation of the instinct for survival, implied in her self-decapitation, has also been connected with war. Finally, she has been connected with ancient unnamed headless sculptures showing squatting women. Worship of Chinnamastā is relatively rare as she has few temples or shrines and is considered a dangerous goddess. In Buddhism, this goddess (as Chinamuṇḍā) is the fully enlightened Buddha; as such, she is a form of **Vajrayoginī**. (Kinsley 1997; Shaw 2006)

**Churalin** A woman who dies in childbirth melts into the repository of frustrated maternity called Churalin, a monster that roams the countryside looking for infants to kill. But a Churalin can be tamed into a submissive wife—if a man can find an attractive one, for most are terrible to look at. Distinguishing between the types can be difficult. One man tricked a Churalin into revealing herself by playing sweet music. He married her, and for 20 years she was an ideal wife, but on the day of the marriage of their last child she disappeared. Another story tells of a Churalin captured by a

*mohini mantra* (love spell), as well as the theft of her clothing. She married the man who captured her but, at the wedding of their last child, begged for her clothes to dance at the celebration. The moment she put them on, she disappeared. (Elwin 1980)

**Cundā** Once a very powerful Buddhist goddess, Cundā has become less prominent since her heyday in the 9th–12th centuries CE. As the goddess who purified negative karma, she was invoked by believers throughout India and, to a lesser extent, in Tibet and Nepal. The meaning of her name is obscure, but literary sources provide evidence that she was envisioned as a protective goddess whose powers included elimination of epidemics and other diseases. Most importantly, she inspires practices that help her devotees toward enlightenment. (Shaw 2006)

**Daini-API** The Abors of the Siang Valley believe that this spirit causes sterility among human women. She was once human herself, but when she offended a water spirit (see **Nippong**) while she was having her first menstrual period, she was cursed never to bear a child. In sorrow, she haunts streams and rivers, hoping to meet girls who have come to do their laundry after the end of their first menses; Daini-API has the power to make them barren. (Elwin 1955 NEFA)

**Dakadidi** Among the Khond of Middle India, she was the primal mother, who with her brother Daspajka conceived the first people while the world was covered with water. Later, when their grandchildren were born and there was still no land, the couple sacrificed one of their granddaughters to dry up the earth so it could be cultivated. Various other versions say that it was the children, not the grandchildren, of the primal woman who were sacrificed. (Elwin 1949)

**Ḍākinī** These powerful female beings, attendants on **Kālī**, reveal themselves in terrifying aspect, sometimes fish-bodied, sometimes huge as an ogre, often eating raw flesh or drinking blood (from which they are called Asrapas, “blood sippers”). In Nepal, they are guardians of greater goddesses; two principal ones are lion-headed Singhini and tiger-headed Baghini.

In Tibet, the Ḍākinī have another aspect, for beneath their horrific guise they grant supernormal powers and insights to the practitioner of yoga. Called Khandroma or “sky-walkers,” these beings appear as beautiful maidens or withered hags. They can be kindly and horrifying, depending on their spiritual mission. These spirits may have some connection to goddesses of the Bon pantheon, where Ma Namkha (“mother sky”) is among the chief divinities. Although generally described as a collective, some Ḍākinīs have individual names. Simhavaktra has the head of a lion and attends **Lhamo**, while Makaravaktra has a crocodile head. (Atkinson et al.; Beyer; Campbell; Daniélou 1964; Dehejia; Shaw 2006)

**Dānu** This obscure goddess figure appears in early Vedic literature as mother of the Asuras, a divine race, called the Dānavas after her. Their name, “children of Dānu,” recalls similar names from other Indo-European peoples, especially the **Danaiids** (see Greece) and the Irish Tuatha de Daanan (“people of goddess Dānu”; see Celtic



World). It has been hypothesized that such figures descend from an ancient Indo-European goddess (\*Danu) whose name survives in Europe in the river name Danube; the Vedic Dānu may similarly represent primordial waters. She is also described as the mother of a reptilian demon whom the gods defeated. (Dexter; Kinsley 1986)

**Depum** The creator-mother of the Shimong people of northeastern India, Depum was confined with her brother for years deep in the earth. There, they fell in love with each other and mated, and Depum conceived. She gave birth to creatures of the earth in succession: first fish, then frogs, then other beings. After each delivery, she released her offspring to the earth's surface. Because of the taint of incestuous love, such creatures lived apart from human beings. (Bhattacharya)

**Devaki** Devaki's father was Devaka, uncle of the evil Kansa who opposed the gods and who was born following the rape of his mother Pavanarekha. Devaki's husband, who had already wed her six older sisters, was Vasudeva. At her wedding, the god Vishnu picked hairs from his own head and from the body of the serpent on which he reclined, prophesying that the hairs would become Devaki's seventh and eighth sons, respectively. But evil Kansa threatened Devaki, agreeing to spare her only if her sons were killed the moment that they were born. Thus Devaki's first six sons were killed, but when she was pregnant with the seventh, Vishnu transferred her child to the womb of the kindly **Rohini** and pretended Devaki had miscarried. Imprisoned while pregnant with Krishna, Devaki gave birth safely and saw her son spirited away to be brought up by the herdsman **Yasoda**. An alternative story says that Devaki's fetus was transferred into a surrogate's womb while a goddess, **Nidrā** or **Durgā**, took up residence in Devaki's womb. When Devaki gave birth and the enemy seized the child, the goddess revealed herself and escaped. (Ions; Pattanaik)

**Deval Devī** This legendary princess of the Rajput culture tended her splendid herds of cattle while mounted on a black mare named Kesar Kālīni. When a neighboring king wanted the mare, Deval refused to let him take her but then, fearful of the consequences of refusing the ruler, hid in another kingdom. There she was protected by a foster brother to whom, in gratitude, she gave the magical horse. He in turn promised to protect Deval and her cattle forever. When, later, the young man married, the cattle were attacked during his wedding ceremony. Deval turned into a bird and whispered into his ear that he had pledged to protect her cattle, and so the young man and his bride rode off to the herd's rescue. The prince was, however, killed in the attempt, as was the magical horse. (Jayakar)

**Devasmitā** When Devasmitā was about to be separated from her beloved husband, she asked a boon of Shiva, to whom she was devoted. He gave her two red lotus flowers, telling her that as long as the couple remained true to the marriage vows, their flowers would remain fresh. With this guarantee of chastity in hand, the husband set off on a business trip, but in a distant city he was set upon by some wily and corrupt young men. Learning of the magical flower, they traveled to Devasmitā's town intent upon seducing her, for no other reason than to test the efficacy of Shiva's boon.



The chaste wife realized what was happening and tricked them into drinking heavily drugged wine, after which she took all their clothing and branded them on the forehead with a dog's pawprint. Once she had finished with them all, she took them to their own city where she sold them back to their fathers as slaves. Then, with her faithful husband, she returned home much richer for her experience. (Ghosh )

**Devayānī** This voluptuous young woman was seduced by Kaca, a young man who wished to use her affections to gain access to secrets held by her father, a sage. Kaca had taken a vow of celibacy, so he only flirted promisingly with her, causing her to fall in love with him. Weak with desire and not realizing that he did not intend to satisfy her, Devayānī was on the verge of revealing her father's secrets, which protected the powers of some nearby demons.

But when those demons realized that Kaca was about to learn secrets that protected them, they killed him and pulverized his body. Devayānī's father, to satisfy his desperate daughter, spoke magical words that brought Kaca back to life. Over and over, the same actions occurred: the demons pulverized the hero, and the heroine's father brought him back to life. Finally, the demons ground him to a powder that they put in wine, which was drunk up by Devayānī's father. The clever girl made her father promise to share the secret of bringing back the dead. When Kaca was reborn, in the process killing Devayānī's father, Kaca spoke the magical words and brought the father back as well. But then Kaca refused to marry Devayānī, because having occupied her father's body, he was equivalent to her brother. (Ghosh; O'Flaherty 1975)

**Devī** All Hindu goddesses are aspects of the powerful Devī. This understanding dates to approximately the 6th century CE, when the text called the *Devī-Māhāmya*, "glorification of the great goddess," appeared. This and similar texts posit a single goddess whose reality underlies all individual goddesses. This belief integrates the ethnic and cultural divisions among worshipers of goddesses subsumed under her name.

Devī transcends categories, including the visible and invisible world. In her identity as **Durgā**, she was born at the beginning of time from the combined anger of the gods, so that she might battle a threatening demon. Her first action was to laugh; her second, to slay the demon; her third, to reveal to the gods that she was in fact their creator and source of all existence. After these actions, she becomes a natural force animating other goddesses.

Devī can be a natural object such as a water-filled cleft in rock, a living girl dressed in bright red, or a high-breasted young mother with a girlish face. Her worship often includes decking her images in silk, flowers, and jewelry. Devī can be difficult to distinguish from other goddesses because they hold these elements in common. (Beane; Brown; Chandola; Dehejia; Gatwood; Gupta, Sanjukta; Hawley and Wulff; Hildebeitel and Erndl; Ions; Kinsley 1986; O'Flaherty 1975; Pintchman 2001; Spivak; Zimmer 1946)

**Dhūmāvātī** A little-known Hindu Tantric goddess, Dhūmāvātī is depicted as scarred and dirty, with long breasts and a long nose, black-skinned as a crow. Fierce and unfriendly, fond of blood, Dhūmāvātī eats bones and chews on corpse meat. Born from

the smoke of self-immolating **Satī**, Dhūmāvatī has been described as a form of that loyal wife. One legend says that when Satī grew hungry and her mate refused to feed her, she ate him and, when he forced her to vomit, was turned into the frightening Dhūmāvatī.

Dhūmāvatī has been connected with **Nīṛṛti**; both may descend from ancient times, for Nīṛṛti appears in the earliest Vedic texts. In esoteric Tantra, Dhūmāvatī represents the condition of absolute freedom that comes from having given up or lost everything. She offers worshipers happiness, provided they renounce worldly ambitions and possessions. She has few temples, and most of her worshipers are unmarried. Yet a heterodox tradition holds that Dhūmāvatī is a sensual goddess who loves to dance and have wild sexual adventures. (Kinsley 1997)

**Dīrghajihvī** The demon Dīrghajihvī (“long-tongue”) licked up the gods’ liqueur, *soma*, whenever it was offered to them in sacrifice. When the god Indra was unable to stop her depredations, he instructed a handsome god named Sumitra (“good friend”) to seduce her. But Dīrghajihvī refused; the god had only one penis, while she had vaginas all over her body. Sumitra returned to Indra with the information, and Indra magically endowed the handsome god with penises all over his body. When he made love to Dīrghajihvī, they stuck within her, immobilizing her, until Indra came and killed the demon queen. (O’Flaherty 1985)

**Dītī** If **Adītī** is “boundless,” her counterpart Dītī is “the bounded one.” Both come from a non-Indo-European source, for their children, though supernatural, were never part of the official pantheon. Dītī’s children were *asuras*, called after her the Daityas. They were powerful beings, especially the warrior Maruts. Dītī, whose earlier children had been killed by Indra, practiced magic while pregnant again. Indra watched her constantly. When Dītī fell asleep, Indra entered her vagina, traveled to her womb, and dismembered the fetus. Even cut to pieces, the fetus was so powerful that it reformed into 49 separate warriors. (Berkson; Daniélou 1964; Dimmitt and van Buitenen; Ions; Kinsley 1986; Pattanaik)

**Draupadī** The heroine of the epic *Mahābhārata*, Draupadī was brought to life by a king who organized a sacrifice to create an improbably strong warrior. From the fire emerged a man strong enough to meet the king’s needs. At the same time a ravishing young woman emerged, dark-skinned and with blue-black hair, from whose body poured forth the fragrance of lotus blossoms. From the moment of her birth, the king hoped that she would wed the hero Arjuna.

When she was old enough to wed, the king organized a contest for her hand. The winner had to string a rigid bow, then, using a pond as a mirror, shoot in the opposite direction, hitting the eye of a wooden fish turning on a wheel. Only one could perform such a feat. Arjuna won, but the other contestants did not take defeat well. He had to fight them all in order to leave with Draupadī.

When they arrived home, Arjuna’s mother Kuntī called out, “whatever you won, you must share equally.” Thus Draupadī became polyandrous, sleeping in turn with each of her five husbands, the Pāṇḍavas. Several alternative stories describe why she

had five husbands. In one, she was so eager to marry that she invoked Shiva five times, for each of which invocation she received a husband. In another, Draupadī was the incarnation of **Lakṣmī** (or **Indrāṇī**), married to five incarnations of her consort Vishnu (or Indra) at once.

When her oldest husband gambled her away, Draupadī's virtue protected her. As her attackers attempted to drag her sari from her, it lengthened into hundreds of yards of material, so that Draupadī was never naked. Humiliated nonetheless, she pledged to wash her hair in her enemies' blood.

Many adventures lay ahead of Draupadī and her husbands. They spent years in exile, far away from the cities to which they were accustomed. While the Pāṇḍavas and Draupadī lived in the wilderness, she was unable to give hospitality as a queen should. So she pleaded with the goddess of abundance, and Lakṣmī gave Draupadī a cooking pot that could never be emptied.

Although she appears as a romantic heroine in the *Mahābhārata*, Draupadī is worshiped as a goddess in southern India, where festivals for her are held and temples erected. A major festival held near Puducherry features fire-walking in honor of Draupadī, because she was born as a result of her father's sacrificial fire. (Dehejia; Gupta, Śakti 1991; Hildebeitel 1988, 1999; Hildebeitel and Erndl; Narasimhan; Pattanaik; Whitehead; Zimmer 1946)

**Ḍuinyo** The Miris of northwestern India say that this goddess or spirit of the sun can never be with her husband, the god of earth, because of their different residences. Si, the earth god, thus took a second wife, the woman Marro. All-seeing Ḍuinyo observes everything on earth and, with the help of her husband, protects humans from danger and difficulty. (Elwin 1955 NEFA)

**Durgā** Durgā, a golden-skinned 10-armed woman, holds a spear and wears a blood-red sari. She was born during the primordial war between gods and demons, which dragged on until the gods concentrated their energies. Flames sprang from their mouths in the shape of a beautiful woman. Although produced by gods, the goddess was stronger than all of them, and she was eager to fight. The gods handed weapons to Durgā, who rode a lion toward the enemy chief, Mahisa. He used his powers to assume one fearsome form after another. Still Durgā advanced until, as Mahisa assumed the form of a buffalo, the goddess slaughtered him, freeing the earth for the gods to inhabit.

The goddess also had to defeat the fearsome Durgā, whose name she took. Durgā marched against the demon's vast army. Durgā grew a thousand arms and used them to throw flaming brands. When she reached her enemy, Durgā tore herself into nine million pieces and destroyed the demon army, then strangled its leader.

Other myths provide alternate versions of Durgā's birth. In one, she was the emanation of the creative force of Vishnu, summoned to protect the endangered Krishna. Then she hid herself in the womb of Krishna's mother, **Devaki**, allowing herself to be killed at birth so that Krishna would live. For that, she was granted perpetual sacrifices. Although Durgā's maternal nature is rarely emphasized in myth, she was the mother of **Lakṣmī** and **Sarasvatī** by her consort Shiva.

Durgā is celebrated as part of a nine-day autumn ritual to aspects of **Devī**; five days are devoted to Durgā. The rite is especially popular in Bengal, where a lion-mounted Durgā, crafted of straw and wood, is paraded through villages and installed in her temples. Domestic rituals, using smaller images, are part of this holy period.

Durgā temples on the outskirts of settlements are often dedicated to Vana Durgās or “forest Durgās,” for Hinduism never fully assimilated these local goddesses. In Java, Durgā is associated with graveyards and black magic, although she was in earlier times a beneficent goddess and protector. In Bali, as Betari Durgā, she rules destruction, although in her association with **Ibu Pretiwi** (see Southeast Asia), she is a cosmic goddess of birth and death.

In Nepal, the goddess is embodied in young girls called Kumaris (“prepubescent girls”) of whom the chief (Raj-Kumari or “royal virgin”) emerges annually from her residence in Kathmandu to renew the state. The chief Kumari abdicates her position before she begins to menstruate, when it is believed that the goddess leaves her body. The name Kumari has been known for at least two millennia as indicating a young girl worshiped as a goddess across the Indian subcontinent. The girl embodies the goddess that is being worshiped in that setting. She was long ago absorbed into Durgā and is infrequently worshiped as a separate divinity. (Allen 1975, 1976; Berkson; Dehejia; Gupta, Śakti 1972, 1991; Harle; Ions; Kinsley 1986, 1989; McDaniel 2004; Pattanaik; Rodrigues; Santiko; Schnepel; Sharma; Whitehead; Young 1994; Zimmer 1946)

**Eling-Litung-Tune** The earth goddess of the Minyong of northeastern India was made of rock. She gave birth parthenogenetically to another rock called Peddong-Nane, who in turn gave birth to earth’s creatures. (Elwin 1958)

**Erukamma** Once, Erukamma was a woman, accused of stealing children and hiding them somewhere beyond the boundaries of the village, where she would cut off their heads and eat them. After she died, she was deified so that her fearsome energies would protect rather than assault the village. The same story is told of the goddess **Hāriti**, who may have been a similar local goddess of earth and sky transmuted via Buddhism into the Hindu pantheon.

Erukamma is a village goddess (see **Grāmadevatā**) who has become absorbed into the larger Hindu pantheon as the coastal Bengalese city of Visakhapatnam has expanded into one of the subcontinent’s most populous areas. In the case of Ellamma, her worship has spread as a result of urbanization. Originally a lower-caste goddess, she is now honored by people of all castes. Other village goddesses of the area are the protective Pyḍamma, credited with helping the village attract commercial investment; Durgāamma, a snake goddess who attracts wealth; Pollamma, a powerful ocean goddess who has been joined by the snake goddess Nīlamma (Nīlamāmba) and by Kunchamma (Kunchamāmba); Kanaka Durgā (Kannakamma), an agricultural divinity; Mariḍamma, goddess of low-caste people honored in the form of a healing neem tree; and Kanaka Mahālakṣmī, a goddess only worshiped in the open air. (Pintchman 2001)

**Gaṅgā** The mother of rivers lived in heaven with her younger sister **Umā**. Gaṅgā flowed three times around the heavenly city that rose on the summit of sacred Mount Meru. When sea-dwelling demons harassed the earth, the sage Agastya swallowed the ocean where they hid. Agastya got rid of the demons, but the earth was left parched and dry. Life on earth would have died, but Gaṅgā threw herself down. Unbroken, Gaṅgā's power could have washed away the world, but Shiva received her torrent on his head. Thereafter the goddess, embodied in the river Ganges, made the land both fertile and sacred as she flowed across it.

Part of Gaṅgā remained in heaven as the Milky Way. Another part flowed under the earth. The intersection of the three at Benares is sacred. An important pilgrimage consists of walking the Ganges from source to sea and back again, marking shrines to the goddess along the way. At sites along the river, people wash themselves in its purifying waters. Annually, hundreds of thousands travel to avail themselves of Gaṅgā's promise to wash away 10 sins from each of a bather's last 10 lives. Devout Hindus seek to die immersed in Gaṅgā, for the goddess ensures instant freedom from both punishment and reincarnation.

Gaṅgā Daśaharā, celebrated throughout India, marks the moment when the river descended from the heavens. Those unable to travel to the banks of the river bless themselves with some of her water from a vial. Calling out the goddess's name is a powerful form of worship, rewarded with her goodwill and blessings. (Bonnefoy; Daniélou; Dehejia; Hawley and Wulff 1982; Ions; L. Gupta; Gupta, Śakti; Kinsley 1986; Narayan; Narasimhan; Sharma; Whitehead; Zimmer 1946.)

**Gaurī** Before she made her reputation as a warrior, **Durgā** was Gaurī, the golden sky virgin. But sometimes Gaurī is called **Pārvatī**, Shiva's dark lover, after she underwent magical skin-lightening beauty treatments. In any case, Gaurī is the name used for the goddess worshiped in August festivals. Gaurī's particular day is August's new moon, when bedtime sweets are eaten to bring Gaurī's honeyed grace into the soul for the year.

In northern India, women celebrate Gaurī at an 18-day festival called Gaṅgāur. Unmarried maidens pray for a good husband, while wives celebrate in hopes of making their unions happy. Images of the goddess are decked with flowers and grass, then plunged into water in replication of Gaurī's austerities undertaken to achieve union with the god Shiva. Her practices were so effective that Kāmā, god of love, shot an arrow that caused the whole world to blossom, after which Shiva fell in love with Gaurī. As Gaurī-Sankar, the goddess is embodied in the world's highest peak, Mount Everest. (Daniélou; Dehejia; Gupta, Sanjukta; Gupta, Śakti 1991; Ions; Kinsley 1986; Jayakar; Zimmer 1946)

**Gāyatrī** Because some rituals could not be performed without a wife to accompany the celebrant, Gāyatrī was installed as wife of Brahma when his first wife, **Sarasvatī**, could not be found. Gāyatrī was mother of the four Vedic scriptures; her name refers to a Vedic meter. (O'Flaherty 1975; Pattanaik)

**Girdoli** The sacred milk-cobra was the primal entity upon which the earth rested, according to the Lohaar of central India. When the gods sought a place for the earth, they came to Girdoli's mother-in-law, the cobra Dudh Nang, who had Girdoli's husband gather all the old rags in the world and build a pad for Girdoli's head, upon which the earth was placed. Girdoli still loves her husband, so every 13 years she puts the earth down so that she can make love with him. When she does, earthquakes occur. (Elwin 1949)

**Goda** A South Indian legend says that the girl Goda, a reincarnation or avatar of the goddess **Devī**, was born in the town of Srivilliputtur, south of Madurai, and intended from birth to become a bride of Krishna. She composed many lovely hymns still used in the daily rituals of **Devī** in that area, then disappeared into a black stone that embodied the god's phallus. Every year her marriage to the god is celebrated in her temple, with the icon of the goddess placed on a swing like a bride. (Dehejia)

**Gōpīs** These "cowherds" play an important role in myths about Krishna. Because Krishna was threatened with murder were he to remain with his mother Devaki, the boy was brought up as the son of the cowherd **Yasoda**. As a child, he saved the Gōpīs when they had drunk the waters of a lake poisoned by the serpent Kāliya. Krishna wept, and his tears revived the Gōpīs. Later, when the Gōpīs were playing on the lake-shore, their ball went into the waves, and Krishna went in after it. When an evil serpent attacked, Krishna swelled up until he was a giant, saving both himself and the cowherds' ball.

Krishna grew into a charming young man with whom all the cowgirls fell in love. One day he stole their clothes while they were bathing, extracting from them a promise that they would dance with him every full moon. Thereafter, the sound of Krishna's flute brought the Gōpīs to the forests, where each one felt that he was dancing with her alone. When the Gōpīs returned home, their husbands were unaware of their absence. When Krishna chose **Rādhā** as his beloved, the other Gōpīs ostracized the girl, bringing about Krishna's illness and near death. But when Rādhā passed a test of her loyalty, the Gōpīs accepted Krishna's love for her. The story of the Gōpīs is enacted by dance troupes that perform the *ras lila* ("play of love") in ritual settings during monsoon season. During this ritual, one woman serves as living representative of the beloved Rādhā. (Beswick; Dehejia; Dimmitt and van Buitenen)

**Grāmadevatā** In addition to divinities of orthodox Hinduism, India is home to myriads of goddesses unknown outside their individual villages. The shrines of these goddesses are honored in the form of an unusual rock or large tree. These "village goddesses" support communal well-being by protecting against infectious disease, by regulating rainfall, by providing abundant crops, and by bestowing children. They are also the guardians of village boundaries that they keep safe from aggressors.

Their simple festivals honor the abundance of the earth and the goddess who provides it. In the south, the name Amman ("lady" or "mistress," a root word found in **Māriammān** and similar names) indicates that the goddess is a Grāmadevatā.



When a village grows into a city, its matron goddess grows in stature. Myths describe the goddess as the reason for the city's foundation. At times, the city goddess is the ancestral divinity of the ruler's family. Such a goddess is Danteshvari, goddess of the region around Jagdalpur in Orissa. Although the ruler was an invader who conquered the indigenous tribal people, they did not discontinue their own village goddess worship, instead simply adopting the new name. Meanwhile old regional goddesses were assimilated to the newcomer by being declared her 32 sisters. Although these goddesses are technically Hindu, they are non-Vedic and have little connection with Vedic divinities. Most do not appear in textual sources; they are known through prayer and practice in their immediate localities. (Crooke; Dehejia; Foulston; Jayakar; Sharma; Whitehead)

**Halia** The lightning goddess of the Bugun of northeastern India is a young girl who constantly attempts to avoid being assaulted by her brother. She hides in the clouds, but he finds her whenever she has to wash her hair, which falls down and turns the sky black. When he sneaks up on her, she pulls out a silver hairpin that flashes as lightning. He runs away, making the sound of thunder. When Halia drops the hairpin, it strikes trees and burns them up. (Elwin 1958)

**Hanai** The sun goddess of the Buguns and Khowas of northwestern India was Hanai, whose husband was the moon, Habia. Their daughter was Lomi and their son, Jomi. When the children conceived an incestuous love for each other and conceived a child, they ran away out of terror at what their mother would do. Lomi gave birth in the sky, then threw the monstrous child down to earth, where it still lives on an oceanic rock. (Elwin 1955 NEFA)

**Hārītī** In an early incarnation, this figure was a human woman who suffered a miscarriage and vowed to take revenge on the townspeople she blamed for her misfortune. So she was reborn as an ogress who had 500 children whom she loved passionately. When the Buddha hid one of her children until she accepted his faith, she converted and, in the process, became tenderhearted toward women who had lost children. (Pintchman 2001; Shaw 2006; Young 2004)

**Hathay** In Parañganad in South India, this goddess ("grandmother") was originally a girl who refused to marry the man selected for her. She drowned herself in the pool in the center of the village. When she appeared to people in dreams, announcing that she had been an incarnation of **Pārvatī**, her worship was assured. (Gupta, Sanjukta; Whitehead)

**Holikā** The demon queen Holikā is worshiped in one of India's major national holidays, Holī, which marks winter's end. She was originally a princess who bathed in fire every day, but one day her magic disappeared, and Holikā burned up. Another story says Holikā was a demon of fire who attempted to kill the young Krishna by offering him her breasts, but he sucked so hard that he killed her. Her myth is reenacted in



the burning of an effigy decorated with cow dung by dancing women. Small household fires clear away piles of discards from spring-cleaning. (Gupta, Śakti 1991; Patton)

**Ilā** Apparently a very ancient name for the Indian earth goddess, Ilā appears in contradictory stories that leave unanswered questions about her original identity and form. Some stories call her male, or say that she changed sex several times. In the *Rg Veda*, Ilā was the goddess-progenitrix of humanity who invented food and milk to feed her children. When invoked, she is often mentioned together with lesser known earth goddesses, Bhāratī, Mahī, and Hotrā. (Dimmitt and van Buitenen; Kinsley 1986)

**Indrāṇī** Indra, the tempestuous storm god, raped Indrāṇī (“divine grace”), who became his consort and bore three sons. One of her names, Śacī, denotes “power,” from which this goddess has been interpreted as her consort’s personified might. (Ions; Pintchman 1994)

**Jaṅgulī** This three-mouthed, six-handed golden Buddhist snake goddess is shown holding a sword, a thunderbolt, and an arrow with her right hands, while her left holds a noose, a blue lotus, and a bow. She was invoked as a protector against poisonous snakes. Because Buddhism did not permit killing such creatures, magical invocations to Jaṅgulī (“snake charmer”) were popular among those fearing snakebite. She was herself a snake goddess, one of a type common in India (see **Manasā**). (Shaw 2006)

**Jayamālā** At the foot of the Bhutan hills, Jayamālā and her husband, the priest Jayanath, lived frugally but happily together—or so thought Jayamālā. But her husband had a streak of greediness. When he was offered the chance for a second wife, the only daughter of a wealthy man, he succumbed to that greed. No sooner had the new wife moved in, but she built a rich new home for herself and husband, barring Jayamālā from entering or from seeing their husband. Only once each day, when she brought water from the river, would Jayamālā see the man she had loved. Then she would sit by the river and weep, making the waters salty with her tears. It was this salt that the king of elephants tasted, a taste that led him to find the lovely abandoned wife. He proposed marriage to her but Jayamālā was true to her first love, until a wave rushed in behind them, tearing down the palace the rich girl had built and carrying away all its occupants. With that, Jayamālā went willingly into the land of elephants, where a waterfall of magic colors turned her into a queen elephant. Since that time, legend says, all elephant herds are headed by a queen in honor of Jayamālā. (Pakrasi)

**Jyeṣṭhā** Jyeṣṭhā is rarely worshiped now, but this was not the case during the 7th and 8th centuries CE when she was an extraordinarily popular divinity. Early images show her as a stout woman with firm breasts and an abundant belly. She stands in a relaxed posture, holding out a lotus flower and a water-pot, making a protective gesture. She wears an elaborate hairstyle and fine jewelry. Crows surround her, as do small children. Born when the cosmic ocean was churned, sister of **Lakṣmī** (thus sometimes identified as **Alakṣmī**), Jyeṣṭhā was dark and unattractive, with breasts that hung to her huge stomach. She married a hermit, who was not a good husband. When he abandoned

her, the gods decreed that she would be supported by women's offerings and that she should appear whenever married couples argued. (Kinsley 1997; Leslie)

**Kadrū** One-eyed Kadrū was born at the beginning of time, when **Shatarupa** divided herself into 13 parts. Best known as the mother of **Manasā**, Kadrū wagered with her sister Vinatā about who could see farthest. But she attempted to cheat and, as a result, forfeited one of her eyes. Kadrū prayed to become the mother of 1,000 snakes, while her sister prayed for two children more powerful than all her sister's.

Kadrū laid a thousand eggs, Vinatā two. For 500 years they rested together in a jar of water. Then Kadrū's eggs hatched into 1,000 snakes. Anxious, Vinatā broke open one of her own eggs to see if anything was alive. She found a son, but the lower half of his body was malformed from hatching too early. He cursed his mother to serve her sister for another 500 years, at the end of which time the second egg hatched into the giant snake-eating bird Garuda, who avenged his mother by eating Kadrū's offspring. (Dange; Kinsley 1986; Pattanaik; Zimmer 1955)

**Ka Iam** With her sister Ka Ngot, these water divinities of the Khasi people of Assam had a race in which they took on the forms of the rivers Uiam and Umngot, each river reflecting the personality of the girl who submerged herself into it. Umngot took an easy path and slid slowly along while Uiam made her way energetically through ravines and gorges. Despite her slow progress Umngot won, reaching the coast and spreading out into a lovely semicircle. When she arrived, Uiam was shamed by her loss and broke into five small rivers. (Pakrasi)

**Kaikeyi** Passionate and beautiful, this warrior wife joined her kingly husband in battle. One day, she saw his chariot wheel about to fly off. So she put her thumb into the bolt-hold and held the chariot steady despite intense pain. When he learned how her effort had saved him, the king promised her two gifts, which she said she would choose later. Many years passed before she claimed her boon: that he pass over his oldest son by another woman to crown her own son king. The king was forced to comply, leading to the exile of his favored son Rama, the consort of **Sītā**. When the king died of a broken heart, Kaikeyi blamed herself. Her son also blamed her, never referring to her as his mother again. (Narayan; Pattanaik)

**Kaitab** Among the Raja Muria of central India, this was the name of the earth's mother. In order for the earth to be born, men stoned Kaitab to death. From her flesh the earth was formed, from her bones the rocks. (Elwin 1949)

**Kālī** Her tongue juts out of her black face. Her four hands hold weapons. Her necklace and earrings are strung with dismembered bodies. Kālī wears snakes all about her body, writhing on her head and around her neck. She was born at time's beginning, manifesting herself when the demon Dārūka threatened the gods. **Pārvatī** entered the body of Shiva and gathered poison stored in his throat, bursting forth as three-eyed Kālī, armed with a trident. This emanation dispatched the demon, but her battle-fury was uncontained, and Kālī threatened the world until Shiva restrained her. Stories of

Kālī as a demon-destroyer connect her with **Durgā**, as does her name Chamunda (see **Matrikas**), formed from demons Chanda and Munda, whom she killed.

Several myths speak of Kālī's uncontrollable energy. Once, Kālī and Shiva danced together, growing more competitive, until it seemed the world would shake to pieces; and so it will, for beneath appearances that dance continues. Another time, Kālī killed two demons, which required that she strip because they were invulnerable to all but a naked woman. This enraged her, so she killed them, then celebrated her victory by draining their blood. Her wrath unappeased, Kālī danced wildly, until she realized that Shiva was underneath her. The god's tactic slowed Kālī's wildness, but only for the moment, for she will resume the dance that ends the world.

During the world's first age, the Satya Yuga, Kālī lived together with Shiva. Shiva abandoned Kālī but could not escape her, for wherever he turned, one of her forms appeared, teaching him that Kālī is all-pervasive and inescapable. So he returned to her and together they watched the four eras unfold. By Hindu calculations, we are currently enduring the age of Kālī, the 432,000-year-long Kālī Yuga, which began on Friday, February 18, 3102 BCE. Creation's final stage before its destruction and rebirth, the Kālī Yuga is a period when kings lack tranquility, women and cows are recklessly killed, and money is the basis for nobility. After this desperate age, humanity will be destroyed after a 100-year drought followed by fire and flood, until the entire universe dissolves into **Prakṛti**. Then the cycle of creation will begin again.

Several attributes are important in Kālī's iconography: her blackness, her jutting tongue, and her wild, snake-like hair. Kālī is described as the cast-off black skin of Pārvatī, who underwent austerities to gain feminine beauty that would attract Shiva. After she had purified herself, her skin whitened, with its blackness consolidating itself as Kālī. The myth, which refers to attitudes towards skin color in caste-conscious India, may point to an indigenous or non-Indo-European origin for the goddess. Another myth describes Kālī as having a pockmarked face, connecting her with **Sītāla**. The rest of her body is unmarked, because her brother licked her all over to remove the scars, but modesty forbade him from licking his sister's face.

Images show Kālī with tongue distended. Often her lips are bright red, suggesting that she has been drinking blood. Some texts say that the gesture indicates Kālī's sudden mortification at finding herself dancing on her consort, Shiva, but it is more likely that the tongue indicates sexuality and/or consumption of forbidden foods, with which Kālī is connected.

Images also emphasize Kālī's wild, disheveled hair. Well-dressed hair is an important part of the Hindu woman's self-presentation, so Kālī's hairdressing (or lack thereof) breaks social norms and taboos. It also connects her to the forbidden parts of women's lives, for they traditionally unbound their hair when "polluted" by menstruation or death.

Although her maternal nature is not clearly evident from her iconography, the goddess is known as Kālī-Mā, "mother Kālī." Bloodthirsty Kālī grows tenderhearted toward anyone who adores her as mother. Such a vision of Kālī animated the work of Indian poets Rāmprasād and Ramakrishna. In addition, the kindly side of the goddess was visible to devotees in the Albanian Catholic nun, Mother Teresa, who was seen as an avatar of the goddess.

**Kālī** is one of India's most popular goddesses, second only to abundance-granting **Lakṣmī**. Her picture hangs in many homes; her name is familiar in Calcutta, home to the temple where her skull is kept. Preeminent among Tantric divinities, Kālī is primary in both right- and left-handed paths, but is especially important in the latter, for she represents the fearful and the forbidden. Dancing in cemeteries, drinking blood, she shows the way to enlightenment through confronting fear and death. (Beane; Caldwell; Dehejia; Daniélou; Dimmitt and van Buitenen; Gombrich and Obeyesekere; Gupta, Sanjukta; Hixon; Ions; Kinsley 1975; Hawley and Wulff 1996; Kripal; McDermott; McDaniel 2004; McDermott and Kripal; Larson et al.; Mookerjee; Pintchman 2001; R. Sen; Thadani; Whitehead; Zimmer 1946)

**Kāmadhenu** This name is commonly used of the sacred cow that symbolizes prosperity in India (see **Lakṣmī**). She is also called Śabalā and Kapilā, depending on whether she is spotted or reddish. In Sanskrit, the words “cow” and “earth” are synonyms, indicating the connection between this figure and the earth goddess. As a divine “wish-cow” or granter of abundance, she was born of **Surabhi** (“fragrance”) and was the mother of the bull who accompanied the wild god Shiva. (Bonnefoy; Daniélou; Gupta, Sanjukta; Zimmer 1946)

**Kāma-Kalā** Goddess of sexuality, Kāma-Kalā is depicted as a series of three dots or circles representing erotic parts of the female body, the breasts and mouth. (Jayakar)

**Kamakhsya** Among the Koch people of central Assam, this was the name of the high goddess, a form of the great **Durgā**. She appeared in her temple annually in human form, as a naked girl who danced all night. One night when she was dancing, the king fell in love with her. She agreed to marry him, but required that he build stairs into her temple from the valley below, the entire project to be completed in one night. The workers came close to finishing, but a cock crowed just before dawn, saving the goddess from marriage to a human. The king then attempted to rape her, after which the goddess cursed him and his family and disappeared into her statue, never to return in the form of a living woman again.

Another version of her legend has it that the tribal Garos people were driven out of their original homeland by invading forces. A woman named Nunui Nanokhi (Noini Mechik) carried with her an image of their ancestral goddess, Phojou. When the woman set down the image of the goddess, it refused to move again. Realizing that this was the place the goddess had selected as her own, the people built a shrine to her and changed her name to Kamakhya. (Ghosh and Ghosh; Pakrasi)

**Ka Nam** Among the Khasis (Hynniew trep), an ethnic group in northern India and Bangladesh, the girl Ka Nam was born, so beautiful that her mother feared that she would be kidnapped. So she imprisoned the child in a secluded part of the village. The girl's father finally convinced his wife that their child should lead a more normal life, which was to prove her undoing.

One day, as Ka Nam was drawing water from a well, a huge tiger dragged her off to its lair. The tiger, U Khla, was very hungry. When he realized what a tiny morsel the

girl was, he decided to fatten her up. He brought her little candies and made her feel at home. Ka Nam forgot to be afraid and grew into a young woman with perfect trust in tigers.

Her host, however, had not lost sight of his objective in rearing the girl. When Ka Nam had reached full growth, U Khla invited all his tiger friends for a feast. But a little mouse warned Ka Nam and she ran away, following the mouse's directions to the cave of the magician toad U Hynroh. He said he would protect her, but in fact he only intended to make her a slave. Telling her he was going to make sure she would be safe from the tiger, he turned her into a truly hideous toad.

The tiger, returning to his den, found his captive had escaped. He grew furious and called down curses on whoever had stolen his prey. The other tigers, when they realized they wouldn't get anything to eat, turned on U Khla and tore him to death.

Meanwhile, back at U Hynroh's cave, the little mouse had witnessed Ka Nam's transformation. Taking pity on the girl, she led Ka Nam to a magical tree that led to the sky. The maiden climbed into the tree and spoke the mouse's magic words: "Grow tall, dear tree, the sky is near, expand and grow." The tree grew and grew until it reached the sky, and there the maiden entered the Blue Realm.

Ka Nam, looking like a toad, went from palace to palace begging for help, but the heavenly folk were so repulsed by her ugliness that they threw her out. Finally she approached the palace of **Ka Sgni**, the sun mother, who gave her an outhouse to live in.

There she sat one day, toadskin off, combing her hair. And there the son of Ka Sgni saw her and fell in love with her. He ran to his mother and asked her to move the maiden indoors so he could be near her. Ka Sgni, a wise mother, waited to see if the infatuation would pass. She also went out to spy on the toad in the outhouse and, sure enough, saw the maiden without her toad disguise, shining with loveliness.

Realizing that the maiden had been bewitched, Ka Sgni knew she would have to find the maiden asleep, and then burn the toadskin. She did so, releasing the maiden but incurring the fury of the magician toad. For days he tried to devour Ka Sgni, causing the world's first eclipse. Below on earth, the people stood in fear, watching the goddess fighting for her life. They screamed and they cried, they beat on drums and cymbals. When he heard the commotion, U Hynroh thought an army was about to advance on him. He released the sun goddess but continues to attack her periodically, hoping humans will be too busy to help. For this reason, the Khasis say, it is important always to make a lot of noise during an eclipse. (Pakrasi)

**Kansa Nagin** The salt goddess of the Chikanput people of Orissa came from the underworld, where she lived with her mother, the ancestral goddess Dhuli Nagin. When the time came to marry, the girl cleansed herself using turmeric and river sand. The dirt from her bath was carried away by cobra-girls and hidden where neither men nor cattle could find it. But somehow a rat found its way to the hidden dirt and carried it up to the world of men, where it was found to be tasty. This was the world's first salt. (Elwin 1954)

**Kantarupi** In the city of Mysore, the goddess **Bisal-Mariamna** and her six sisters stole the husband of a young woman, Kantarupi, for their pleasure. They held him

captive, but after growing weary of him, decided to let him return briefly to his wife. Mischievously, they hypnotized Kantarupi, so that she was ignorant of the night they spent together. A few months later the apparent widow, Kantarupi, realized she was pregnant but could not explain how. Certain that she'd been unfaithful with a secret lover, Kantarupi's father cast her out into the woods. There a prostitute adopted her and exposed the baby boy in a snake temple, where his grandfather found him and raised him. Kantarupi, having no other recourse for keeping herself alive, joined her hostess in prostitution.

Years later, the now-grown son passed through the prostitute's quarters and, seeing Kantarupi, fell in love and arranged a meeting. But on the way there, he stumbled over a calf whose mother soothed him by saying, "What can you expect of someone about to sleep with his own mother?" The young man was baffled. He was even more baffled when he approached Kantarupi, and all the mother's milk she had never given him to drink exploded from her breasts at once. All ended happily, however, when Bisal-Mariamna released the stolen husband, and the little family was reunited. (Shulman)

**Karni** This minor goddess was said to have asked the god of death, Yama, to restore a poor woman's son to life. When Yama refused, Karni vowed that none of her devotees would ever die. When they pass from this life, they are reborn as the mice that live in her temple in Rajasthan. When the mice die, they are reborn as Karni's devotees. (Pattanaik)

**Ka Sgni** The sun goddess of the Khasis lived on earth with two sisters, Ka Um (water) and Ka Ding (fire) as well as their brother U Bynai, the moon. U Bynai was as bright as Ka Sgni. But he was a spoiled and self-centered young man who spent many nights away from home, drinking and gambling.

Then he began to desire his sister. When she realized what he was planning, she grew furious. Scorching his face with ashes, she refused to consort with him. U Bynai was so ashamed that he left home to wander through the heavens. His sisters stayed home with their mother until she died. Then they formed the earth from her body.

Another story says that the civet cat, U Kui, cut the line that held earth and heaven together. Those below were plunged into darkness because the sun hid in shame over her brother's propositions. Many animals went in search of the sun—the elephant, the horse, the rhinoceros, the buffalo—but none could find her. Finally, the cock saved the day, by convincing the divinity who removes the curse of incestuous love to do so for the sun goddess. Then he crowed three times, and the sun goddess reappeared. (Rafy)

**Kayum** In the Indian northeast, this great ancestral mother plays little part in human history except to give birth to important beings including the earth goddess Sedi. She is honored in genealogical songs but has little religious role. (Elwin 1955 NEFA)

**Khupning-Knam** Born of clouds and mist, this primal woman of the Singpho floated in primeval mist until she gave birth to snow-children, a boy and a girl. Because they had no one else to marry, they married each other and produced the earth goddess Inga



and the sky god Mu. At first the earth was only mud and the sky was only cloud, but the siblings' son, the wind god Imbung, blew so hard that Inga dried up and Mu flew upward. (Elwin 1958)

**Klu-mo** Part of the tradition of Bon, the religion which preceded Buddhism in Tibet, Klu-mo was the first being to emerge from the void of creation. From the top of her head, the sky erupted. Then the moon burst from her right eye, the sun from her left, and the stars from her teeth. Her voice created thunder and her tongue lightning. Her breath formed the clouds, her tears the rain. Her flesh formed the earth, and the rivers that run across it are her veins. When her eyes open, it is day; when she closes them to sleep, night descends. (Bonnefoy)

**Koṭavī** Wild and naked Koṭavī appears on battlefields where she opposes the forces of the gods while protecting her demon offspring. A similar goddess, found in South India and called Korravai, haunts battlefields and grants victory to her favorites. She is shown nude, with deranged hair. Sometimes armor covers her upper body. She was a special goddess of the women drummers who accompanied warriors into battle. (Caldwell; Kinsley 1986, 1997; Pattanaik)

**Kubjā** This hunchbacked girl worked as a masseuse, for despite the twist in her spine she was strong and agile. She was beautiful, too, although her deformity kept people from realizing that. Nonetheless she attained renown for the oils she mixed and applied. One day, she met Krishna and, smitten with love for the handsome god, gave him some of her unguents. This so pleased Krishna that he picked her up and, hanging her for a few moments like a fish on a scale, straightened her spine and made her into a desirable woman. (Dimmitt and van Buitenen)

**Kuhrami** Among the Maria of central India, this primal woman was set afloat in a gourd with her brother. When the gourd ran aground on a rock, the couple found no food or water, and the earth was so hot that it burned their feet. But when the high god sent animal messengers to check on the children, they replied that the boy and girl were fine, because the animals wanted to eat them. Finally a monkey told the truth, and the high god sent help so that they were able to plant and harvest. But they could not reproduce, because they were sister and brother. So Budi Matal, the mother goddess, inflicted smallpox upon them, so that they became too scarred to recognize each other. From them, all the people of the region descend. (Elwin 1949)

**Kujum-Chantu** The Apa Tanis say this giant woman formed the earth when, noticing that creatures were walking about on her fat stomach and realizing that if she rose they would fall to their deaths, willed herself to die. Her body turned into the earth, with the soil being richer where she was fattest; her eyes became the sun and moon. (Elwin 1958)

**Kundalinī Devī** A goddess who incarnates herself within human bodies, Kundalinī Devī lives for union with her consort, Shiva, brought about by yogic practices.



Kundalinī Devī lives in the lowest of 10 *chakras*, where she appears as a snake coiled around a lingam with her head resting on its top. Through discipline, the snake can be encouraged to unwind herself and stretch up the entire spinal cord, bringing illumination. (McDaniel 2004)

**Kuṇtī** An ancient mother goddess, Kuṇtī was the ever-virginal lover of the gods. Although replaced in Hindu worship by later goddesses, Kuṇtī figured in the epic *Mahābhārata* as a king's daughter so devout that a sage gave her a magic formula to seduce any god. Kuṇtī had a son by the sun god but, because she was unmarried, cast the child away. Found by a charioteer, he was raised as such, but his kingly nature kept appearing, so that he led a miserable, confused life. Later, Kuṇtī bore the husbands of polyandrous **Draupadī** by several gods. Kuṇtī is honored with a fair in north India, where a temple is dedicated to her. (Daniélou; Gupta, Śakti 1991; Hawley and Wulff 1996; Narasimhan; Pattanaik)

**Kurumba** Celebrated at the popular Cock Festival in central Kerala, Kurumba is honored by the singing of sexual songs and the ceremonial pollution of her shrine when a lower-caste man circumambulates it. Possessed men dance and cut themselves with swords as they utter oracles from the goddess, and chickens are offered to the goddess, who keeps the region free from smallpox and other afflictions. As the festival site has Jain connections, Kurumba has been described as a form of the Jaina goddess Kannaki, as her name is etymologically connected with the word for “anklet,” the most important symbol of that goddess. (Gentes)

**Lakṣmī** India's most popular goddess, golden-skinned Lakṣmī represents abundance and wealth, not only in the form of money but also children, jewelry, and cows. She is the primary goddess of the home, honored with flowers, leaves, and vines. Peacocks and elephants also draw her approving eye.

Early myths describe Lakṣmī floating before creation in the milk ocean. Later myths describe Lakṣmī as rising from the ocean when churned by the gods, covered with necklaces and pearls, crowned and braceleted. Every god wanted her as wife, but she preferred Vishnu, being reborn with him in several incarnations. She was Padmā or Kamalā when he was the dwarf Vamana; she was Dharani, the earth, when he was Parasurama; she was faithful **Sītā** when he was Rama. Finally, when Vishnu was born as Krishna, Lakṣmī accompanied him as the cowgirl **Rādhā**, and later as his wife Rukminī.

Once Vishnu cursed Lakṣmī and turned her into a mare, in which form she lived in the underworld. There she centered her mind on the wild god Shiva. After thousands of years, the god was moved by her austerities and came to her, riding on a bull. When he asked her why she prayed to him, rather than to Vishnu, she revealed that she knew their secret: that they were the same divinity. Impressed by her awareness, Shiva predicted that Vishnu would reunite with her. The prediction came true when Vishnu arrived in the form of a stallion.

Many interpreters suggest that Lakṣmī was preeminent in pre-Vedic India as goddess of the earth and its fructifying moisture; she was incorporated into Vedic

theology when her worshipers would not abandon their devotion to her. Once established, Lakṣmī grew to symbolize the wealth of the soul, becoming a symbol of spiritual prosperity. Lakṣmī's other name is Śrī, "great one," under which name she is associated with both the lotus (symbol of enlightenment and fecundity) and the elephant (rain and royal power).

Hindu reverence for cows is based on worship of Lakṣmī. Hinduism defines male godhead as passive unless activated by the goddess, so Vishnu's power to enrich life only functions when Lakṣmī inspires it. Therefore it is thought good policy to revere embodiments of wealth—cows, which are called "Lakṣmī" after the goddess. At the festival of Pongal, cows' horns are painted brightly, their necks garlanded with flowers, and their food specially prepared. The festival draws its name from the raisin-filled rice fed to cattle on that day.

Rice is another important embodiment of Lakṣmī, used to create wall paintings (*chita*) in honor of the goddess. In Orissa, during the Kaumunī-pūrṇimā festival, women invoke the goddess in a mound of grain and tell how she once disappeared, taking the world's food with her. Her connection with rice led to her adoption in Bali and Java as the goddess **Dewi Shri** (see Southeast Asia).

As an embodiment of the goddess's reproductive power, brides are called "Lakṣmī" during their wedding festivities. At the goddess's *puja* (festival) in Tamil Nadu, the goddess is honored as goddess of happily married women, because of the myth that Lakṣmī honored the god Shiva with a daily offering of a thousand lotus buds. When, one day, she found herself short two buds, she began to cut off her breasts because Vishnu compared them to lotus buds. Shiva, stopping the sacrifice when she had only cut off one breast, turned it into the sacred bael tree, under which he thereafter lived.

Although Lakṣmī is known as a consort goddess, she appears as the dominant partner in some myths. In Purī, she was said to roam the countryside alone, checking into the homes of her worshipers to see that they were performing rituals correctly. She found that they were sloppy in their worship, except for one outcaste woman who created a perfect ritual. Lakṣmī accepted food from the woman, but when she returned, her consort and his brother said that she was ritually polluted. The goddess cursed them to wander for a dozen years until they were offered food by a *dalit* ("untouchable"), who would be Lakṣmī in disguise.

Many festivals are dedicated to Lakṣmī, the most important being Dīvalī, the festival of wealth and light. During Dīvalī, lamps are lighted to attract Lakṣmī's bounty. She is drawn to the best-lit homes and spurns dim ones, while her sister **Alakṣmī** prefers to visit dirty places. Devotees also offer Lakṣmī silver coins and light fireworks in her honor; they leave windows open all night, so the goddess has easy access. Businesspeople put their account books on an altar to Lakṣmī. Lakṣmī is the supreme divinity and object of worship in the sect called Pancaratra Tantra, whose practitioners have developed many esoteric rites and yogas centering on the goddess. (Atkinson et al.; Daniélou; Dimmitt and van Buitenen; Gupta, Śakti; Gupta, Sanjukta; Hamilton; Hawley and Wulff 1982; Ions; Kinsley 1986, 1989; Kumar; Leslie; Pattanaik; Sharma; Shaw 2006; Warrior; Young 1994; Zimmer 1946)

**Lalitā** A form of **Devī** or of **Tripurasundarī**, Lalitā represents universal consciousness embodied as a desirable and desiring young woman. (Brooks; Gupta, Sanjukta)

**Lha-Mo** Tibetan Lha-Mo is the supreme guardian of Tibet and of the Dalai Lamas, protecting the land and its Buddhist believers. She is depicted as enveloped in flame, riding across a lake of blood. She was so fierce that when her son refused to convert to Buddhism, she killed him and made a saddle blanket for her mule from his skin. Her companions are goddesses of the seasons and the five goddesses of long life, and innumerable fierce female spirits who inhabit the Tibetan landscape. (Dehejia, 250–251; Shaw 2006)

**Madhighariani** Goddess of the city of Rayagada in Orissa, Madhighariani is honored in the form of six small white stones and one large one painted in the form of Madhighariani's head, with huge dark eyes and a golden mouth with protruding silver tongue. Assimilated to **Durgā**, Madhighariani ("in the middle of the fort") was originally a tribal goddess later patronized by the region's kings. A similar goddess, Markama, was the **Grāmadēvatā** of the village of Bissamcuttack, adopted by local rulers. She was worshiped in the shape of a red-painted stone that represented her head, while an unpainted stone nearby represented her body. (Schnepel)

**Mahi** Goddess of the river that bears her name in the state of Gujarat, Mahi was a headstrong girl. She wanted to marry the sea, but her father refused to approve the match. So she set out alone from home to reach her goal. Wandering west, she found jungles filled with tigers. So she turned east, crossing rocky regions until, exhausted and spent, she reached her objective. But the sea, seeing the dark-skinned woman, rejected her. Furious, she returned home and raised an army of stones, with which she assailed the sea. Overwhelmed by her strength and power, the sea married her, burying the stony army at their point of union. (Beck et al.)

**Mahiṣi** Three goddesses incarnated together as the voluptuous and seductive Lilā, while three gods incarnated together as her spouse. When the gods grew tired of life's challenges and wanted to enter a hermitage, Lilā was not satisfied to go without intimacy for the rest of her life. For this, the triple goddess was cursed to be reborn as a demon, Mahiṣi. Sister of the demon Mahisa destroyed by **Durgā**, Mahiṣi engaged in austerities in order to gain spiritual power over the gods. She grew so powerful that she received a blessing from Brahma that no one born of a man and a woman could kill her. But the god Vishnu incarnated as a temptress, the **Apsarā** Mohinī, and seduced the god Shiva, giving birth to the sage Ayyappa. He was so pure that he resisted gorgeous Lilā, reborn once again from the ashes of the demon-queen. So she took the form of a goddess Malikapuruthamma, who in turn may be the same as the goddess Kadhiraṇvati, goddess of the acacia tree. (Subramaniam)

**Mainakini** Once this princess of Sinhala saw a spirit, flying across the sky, lose his garments in the wind. As a result, she could see how small his penis was, and she laughed. In punishment, he stranded her in an all-women's land where she could not

become pregnant. The women, desiring offspring, prayed to **Devī**. Although she could not break the curse, the goddess arranged that a god would stand just beyond the limits of the women's world and sing, causing the women to conceive. When a celibate monk was sent to live among the women, he spent many years pleasuring the women and forgetting his spiritual disciplines. After decades, a student of the yogi happened along and brought the sage back to the outer world and yogic practice. (Pattanaik)

**Manasā** The worship of Manasā, daughter of **Kadrū**, remains strong in Bengal, where she is honored as a goddess of prosperity and a protector against snakebite. Her connection to wealth may derive from the reemergence of snakes at the beginning of the growing season. She has the power to bring the dead back to life, as snakes apparently revivify when they shed their skin.

Manasā emerged when Shiva, meditating by a pond, saw a lotus blossom. This caused him to become aroused, and he ejaculated. His semen slithered down the stalks of the plant until it reached the king of the *nagas* (snake-people), whose mother fashioned the seed into a beautiful goddess of snakes and poisons. She rose to the surface where Shiva sat, frightening him. He called for help in eradicating the snakes, but lovely Manasā pleaded for them. Struck by her beauty, Shiva attempted to make love to her, but she refused him, reminding him that she was his daughter. She did agree to go home with him, for which purpose she turned herself into a spider and hid among the lotus flowers. But Shiva's wife **Caṇḍī** rejected Manasā and, believing her to be Shiva's mistress, put out Manasā's eye with a hot poker. Her remaining eye flung out poison, and Caṇḍī fell down dead. After Shiva pleaded for Manasā to return his wife to life, Manasā restored her.

Manasā also saved Shiva's life after he had drunk poison produced by the churning of the cosmic sea. Because she had power over poisons, she was called upon to save her father. But she demurred because she was naked except for a tiger skin and could not appear before the gods. Caṇḍī gave Manasā some rags to wear and, insulted, Manasā struck her dead. But she went to the dying Shiva and sucked out all the poisons, half of which she shared with snakes and scorpions, the other half of which she kept in her single eye. Again, upon Shiva's request, she revived the dead Caṇḍī.

As part of his fatherly duties, Shiva had to find a husband for his fierce daughter, and he married her to a sage, by whom she had a son. Then she decided humans should worship her. The first people she encountered were cowherds who beat her bloody. She set her snakes upon them, but they still did not acknowledge her divinity. She milked a cow into a leaky basket and, turning it upside down, sipped milk from it, but this did not impress the cowherds. So she made their cattle disappear and refused to return them until they had agreed to festivals in her honor. As she traveled across India, she had many such encounters with people who, refusing to worship her, were brought into her devotion through threats of death and loss of livelihood.

In Bengal, a man refused to honor her, so Manasā killed each of his sons in turn. Finally only Lakhindar, husband-to-be of Behulā, was left, and he was cursed to die on his wedding night. All local people knew the curse, so no girl would wed Lakhindar. But Behulā came from a distant town and did not know her likely fate as a despised widow. Lakhindar's father tried to thwart the goddess by building a snake-

proof iron house, but Manasā threatened the architect, who left a small opening. Soon Lakhindar was no more.

Behulā would not leave the corpse, launching it onto the river with the intention of confronting the goddess. Behulā found her way to the hall of heaven, where she presented evidence against Manasā, who was ordered to restore Lakhindar's life. Through dancing, Behulā gained back the lives of her brothers-in-law, returning to the family as a heroine.

Manasā's most important festival is Naga-pachami, during monsoon season. On that day, the race of serpents that includes the **Nāginīs** was said to have been born. As the rainy season forces serpents from underground hiding places, pots of milk are put out for them to feed upon, in hopes of deterring them from biting people. (Daniélou; Dehejia; Gupta, Sanjukta; Ions; Kinsley 1986; McDaniel 2004; Sharma)

**Manōdari** One of India's smallpox goddesses comes from the region around Malabar. Once she was the wife of a demon whom **Kālī** was sent to kill. In an attempt to save her husband, Manōdari began a series of extreme austerities that finally forced Shiva to give her a boon. He told her that her sweat would thereafter be extraordinarily powerful. So when Manōdari met Kālī, returning triumphant from killing her husband, she hit the goddess with beads of her sweat, which turned into the pimples. As Kālī lay, excruciatingly ill, Shiva grew angry at this use of his boon, and his anger formed into a hero who licked Kālī all over to remove the pox. But when he came to her face, he demurred out of modesty, for he was her brother and could not lick her face, so the otherwise-lovely goddess has visible pockmarks. The revived Kālī sent for Manōdari and had her arms and legs cut off, forcing her to serve thereafter as a figure to whom people pray under the name Vasūrimāla ("garland of poxes") for relief from the disease. (Aiyappan)

**Mari** Although women are devoted to this goddess, she is served by transvestite priests called *potarāja*. Legend has it that a lower-caste man, in love with a higher-caste woman, had to bury her when she suddenly died, because her family would have nothing to do with the process. In his grief he dressed in her clothing and ran through the town, invoking her as the goddess **Lakṣmī**. Another story says that the goddess, then called Ādimāi, granted the boon of a son to a good but barren man, but demanded that the son be always dressed in girls', then later women's, clothing. The goddess has both benevolent and dangerous aspects, the latter connected (see also **Sītāla**) with the affliction of smallpox. As such, she can appear either as a beautiful healthy woman or as an impoverished pox-ridden one with mad eyes. It is likely this goddess is a local version of **Māriyammān**. (Vetschera)

**Mārīcī** Buddhist goddess of dawn, invoked as the sun rises, Mārīcī was typically depicted with three heads, at least one of which is a wild boar. She is also shown in a chariot drawn by seven wild boars. She is a protective divinity, endowing her worshippers with assurance that thieves and enemies cannot harm them. As such, she is sometimes depicted as a warrior. Mārīcī was masculinized into a god in China and Japan. (Dehejia; Shaw 2006)

**Māriyammān** This smallpox goddess is honored in southern India, where her temples must be built far from residences. Pox is understood as a visitation from the goddess and as a reminder of the importance of maintaining devotion to her. Now that smallpox is rare due to inoculations, the goddess functions as a maternal goddess who both loves and disciplines her children. Her images show her as a fierce weapon-wielding goddess.

The goddess was originally a girl of the Brahmin class who was courted by a disguised *dalit*. Furious at being tricked, she killed herself and, becoming a goddess, burned the *dalit* alive. Another story says that she was a pure wife, so chaste that she could boil water on her head. But she encountered two people making love and, feeling envy, lost her miraculous powers. Her husband, suspecting that she had been impure, had her beheaded. When she was restored to life, her body was mixed up with that of another woman, creating a half-Brahmin, half-outcaste goddess.

Māriyammān has been connected with the **Matrikas**, who both inflict and heal disease. Her preferred offering is human hair, so her devotees shave their heads. She regularly possesses her followers (usually male) in ecstatic worship, provided they are chaste and strictly vegetarian. (Kapadia; Kinsley 1986; Pintchman 2001; Younger)

**Matrikas** The “seven mothers” may descend from the ancient Indus Valley civilization, for sculptures of seven goddesses have been found from Mohenjo-daro. In Hinduism, the Matrikas are said to have been the empowering consorts of important gods: Brahmanī (female aspect of Brahma), Maheśvarī (Shiva), Kaumārī (Skanda), Vaiṣṇavī (Vishnu), sow-faced Vārāhī (Varaha-Vishnu), **Indrāṇī** (Indra), and skeletal Cāmuṇḍa (with no consort, a form of **Devī** sometimes called Kālīka). Their worship is common throughout India, especially in Orissa. Honored with life-sized images, they may have their own temples or be lodged in those of other divinities. Occasionally a temple is devoted to a single Matrika, commonly Vārāhī or Cāmuṇḍa. The latter is found in Nepal, where frightening images of an emaciated goddess seated on a corpse are called Mahakālī, “great black one.”

Typically, this collective is seen as benevolent and protective, although occasionally danger is associated with them. Stories exist of Matrikas attacking newborns or pregnant women, with the first 10 days of a child’s life said to be especially dangerous. Fierce Matrikas include Jarā, who stole two miscarriages to eat but accidentally formed a whole baby out of them; Pūtanā, an ogress who tried to kill the young Krishna by poisoning her breasts; and the husbandless **Jyēsthā**. The dangerous Matrikas are offset by benevolent ones to whom offerings are left on crossroads and to whom barren women make sacrifices in hopes of a healthy pregnancy. (Dehejia; Kinsley 1986)

**Matsya** This goddess was conceived when a king accidentally ejaculated on a leaf that he gave to a parrot to take to his queen. Attacked by a hawk, the parrot dropped the semen-containing leaf, which was eaten by the water nymph Adrika, who took the form of a fish for the occasion. When caught in a net, the fish was found to have twins in her belly: Matsya (“fish-born”) and her brother, who was adopted by the king while the girl was abandoned to the fisher folk.



The fisherwoman Matsya was so smelly, from constantly handling dead fish, that she was called Gandhavati or “stinky.” But she was a good-hearted woman who wished to marry someday. To attract divine attention, she offered her boat to anyone who needed a ride across the river. One of these was a sage, who in the midst of the journey decided he had to have sex with the woman. Although frightened, Matsya agreed. The sage covered them with clouds so that they could not be seen. The sage was so powerful that Matsya lost her virginity, got pregnant, carried her child, delivered her baby, and was restored to virginity within a few moments. In recompense for providing him with offspring, the sage turned Matsya’s odor into an intoxicating fragrance that attracted a king, who married Matsya and made her queen.

Because she had been betrayed by her own father, Matsya demanded that only her sons would be allowed to inherit, thus forcing the king to disenfranchise the son he already had. To further ensure that there would be no contenders to the throne, Matsya demanded that the son, Devavrata, take a vow to remain childless; he did so, becoming known as Bhisma, “terrible vow.” But Matsya’s sons were unable to find brides, so Devavrata found a woman named **Amba**, at whose reincarnated hands he eventually died. The name Matsya is also used as an avatar of the god Vishnu. (Narasimhan; Pattanaik)

**Māyā** Māyā is a philosophic concept embodied in female form. Her role in the universe is important in Vedanta philosophy, which describes her as the creative force within Brahma. Because she endlessly creates new forms, Māyā disguises the ultimate oneness of all beings. Often called “delusion,” she is more properly “illusion.” There is no existence without Māyā, but we mistake her for reality. For this reason, Māyā is referred to as the veil of illusion, the distracting dance of multiplicity. Māyā’s illusion is not falsehood or error; she is the basis of the universe, as well as being that universe.

In Buddhism, Māyā incarnated as a queen, mother of the bodhisattva Shakyamuni. It was his final rebirth, after having been born of the same mother for many lifetimes. Asleep and alone, Māyā dreamed that a white elephant with golden tusks entered her womb through her right side, impregnating her. From that moment, the bodhisattva was fully conscious in Māyā’s womb. The pregnancy was pleasurable, for divine nymphs ceaselessly massaged Māyā. Anyone whom Māyā touched was instantly healed of disease and unhappiness. When her time drew near, Māyā gave birth effortlessly. But seven days later, she died, her life’s purpose fulfilled. She went to heaven to watch over her son, who ascended to heaven to teach her and the other heavenly beings. A number of sites of pilgrimage are devoted to queen Māyā, especially around Kapilavastu, where the Buddha was born. (Daniélou; Dehejia; Gupta, Sanjukta; Kinsley 1986; O’Flaherty 1980; Paul; Pintchman 1994; Shaw 2006; Whitehead; Young 2004; Zimmer 1946)

**Menā** Queen of the world’s highest mountains, Menā lives in the peaks in a golden palace, tended by magical birds and maidens. Her consort, the airy Himavat (Himālaya), was the father of **Pārvatī**. According to West Bengali myth, Menā was a devotee of **Satī**, to whom Menā offered rituals for 27 years. For such devotion, the goddess offered a boon, and Menā asked for 101 children, all boys except for one girl. Satī



agreed, adding that she herself would incarnate as Menā's daughter. As the goddess reincarnated as a child with blue-black skin, flowers fell from the sky like rain. She was named Kālī, and she wished to have Shiva as her husband. But her father disagreed, claiming that Shiva was a homeless drunk. He was correct in his estimation, for Kālī lived a miserable life with Shiva (see **Pārvatī** for another version of this myth). (Daniélou; Dimmitt and van Buitenen; McDaniel 2004)

**Mīnāchīammān** A local goddess (see **Grāmadevatā**) of Madura, she incarnated as a little girl to revenge herself on a king who dared close her temples. She appeared miraculously in the palace, wearing a bracelet that duplicated a favorite of the queen's. Astrologers warned the king not to adopt the babe, so he cast Mīnāchīammān into the river, from which a merchant plucked her. He raised her to be a fine young woman who attracted the eye of Shiva, incarnated as a poor man in a village on the River Kaveri. They were so poor that Shiva took the bracelet from his wife's arm and attempted to sell it. Accused of stealing the queen's jewel, he was put to death. The goddess, taking her demon form, under which she was called Thurgai, killed the king in retaliation. (Whitehead)

**Mīnakṣī** Born from a sacrificial fire, Mīnakṣī had three breasts at birth, but her royal parents were warned by a heavenly voice that the third breast should remain until she met her intended husband. Mīnakṣī grew up to become queen of Madurai, from which she set out to conquer the world. City after city fell, until she reached the home of Shiva in the wild Himalayas. Even Shiva's army could not withstand Mīnakṣī, and as disaster loomed, the god took to the battlefield. There Mīnakṣī's third breast suddenly disappeared, and the girl realized that Shiva would become her husband.

They were wed in Mīnakṣī's city, where Shiva took the name of Sundaesvara. When their son, Skanda, was old enough to rule, the couple entered the temple dedicated to them and disappeared. They continue to be worshiped in the center of an industrial city of a million residents. One of the largest in India, the temple receives daily visitors in the tens of thousands. The goddess is envisioned as the preeminent member of the couple, such that female-dominant marriages are sometimes called Madurai-marriages. (Berkson; Fuller 1980, 1984; Gupta, Śakti; Hildebeitel and Erndl; Harman.)

**Mitki** In Madhya Pradesh, this goddess was once a young woman who lived with both her husband and her brothers. When a dam broke and threatened the area, Mitki's brothers sacrificed her husband by burying him inside the dam. Mitki, seeing her husband's hand stretching forth from the earth, drowned herself in the canal and has thereafter been worshiped on Fridays. She possesses people who act as her mediums. (Dehejia)

**Miyolangsangma** The goddess of the world's highest mountain, Everest, is the residence of one of five Tibetan goddesses known as the Sisters of Long Life. Their leader is Tashi Tseringma (goddess of Chomolhari in western Bhutan). Golden Miyolangsangma, astride a tiger, carries a bowl of barley, while a mongoose spits out jewels.

The main festival of these five goddesses, Mani Rimdu, climaxes in the release of a yak. When international interest in Everest's peak grew, the region around it was renamed without a goddess reference as Sagarmatha ("Forehead of the Sky"), a title of the god Vishnu. (Bernbaum, 6–7)

**Mohinī** Once, Vishnu assumed a voluptuous female body and sat beside the milk river, intending to seduce Shiva, wild dancing god of destruction. In the shade of a tree on the ocean's edge, Shiva and Mohinī united in sexual joy. Their flowing juices formed the river Ganges, and from their union the dual-sexed divinity Ariharaputiran was born. (Daniélou 2007)

**Mrityu** Goddess of death, she was unhappy from the moment she was born from the scowl of the high god Brahma and assigned the task of destroying life. She wept until her eyes were as red as her sari, but Brahma convinced her that because humans would fear her, they would be captured once again on the wheel of desire, ensuring that they would be reborn. Mrityu grew into her job, becoming a goddess who killed children in the womb and grooms on their wedding nights. She lived in the cremation grounds outside the village, where food was offered her in hopes that she would stay on the periphery and not wander into the village homes. (Pattanaik.)

**Muthumāriammān** This regional agricultural goddess of Puducherry in the Tamil region is celebrated in a 10-day summer festival in which the goddess's image is paraded through the streets, accompanied by music and the noise of fireworks. She is believed to have the power to protect people against diseases prevalent at that time of year, including smallpox and measles (see also **Sitalā**). Those who are cured of such diseases often offer homage to the goddess by piercing their tongues. (Gupta, Śakti)

**Naddidai** Daughter of the Parenga goddess Gongadai, Naddidai was washing her clothing at the end of her first menses when a god attempted to rape her. She ran away, her necklaces breaking. The red and black beads turned into red and black ants, which attacked the rapist god. But he continued, so she took her hairstring and tossed it to the ground, where it turned into a snake that bit the god. This discouraged him, and he begged the goddess to forgive him. She agreed, but ants and snakes have remained in the world. (Elwin 1954)

**Nāginīs** These semidivine snake women now appear as background figures in myths but may have had greater religious importance in the past. Sculptures of snake-girdled women found in eastern India suggest that goddesses such as **Manasā** may derive from an ancient serpent cult. Indian mythology associates snakes with water, perhaps because the monsoon season brings them out into the open. Although all snakes are revered in India, the most sacred is the cobra, which Indians will not kill. If left alone, the cobra does not strike, for which it is seen as a protective being. During festivals marking the monsoon month, images of Nāginīs are decorated with silk and ribbons, and food is offered to them. (Dehejia)

**Naina Devī** The Bilaspur eye goddess was brought to earth by a supernatural cow, who gave great floods of milk at her sacred spot, a place to which pilgrims travel regularly. Most are Sikh, although attendance by followers of that religion at a Hindu shrine is otherwise unusual. Thus, the goddess has been seen as a folk divinity of Sikhism as well as Hinduism. Her sacred lake was formed when the eyes of **Satī**, whose charred body was being carried around the world by her grieving husband Shiva, fell to earth. (Bhardwaj; Gupta Śakti)

**Nandā Devī** An aspect of **Pārvatī**, Nandā Devī is “goddess of bliss.” Near the border with Nepal, her mountain rises 25,645 feet near peaks called Nandā Ghunti (Nandā’s Veil) and Nandā Kot (Nandā’s fortress). The region around Nandā Devī is intensely sacred, visited by tens of thousands annually to honor the goddess at her many temples and shrines. Every dozen years, a pilgrimage brings an image of Nandā Devī to the mountain, at which time a decorated four-horned ram is released into the snowy wilderness. The goddess was said to have offered solace to humans when, at the dawn of time, the world was flooded. Only the sage Manu and his family were saved when Vishnu took the form of a fish and towed their boat to the peak of Nandā Devī, from which Manu and his wife descended to repopulate the earth.

The American mountaineer Willi Unsoeld was so enraptured with the beauty of Nandā Devī that he vowed to name his first daughter after the mountain goddess. In 1977, at the age of 21, Nandā Devī Unsoeld and her father set out to climb the mountain. The young woman died at the summit, where her body remains buried in the snows. Local people believed that the girl was the incarnation of Nandā Devī, and that her death was the return of the goddess to her mountain home. (Bernbaum; Gupta, Śakti 1991; Sax)

**Narmadā** The holy river Narmadā is the embodiment of this goddess, who like **Gaṅgā** removes the sins of those who bathe in her waters. Even Gaṅgā bathes in Narmadā’s waters, in the shape of a black cow. Days when this event is witnessed are especially holy. So holy is Narmadā that, to remove all sins of all lifetimes, one must bathe three years in the Saraswati, seven days in the Yamuna, or one day in the Ganges—or merely glance at the Narmadā. Narmadā’s waters are held effective against snakebite, for which reason she is sometimes considered related to the Nāginīs. (Gupta, Śakti 1991)

**Nidrā** Nidrā, the sleep of time, is a black-skinned goddess clothed in yellow and dark blue silk, who practices ascetic rites. When the evil Kāṃsa attempted to destroy the world, Nidrā descended into the womb of **Yasoda** while her brother Vishnu incarnated through the womb of **Devaki**. At birth, the two babies were exchanged, and Kāṃsa kidnapped the baby he thought was Vishnu and smashed its head against a rock. But the goddess arose and flew to heaven, leaving Vishnu alive, as Krishna, to combat the demon. Nidrā is called YogaNidrā for her ascetic practices, and Vindhyaasini for the village in which her cult is practiced; sometimes she is viewed as a form of **Māyā**. (Hiltebeitel and Erndl; Ions)

**Nimibatapa** Among the Sherdukpens, this goddess creates lightning when she has an argument with her husband. He pursues her across the sky, intending to strike her, but she runs away. Her genitals flash lightning while her husband's heavy steps are the sound of thunder. Other tribes in northwest India tell similar stories. The Miri waterfall goddess Chigum-Erum creates lightning when she lifts her skirt to show her vulva, while her husband creates hail when he spits at her. Another goddess, Dorak, lives with her husband in a water-tank in the sky, which sometimes overflows to cause rain. When it is dry, she lifts her cane-belt, causing lightning from the revelation of her genitals. Meanwhile her husband clashes armor together, causing thunder. (Elwin 1955 NEFA)

**Nippong** Among the Abors, these water spirits bring harm to women by causing excessive menstruation or miscarriages. Because the Nippongs keep their fingers clenched together, the best way to drive one away is to set fire to her hair, because she finds it hard to put out the flames with joined hands. They appear in men's dreams, bring them to orgasm, and thus kill them. (Elwin 1955 NEFA)

**Nirantali** The creator goddess of Orissa gave turbans to the world's most important people, but she forgot the moon goddess. So Nirantali promised that she would give the moon a turban in return for a feast. The moon held the party, and the goddess gave her a lovely turban. She also gave the moon a baby hare, with instructions to carry it always. When the moon grows full, those on earth can see the ornament on the moon's face and the hare in her lap. When the sun came wanting a turban too, Nirantali had none left, so she offered instead a crown, which emits golden rays.

Nirantali made humans by breaking a metal pot, making powder of the metal, and adding wax. Because of the wax, the first man's color was black. He was big and fat, with a soft body and buttocks so large they dragged. He was endlessly hungry, so Nirantali gave him rice, which the pregnant moon goddess stole. In revenge, he ate her, but Nirantali made him vomit her back up. For this reason, whenever there was an eclipse, the people threw rice at the moon so that her captor would be distracted and let her go. (Elwin 1954)

**Nīṛiti** Humanity's misfortunes are embodied in this goddess: a weary old woman, starved and leprous, holding out her hand for alms. She protects those born into poverty and crime who attempt to live righteously. Those wishing for a change of luck pray to her as the goddess who endures earth's misfortunes. Wearing black garments and ornaments that imitate Nīṛiti's attire, priests offer sacrifice, then put a stone into water and toss it to the southwest, transferring more disease and ill fortune to Nīṛiti's heavy shoulders.

An ancient goddess, she was born before **Lakṣmī** appeared from the churning of the sea of milk. Thus, misery came into the world before luxury and beauty. Nīṛiti, who appears in early Vedic literature, has been seen as a precursor to the later development of **Kālī**. She has also been described as the negative aspect of **Adīti**. (Dexter; Kinsley 1975, 1986)

**Padmāvatī** This Jaina snake goddess protected the founder of a dynasty when, as the king was fleeing from his cannibal father's army, she created a phantom army to frighten away the soldiers. She instructed the king to touch the vulva of her statue with an iron bar, which instantly turned to gold, sufficient for him to establish a city over which he ruled. Rituals to Padmāvatī connect her with riches and with transformation. (Cort)

**Parṇāsavarī** "Leaf-clothed tribal woman" is the name of this Buddhist goddess, a beautiful nature divinity who wears clothing made of leaves and flowers. She provides healing through her herbs and magic. She also bears a noose that she uses to capture diseases as though they were cattle. Other weapons such as arrows and swords are also part of her regalia, to be used to destroy negative energies that affect health. She is thus connected with the protective village goddesses (see **Grāmadevatā**), divine mothers who can either bring or ward off epidemics of such dire illnesses as smallpox. (Shaw 2006)

**Pārvatī** Whereas the union of Vishnu with **Lakṣmī** exemplified the idealized image of Hindu marriage, a different relationship is pictured in the tempestuous marriage of the mountain goddess Pārvatī and the wild god Shiva. This may arise from the fact that, among ancient goddesses, Pārvatī is unusual in being both a consort goddess, in which legends emphasize her role as married woman, and a supreme goddess who holds power without needing a mate.

She gained Shiva's attention by practicing asceticism until he could not resist her. Thereafter he spent his time pleasing the goddess. Once she demanded that he provide jewels for her. It took years for him to respond, but finally he showered her with seeds of the rudraksha ("bead tree") that she strung into necklaces and bangles.

Once, interrupted during sex before she was satisfied, Pārvatī cursed the gods so that their consorts were barren but they were pregnant. They were miserable until Shiva allowed them to vomit up the semen that had impregnated them. Another version of the story says that when Shiva and Pārvatī were interrupted, he was turned into a phallus, while the goddess covered her face with a flower, becoming thereafter known as Lajja-Gaurī. Barren women wishing to conceive employ figures with this name, painting the vulva and breasts of the figures with butter and red paint.

Pārvatī is connected to maternity, but never in an ordinary way. Once, she offered her breasts to the gods, but they suckled so hard on her right breast that they drew blood. Undeterred, they continued to suck until the breast shriveled up; Pārvatī's blood made these divinities uncontrollable.

Pārvatī had one son of her own. Shiva did not want to be bothered with children, but Pārvatī wanted a child to caress. Shiva ripped a piece from her skirt and told her to fondle it. Pārvatī grasped the red cloth and, as it touched the goddess's nipples, the cloth began to nurse. Thus was benevolent Ganesha born. But Shiva, angry and jealous, found an excuse to behead the child, saying that he slept in a ritually incorrect way. Pārvatī was desperate with grief, and Shiva, ashamed, told her he would find the boy another head. The only one he could locate was an elephant's, so Ganesha is now half human, half elephant.

Another myth says the hero Kartikeya was born when, interrupted while he made love to Pārvatī, Shiva spurted semen into the mouth of the fire god Angi. Kartikeya became leader of heaven's armies, but he became so lust-filled when he killed that he raped any women he encountered. Pārvatī put a curse on him that every time he tried to rape a woman, she would turn into the likeness of Pārvatī. Kartikeya stopped his aggressive behavior.

Pārvatī could function without Shiva, but the reverse was not true. When a sage attempted to trace sacred circles around the god, Pārvatī told him that he had to circumambulate her as well. The sage refused, so Pārvatī mounted Shiva, but the sage turned himself into a bee to irritate Shiva into dislodging Pārvatī. But the goddess melded herself into Shiva. The sage turned himself into a worm, intending to burrow between the two fused sides of the divinity, but the goddess made him so weak that he could no longer stand. When the sage begged for mercy, Pārvatī gave him a third leg so that he could hobble around the couple and acknowledge their equality.

The consort of Shiva is also called **Kālī** and **Durgā**. One legend explains how the goddess divided herself. Originally, she had dark skin, about which Shiva teased her. Furious, she set off for the mountains, intending to practice asceticism until she gained her desire. With Ganesha accompanying her, she left Viraka, Shiva's attendant, to guard his bedroom so that he didn't enjoy other women's company. But a demon disguised as Pārvatī attempted to kill Shiva. He lured the god to bed after loading his illusory vagina with real nails. Shiva, recognizing the deceit, put a sword on his penis and dispatched the demon.

Pārvatī's informants spread the word that a woman had been seen entering Shiva's bedroom, and Pārvatī exploded in anger. Her anger shot out of her mouth in the form of a lion. Then she continued practicing yoga until Brahma took pity on her and asked her what she wished. When she said she wanted a golden skin, he blessed her. From her body sprang another goddess: black **Kālī**. Now golden and beautiful, Pārvatī started home. Viraka, still on guard, refused to let her enter, not recognizing the goddess.

Pārvatī resides in the sacred mountain Kailas, a major place of pilgrimage. The mountain rises near the source of four great rivers. Although the Ganges does not arise there, Kailas is mythically connected with the descent of that river goddess from heaven. As with many primary goddesses, Pārvatī bears many names, many of which are identical to those of other goddesses, who may be aspects of Pārvatī or assimilated to her. She is **Umā**, **Gaurī**, **Śakti**, and **Bhudevī**. As daughter of the god of the Himalayas, Himavan, and the woman Menā, she bore the name of Haimavati. (Beck et al.; Bennett; Bernbaum; Caughran; Daniélou 1964; Dimmitt and van Buitenen; Gupta, Sanjukta; Handelman; Hawley and Wulff 1982; Ions; Kinsley 1986, 1997; O'Flaherty 1980; Pattanaik; Whitehead; Young 1994; Zimmer 1946)

**Pedammā-Mariamā** The virgin goddess saw a jasmine blooming near an anthill. Transforming herself into a bird, she sat on the flower until she conceived, then laid three eggs, one of which was sterile while the other two contained the universe and the gods. When the gods were old enough, she taught them how to pray and then decided to make them her consorts. Brahma and Vishnu refused her, but Shiva agreed,



in return for the third eye she wore in her forehead. When she agreed, she was turned into an old woman, with no desire for sex. Full of vengeance, she began to kill demons. But every time demon blood fell to earth, more demons were conceived, so she began to lick the earth with her enormous tongue. Thus she captured the blood as it fell, except for the bit that formed a buffalo demon that the goddess fought and killed. At her festivals, a buffalo sprinkled with turmeric is sacrificed in commemoration of her heroic deed, and her image is carried from the temple to the town's boundary to protect it. (Jayakar; Whitehead)

**Phoureima** This Indian rice goddess is personified in a round black stone sitting in a pot upon a bed of rice grains (never directly on the ground) within the granary. So long as the goddess is honored in this way, it is believed that there will be no shortage of rice. (Hamilton)

**Pidari** This South Indian snake goddess was depicted with flaming hair and three eyes; she held a noose and a drum to frighten away evil spirits from the villages she guarded. Her worship has been traced to the first millennium CE. (Whitehead)

**Ponniyammān** The “rice mother” of Tamil Nadu, Ponniyammān is one of the Sapta Kannimaars (“seven virgin sisters”) represented by rock heads placed in fields, the earth forming the goddess's body. She is honored in rituals where she is offered rice cakes and other food that is then ceremoniously consumed. (Hamilton)

**Prajñāpāramitā** This figure, a golden-skinned woman who emits rays of light, was the mother of space and of secrets hidden at time's beginning, to be revealed when humankind is sufficiently advanced. She was especially prominent in Sri Lanka, where Buddhism has been dominant since the 3rd century CE. (Dehejia; Shaw 2006; Zimmer 1946, 1955)

**Prakṛti** Hindu philosophy gives divine feminine form to three philosophical concepts: **Māyā**, **Śakti**, and **Prakṛti**. These three concepts are closely connected and sometimes difficult to separate, as each is identified with one or another of the triad. As articulated early in the Common Era, Prakṛti stands for feminine energy as the universal creative principle. Prakṛti's male counterpart is Puruṣa, consciousness, who took the form of Brahma. Prakṛti is the active part of the dyad, for without her the god is inactive and uncreative. The goddess has three major qualities: purity, activity, and lethargy, combinations of which form everything in the tangible universe.

Early in creation, Prakṛti laid an egg, then surrounded it with seven layers of herself. Within the egg grew Brahma, together with other divine and semidivine beings. When they were born, the afterbirth formed the mountains, while the water of Prakṛti's womb became the ocean. Self-knowing and endless, Prakṛti exists everywhere in various individual forms. She is therefore paradoxical, divinely alone but with uncountable forms. (Daniélou 1964; Dimmitt and van Buitenen; Gupta, Sanjukta; Hiltebeitel and Erndl; Kinsley 1986; Pattanaik; Pintchman 1994)



**Prapañcésvarī** “Mistress of the fivefold world,” this early Hindu Tantric goddess may be the same as, or have given rise to, the world mistress **Bhuvanésvarī**. Sun-colored and brilliant, she ruled the five elements of earth, air, fire, water, and ether. As such, she was embodied in mountains, winds, stars, and oceans. Other names for this goddess were *Pradhāna* (“receptacle of matter”) and **Prakṛti**. (Kinsley 1997)

**Ṗṛthivī** The feminine earth in both Hinduism and Buddhism is *Ṗṛthivī*, a cosmic cow full of milk for her children. A pre-Vedic divinity, she lost power as Hinduism spread. Many prayers are offered to her, but she figures in few myths. In one, *Ṗṛthivī* hid treasures until threatened with death by a king whom she had married. She could find no refuge among the gods, so she returned to her husband, who beat her, which is why farmers use sharp tools to cut into the earth.

Although generally a benevolent goddess, she shows her fierce side during earthquakes, when she evinces displeasure at human behavior. In Southeast Asian Buddhism, she was depicted wringing out her wet hair, thus connecting life-sustaining earth and water. (Gupta, Sanjukta; Ions; Kinsley 1986; Pintchman 1994; Shaw 2006)

**Rādhā** Each time **Lakṣmī** became human, so did her consort Vishnu. When he was born as Krishna, she was reborn as Rādhā, one of the **Gopīs**. Although married to his uncle, Rādhā could not resist the beautiful Krishna. Like the other *Gopīs*, she danced with him at night, offering love that he finally returned. Every night Rādhā stole from her home to make love on the banks of a river. Gossip caused Rādhā to become a pariah and Krishna grew ill with fever, for which the lustful *Gopīs* blamed Rādhā. But a sage predicted that water carried in a sieve would cure the god. Every woman tried, but the water ran out the holes. Finally, Rādhā successfully carried the curative water, proving that her love was chaste despite defying social convention.

Rādhā is customarily worshiped alongside Krishna, for devotees regard them as eternally united and as presiding now in the heaven to which their followers aspire. Rādhā is honored in rituals and shrines in northern India, where she inhabits a woman’s body for the occasion. Naked except for jewelry and flowers, the woman is given reverence by groups of male and female worshipers. Love-tormented poems in the voice of Rādhā form part of the canon of Indian literature. (Dehejia; Dimmitt and van Buitenen; Gupta, Sanjukta; Hawley and Wulff 1982, 1996; Ions; Kinsley 1986; King; Pattanaik; Sharma)

**Rangada** This maiden was brought up dressed as a boy. She learned all the manly arts, from riding and hunting to fighting like a warrior. One day, when she was hunting, she stumbled upon the sleeping hero Arjuna. Finding him attractive, she sat on her heels watching him until he woke, then told him frankly that she wished to enjoy his body. Shocked at her frankness, Arjuna said that he had taken a vow of celibacy—and besides, he would never be tempted by such an aggressive woman.

So Rangada went home. There she dressed herself in womanly silks, perfumed herself, and went back to Arjuna’s tent. It did not take him long to break his vow, and he did so frequently for the next 13 months. But Rangada’s people came looking for her, bemoaning the loss of their village protector. As they sang her praises—how she rode,

how she fought—Arjuna began to wonder aloud what it would be like to love such a strong woman. Finally, Rangada came from the tent to see her former comrades; they were overjoyed to see her, and Arjuna was thrilled to ride into battle beside his bed-mate. (Ghosh; Pattanaik)

**Rātri** Kindly goddess of passionate night, Rātri is sister of **Uṣas**, the dawn. Each night she walks the earth, wearing dark robes set with stars. Her devotees pray for safety from robbers, wolves, and other dangers. Rātri was an embodiment of **Kālī**. But while Kālī was the perpetual night that ends creation, Rātri was earthly night in which all beings rest. In esoteric tradition, Rātri symbolized enlightenment, for if **Māyā**'s dance of creation confuses the senses, Rātri's darkness permits less confusion. (Daniélou 1964; Dehejia; Ions; Kinsley 1986, 1997; O'Flaherty 1980; Pattanaik)

**Reṇukā** Reṇukā was the wife of a sage, so dutiful that she went out every day when her husband practiced archery and picked up every arrow he shot. But one day she did not return and her husband, suspecting her of infidelity, demanded to know where she had been. She was overwhelmed, she said, by the heat, and had sought shelter under a tree. The next day, the sage threatened to shoot the sun out of the sky in order to protect his wife. But the sun god offered a compromise: a parasol and sandals to protect Reṇukā.

Reṇukā is a model of the perfect wife. She was said to be so holy that she could carry water in sieves. But she was not so pure that she did not occasionally entertain a lascivious thought. This happened when she saw a handsome man frolicking in the river. Instantly the impurity caused her to lose her magical power, which revealed her adulterous fantasy to her husband when suddenly water ran out the holes in her sieve. Furious, he had his son behead Reṇukā. Because of his son's obedience, the father granted him a boon, and he asked that Reṇukā be brought back to life with no memory of her death. Because she had hidden among lower-caste people who had been beheaded for sheltering her, Reṇukā's head was placed accidentally on the body of an outcaste woman, after which she was called Elammā (or Embikā-Elammā). The same story is told of the village goddess **Māriyammān**.

Near Puducherry, Reṇukā is honored as a goddess whose special boon was the curing of diseases, especially those involving the eyes. At a temple dedicated to her, three major festivals invoke her curative powers. At all three, the image of the goddess is dressed in silk and led in procession through the town, with devotees feeding the poor in the goddess's honor. (Dehejia; Gupta, Śakti 1991; Jayakar; Pattanaik; Pintchman 2001)

**Rohinī** The sage Daksha had 27 daughters, all married to the moon god Chandra. But though the moon promised to spend his favors equally, he fell in love with Rohinī. Daksha cursed the moon with consumption, but his daughters prevailed on him to lighten his curse, so he allowed the disease to be chronic rather than fatal. Whenever Chandra leaves Rohinī at the full moon, he wanes and grows thin. (O'Flaherty 1975; Pattanaik; Zimmer 1946)

**Śakti** In Hinduism, goddess energy animates male divine energy. Thus religious artists show a goddess having intercourse atop a god, activating his languid body. Like **Prakṛti** and **Māyā**, Śakti refers to an abstract understanding—in this case, power and potency. Śakti can also refer to the essence of femaleness. Each member of the Vedic trinity was provided with his Śakti: **Māyā** enlivening creative Brahma; **Lakṣmī** empowering nurturing Vishnu; and **Pārvatī** or **Kālī** as the consort of destructive Shiva. But Śakti is sometimes used as a name for Shiva's energy alone.

Little myth describes this goddess. When the genderless god Bhagavān uttered the primal sound (“Om”), Śakti emerged. She immediately wished to have intercourse with the god, who divided into Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva. She was so powerful that Brahma, looking at her, grew old and gray. Vishnu grew afraid and called her “mother,” but Shiva united with her and satisfied her. But when Śakti realized that Vishnu was mocking her in his heart, she cursed him to have 10 incarnations, in each of which he would be threatened by demons and would have to call upon Śakti to save him.

The Hinduism in which the goddess is most prominent is called Śaktism. Although goddesses are found in all forms of Hinduism, the goddess is not central in other forms. Some forms of Śaktism see all goddesses as unitary, while others envision the many goddesses as separate. Sometimes Śaktism centers entirely on the goddess, other times including worship of her consort. To qualify as Śaktism, the tradition must see the goddess and her female energy as the supreme creative and liberative power of the universe. Śaktism is based in experience, for its teachings are transmitted orally from guru to student. Śakti is also significant in Tantric philosophy. While Shakta Hinduism emphasizes the role of the goddess, some Tantric schools talk about the polarity of being, with Śakti being the necessary counterpart of every god. But just as frequently, the goddess may be seen as primary, with no male counterpart. (Beane; Brown; Gupta, Sanjukta; Gupta and Gombrich; Hildebrandt and Erdl; Kinsley 1986; Koppers; McDaniel 2004; Pintchman 1994, 2001; Warrior; Zimmer 1946)

**Samjñā** The sun's wife Samjñā hid in the wilderness disguised as a mare when her husband's intense brilliance tired her, leaving her disguised handmaiden Chhaya in her place. But the sun discovered her ruse and transformed himself into a stallion to have intercourse with her. Samjñā turned her face to him, but he breathed upon her and she conceived through her nose. From their union came the horse-headed Aswins, as well as the god of death Yama and his sister **Yamī**. Samjñā agreed to return to the sky, but first she had her father trim away some of the sun's rays to diminish his brightness. The weapons of other gods were fashioned from the extra pieces of sun.

The goddess Saraṇyū, sometimes identified with **Uṣas**, had a similar marriage. She bore the sun twin children, Yama and Yamī, but she grew weary of her husband's brilliance and left a maid in her place, upon whom her husband fathered a child. She was able to remain away for years, until Yama annoyed the substitute, who kicked him so hard that the child was wounded. This alerted Saraṇyū's husband to the deception, and he found his true wife. (Daniélou 1964; Hawley and Wulff 1996; Ions; Kramrisch; O'Flaherty 1979; Pattanaik)

**Sarada Devī** During her lifetime, Sarada Devī became known as an incarnation of **Kālī** or **Durgā**. Wife of the poet and spiritual leader Ramakrishna Paramahansa, she is honored as the primary goddess of the tradition he founded. She was partially crippled from rheumatism and spent much of her time caring for a mentally handicapped adopted daughter, yet during her lifetime she attracted many followers and since then has continued to inspire devotion. Born on December 22, 1853, she was married at the age of five to Ramakrishna, believed by his family to be mad and thus in need of marriage, but she did not live with her husband until she was 16.

With her father, she walked 60 miles to meet her husband, who immediately began to worship her as an incarnation of the goddess. They lived together in a sexless marriage, with recent work finding a reason in Ramakrishna's homosexuality. Widowed when she was 32, Sarada went through a period of poverty and isolation until her woman followers began to describe the ecstasies she experienced. After being derided for her unwillingness to give up her bright saris and bangles, a requirement of widowhood, Sarada had a vision of Ramakrishna that revealed that he was not dead, thus she could not be a widow and was, like him, divine. Thereafter, until her death on July 20, 1920, Sarada served as guru and incarnate divinity to many and wore the bangles to emphasize her status as goddess. (Kripal; McDaniel 1989, 2004; Pintchman 2001)

**Sarameya** Mother of dogs and wild animals, she was one of the primal goddesses formed when the god Brahma's only daughter, **Shatarupa**, divided herself in order to quickly populate the world. As Saramā (possibly "to speed"), she was sent to find the missing divine cows, performing miracles as she went. Finding the cows with the demons that had stolen them, Saramā was tempted with butter and milk to side with the demons. She refused, returning to the gods with the location of their precious cattle. (Another version claims she, acting as a typical dog, ate up the milk and then skulked back to heaven, where she was forced to vomit up the milk. She fled back to the demons, with the gods following the trail of her vomit to locate the missing cattle.) For this deed, Saramā was given the boon that her descendents would all be able to kill anything that attacked them, even tigers. (Kramrisch; O'Flaherty 1985; Pattanaik)

**Sarasvatī** For the world to come into being, Brahma required the power of his consort Sarasvatī. As such, she is called Viraj, the female part of primordial chaos.

Sarasvatī's portraits show a sinuous light-skinned woman wearing a lunar headdress as she sits astride a swan or peacock. In four arms she holds a book, a musical instrument, a rosary, and a ritual pot, to indicate her connection with the arts and the sacred. Her colors are white and yellow, sometimes with a touch of watery blue, for she is one of a trinity of water goddesses that includes **Gaṅgā** and Yamuna (see **Yami**). Sarasvatī is also goddess of eloquence. Inventor of arts and sciences, patron of intellectual endeavors, Sarasvatī is honored by students and artists. She is **Lakṣmī**'s rival, for if someone has the favor of one goddess, the other turns away. In her identity as **Vāc**, she invented the sacred language, Sanskrit.

Sarasvatī is primarily an independent goddess and has been so since her first appearance in the Vedas. She has, however, been enlisted into narratives as the consort of both Brahma and Vishnu. In Vaishnava thought, Sarasvatī was cast as co-wife to

Vishnu with Lakṣmī and Gaṅgā. But she was jealous of Gaṅgā, accusing her of stealing Vishnu's affections. The other wives drove her away because of her angry outbursts, whereupon she became Brahma's consort. She remained somewhat haughty in her new role. Once she refused to hurry to meet Brahma for a sacrifice, so the god married **Gāyatrī** as an immediate stand-in. In retaliation, Sarasvatī cursed Brahma that he would only be worshiped once a year, a curse that remains in effect. On the whole, however, these stories are not well-known, and although they place Sarasvatī in association with male deities for a limited period, they equally account for the fact that she has no consort. Sarasvatī is portrayed and worshiped alone, the sovereign goddess of music, art, and learning.

Sarasvatī is celebrated at the spring festival of Vasanta Pachami, when people dress in yellow clothes to mimic the mustard blooming in the fields. Sarasvatī is a special goddess of the Jains, a religion that began in the first millennium BCE and that emphasizes not divinity but transcendent *jinas*, highly evolved souls. Yet even this nontheistic religion could not entirely eliminate devotion to the goddess, of whom Sarasvatī was the favorite form. (Daniélou 1964; Dehejia; Gupta, Śakti 1991; Gupta, Sanjukta; Ions; Kinsley 1986; Kramrisch; Sharma; Shaw 2006; Subramaniam; Warrior)

**Satī** Anglicized, her name becomes *suttee*, for Satī was the first woman to dare the flames of death. An incarnation of **Devī**, she was married against her father's will to an incarnation of Shiva named Rudra. She immolated herself when Rudra's honor was threatened and he, in wild grief, began to dance with her corpse. (Some stories say that anger transformed Satī into **Kālī**, and that she destroyed the integrity of the sacrifice by her suicide, whereupon her consort began dancing with her charred corpse.) But Vishnu hacked her body apart, and as the pieces fell to earth, they sanctified each place. This began the Tantric practice of honoring the *yonī*, the genitals of the goddess fallen to earth, and thus too began the practice of yoga, which Shiva inaugurated as a way of distancing himself from the wildness of his emotions at Satī's death.

In Tantra, Satī is the source of the 10 goddesses known as the Mahāvidyās, which include Kālī and **Tārā**. The goddesses were created when Satī and Shiva were not invited to the home of Satī's father, who disapproved of Shiva's going about naked and meditating in cremation grounds. Satī, infuriated by this slight, decided to confront her father. Shiva forbade her, so Satī transformed herself into a terrifying but beautiful goddess with a lolling tongue and a necklace of skulls. When Shiva attempted to run away, Satī surrounded him with 10 different forms of herself, the Mahāvidyās. Thereupon Shiva acknowledged her wish, and the goddesses disappeared. Satī went to her father's home and immolated herself in protest of his actions. She was reborn as **Umā** or **Pārvatī**.

The practice of suttee can be dated to as early as 400 BCE. Although praised as an act of loyalty to the deceased husband, suttee may have been the only option for a woman who faced a life of grinding poverty as a widow. Drugs may have been used to induce women into fiery oblivion, allowing property to pass to male relatives. Outlawed in 1829, the practice has continued to the present despite the ban. While the practice attracts a great deal of attention from lay readers as well as scholars, it is argued that it has always been the exception rather than the rule.

In Rajasthan in 1987, Roop Kanwar was immolated with her husband at the age of 18 after a brief arranged marriage, igniting both an outcry against wife-murder and attempts to deify the girl. Evidence that she was drugged, stumbling on her way to her death, convinced many that her death was at least partially unwilling, as do reports that she attempted to escape the flames. Her death, celebrated by as many as a quarter-million people, resulted in trial of her father-in-law and others, but all were acquitted of her murder. As a result of Roop Kanwar's death, a law outlawing the glorification of *Satī* was passed.

In most areas of India, a widow faces a difficult life. She lives in almost complete isolation and often receives little food. She cannot participate in any social events or eat with others. Some have argued that some women indeed embrace death over such a life. But not all "bride-murders" involve immolation or the death of a husband. In 2000, a young woman was beaten to death for carrying an empty water jar, an inauspicious action. Women who survive "bride-burning," horribly disfigured, are often said to have accidentally burned themselves. The number of victims is difficult to ascertain, although figures in the thousands or even tens of thousands are offered. Objections to the practice of *suttee* and other forms of violence against women are the subject of feminist activity in India today. (Cormack; Dimmitt and van Buitenen; Hawley; Hawley and Wulff 1996; Ions; Kinsley 1986, 1989, 1997; Leslie; M. Sen; Sharma; Zimmer 1946)

**Śedi-Bakup** Among the Komkar people of Pakistan, Śedi-Bakup is the earth goddess, married to Melo-Baloat, the sky man. At the beginning of time, they lived so close that there was no room for the people and animals to lift their heads. So they joined together with the spirits to determine what could be done. A brave spirit, Sid-Diyor, grabbed the sky man and beat him so furiously that he ran away. As he rose, space opened between the sky and earth, revealing that Śedi-Bakup was pregnant. She gave birth to two daughters, Bong and **Bomong**, but was so sad at the loss of her husband that she could not look at them. They later became the sun and the moon. (Elwin 1955 NEFA)

**Shatarupa** On the cosmic ocean slept Vishnu, from whose navel rose a lotus carrying Brahma. Brahma created sons by thinking, but sons alone cannot populate the universe. So he knitted his brow, from which sprang forth two-sexed Shiva. Brahma divided Shiva into two parts, the left becoming Shatarupa, who could take any form. As soon as she was born, Shatarupa so excited Brahma that he grew four new heads with more eyes to watch her. Shatarupa saw her father's eyes shining with lust. She transformed herself into a cow, whereupon he became a bull; she turned into a mare, he a stallion; she became a doe, and he turned into a buck. But she created new beings more quickly than he could respond. All creation rises from Shatarupa's attempt to avoid her father; she is usually considered identical to **Sarasvatī**.

A similar figure is found in Sandhya, created by the god Prajapati when he discovered that his thought-generated sons could not propagate. But he became lustful toward his daughter, who ran to her brothers for help. They asked a monkey's help,



so he shot an arrow into Prajapati, whose ejaculate formed a lake from which all animals were born.

This goddess also appears as Sāvitri. The name is given to a beautiful brilliant woman who remained unmarried because men found her intimidating. So she decided to travel the world, looking for a husband. She had no luck but, when she returned home, met a woodcutter. Despite her father's objections, Sāvitri decided to marry him; he was secretly a king, driven from his throne by corrupt officials. The couple was wed despite predictions that he would live only one year.

When four days remained of the allotted lifespan, Sāvitri began fasting. When the fated day came, she begged to accompany her husband to the forest. There Sāvitri encountered the god of death and, when Satyavān's soul was taken, followed it to the otherworld. Yama, god of death, offered her any boon but her husband's life. She asked for 100 sons, which was granted. Then Sāvitri demanded her husband, for she had already been pledged 100 sons and needed him to make that happen. Impressed with her cleverness, Yama released her husband.

Sāvitri is honored in a festival during which women fast and pray that their husbands will live long lives. Offerings of rice, wheat, millet, lentils, chickpeas, and sorghum are left at the base of a long-living banyan tree, around which married women dance. (Babb; Beswick; Daniélou 1964; Dimmitt and van Buitenen; Gupta, Śakti 1991; Gupta, Sanjukta; Kinsley 1986; Pattanaik; Sharma; Zimmer 1946)

**Sichi** The earth goddess of the Singpho, Tagin, and Minyon peoples of Pakistan quarreled with her husband, the sky, when he threatened her with an army of stars. She retaliated by threatening him with the poisonous snakes that lived in her waters, which so frightened him that he surrendered. But he still intended to kill Sichi, so he began to lower himself until it seemed he would kill everything on the earth's surface. Birds and animals gathered, discussing what they could do to make the sky move back up. A bird finally served as ambassador between the warring spouses, setting up a treaty that both would remain indoors for 10 days or risk becoming deformed. Sechi could not endure the captivity and exited her home after three days, for which reason the earth has bumps and ridges on it. But the sky stayed indoors and so is smooth all over. The similarly named primal goddess of the Minyong, Sedi-Nane, created the thunder when she wept over the death of her children, while the lightning came from her flashing eyes. (Elwin 1958)

**Sītā** Sītā, born from the earth when it was cut with a plow, was reincarnated from the woman Vedavati, whom the demon Rāvaṇa threatened with rape. She burned herself to death rather than endure his assault. Nine months later, she was reborn to Rāvaṇa's wife. When the demon heard a prophecy that the child would cause his death, she was thrown into the ocean. But the sea would not kill her and gave her to the earth, who assured her safe rebirth.

The moment she saw Rama, she fell in love with him. But her father had set a condition for a suitor: a huge bow that belonged to Shiva had to be lifted, strung and shot by the hopeful bridegroom. Many came, eyed the bow, and left without even trying.



But Rama, with one swift movement, met the required challenge, and the destined couple was reunited in marriage.

Soon the couple faced their first challenge together, because Rama's mother's co-wife, Kaikeyi, denied his claim to his father's throne. She was within reason, for she had extracted a promise that her own son would inherit the throne. Kaikeyi forced Rama into exile for 14 years, charged with ridding the land of demons. Loving Sītā accompanied him, but while in that forest exile, Sītā was kidnapped by Rāvaṇa. A golden deer with jewel-covered legs came from the forest. Enraptured with the creature, Sītā begged Rama to capture it. While Rama chased the improbable animal, Rāvaṇa captured Sītā.

Rama destroyed Rāvaṇa, fulfilling their destiny. But even divine incarnations are imperfect, and Rama doubted Sītā's chastity during her imprisonment. Though Sītā successfully underwent a test of fire, Rama continued to doubt. Sītā, pregnant, retreated to the wilderness to bear twin sons who, recognized as adolescents by Rama, brought about the couple's reunion. But still Rama doubted. Sītā called for a final test: earth, which gave her birth, should take her back if she were innocent. The earth opened and Sītā disappeared, leaving Rama convinced of her purity and heartbroken at her loss.

As Rama was an avatar of Vishnu, Sītā is connected with **Lakṣmī**. Like other consort goddesses, she reincarnated with her husband, becoming his partner in life after life. In each lifetime, she was loyal and modest. In one, Vishnu incarnated as a leper, but Sītā (here named Anasūyā) treated him with respect, even taking him to a prostitute when he demanded it. As he rode on her back to the brothel, the leper kicked a demon, who cursed Vishnu with death at sunrise. The loyal Sītā kept light from returning until the gods removed both curses. (Daniélou 1964; Dehejia; Dimmitt and van Buitenen; Hawley and Wulff 1982; Ions; Kinsley 1986, 1997; Narayan; Pattanaik; Sharma; Warrior; Whitehead)

**Sītāla** This goddess possesses those stricken with smallpox. Born after other goddesses, Sītāla had difficulty getting humans to pay attention to her, so she invented smallpox to force them to her altars. Now Sītāla is one of the most worshiped goddesses of India, called the Mata ("mother") of each village.

Another version of her birth says that a prince who wanted a male heir offered a sacrificial fire, from which a woman emerged. Brahma told her to carry lentils always, to assure that humans would honor her. When she desired a mate, she was given a demon born from the sweat of Shiva's austerities. Then she and her mate visited the gods in disguise, changing the lentils into poxes. The gods implored her to set her lentils loose on earth, promising that this would encourage people to worship her.

Pictured as a red-clad, golden-skinned goddess with a winnowing fan to cool victims of the disease or carrying rods to strike her victims, Sītāla is honored by menstruating women. The appropriate ritual involves placing a pan of water in front of her image, with a prayer that pox would pass over the home. On her feast days, children were taken to her temples and blessed with flowers and water; if they were not stricken, the parents would offer thanksgiving gifts to the goddess.

Sometimes said to be **Kālī**, Sītāla is worshiped annually in the festival called Thadari, when cooking fires must go out and cooling buttermilk porridge is served. In northern India, the Shitala Ashtami festival in late winter celebrates Sītāla as Vasanta, who wears yellow, the color of the season's blossoms. The goddess is honored by housecleaning, for she hates dirt and disorder. The cleaning doubtless has a prophylactic effect, especially in seasons when disease threatens. (Babb; Gatwood; Gupta, Śakti 1991; Hawley and Wulff 1982; Ions; Kinsley 1986; McDaniel 2003; Misra; Pattanaik; Patton; Sharma)

**Sitātapatrā** This Buddhist goddess protects devotees from black magic and astrological disasters. She carries a huge silken parasol, indicating the umbrella of protection she casts around her children. The goddess's emergence is described by her full name of Uṣṇīṣasitātapatrā, "lady of white parasol who emerged from Buddha's crown of light." She has 1,000 legs so that she can rush to her worshipers' aid, and her body is covered with eyes so that she may better watch over them. (Shaw 2006)

**Sonwari** Among the Kerba people of Orissa, this was the name of the woman who brought light to the world. She lived alone in darkness until she was married, at which time she moved in with her husband. Both while single and later as a married woman, she wore great golden earrings. One day, as she was drawing water, a huge bird came from the sky and snatched one of the beautiful earrings and tossed it into the spider's web that stretched across the sky. There, it fixed itself and became the sun that afterward lit the world. Through her tears over her lost ornament, Sonwari was grateful for the light and warmth. (Elwin 1954)

**Srid-Icamphrul-mo-che** Tibet's ancestral goddess lived in heaven with her parents and her only brother. When a human man asked for her in marriage, she accepted. But before she departed the heavens, she asked for her half of the world as her inheritance. But she was told that, as a girl, she only got one-third, as well as a spindle from her mother and an arrow from her father. These dowry gifts were sufficient for Srid-Icam to create a comfortable world for her descendents. In northwestern Tibet, this goddess's name is rNam-rgyal. (Bonnefoy)

**Śrīmati** Two sages both fell in love with this princess, and both asked her father for her hand, but neither sought the opinion of the girl herself. Śrīmati's father told the two sages that choice of a husband was the girl's, not his, and that they could present themselves to her at court. Both sages then prayed to the god Vishnu that the other would be given the face of a monkey, and when they turned up to present their suites to the princess, she found herself confronted by two men with identical monkey faces. Instead, she turned to a beautiful young man standing nearby and put a garland around his neck, indicating her desire to wed him. The young man was the god Vishnu in disguise. (Pattanaik)

**Subbu-Khai-Thung** The Dhammai people gave this name to the earth goddess, born from the primal mother Zumiang-Nui. Right after her birth, Subbu-Khai-Thung

disappeared into the mouth of a worm, but her mother killed the worm and found her alive within his belly, from which the earth was formed for the goddess to rule. Subbu-Khai-Thung bore a series of children in twin pairs, boy and girl; each of them mated to give birth to earth's creatures. (Elwin 1958)

**Sujātā** Buddhist legend tells of this woman, daughter of a village chief, who was inspired by a vision to offer food to the future Buddha. Her vision instructed her to wish for his enlightenment as she offered him a dish of the freshest rice cooked in the cream of a thousand cows. She prepared the meal, then strewed flowers about and sent for the future Buddha. She offered the sweet rice in a golden bowl, which she gave to him, despite the fact that as an ascetic he had no need of such an object. This gift sustained him for his final meditations. Shortly afterwards, he attained enlightenment. (Young 2004; Zimmer 1955)

**Sukanyā** When this princess accidentally blinded a sage by poking a twig into the ants' nest where he was performing austerities, her father bore the brunt of the resultant curse. To avoid his fate, the king gave Sukanyā ("lovely maiden") to the sage. Blind and cranky, the man was not a good husband for a princess, but she was a loyal wife nonetheless. When twin trickster gods tried to seduce her, she refused; when they transformed her husband into their likeness, she was still able to see his identity and avoid being compromised. Impressed with her loyalty, the gods left Sukanyā's husband with his new youthful beauty so that they could enjoy true marital pleasure. (O'Flaherty 1985; Pattanaik)

**Surabhi** One of the beings who emerged from the ocean as it was churned in primordial times was the cow Surabhi, goddess of plenty, called the "fragrant one." She forthwith produced all luxury—and a daughter, **Nirriti** ("misery") as well. She was also said to have been one of the multiple forms of the god Brahma's only daughter, **Shatarupa**, and the ancestral mother of all domesticated animals. (Daniélou 1964; Kinsley 1986; Pattanaik)

**Sūryā** The feminine sun has a name almost identical to that of her father, Surya. Little myth exists about her, although she is referred to as the consort of the twin gods, the *Āśvins*. Her father intended to marry her to the moon god, Soma. A race was held, with Sūryā as the prize, and the twins were the winners. Thereafter, she rode with them in their chariots through the sky. Some texts describe her as the consort of Soma and the embodiment of sacrifices to him. (Kinsley 1986)

**Swasthānī** In Nepal, this goddess is widely honored as a representative of ideal womanhood and a protector of the home. A form of **Devī**, she is described in the *Swasthānī Vrata Katha*, a sacred text that may have come from India. Invoked through fasting by women only, Swasthānī especially concerns herself with women's marital happiness. (Bennett)

**Taleju** The Nepalese guardian goddess was a virginal woman who, insulted when the king cast lustful eyes at her, left his borders unguarded to teach him a lesson. He sued for mercy, and she agreed to return so long as he worshiped her thereafter in the form of a girl who had not yet menstruated, on the belief that this would keep him from having lascivious thoughts. Such girls, called Kumari, are said as well to incarnate the goddess **Durgā**. (Pattanaik)

**Tambaku** The spirit of the tobacco plant was once a yearning young woman who was unfortunately so unattractive that she could not attract the attention of a lover. Her father offered a huge dowry, but no one came forward to marry Tambaku, who soon died of loneliness. She was reincarnated as the tobacco plant, which all men love. (Pattanaik)

**Tansirjo** The sun goddess of the Bondo of Orissa was the sister of the moon goddess, Jonmati. They shared a house together with their children, giving equally to all even though Tansirjo had more children. But one day Jonmati grew angry that she was feeding more of her sister's children than her own, and so she hid hers in her hair. When Tansirjo came in and asked where the children were, Jonmati said they had been bothering her so she ate them. This made Tansirjo aware of how annoying her own children were, so she ate them too. When Jonmati's children came out of their mother's hair, Tansirjo wished she could have her own back. But she could not bring them out of her stomach. Furious, she cast Jonmati out and remains hot with anger to this day. But Jonmati, though she has her children with her, misses her sister and is very cold for that reason. (Elwin 1954)

**Tārā** Tārā is one of the 10 Mahāvidyās in Hindu Tantric practice. She is second in importance only to **Kālī**, although tradition stresses that all goddesses are ultimately one. Blue-skinned and wearing bone jewelry, she sits on a corpse, blazing like a pyre. This frightening Tārā can show her kindly side, for she carries the dead on a ghostly boat rowed by beautiful singing boat-women. She always aids her devotees when they are in need. Yet even to this kindly goddess, blood sacrifices of goats are offered daily.

Tārā is more fully a Buddhist figure. Although Buddhist cosmology is nontheistic, most figures of devotion are male, with Tārā an important exception. Because of the



**Vajra-Tārā.** Found in both Hinduism and Buddhism, the figure of kindly Tārā represents mercy and generosity. Said to have been born when a being, about to attain enlightenment, shed a tear over humanity's travails, Tārā appears in many forms including this three-headed one that can be seen in India's Delhi National Museum.

multiplicity of her images, she can be seen as a collective figure, incorporating many features of divine females in the Indian landscape. The earliest textual references refer to her as “lady twilight,” a *bodhisattva* second only to Avalokitesvara, of whom she is sometimes said to be the female aspect. She came into being when Avalokitesvara, about to reach nirvana, heard the cries of humans whom he would leave behind. He shed a single tear, and that tear was Tārā.

In Tibet, where she is honored among all classes and sects, Tārā appears as an ancestral mother. In her incarnation as a sexually eager rock ogress she mated with a monkey (Avalokitesvara in disguise), from whom the royal family was born. This “White Tārā” or Drolkar is a generous maternal figure with a personal relationship with each worshiper. She offers protection and relief from life’s difficulties, for she is the epitome of compassion. Calling out to Tārā or reciting her mantra provides protection from enemies and dangers.

Yet this Tārā too has a fierce side, depicted wearing a crown of skulls and a necklace of decapitated heads. She dances, attired in a tiger’s skin and baring her fangs, to drive away a devotee’s enemies or to conquer evil spirits. Dressed in red garments, devotees can embody the powerful energy of the goddess after reciting her mantra 10,000 times. (Beyer; Bühnemann; Galland; Kinsley 1997; Shaw 2006)

**Tārāka** This woman’s father was a yakṣha (see **Yakṣī**); as befits a nature spirit, she was wild and energetic. When a sage killed the father of her sons, Tārāka and her children demanded retribution. Instead, they were turned into demons who devoured everything with fire. The sons abandoned their mother, who created deserts out of fertile land until killed by Rama, an incarnation of Vishnu.

Tārāka was also the name of a woman who attracted the eye of the moon god Soma. He kidnapped her from her husband, a sage, and refused to release her. During the war that followed, Soma was vanquished and Tārāka returned to her husband. There she was found to be pregnant, with the father of the child unknown. When the child was born, he was a beautiful infant, but the humiliated Tārāka hid him in a clump of grass and only under threat of a curse presented him to Soma; the child became the planet Mercury. (Gupta, Śakti 1971; Narayan)

**Tārī** In Bengal, the sun god propositioned this earth goddess. She refused him, so he created human women. But they took up the worship of the goddess, and the struggle between Tārī and the sun continues to this day. In the early 20th century it was estimated that as many as 150 people annually were sacrificed to this goddess. Brought in or captured from another village, the victims were treated with respect and kept well fed, often for years, before being sacrificed. The victims were drugged and told the story of how the goddess required blood in order to be fruitful, before being attacked by the entire village, armed with sharp knives. The body parts and blood were used for rituals of restoration of the goddess’s fertility. When the sacrifices were outlawed, animals were substituted. (Berkson; Zimmer 1968)

**Thabaton** In Manipur, there was once a beautiful girl whose seven brothers went in search of fortune, leaving her unprotected. A tiger demon heard about her lonely

situation and came to abduct and eat her. As Thabaton was dragged through the jungle, she ripped tiny pieces of her garments and left them to mark her trail. It was many years later that the brothers finally returned and, finding the house empty, set off in search of her and, following her fabric trail, were able to locate and free her. But she wanted revenge on the tiger abductor, who had made her his sexual slave, and so she asked the brothers to wait until she did so. She pretended that all was as usual but asked the tiger for the skin of an old woman, which he brought from his next killing expedition. When he was due home the next time, Thabaton set the hut on fire and made sure the burning skin was clearly visible. When the tiger came home, he thought the skin was Thabaton and leaped into the fire and died. (Beck et al.)

**Trikalā** When Brahma noticed Shiva making love with **Pārvatī**, he imagined Vishnu and, from the unified power of three gods, Trikalā burst forth. She had three distinct bodies, one beautiful and creative, known as Brahmī; one red and abundant, called Vaiṣṇavī; and one black destroyer named Raudrī. This goddess was later assimilated to **Prakṛti**. (Pintchman 1994)

**Tripura-sundarī** Third in importance among Tantric goddesses (after **Kālī** and **Tārā**), Tripura-sundarī is depicted as a shining goddess holding weapons in her four hands, covered with jewels and crowned with the moon, seated on a throne composed of the corpses of gods. She lives high in the Himalayas, where sages and heavenly women worship her. There she decks her crystal body with tigers' skins and drapes snakes around her neck.

Tripura-sundarī serves as a protective goddess, for her myth describes how she helped the gods when the demon Bhaṇḍa attacked. She led an army of goddesses against the demon, who laughed at the sight of female warriors under the banner of the goddess, here called Lalitā. But the demon judged wrongly, for Tripura-sundarī cast forth innumerable deities from her body (including **Durgā**), who fought the corresponding demons that Bhaṇḍa produced. The goddess prevailed, in the process re-enlivening the god of love, Kāmā, who had been killed before the battle started.

In addition to her role as a protector, Tripura-sundarī is also associated with passion; she is the wife of Kāmā or a form of **Rātri**. Many titles describe her as passionate and beautiful, filled with erotic desire. Even heavenly beings were aroused by her, for which reason a young woman often stood for the goddess in worship ceremonies, receiving honors to each part of her body.

Her voluptuous nature notwithstanding, Tripura-sundarī has a fierce side, whence she wears skulls and has a long, protruding tongue. A myth explains this apparent contradiction: Kālī was once insulted by Shiva and withdrew to practice asceticism. When a sage convinced Kālī to return, she did not realize that her austerities had turned her complexion white and, seeing her own reflection in Shiva's heart, thought it was another goddess and became enraged. Shiva told her that she was now light and beautiful and would henceforth be known under the name Tripura-sundarī, "beautiful in three worlds." A temple in Varanasi, dedicated to Tripura-sundarī under the name of Rājarājeśvarī, is so suffused with her presence that no one can spend a night there without going mad. (Dempsey; Kinsley 1997; Warrier)



**Tushu** This Bengali agricultural goddess is honored in public and private worship. Her popular annual festival marks completion of harvest. Songs are sung each night asking that the goddess will be generous with her gifts during the following year. Some songs describe Tushu as a village woman who protects fields against invaders, although more typically she is a divine woman whose domain includes rivers, important for irrigation, as well as the fertile fields. (McDaniel 2003)

**Umā** When **Pārvatī** mastered the ascetic arts, her skin became golden, after which she was called Umā, “light” or “beauty.” (This form of Pārvatī is also associated with the golden **Gaurī**.) She was the reincarnation of **Satī** and awaited marriage with her intended mate, Shiva. It had been predicted that their child would kill the demon who threatened the gods. Shiva did not wish to marry, so Kāmā, god of love, was sent to inspire him. But when he shot his arrow toward the god, Shiva deflected it, killing Kāmā with his own darts. Umā, stricken with guilt, collapsed. Dressed as a hermit, she began to meditate upon Shiva, thus attracting his attentions. As part of his courtship, Shiva restored Kāmā to life. As prophesied, the child of Shiva and Umā grew up to free the gods from the demon who threatened them. (Beswick; Daniélou 1964, 2007; Ions; Kinsley 1986; McDermott; O’Flaherty 1975; Sharma; Zimmer 1946)

**Urvaṣī** Most famous of the **Apsarās** was Urvaṣī (a name sometimes used of **Uṣas**). She was born when a sage surrounded by tempting Apsarās slapped his thigh, causing energy to fly out in female form. Like others of her kind, she was both lustful and loving. Once she consented to live with a human king but told him that human nakedness disgusted her. He promised she would never see him unclothed. But he broke his promise, and when Urvaṣī caught one glimpse of his naked body, she instantly fled. Unhappy without her, the king grew more and more wicked until his subjects revolted and killed him. Other tales about the couple say that when he promised to become an erotic singer-dancer, Urvaṣī agreed to return; that Urvaṣī either complained or bragged about his making love to her three times a day; and that Urvaṣī taught him the secrets of immortality. Occasionally, Urvaṣī appears in animal form, as a waterbird or a mare. (Daniélou 1964; Dimmitt and van Buitenen; Ions; O’Flaherty 1980; Zimmer 1946)

**Uṣas** The dawn goddess, popular in Vedic times, stayed eternally young but made men grow older. She appeared each morning, driving a chariot drawn by red horses and throwing off her bright red blouse to reveal shining breasts that filled the heavens with splendor. The sun relentlessly pursues Uṣas across the sky, intent upon ravishing her. Another myth says that Brahma, her father, turned the beautiful Uṣas into a deer and raped her in that form.

A goddess who can appear as singular, dual or multiple, Uṣas’s name (“burning”) emphasizes her solar connections. She is sometimes said to be the sister of **Rātri**, both of them daughters of the sky. Her connection with the chief of the **Apsarās**, **Urvaṣī**, is unclear. (Beswick; Daniélou 1964; Ions; Kinsley 1986; Thadani; Zimmer 1955)

**Uṣṇīṣavijayā** Buddhist goddess of long life, Uṣṇīṣavijayā assures worshipers that they will not have an untimely death or be reborn in a lower form of existence. She emerged



when the Buddha, asked by Indra to have mercy upon a carefree prince who would be reborn as a dog, promised that those who honored Uṣṇīṣavijayā would not be subjected to such difficulties. She extends life by purifying karma and bringing the devotee to a state of blissful surrender. She also permits entrance to the paradise where residents can move towards enlightenment without descending into the human realm. (Shaw 2006)

**Uyugsum** Among the mountain people called the Koraput, this mythic woman cut her own daughter's throat in order to have something to eat. But the child's soul blazed out through the wound and threatened the world with a holocaust. To avoid the world's destruction, Uyugsum swallowed her daughter. She then rose up from the earth into the sky where, lit from within by her daughter, she is now the sun. (Obeyesekere 1984)

**Vāc** Goddess of eloquence, Vāc can appear as a form of **Sarasvatī** or a separate divinity. Called the mother of the Vedas, she is associated with the important symbol of abundance, the cow. One text says that she is present in all worship. She is also the mother of the celestial nymphs, the **Apsarās**. She is envisioned as a queenly woman, wearing gold, graceful of movement, benevolent and generous. (Daniélou 1964; Kinsley 1986)

**Vaiṣṇo Devī** This Kashmiri goddess is honored with pilgrimages to a vagina-like cave at the end of a nine-mile trail up a 6000-foot peak called Trikuta. Attested to a millennium ago, the pilgrimages draw as many as 5 million people who make the difficult ascent each year. Manifest in three rounded boulders, she is **Devī**, who reincarnated in a young girl in order to vanquish demons. (Pintchman 2001)

**Vajrayoginī** The supreme goddess in Tantric Buddhism, Vajrayoginī offers an image of the highest enlightenment. With bright red skin, she holds a bowl made from a skull and brandishes a crescent-bladed knife. Like other **Ḍākinīs**, Vajrayoginī represents liberation from human life. As an instructor in Tantric mysteries, Vajrayoginī (“indestructible practitioner of yoga”) asks male adepts to serve women as embodiments of herself, offering food, flowers, and sexual satisfaction. Although early scholars of Tantra envisioned the sexual practices as debasing to women, recent feminist scholarship points to figures such as Vajrayoginī as evidence of a contrary tendency.

Because of her Buddha nature, Vajrayoginī is three-bodied: her “truth body” is pure radiance, while another “bliss body” allows her to frolic through time and space, and her “transformation body” is tangible to gross human senses. She mostly stays in her bliss body, enjoying the pleasures of her paradisiacal home, surrounded by **Dakinis**. The rainbow is her signature, for her adepts dissolve into rainbows at death. (Hiltebeitel and Erndl; Shaw 2006)

**Valḷi** In Tamil-speaking areas of southern India, the romance of Valḷi and her consort, the handsome god Murugan, has been a popular part of religious life for more than a century. Valḷi's mother was a doe who was raped by a male hermit. The baby was rejected by her deer mother, who nonetheless made a hole to protect the infant, who

was shortly found by a group of hunters. Brought up as the adoptive child of the hunters' king, Vaḷḷi attracted the eye of a wandering god, who drew her picture and took it to his lord, Murugan. Infatuated with the wild woman, Murugan approached her directly, inviting her to have sex with him, but to no avail. So he came in the form of a merchant, offering bangles, only to be rejected once again. Finally, he came disguised as a sage and, when Vaḷḷi once again spurned him, created the illusion of a stampeding elephant to drive the girl into his protective arms. Then he turned into the handsome god he truly was and won her love. Though Vaḷḷi's family resisted, they were ultimately won over by the god, and the wedding was celebrated with great joy. (Handelman; Hawley and Wulff 1982; Jayakar)

**Vasudhārā** The Buddhist goddess of wealth is similar to Hindu **Lakṣmī**, with whom she shares many iconographic traits. Indeed, her name is also sometimes used as a title of Lakṣmī. In Nepal, Vasudhārā ("stream of good fortune" or "fortune-giver") is a popular goddess invoked for riches including healthy children as well as productive fields. (Dehejia; Larson et al.; Shaw 2006)

**Vindhyavāsini** In the mountains that bear her name, and in a village named for her, the local goddess Vindhyavāsini has her temple complex. Although brought into the Hindu pantheon through the story of how she saved the baby Krishna from death by incarnating herself as a substitute victim (see **Nidrā** and **Yasoda** for more of this story), she existed earlier as a local goddess, perhaps one of the most ancient divinities of the region. Pilgrimages to her temple remain popular, as does Tantric meditation upon her yantra or sacred image. (Hawley and Wulff 1996)

**Virāj** This name for the great creatrix appears in Vedic literature, including the *Rg Veda*, where she and her consort simultaneously gave birth to each other. In other texts she is described as dual-sexed, while yet others give her a masculine gender. In all cases, she appears as the creative power of the universe and the foundation upon which the material world depends. (Pintchman 1994)

**Vrinda** The loyal wife of a demon king, Vrinda's virtue protected her husband from the gods' attempts to slay him. To negate her power, the gods sent Vishnu to her, disguised as her husband. When Vrinda was unable to see that she was not making love chastely to her husband, she left him unprotected, and he was killed by Shiva. Another story told of Vrinda was that she was such a loyal wife that she performed intense austerities in order to gain the boom of immortality for her husband, but he only grew arrogant with her protection and went to war against the gods themselves, even lusting after the goddess Pārvatī in the presence of Vrinda. Vrinda, however, remained loyal and prayed to Vishnu to aid her husband. But the god, more loyal to the other gods than to his devotee, sent her a corpse disguised to look like her husband, over which she began to mourn. Thus tricked into revealing that she was not perfect in her wifely devotion, Vrinda learned that her mistake had indeed cost her husband his life. Furious, she cursed the gods, who turned her into the plant called Tulsi ("the incomparable

one,” Indian basil), still revered as a holy plant in India today. (Babb; Gupta, Śakti 1971; McDaniel 2003; Pattanaik)

**Yakṣī** These voluptuous figures, found in 3rd–1st centuries BCE sculptures, may descend from indigenous woodland love goddesses, as they are not part of the Vedic pantheon. Associated with trees and water, thus known as nature goddesses, the heavy-breasted Yakṣī are depicted surrounded by animals and, occasionally, male figures called Yakṣa. The Yakṣī were irresistibly beautiful, so much so that the love god never bothered to use his arrows when they were around. Their bodies were a perfect blend of slenderness and plumpness, for they had massive breasts, hips, and thighs but girlish waists. Artists’ representations of them show them scantily attired but wearing magnificent jewelry. Often, to emphasize their connection with nature, a Yakṣī stands beneath a tree, fondling its branches. She may also point to her barely covered genitals, emphasizing her connection with fertility.

Occasionally the Yakṣī appears terrifying, luring men to their deaths with unearthly beauty. Such Yakṣī enjoy men’s sexual favors before eating them, but even demonic Yakṣī could be converted. Although the figures are well attested in Hindu contexts, they also appear in Buddhism, where the Yakṣī appear on temples and shrines as sculptured maidens who protect the inner sanctum. The Yakṣī **Hārītī** was singled out for worship and became the focus of a major devotional cultus in Indian Buddhism and became established across the Asian world. Finally, the Yakṣī are honored with devotional practices as Jaina goddesses. (Cort; Dehejia; Subramaniam; Ions; Shaw 2006; Young 2004)

**Yamī** This primal goddess asked her brother, Yama, to inseminate her so the world might be populated. But he refused, preferring to die childless than to engage in a befouling sin. He became lord of the dead, while Yamī became the night goddess Yamini. In some versions, Yamini was created to soften the pain of rejection that Yamī felt. Some sources said that Yamī mated with her brother, producing the human race before Yama grew doubtful as to the sanctity of their behavior. In Bengal, she is identified with the goddess Yamunā, divinity of the Jumna river. (Bonnefoy; Daniélou 1964; Ions; Pattanaik; Zimmer 1955)

**Yasoda** Foster mother of Krishna, Yasoda was pregnant with **Nidrā** when the also-pregnant **Devaki** was threatened with the death of her child. The two fetuses were switched, so that imprisoned Devaki gave birth to the goddess, who flew away, while Yasoda gave birth to Krishna, safe from the threatening king Kāṁsa. Thereafter, Yasoda raised Krishna as her own son. A cowherd or **Gopi**, Yasoda brought her friends to admire the growing child, and when he was grown they danced to his flute. (Ions)

**Yeshey Tsogyal** “Bliss Queen” is the title of this Tibetan goddess born in warrior form from a lotus blossom. She is a figure of enlightenment among Tibetan Buddhists, seen as a form of **Tārā** or **Vajrayoginī**. She was incarnated in the 8th century as a Tibetan queen, who was fully enlightened but chose to appear as a young girl. She showed herself to be a spiritual adept from childhood, despite persecution. Once

installed as queen, Yeshey Tsogyal taught spiritual discipline through her words and her extreme asceticism. She is depicted as red and naked, revealing her vulva for her devotees' edification. (Atkinson et al.)

**Yoginī** These spirits play important parts in Tantric practice, whose female adepts are called by this name. Like **Apsarās**, these celestial beings can fly or transform themselves into birds. They are envisioned as full-breasted, small-waisted women; sometimes they have animal heads. Their special role is to protect Tantric practitioners, but they also punish those who are initiated but lapse in their practices (as such, they are equated with **D,ākinīs**). Yoginīs may appear as mother, sister, or wife, or the same Yoginī may take these different roles with a practitioner. (Hiltebeitel and Erndl; McDaniel 2004; Stoddard)

**Yuk** The primal mother Yuk of northeast India was a lightning goddess who helped create life. Because earth was bare, she revealed her genitals, and her sun-bright vulva flashed lightning across the sky. This brought rain, which nourished the earth so that plants burst forth. (Elwin 1958)

# SOUTHEAST ASIA AND INDONESIA

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## SOUTHEAST ASIAN AND INDONESIAN PANTHEON

Ande Gadih *Minangkabau*; rice.

Antaboga. *See Nyi Pohaci*

Aponibolinayen *Philippines*; sky, moon.

**Arrang Dibatu**

**Au-Co**

Bangur *Sikanese*; earth

Ba Nguyet *Vietnam*; moon.

Ba Set *Vietnam*; lightning.

Bela. *See Tagbudangan*

Bési Paré *Malaysia*; rice.

Bia. *See Tuglibung*

Bidasari *Malaysia*; good fortune.

**Bimān Chan**

**Buan**

**Bugan**

**Bundo Kanduang**

Calon Arang. *See Rangda*

Dagáu *Philippines*; snake.

Darago *Philippines*; volcano.

**Dayang Raca**

**Dewi Nawang Sasih**

**Dewi Shri**

Dwata. *See Maguayean*

**Giri Devī**

Giriputri. *See Dewi Shri*

**Hainuwele**

**Ibu Pretiwi**

Ibu Semangat Padi *Malaysia*; rice.

**Inada Samadulo Hosi**

Iné Paré *Malaysia*; rice.

Kakana *Thai*; demon.

**Kaṇṇagi**

**Kinnari**

**Kiri Amma**

**Kling**

Lakarol. *See Maguayean*

Lakbang. *See Maguayean*

**Lieu Hahn**

Lieui *Cambodia*; ancestral mother.

Madavi. *See Pattinī*

**Mae Khau**

**Mae Phosop**

**Maguayean**

Mandiana. *See Tagbudangan*

Mando *Thai*; frog.

Manimekhala *Thai*; ocean.

**Māyāri**

**Mba Kuy**

**Mebū'yan**

Mona. *See Tuglibung*

**My Chau**

**Nachailiavang**

**Nawangwulan**

**Ntsee Tyee**

Nyai Blorong. *See Nyai Lara Kidul*

**Nyai Lara Kidul**

**Nyi Pohaci**

**Pattinī**

Paula. *See Tagbudangan*

Po Ino Nogar *Cambodian; rice.*

Puti Bungsu. *See Bundo Kanduang*

Puti Lenggo Geni. *See Bundo Kanduang*

Quan Am Tong Tu. *See Thi Kinh*

**Rangda**

Ratu Kidul. *See Nyai Lara Kidul*

Retna Dumilah. *See Dewi Shri*

Roro Kidul. *See Nyai Lara Kidul*

**Royot**

Samanakha *Thai; slander.*

Sanghid. *See Tagbudangan*

Sangiang Serri *Celebes; rice.*

Saweigh. *See Maguayean*

Si Boro Ihat Manisia. *See Si Boru Deak Parujar*

**Si Boru Deak Parujar**

Sicauay. *See Maguayean*

Sorbayati. *See Si Boru Deak Parujar*

**Tagbudangan**

Tala. *See Buan*

Tara Bumi *Minanao; earth.*

Thai-Bach Tinh-Quan *My Chau*

**Thi Kinh**

**Thusandi**

Tisnawati. *See Dewi Shri*

Trung-Nhi. *See Trung-Trac*

**Trung-Trac**

**Tuglibung**

**Upu Nusa**

Wasundari. *See Ibu Pretiwi*

Yang Hrai. *See Yang Sri*

Yang Hri. *See Yang Sri*

**Ya-hsang Ka-shi**

**Yang Sri**

Yugang. *See Tagbudangan*

**Arrang Dibatu** Born from rock, this primordial woman of the southern Celebes sent her husband west, looking for gold with which to create the world. From flakes of its ore, he created animals, plants, and humans. (Bonnefoy)



**Rangda.** In Bali, Indonesia, shadow puppets are a popular form of entertainment, with many plays based upon mythic narratives. A common demon in these plays is Rangda the sorceress, who derives from a pre-Hindu indigenous goddess.

**Au-Co** In Vietnam, Au-Co was an immortal queen who lived in the mountains while her consort, the dragon king, lived in the sea. Au-Co gave birth to a sticky pouch from which a 100 eggs emerged. She divided the hatched offspring, leaving half with their father and taking others to land; thus some people live in the highlands, others by the sea. (Bonnefoy; Nguyen)

**Bimān Chan** This Cambodian heroine was taken into the sky by the moon god Chan, who had fallen in

love with her. When his other wives grew envious of her, Bimān Chan begged the moon to lift her higher, but the strong wind there blew her to pieces. Her head fell to earth, but her body remained aloft. (Bonnefooy)

**Buan** Buan, moon goddess of the Philippines, had as many children as the sun. Because the sun's were brighter, Buan feared for her duller children. So she convinced the sun god to kill his children, promising she would kill hers too. But she hid hers behind clouds, from which they occasionally emerge to shine as stars. The angry, grieving sun everlastingly chases Buan across the sky. But she stays far away, guided by her eldest daughter Tala, the morning and evening star. In a similar story from the Luzon people, in which the moon's name was Mayari, the goddess fought with her brother, the sun god Apolaqui, over who would rule the world. He put out one of her eyes to make her light fainter than his, and henceforth she ruled the night. (Rahmann)

**Bugan** The first woman of the Ifugao of the Philippines wanted her daughter Bugan and her son Wigan to populate the world, but they were resistant to leaving home. So she sent them into the forest, then unleashed a flood. Floating on the raging waters, Bugan and her brother found houses, pigs, cats, chickens, dogs, and jars full of food. They soon had a nice homestead, but populating the land was difficult because, as brother and sister, the couple was forbidden to have sexual relations. But one night Wigan impregnated his sleeping sister. The taboo against brother-sister incest was reimposed as soon as the earth was populated. (Bonnefooy; Demetrio)

**Bundo Kanduang** In Sumatra, Bundo Kanduang is the earth goddess, a primary divinity whose worship continues despite Islamic influence. Bundo Kanduang was created simultaneously with the visible world and ruled from the traditional Minangkabau capital, Pagarrujung, with her son Duang Tuanku. An important if complicated legend revolves around the betrothals of Bundo Kanduang's daughter, Puti Lenggo Geni, and her niece, Puti Bungsu; the latter was kidnapped at her wedding, which resulted in the goddess leaving this world. But Bundo Kanduang still inhabits human women, and occasionally men. Believers seek the reincarnated goddess's counsel and offer her homage. The goddess's name designates women who hold leadership positions in the region, where inheritance passes through the mother's line. (Abdullah; Blackwood; Frey; Kartomi)

**Dayang Raca** When a flood exterminated all humanity except for this woman, she was unable to continue the race without divine help. So the spirit of fire impregnated her with a child that had half a body. In despair at his deformity, the boy tried to drown himself, but was saved by the spirit woman Indai Jebua, who gave him the world's first rice. (Bonnefooy)

**Dewi Nawang Sasih** Among the Sundanese, this celestial nymph taught people how to cook rice. The recipe was easy: place one grain in a pot, and wait until it divided into a meal. People lived in comfort for many generations, because the men always obeyed Dewi Nawang's one commandment: never touch a woman's cooking implement. But



a king deliberately broke the goddess's rule, and Dewi Nawang Sasih departed from earth. Since that time, it takes a bunch of rice to fill a pot, because the grains no longer divide and reproduce. This goddess may be a form of **Dewi Shri**. (Bonnefoy)

**Dewi Shri** The rice goddess of Bali and Java, goddess of the underworld and the moon, has both earthly and celestial powers. Although she rules life through her control of foodstuffs, she also controls death. Most importantly, she controls the monsoons, and thus the time of rice ripening. Under the name of Dewi Danuh, this goddess is a divinity of the ocean. As benevolent Giriputri, she rules the sacred mountain where water is drawn to bless the harvest.

Her myth begins when the god Batārā Guru created a girl named Retna Dumilah. Then, although she was his daughter, he desired her. When the god was unrelenting in his demands for intercourse, Retna agreed they could wed if he provided her with a gamelan that played itself, a dress that never wore out, and a food that sustained without filling. Batārā Guru sent his messenger, Kula Gumarang, to earth to locate these magical items, and there he met Dewi Shri, with whom he became infatuated. But she would not break her vow to her husband, and changed Kula Gumarang into a wild boar because of his insolence.

Meanwhile, in heaven, Batārā Guru grew impatient. He raped Retna Dumilah, who died of shame. Although Batārā Guru was struck with remorse, the god of death assured him he would never see his beloved again. However, if he buried her with the proper ceremonies, a boon would come. Batārā Guru followed these instructions, and Retna's body dissolved into many kinds of food—coconuts, mangos, beets, and, most importantly, rice.

Meanwhile Dewi Shri, still pursued by the transformed wild boar, begged heaven to let her dissolve into food; she did so, but the rice that came forth from her body required constant irrigation while that which Retna produced could be dry-farmed. Kula Gumarang changed himself into pests that devour rice crops. Dewi Shri, in retaliation, transformed herself into a snake that eats such vermin.

In the Sundanese version of the story, Shri was hatched from an egg presented to the god Guru. Suckled by Guru's wife, the child grew to be a beautiful woman upon whom the god's desires became fixated. Because of the threat of incest, the other gods killed the maiden, and when her body decomposed, useful plants including bamboo and rice sprang from it. The gods named her Nji Pohatji Sangjang Sri.

In one of her incarnations, Dewi Shri was the incestuous woman Sri, who with her brother Sadana created all beings, who emerged from their decaying bodies after they died for their illicit passion. Sadana and Sri fled separately from the palace of their father, who had promised Sri in marriage to an ogre king. The ogre and his demon army pursued her as she tried to reunite with her brother. Finding the devout woman Patani, Sri asked for an inner room in which to rest and then told ritual secrets to the woman.

In Bali, where Batari Sri Dwi is an important and popular divinity, she is the focus of an annual wedding ritual at the primary temple, Pura Bessakih. Simpler rituals in rice fields are also part of Balinese religious life. As goddess of the irrigation systems, she is known as Dewi Danu, although that name is also used of a goddess who emerged

from an erupting volcano and now rules Mount Batur. Her consort is Dewu Agung, the god who rules another volcano, Mount Agung. Dewi Danu is honored at an important temple where 24 priests and a single priestess serve. A high priest, selected while in trance by the priestess, incarnates the goddess.

Despite the influences of Islam and Christianity, devotion to Dewi Shri continues. Emerging rice stalks are covered with a fertilizing liquid invented by Dewi Shri, and irrigation water includes bits of chalk as offerings to her. (Bonnefoy; Headley; van der Kroef; Wessing 1990)

**Giri Devī** In rituals associated with **Pattinī** of Sri Lanka, Giri Devī is invoked in dances and songs. She was the sister of an evil demon who indulged an illicit desire for her. This grew to be an obsession, until at Giri Devī's wedding, the demon went crazy and ate all the food, then kidnapped her. Taking her to the forest, he had intercourse with her and kept her prisoner. Giri Devī hanged herself from a tree. The demon never recovered from his loss, although Pattini kept him from devastating the world. (Obeyesekere 1984)

**Hainuwele** On the island of Ceram, this supernatural woman was born when the hunter Ameta pursued a wild pig into a deep pool. The animal drowned, and Ameta tried to drag out the body for meat. What emerged was an unknown fruit stabbed with a boar's tusk. Ameta planted the fruit, which flowered within a week. From one of its leaves, fertilized by Ameta's blood, Hainuwele was born. Like the coconut tree from which she sprang, Hainuwele grew swiftly. She showed miraculous powers, offering people jewels and other treasures that she made from her own excrement.

Then, less than a week after her birth, she led the world's first ritual dance. Around and around the people spiraled, as Hainuwele began to sink into the ground. The people danced over her head until Hainuwele was buried. Hers was the world's first death. From her place of descent grew food plants, never before seen on earth. Furious at the death of the young girl, the village's woman chief, Mulua Satine, left and became queen of the dead. Both she and Hainuwele are considered aspects of the goddess whose other aspects are Mulua Dapie Bulane and Tapele, moon and earth goddesses, respectively. (Bonnefoy; Jenson)

**Ibu Pretiwi** This Balinese goddess of abundance, often assimilated into the better-known **Dewi Shri**, represents birth, fertility, and germination. Flower, fruit, and rice-dough sculptures are offered to her on altars erected in fields or rice-paddies. Ibu Pretiwi's boar son was the force of vegetation that sprang from the fertile earth. She is honored at plowing and planting. Dedication of new buildings and naming of children also fall under her power. Her consort is the sky god, with whom she is called upon to witness religious rituals and thus promote their efficacy. (Brinkgreve)

**Inada Samadulo Hosi** The mother goddess of southern Nias was born from rock and produced twin gods with no father. She then gave birth to a dual-sexed sister-wife, Silewe Nazarata, who could be both kindly and threatening. (Bonnefoy)

**Kaṇṇagi** Among the 40 million Tamils in southern India, Sri Lanka, and Malaysia, this is the name of the ancestral mother, symbol of their ethnic unity and ruler of the faithfulness of wives, important in patrilineal traditions. This emphasis on monogamous chastity in an ancestral mother is unusual, for such divinities often produce children through parthenogenesis or through multiple matings, so it is possible that Kaṇṇagi's myth once depicted her as engaging in less-than-chaste behavior that was later discouraged. Despite her importance as a symbol, little ritual activity is connected to Kaṇṇagi; temples devoted to her are rare. The epic of Sri Lanka, the *Cilappatikāram*, tells how Kaṇṇagi was transformed into the goddess **Pattinī**. Whether they were originally separate figures is unclear. (Kinsley 1986; Parthasarathy; Preston)

**Kinnarī** In Thailand, these bird-women descend to earth to dance and sing on the edges of lakes and in forest clearings. They sometimes meet and mate with human men, but such affairs are usually short-lived. In India, the Kinnarī were nymphs like **Apsaras** (see India). (Bonney; O'Flaherty 1985)

**Kiri Amma** Her name has several meanings—milk mother, wet nurse, and grandmother—all of which indicate her nurturing interest in the Sri Lankan people. Kiri Amma appears as a group of seven divinities but also in singular form. When a child falls ill, seven women dressed in white impersonate the goddess, arriving at the house with rice and cakes. A blessing from lactating women is especially effective in healing childhood diseases, for in such women the strength of this protective goddess is strongest. She may be an ancient goddess displaced by **Pattinī**, whose worship spread from South India. (Gombrich; Obeyesekere 1984)

**Kling** Among the tribal Indo-Chinese, this falcon goddess was the mother of many sons, who waged war using kites to which they tied themselves. Flying beneath their drifting kites, they attacked and conquered their enemies. (Bonney)

**Lieu Hahn** This Vietnamese goddess was sent into exile because she broke a wine cup in the home of her father, the Jade Emperor. She lived an unremarkable life, marrying and bearing a son, then dying when her exile was over. But after she returned to heaven, she was haunted by memories of life on earth. So she returned, clothing herself in the form of a beautiful flute player. She ran a teahouse that miraculously disappeared whenever she left it, then reappeared at her return. Lieu Hahn was often seen at secluded sites of natural beauty. Meanwhile, the husband of her first incarnation reincarnated as a great scholar, whom she married and with whom she lived another happy lifetime.

When she died, she ascended again to heaven but still wished to return to earth. In her third and final incarnation she became a village goddess. There she happily remained, caring for her people, until the 17th century, when an emperor ruled that she was a demon and destroyed her shrine. Infuriated, she afflicted men and animals with a fatal illness, until the emperor was forced to admit his error and rebuild her shrine. (Bonney)

**Mae Khau** This goddess of the Vietnamese Tai helps rice thrive. A planting ritual reinforces the connection of female fertility and food, for only a woman with many children can ceremoniously plant the first rice, from seeds that had been set aside during the previous harvest. (Hamilton)

**Mae Phosop** Thailand's most important goddess is the source of rice. When rice plants bloom, the goddess is envisioned as a nubile maiden awaiting conception. When rice grains appear, Mae Phosop is said to be pregnant. Offerings are made to her: oranges, for pregnant women like the fruit as an antidote to morning sickness; and powder and perfume, because pregnant women like to pamper themselves. Several plants are groomed as though they are women, their leaves combed back like hair. Combs, bananas, and sugarcane are offered to them.

In some places, the soul of Mae Phosop is bound to the ripening plants with small threads. At the conclusion of the ritual, boundary markers are set in place so that no one disturbs the goddess until her birth time arrives. Only women are permitted to perform Mae Phosop's rituals, for she hates men because she was threatened with rape, so she flew away and took rice with her. Only when people agreed to worship her in rituals in which only women participated was she satisfied and did she return.

Once the harvest has taken place and threshing is complete, the ritual called "calling the rice mother's soul" is celebrated. Set-aside stalks are ritually struck against the ground, releasing their seeds; these grains are used to bless the harvest before storing. The next morning, flowers and boiled chicken are offered to the goddess, and water is sprinkled on family members and cattle in her honor. (Hamilton)

**Maguayean** In the Philippines, the goddess of sea breezes fell in love with Captan, god of the winds from the land. Their courtship was fearsome as each tried to outdo the other. But when Captan proved himself the equal of Maguayean, they swept each other up and dived together into the ocean. Some versions of the story say that they had one child, a reed that broke in half to form the first people; the first woman was named Sicauiay. Other creation legends name the first woman as Dwata who lived with her twin sister Saweigh on an island the size of a hat, where no trees or grass grew until a bird brought a seed across the waters. Other names for the primal woman include Lakbang and Lakarol. (Demetrio)

**Māyāri** Among the Luzon of the Philippines, this moon goddess was the beloved daughter of the high god, sister to the sun. When the high god died, the sun decided to take all power. Māyāri opposed this, so he put out one of her eyes. Horrified at his behavior, he offered to share the world. Thus she rules at night with one eye, while he rules during the day. (Rahmann)

**Mba Kuy** The Dyaks of Borneo believe that food came to earth due to when Mba Kuy, threatened with marriage to a man she did not choose, tore out her uterus and threw it to earth, making herself barren. But she was so fertile that, even detached from the goddess's body, her womb brought forth rice and other grains for human consumption. (van der Kroef)

**Mebū'yan** The Bagobo of the Philippines say that this death goddess is covered with nipples, so that babies who died unweaned can be nursed. She tends them as though they were her own children and, when they reach the point where they no longer need her milk, she releases them to their ancestors, who feed them on rice. All spirits visit Mebū'yan on their way to the underworld, for she washes them free of their bodies; if she did not, bodies would reanimate themselves. (Benedict)

**My Chau** The coastal Vietnamese say that pearls were formed from the blood of this betrayed woman. She entered an arranged marriage with the son of a neighboring king who had been defeated by her own father. Without her knowing it, this had been done by magic, for her father had a bow that shot hundreds of arrows at once. My Chau's husband was superficially loving, but he harbored anger about his father's defeat, so when he discovered the secret of the bow, he set out to steal it and replace it with a replica. Having done so, he claimed to be homesick and, when My Chau encouraged him to visit his father, made her promise that if they were ever separated, she would pull feathers from her feather robe so that he could find her again.

He then went home and, with his aging father, launched an assault on My Chau's kingdom. To his horror, her father found his magical bow no longer worked, but his enemy seemed to have gained the power he once had. So he put My Chau on the back of his horse and fled. The loyal girl, however, marked their way with feathers, so that her husband could find and kill them. But once he had done so, the husband regretted his action and died of sorrow. Pearls, the Vietnamese say, were first formed from the blood of this betrayed wife.

Another story describes My Chau as a princess who causes the storms that rage from the ocean to the mountains—the result of competition between two divinities for the love of the princess. It began when Tan Vien, a destitute woodcutter, chopped down a particularly large tree. It took all day and the young man, exhausted from his labor and unable to continue in darkness, went home to sleep and dream of the income the huge tree would bring. But when he returned, the tree was standing again, fully restored to life. Once again, he cut it down; a second time, the tree was restored. When the same thing happened a third time, Tan Vien decided to cut down the tree but to remain with it through the night. At midnight, a beautiful fairy arrived. Thai-Bach Tinh-Quan set about restoring the tree to life, but when Tan Vien interrupted angrily, pointing out that she was taking his livelihood, the fairy explained that she loved to perch in the tree and so would exchange a magical wand for the tree's life.

With that wand, Tan Vien became a renowned healer, for anything he touched could come back to life. One victim who owed his life to Tan Vien was the son of the dragon king of the southern ocean, who was swimming as a fish when he was caught and killed. Recognizing the royal crest on the fish's head, Tan Vien restored him to life.

Although the prince pledged his gratitude, the friendship between him and the healer soon ended, because both fell in love with the lovely My Chau, whose father promised that the suitor who brought the most splendid gifts would have the girl's hand. Tan Vien lived nearby, so he was able to spread his splendid offerings before the king and gain My Chau's hand before the dragon prince even arrived. Ever since, they annual stage a combat over the girl, with the dragon prince tossing storms against

the mountains where Tan Vien and his bride live. Every year, however, the prince is defeated, and life resumes as it should.

**Nachailiavang** The matrilineal Ifaluk give this name to a creatrix. When her sister, Nachailiol, began to steal from her, Nachailiavang grew angry. Limes were disappearing from her tree, so Nachailiavang washed herself in her sister's watering hole. Their parents sided with Nachailiol and cut Nachailiavang's hair off. Furious, Nachailiavang left, taking her son with her. As she walked on top of the ocean's waves, she dropped sand from a coconut, creating islands and atolls. (Spiro)

**Nawangwulan** This Javanese swan maiden married a mortal. She made one rule: that he should not watch her while she made rice, because she had the power to feed her entire family on one grain. Unable to control himself, he observed her. Thereafter she had to hull each grain of rice separately and, finding this odious, Nawangwulan flew away. (Bonnefoy)

**Ntsee Tyee** Ntsee Tyee, primal woman of the Hmong, rose from a crack in the rocks with her consort, who brought a flower with him. At first they ate seeds from the flower to survive, but finally realized that the seeds were almost gone, so they planted the remaining ones. One stalk grew, and it was miraculous: corn and millet, on the same plant. As each kind of grain ripened, it spoke to Ntsee Tyee and Lou Tou, calling them "mother and father" and giving instructions as to how they were to be preserved. (Livo and Dia Cha)

**Nyai Lara Kidul** The primordial serpent of West Java, Nyai Lara Kidul lives beneath the waves in a golden palace whose courtyard is paved with jewels. An important indigenous goddess, she has been connected to Hindu **Durgā** and to Buddhist **Tārā**. **Dewi Shri** has been described as this goddess's positive side, while the temptress Nyai Blorong represents her negative aspects; in such interpretations, Nyai Lara Kidul is a multifaceted goddess whose power was divided among more specialized divinities.

On the southern coast of Java, where she is called Roro Kidul or Ratu Kidul, fisher folk are careful not to wear green garments near the ocean, so as not to offend this queen of the sea, who might dash their heads against rocks or change her current to endanger them. Fishermen worship Ratu Kidul, as do those who gather swallows' nests from the sides of sheer sea cliffs. In the 1500s, a king had intercourse with Ratu Kidul; only their descendents, members of the royal family, can see the goddess now. Festivals dedicated to her survive despite Islamicization of the region. (Brakel; Bonnefoy; Jordaen; Resink; Wessing 1988, 1997)

**Nyi Pohaci** This Sundanese rice goddess was daughter of the serpent goddess Antaboga. Her mother, afraid to lose her to marriage, gave her fruit from the tree of paradise to eat. But it was not enough to sustain her, and she wasted away. As her body decomposed, rice sprang forth from her eyes, bamboo from her thighs, and the coconut palm from her head. (Bonnefoy)



**Pattinī** The greatest goddess of Sri Lanka and of the Tamil people in Malaysia and southern India, one-breasted Pattinī is served by transvestite priests who enter a trance and engage in difficult ascetic practices. She is honored as the mother of all children, although her myth shows her as virginally pure. Pattinī is the only goddess known throughout the land, for others are restricted to specific localities. She is described in the epic poem called *Cilappatikāram*, “the epic of the silver anklet” (lost for several centuries and then rediscovered), as well as in rituals and folkways.

Pattinī appears in myth as an exemplary wife. Born miraculously from a mango and known during her lifetime as **Kaṇṇagi**, Pattinī married a merchant with whom she could not have intercourse. Her husband Kovalan left her for a prostitute, Madavi, on whom he squandered his fortune, returning home penniless to Pattinī, who was mired in poverty as an abandoned wife. But she gave him her precious silver anklet to sell in the marketplace. Unbeknownst to them, the queen’s identical bracelet had been stolen. When Pattinī’s luckless husband showed the bracelet to the jeweler, who was the real thief, the jeweler arranged to have him captured and executed for theft.

Pattinī went to the king to plead for her husband’s life. It was too late, for he was already dead. Pattinī tore off her left breast and threatened the king, then threw it at the city. It burst into flame, destroying everything but the body of her husband, whom Pattinī lovingly resurrected. Then she rose into the sky, transfigured into a goddess. Summer’s heat and drought are caused by her fury at her husband’s death. Cooling ceremonies include drinking sacred water in which an anklet has been dipped. (Gombrich; Obeyesekere 1981, 1984; Parthasarathy; Winslow)

**Rangda** Associated with **Durgā** (see India), said to have been Rangda’s teacher, Rangda is a folk-memory of a pre-Hindu goddess of Bali. Her legend says that she was the widow of a king who, because no one would marry their daughter because of Rangda’s reputation as a sorceress, tried to destroy the land. Her image in Balinese folk drama is almost indistinguishable from Durgā’s. (Brinkgreve; Preston)

**Royot** At the beginning of time, the universe was united and whole, and the gods walked on earth. But, say the Jarai, a young man accidentally drank a love potion intended for another man, which caused him to fall desperately in love with his sister Royot. She returned his love but died giving birth to their first child. The gods were so stricken by this tragedy that they turned the doomed lovers into boulders. Now humans no longer understand the language of animals or birds, for when Royot died, the universe was permanently torn apart. (Bonnefoy)

**Si Boru Deak Parujar** Among the Batak of Indonesia, this creatrix was born in the heavens with her sister, Sorbayati. Their parents arranged for Sorbayati, the older sister, to marry the lizard god, but at a dance party he revealed that he really preferred Si Boru Deak Parujar. Humiliated, Sorbayati threw herself off heaven’s balcony; her body disintegrated into bamboo and rattan. The bereaved sister then descended. Since she could not bring back her sister, Si Boru Deak Parujar created the earth on the back of a snake. Only after doing so would she agree to marry the lizard god, who was



transformed into a human at the wedding. From this union were born the first humans, including the first woman, Si Boru Ihat Manisia, and her twin brother. (Bonnefoy)

**Tagbudangan** This earth goddess of the Philippines marked the land. Where she urinated, grooves in the rock can be seen. She left her footprints on other rocks when unsuccessfully pursued by potential rapists. She dented a rock when she lay her newly shampooed hair on it. Consort of the culture hero Maka-andog, she appears under several names, although it is unclear whether several wives are intended. Because Maka-andog was notoriously unfaithful, his wife left him and returned to her woodland home. (Hart and Hart)

**Thi Kinh** Although famous for her beauty, the Vietnamese heroine Thi Kinh pledged to sacrifice her happiness to alleviate the pain of others. To further this, she married a poor and ugly man, with whom she had a peaceful if impoverished life. She treated her husband with the utmost tenderness, which led to difficulty, for as he slept one day, she saw a hair on his chin that he had missed while shaving. To spare him the embarrassment of discovering it, she took a pair of scissors to cut it. But at the moment she touched him, he jolted awake and stabbed himself against the scissors. He had been unable to believe his good luck in finding a beautiful wife, and now he imagined she had turned against him. He accused her of attempted murder, and the village turned against her. Recognizing there was no way to prove her innocence, Thi Kinh disguised herself as a man and entered a monastery.

A young woman worshiper fell in love with her. When Thi Kinh reminded the woman of the monk's vow of chastity, the girl's love turned to fury. When she bore a child to another man, she left it on the temple steps with a letter saying that Thi Kinh had impregnated her. Thi Kinh was called to defend herself. The baby began to cry, and she picked it up. This convinced the abbot that Thi Kinh was guilty, so she was expelled from the monastery. She spent the rest of her life supporting the child through begging until, near death from starvation, she returned to the monastery and told the truth to the senior monk. As she died, she left the child to the monastery's care. Thereafter, she was deified as Quan Am Tong Tu, "merciful protector of children," who is still honored in Vietnam, often seen as a form of the Chinese goddess of mercy, **Guan Yin**. (Boucher; Do Vang Ly)

**Thusandi** Among the Palaungs of Thailand, this primal serpent-woman was the ancestor of all people. She married a prince, by whom she bore three eggs. But her mate was called away and wrote her an explanation, enclosing a jewel to show his love. He entrusted the letter to parrots, who fell in with other parrots. While the messengers were playing, enemies of the couple found the abandoned letter and replaced the jewel with bird droppings. When the parrots finally delivered the letter, Thusandi was so furious that she threw two of her eggs into the river Irrawaddy; they floated downstream and hatched into royal beings. The third, she smashed against rocks; the bits became rubies, for which the region is still famous. (Scott)

**Trung-Trac** The rain goddesses of the Tonkin were originally warrior women who led a revolt against a tyrannical Chinese governor. The uprising was successful, and Trung-Trac, the elder sister, became queen while Trung-Nhi was honored as a war hero. The women were deified after death. (Scott)

**Tuglibung** Among the Bagobo, this primal woman was created already old, together with her spouse Tuglay. Because the sun hung too low in the sky, interfering with her housework, she demanded that it move to its present height. She also created everything in the world. (Benedict)

**Upu Nusa** The Molucca goddess Upu Nusa engendered the universe through her union with the sky god. Similar primordial goddesses found in the region are Tana Ekan (Lamaholot, eastern Flores islands) and Irik (Iban of Borneo). (Bonnefoy)

**Ya-hsang Ka-shi** The Wa people said that the water goddess Ya-hsang Ka-shi conceived after eating a gourd, whose seeds she sowed near a rock. Two enormous plants grew there, each bearing one gourd. Eating the gourd put the goddess into a state of sexual ecstasy, and she gave birth to a powerful tiger-eared daughter, Nang Pyek-kha Yek-khi. Ya-hsang Ka-shi gave the gourds to her daughter, telling her that only the man who could cut them open was worthy to be her husband. Ya-hsang Ka-shi began to age, but she lived long enough to give her consent for her daughter to marry a man who opened the gourds, setting loose animals and human beings. (Scott)

**Yang Sri** The toad goddess of the Senang people of Vietnam can bring or withhold rain. She was the wife of the thunder god; so, in times of drought, the Senang captured a toad and bound it, believing that the threat to his beloved would cause her husband to let the rains come. Yang Sri is also goddess of rice, because the outer husk of rice resembles a toad's skin. In winter, the thunder god sneaks away to visit his lover, the sea goddess. (Dang Nghiem Van)

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# JAPAN

Only one of the world's major religions is centered on a goddess: Shinto, which grew from the myths and rituals of several cultures, both indigenous and imported. An important influence on Japanese arts, culture, and philosophy for more than two thousand years, Shinto has always given prominence to goddesses, which are embodied in natural forces.

Japan's most ancient culture, the Jōmon, was based on a female divinity. Big-hipped and large-breasted goddess figurines, made from 11,000 to 300 BCE, have been found near or in graves, often broken, suggesting a ritual of release. Connection of the Jōmon culture with other peoples of Japan is unknown. Before 1500 BCE, the Ainu people lived throughout the archipelago, but later settlers drove the Ainu to the northern islands of Honshu and Hokkaido. The beliefs of other early people, such as those found in Okinawa, appear in vestigial form in Japanese myths. Both the Ainu and the Okinawans have traditions of female shamanism that can be found as well in the early Shinto era, when entranced priestesses conducted ceremonies and empresses sought counsel through trance before making political decisions.

Such shamanic queens were the norm through the era of the Yayoi (300 BCE–300 CE). Rice-farmers, the Yayoi crafted goddess images that were often accompanied by phallic stones. Ceremonial jewels, mirrors, and swords, which play a significant role in the mythology of the sun goddess, were introduced at this time. Then, in approximately the 4th century CE, Japan was overridden by a new culture. Horsemen from central Asia brought religious images of warriors and a peculiar stone tomb for their warlords. How these nomadic warriors were absorbed into Japanese culture is unclear, but two centuries later the ruler was male, although the primary divinity remained female.

After Buddhism became the land's official religion in 592 CE, earlier myths were nearly lost. But in 681, Heida-no-Are, a court woman of phenomenal memory, was assigned to memorize ancient tales. Thirty years later, empress Gemmyo assigned a



**Amaterasu.** A famous woodblock print by the 18th-century artist Utagawa Kunisada, in the collection of the Victoria and Albert Museum, shows the sun goddess Amaterasu emerging from a cave in which she had hidden herself after the storm god's assaults. Lured from her cave by a dancing shaman goddess, she saw her beauty in a mirror crafted for that purpose by the smith goddess. The story is the primary myth of Shinto, Japan's indigenous religion.

scribe to take down stories from the aging Heido. Called the *Kojiki*, these writings form the basis of Shinto beliefs. A few years later Gemmyo had additional material compiled from other sources. The *Nihongi* is an important source of information on Japanese mythology.

As the court became more Buddhist, some figures from that religion were brought into Japanese culture. Most were male, a change that diminished the mythic role of women. Yet Shinto continued to thrive, sufficiently influencing Buddhism that a nature-oriented Buddhism called Zen emerged. Even today, the distinction between Shinto and Zen Buddhism in Japan can be unclear, and many people practice both religions.

In 1868, Shinto became a state religion, its rituals and symbols used to enhance imperialism. This status formally ended when the 124th emperor of Japan was forced to renounce his claim of direct descent from the sun goddess in the treaty that ended World War II. Yet when Hirohito died in 1989, his son Akihito was installed with ceremonies that claimed he was the sun's descendent. For a decade, because the royal family had no sons, there was debate about changing the rules so that Princess Aiko

would be permitted to inherit the throne. But in 2006, a son was born to the royal house, and discussion ceased.

If the prospect of a restoration of the traditional role of empress has faded, women have once again begun to practice as Shinto priests. While today only a small minority of Shinto priests are women, that number is increasing and represents the first strong female presence in the Shinto hierarchy in centuries. At a lower level, local shrines increasingly permit girls to carry portable shrines during festivals, a privilege formerly limited to boys.

Contemporary Japan is a predominantly secular land, despite which Shinto beliefs continue to be recognized. However, little national attention is paid to the goddess culture of the land. Outside Japan, there is little awareness either of the importance of goddesses in Shinto or of its environmental and ecological aspects, although *miko* (“shrine maidens”) appear in anime comics as feisty heroines.

## JAPANESE AND AINU PANTHEON

Akuru-hime *Japanese; light.*

### **Amaterasu**

Amaterasu-omikami. *See Amaterasu*

Amë-Nö-Uzume-Nö-Mikötö. *See*

*Uzume.*

Ape Huchi. *See Kamui Fuchi*

### **Benten**

### **Chup-Kamui**

### **Fuji**

Fuji-yama. *See Fuji*

### **Hani Yama Hine**

Hasinau-uk Kamui *Ainu; hunting.*

### **Himiko**

Huchi. *See Kamui Fuchi.*

Iha-Naga. *See*

*Kono-Hana-Sakuya-Hime*

### **Ikutamayorihime**

### **Inari**

### **Ishikore-Dome**

### **Izanami**

Jingo. *See Jingu*

### **Jingu**

Juni-sama. *See Yamanokami*

### **Kaguya-Hime**

### **Kamui Fuchi**

Kana-Yama bi me No Kami. *See Hani*

*Yama Hine*

Kannon *Chinese; see Guanyin*

Kishimogin *Japanese; devouring mother.*

### **Kono-Hana-Sakuya-Hime**

Kwannon *Chinese; see Guanyin.*

Mi Tsu Ha No me No Kami. *See Hani Yama Hine*

Mitsu-ha-no-me. *See Izanami*

Naru-Kami *Japanese; thunder.*

Natsutakatsuki-no-Kami *Japanese; high summer.*

Niman-katke-mat *Japanese; boats.*

Nitsu Ha No Me. *See Hani Yama Hine*

O-hirume. *See Amaterasu*

Okinaga-Tarashi-Hime no Mikoto. *See*

### **Jingu**

Ootonobe-no-Kami *Japanese; fecundity.*

Opo-Gë-Tu-Pime. *See Uke-Mochi*

### **Otohome**

Pimiko. *See Himiko*

Pinne-ai-hashinau-koro-oina-mat. *See*

### **Chup-Kamui**

Rafu-Sen *Japanese; plum-blossoms.*

Ryūgū Otohome. *See Otohome*

Sakuya-Hime. *See*

*Kono-Hana-Sakuya-Hime*

Seiobo *Chinese; see Hsi Wang Mu*

Sengen Sama. *See*

*Kono-Hana-Sakuya-Hime*

Shi-nish-e-ran-mat *Ainu*; *clouds*.  
 Suhijini-no-Kami *Japanese*; *primal earth*.

**Sukunabikona**

Tamamo-no-Maye. *See Inari*

**Tamaya-gozen**

**Tamayorihime**

Tokap Chup Kamui. *See Chup-Kamui*

**Toyota-Mahime**

Töyö-Tama-Bime. *See Toyota-Mahime*

Toyo-tama-hime. *See Toyota-Mahime*

**Toyo-Uke**

Toyouke. *See Toyo-Uke*

**Tsuru**

**Turesh**

**Uke-Mochi**

Ukë-Möti-nö-kamī. *See Uke-Mochi*

Unchi Ahci. *See Kamui Fuchi*

Unci Ahci. *See Kamui Fuchi*

Unci Kamui. *See Kamui Fuchi*

Urara-e-ran-mat *Ainu*; *fog*.

**Uzume**

**Yachimata-hime**

Yama-hime. *See Yamanokami*

**Yamanokami**

Yama no Kami. *See Yamanokami*

Yamanoshinbo. *See Yamanokami*

Yama no Shinbonbo. *See Yamanokami*

Yama-onna. *See Yamanokami*

Yamato-Hime-no-Miko. *See Amaterasu*

Yamauba. *See Yamanokami*

Yama-uba. *See Yamanokami*

Yaya-Zakura *Japanese*; *cherry trees*.

**Amaterasu** In simple shrines, notable for architectural purity and for the central mirror that represents her, Amaterasu (“great shining heaven”) is honored as the ruler of all deities, the guardian of Japan’s people, and the symbol of Japanese cultural unity. Her emblem, the rising sun, flies on Japan’s flag, and the emperor is called her direct descendent.

Japanese scriptures say that Amaterasu was brought into being after **Izanami** died from the effort of giving birth. Her husband Izanagi washed his left eye, from which the sun goddess was born. Giving her a sacred necklace, Izanagi also granted her power over land and sea, while to his son Susano-o, Izanagi gave oceans and storms. Not long after, Amaterasu and her brother quarreled. Two reasons are given: either he murdered their sister **Uke-Mochi**, or he engaged in deliberately provocative acts against Amaterasu herself.

Amaterasu did not trust Susano-o because of his excesses and constant shouting. One day he came to heaven, claiming he meant no harm. Amaterasu was wary, but he promised that he would undergo a ritual test to prove his goodwill. They agreed to give birth magically. Amaterasu broke Susano-o’s sword with her teeth, spitting out three pieces that became goddesses. They were called Susano-o’s children because they were born from his sword. Then Susano-o asked Amaterasu for her jewels. She gave him five, which he cracked open and made into gods, considered Amaterasu’s children.

Susano-o grew wild with excitement and tore through the world destroying everything in his path. He piled feces under Amaterasu’s throne, then he stole into her quarters and threw a flayed horse through the roof of her weaving room. This startled one of Amaterasu’s companions, who pricked herself and died.

This was too much for the sun goddess, who shut herself up in a cave. The world was plunged into blackness. The 8 million *kami* pleaded to her that she should return,



but no response came forth. Then **Uzume** turned over a washtub, climbed on top, and began dancing and singing. Soon the dance became a striptease. When she had shed her clothes, Uzume began dancing so wildly that the gods and goddesses shouted with delight. Amaterasu asked what was going on. Someone answered that they had found a better goddess than the sun. Provoked, Amaterasu opened the door of her cave.

The gods and goddesses had installed a mirror outside of the cave. Amaterasu, who had never seen her own beauty, was dazzled. While she stood there, other divinities tied the door open. Thus the sun returned to warm the weary earth. Mounted again on her heavenly throne, Amaterasu threw Susano-o out of heaven. Then she and her son Oshi-ho-mimi rid the island land of restless spirits, after which they handed over the sacred implements of rulership—the mirror, jewels, and sword—to her grandson, ancestor of the imperial clan.

Ameratsu's shrine is still a center of religious activity. At the Great Shrine at Ise, a complex of buildings rises in the center of a 13,600-acre forest where trees are raised for reconstruction of shrine buildings. The two major sacred buildings are rebuilt every 20 years, the new buildings exactly duplicating the old. Pilgrimage to Ise is the highlight of the Shinto believer's life, with some six million making the journey annually. Favored times are September and April. Other major pilgrimage times are mid-February and mid-June, while minor festivals in January and March draw thousands. (Aston; Blacker 1982; Kirkland; Littleton; Matsumae 1978, 1980; Miller 1984, 1987; Monaghan; Phillipi; Piggot; Takeshi 1978)

**Benten** Among the seven divinities of good luck, only one was a goddess: Benten, who brought inspiration and talent, wealth and romance. Benten was a dragon woman who swam with a retinue of white snakes. She protected her devotees from earthquakes by mating with monstrous snakes that thrashed about beneath the land. She could also appear as a lovely human woman; in this form she was usually portrayed mounted on a dragon. (Littleton)

**Chup-Kamui** Among the Ainu, the sun was the highest divinity, greeted each morning as though she were a living being. People were careful not to step into sunbeams flooding toward the stove, for that was the sun's greeting to the hearth goddess **Kamui Fuchi**. Originally Chup-Kamui was the moon, but after watching illicit moonlit trysts, the modest girl asked the male sun to trade places. Thereafter she rose each day from the mouth of a devil who spent the night trying to eat her. A magical helper shoved crows and foxes into the devil's mouth while Chup-Kamui escaped. Hence these animals were sacred to the Ainu. During an eclipse, the Ainu dipped willow branches in water and cast droplets upward while calling out prayers. As soon as the eclipse passed, they drank sake to celebrate their escape from darkness. (Batchelor 1892, 1894, 1971; Kuzono.)

**Fuji** Now the highest mountain in Japan, Fuji was once the same height as nearby Mount Hakusan, wherein a god lived. A dispute arose between them about which was taller. The Amida Buddha connected the two peaks with a long pipe and poured water in one end. Unfortunately for the proud goddess, water fell on her head. But

her humiliation did not last long, for Fuji immediately struck Hakusan eight blows, creating the eight peaks of today's mountain. The name of the mountain may derive from **Kamui Fuchi**. (Batchelor 1892, 1971; Kuzono)

**Hani Yama Hine** One of the children of the primal goddess **Izanami**, Hani Yama Hine was the “pottery-clay mountain princess,” one of the earliest-born of the second generation of divinities. Her sisters, also minor divinities born of the blood and feces of Izanami's birth-giving, included Kana-Yama bi me No Kami, the princess of metal mountain; Mi Tsu Ha No me No Kami, the archer-water goddess; and Nitsu Ha No Me, the elephant girl. These deities were connected to the transformation of nature's materials into things useful for humanity. (Fairchild)

**Himiko** Japan's first ruler was Himiko, who lived in the 3rd century CE. Called “the great child of the sun,” this empress never left her palace and governed through messages received in trance. She lived to an advanced age but never married, living in seclusion with thousands of maiden attendants. During her long reign, Japan was at peace, both within itself and with its neighbors. Her name may be a title held by shaman queens who used trance to govern. There is evidence that these women ruled in tandem with their brothers, suggesting a matrilineal social organization. (Blacker 1982; Littleton; Piggot)

**Ikutamayorihime** From the *Kojiki*—Japanese myths and folktales compiled in the 6th century by the noblewoman Hiedo-no-Ame—comes the story of this woman who conceived a child from a mysterious unknown lover. To discover the man's identity, Ikutamayorihime's parents told her to sew a thin, long hemp thread to him to follow it after his departure. The next morning, the thread was not found to go under the door but through the keyhole, from which it led straight to the snake god's shrine on Mt. Miwa. After this miraculous conception, the child in Ikutamayorihime's womb became the ancestor of the shrine's priestly family. In this tale scholars have detected a vestigial matrilineal tradition of an ancestral human mother and an unearthly father. (Blacker 1982)

**Inari** One-third of all Shinto shrines are dedicated to this goddess of rice. At tens of thousands of Inari shrines, fox sculptures indicate the goddess's animal form, for she appears in the form of a vixen, often seen in rice fields in spring. Although some Buddhist traditions consider Inari to be male, Shinto tradition claims her as feminine, and women religious leaders invoke her with groups of women who make pilgrimages to Inari shrines.

The rice goddess was honored on each farm because she brought fertility and prosperity, for which reason she has been connected with the food goddess **Toyo-Uke**. Inari took human form to sleep with men, who had excellent crops as a result. One of these men realized he was sleeping with the goddess when he saw a furry red tail sticking out from beneath the blankets. He said nothing, and she rewarded his discretion by causing his rice to grow upside down, thus bearing a full harvest that was exempt from the rice tax. (Blacker 1982; Hamilton; Opler and Hashima.)

**Ishikore-Dome** This smith goddess created the first mirror, which saved the world from darkness. Three times she tried, while **Amaterasu** hid herself in the Sky-Rock--Cave, and twice she failed to create a perfect reflection of the sun's beauty. But she succeeded on the third try, after which her mirror became a sacred relic, held in the Imperial Shrine at Ise. Each of the more than 90,000 Shinto shrines across Japan preserves a mirror in its sanctuary. (Wheeler)

**Izanami** Before this world, there was only oil and slime, which slowly congealed into Izanami, the inviting woman, and her consort Izanagi, the inviting man. Standing on the rainbow, they stirred chaos with a spear until matter formed. Placing this island on the oily sea, they descended to populate the earth.

But they did not know how until they saw two wagtail ducks mating. Then Izanami gave birth to the islands of Japan, to water, and to animals. Last to be born was fire, which exploded from Izanami's body, leaving her retching and bleeding. From her excretions, new creatures sprang up. The water goddess Mitsu-ha-no-me was born from her urine; the earth goddess Hani-yama-hime, from her excrement.

Izanami died and traveled to the underworld. Desperate without her, Izanagi traveled there to beg her to return. She had already established herself in the world of death and refused, but she suggested that he ask the lord of death for her release. Izanami also warned him not to enter the palace.

Izanagi approached the dark building. He took a broken comb and broke off its last tooth. Lighting it, he looked inside, where the body of Izanami was decomposing. Her spirit attacked him, humiliated at being seen that way; she drove him from the underworld and, as they parted, claimed his actions constituted divorce. Some say that Izanami rules still as queen of death. She is also described as an earth goddess, honored in musical ceremonies and flower offerings. (Aston; Blacker 1982; Bonnefoy; Holtom; Murakami; Phillipi; Wheeler)

**Jingu** This Japanese warrior queen remained pregnant for three years, rather than stop her war on Korea to give birth to her son. Jingu devastated three Korean kingdoms; some credit not her battle prowess but her supernatural control of the tides for the victory. Once, when her consort expressed doubt as to the accuracy of her shamanic predictions, Jingu killed him with a gesture. (Aston; Blacker 1982)

**Kaguya-Hime** When she incarnated on earth, the spirit-woman Kaguya-Hime was the most beautiful child ever known. Despite this, her human parents abandoned her. An old farmer found her and raised her tenderly. When she had grown into the lovely maiden her early beauty had promised, Kaguya-Hime attracted the emperor's eye. They were married, but after some time she revealed her celestial origin and told him she needed to return home. Before she rose into the sky, Kaguya-Hime gave her love a mirror into which, whenever he wanted to see her, he could gaze, a motif that connects her with the most important Shinto divinity, the sun goddess **Amaterasu**. The emperor pined away, eventually climbing Mt. **Fuji** in order to be closer to his heavenly love. He died there of grief. (Katz; McAlpine and McAlpine; Tyler)

**Kamui Fuchi** The most important Ainu goddess was a matron of great age and stature charged with protecting humans from disease and with judging them after death. Ainu shamans served Kamui Fuchi in a night ritual lit by the hearth-fire. The hearth was a microcosm of the universe, the fire a living goddess. To the accompaniment of drums, the shaman placed herbs on the fire to create fragrant smoke, then asked Kamui Fuchito to help sick family members. When the shaman spoke again, it was in Kamui Fuchi's voice, diagnosing the illness and giving instructions for its cure. (Baba; Batchelor 1892, 1971; Munro; Ohnuki-Tierney)

**Kono-Hana-Sakuya-Hime** The Japanese cherry tree goddess was younger sister of the rock goddess Iha-Naga. Both desired the man Ninigi, who chose the younger goddess. Iha-Naga cursed their children with lives short as a blossom, while hers would have lived as long as the rocks. Kono-Hana gave birth nine months after marriage. As she swelled, her new husband began to suspect she had conceived before they met. Insulted, Kono-Hana built a magic house that, when labor began, she set afire, saying any children born who were not Ninigi's would die in the blaze. Triplets were born, all safe, disproving the man's doubts. As the same story was told of Sengen Sama, a goddess of Mt. **Fuji**, it is probable that Kono-Hana was the same goddess under a different name. (Taryo)

**Otohome** The adventurer Urashima, rescued by a turtle when his ship sank, was brought to the dragon queen Otohome, who endowed her new lover with valuable gifts. Time passed quickly, more quickly than Urashima knew. Finally he grew homesick for his family and for earthly life. Otohome agreed to let him go, giving him a small box with the requirement that he never open it.

When Urashima reached home, he found the faces and names unfamiliar. Puzzled, he found an ancient resident who recognized the name of his family, and learned he had been gone for hundreds of years. Sadly, the young man sat down and, forgetting his promise, opened the little box. Out swept the years he had lived with Otohome. Surrounding him like smoke, they withered his body, and he fell into dust.

In recent years, a woman named Fujita Himiko announced herself as the reborn Otohome. From a shrine near Kyoto, she serves as a shaman, bearing the goddess's name. The reborn goddess has announced that humanity suffers from the same delusions as Urashima, because societies fail to recognize the power of women. (Kawai; Shillony)

**Sukunabikona** This heroine appeared to the creator and hero Okuninushi. From the mysterious otherworld of Tokoyo no Kuni, the land beyond the sea, Sukunabikona arrived on a flying boat, wearing wings that made her look either like a great feathered bird or like a butterfly. She helped the hero create the land, then departed as mysteriously as she had come. (Bonnefof)

**Tamaya-gozen** This mythic ancestor guides blind women shamans on the island of Honshu. Tamaya-gozen fell in love with a magical stallion, Sedan-kurige. The two married happily, but Tamaya-gozen's father became enraged that his daughter had

made such an unlikely marriage. So he killed the stallion and flayed it. But the flayed hide wrapped itself around Tamaya-gozen and the pair flew off to heaven, dropping silkworms as they descended. This was the first shamanic ascent to the heavens; thus Tamaya-gozen was adopted as an image of the shaman woman. (Miller 1993)

**Tamayorihime** Like the similar heroine Seyadatarahime, Tamayorihime was a young woman who became ancestor to an important family after mating with an otherworldly creature. He came under cover of darkness, but not seeing her lover did not disturb the girl until she became pregnant. Then, to discover his identity, she sewed a long hemp thread to his hem, and, next morning, followed it to a dark cave. At its mouth she called out for her lover to show his face. “You would burst with fright,” a deep voice answered from the earth’s center. Unafraid, she continued to make her demand until he appeared, a scaly monster with a needle stuck in its throat. Tamayorihime fainted, but lived to bear the great warrior Daida. The heroine’s name, meaning a woman (*hime*) possessed (*yor*) by a god (*tama*), may have been a title borne by the shamans called *miko*. (Blacker 1982)

**Toyota-Mahime** This goddess married a mortal, setting a condition on their happiness: that he should never look upon her in childbed. Then she hid in a hut thatched with cormorant feathers. Her mate, unable to contain his curiosity, peered inside to see Toyota slithering around in her serpent form. Discovering his betrayal, she retreated to the ocean and forever closed the door joining her realm to his. (Blacker 1982; Mackenzie; Phillipi)

**Toyo-Uke** A food goddess whose gold-filigree shrine stands at the great shrine of Ise, Toyo-Uke may be an early sun goddess whose worship was made secondary to that of the powerful **Amaterasu**. (Fairchild; Littleton; Ross)

**Tsuru** When Japan lived under the rule of shaman queens, this woman offered herself as a human sacrifice in the building of a dyke against a raging flood in Oita prefecture. Buried alive in the river, she successfully diverted the waters so that the village was safe. She may have been a *miko*, or shaman, for there is a tradition—the *hito-bashira* or “human pillar” tales—that only such women could hold back ravaging floodwaters, provided they were willing to lay down their lives. In some interpretations, this “death” was metaphoric and meant retirement to an ascetic life in the shrine. Tsuru was worshiped at the Aibara shrine near the site of her sacrifice. (Blacker 1982)

**Turesh** The Ainu remembered a golden age when humans did not have to work for a living, for the god Okikurumi caught fish in the celestial sea and sent them down in baskets with the goddess Turesh. There was a single law in this paradise: no Ainu should ask their benefactress’s name or seek to discover her appearance. One Ainu was curious and grabbed the ministering hand as it set food upon his table, pulling into the house a squirming sea monster. Since that time the Ainu have had to struggle for food. (Chamberlin)

**Uke-Mochi** Japan's food goddess had a peculiar way of providing for the world's needs: she vomited. When she faced the land, rice poured from her mouth. Facing the sea, she regurgitated fish. Looking to the mountains, she vomited game creatures. Unfortunately, she set her table this way when the violent Susano-o was visiting her. It disgusted him, so he killed her. Her body, falling to earth, dissolved into food: cattle from her head, silkworms from her eyebrows, rice plants from her belly. (Aston; Phillipi)

**Uzume** When **Amaterasu** hid in a cave, Uzume ("sky-frightening-woman") lured her out with a merry mockery of shamanic ritual. Tying her sleeves above her elbows with moss cords and fastening bells around her wrists, she danced on an overturned tub before the heavenly Sky-Rock-Cave. Tapping out a rhythm with her feet, she exposed her breasts and then her genitals. Her striptease caused the myriad gods and goddesses to clap and laugh, an uproar that finally brought the curious sun back to warm the earth.

Uzume is credited with being the first shaman, called *miko* or *sarume* in ancient Japan. Early shamans were queens like **Himiko**, but later they were princesses and commoners. Some Japanese women today, especially those in Okinawa and the surrounding islands, practice shamanic divination. These women often practice a combination of verbal and movement magic called *chinkonsai*, of which Uzume's performance before the Sky-Rock-Cave was the original. Such magic was employed during eclipses and at funerals, suggesting a parallel between the sun's disappearance and death. A dance called Kagura, part of Shinto ritual, enacts Uzume's dance. (Averbuch; Miller 1993; Wheeler)

**Yachimata-hime** The guardian of travelers always traveled with her consort, Yachiamata-hiko, the two being known as Chimata-no-kami, the "road folk spirits." With their help, travelers could avoid ghosts, demons, and other specters that haunted the roadways. (Ross)

**Yamanokami** This shape-shifting mountain goddess can appear as any kind of animal or dragon. She can also double herself into two people with red faces. In human form, she is often a young woman, friendly to humans. But she can also become an old woman, Yamauba, whose mouth covers her face.

A goddess of wilderness, she brings good luck to hunters and woodsmen who attend to her rites and punishes those who do not. One-legged and one-eyed, she protects women in childbed. As a seasonal goddess, she annually gives birth to 12 children, the year's months, for which she is called Juni-sama. She is also called Yamanoshinbo, "mountain-mother."

Devotion to this goddess appears ancient, but as Japan becomes more crowded, little wilderness is left for Yamanokami. Known throughout Japan, her cult is now restricted to mountain areas where woodcutters and hunters honor her. (Blacker 1996; Hori; Kawai; Schattschneider)

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# THE PACIFIC ISLANDS

Scattered across the Pacific Ocean are thousands of islands and atolls that were beacons for early migrants. Beginning some 22,000 years ago, people who relied on fishing, hunting, and gathering populated Australia, New Guinea, and parts of Melanesia. Perhaps 17,000 years later came other settlers, bringing a farming culture. Descendants of these two cultures spread across the region, with migration continuing to at least 1000 CE, when New Zealand was settled.

Because of the distance between culture centers, Pacific mythology has no centralized or hierarchical framework. Innumerable divinities, sometimes known only on a single atoll, are found. Despite this complexity, Pacific myths have similarities, including the importance of an ancestral mother-creatrix. This goddess moves between earth, underworld, and heaven; she changes from bird or animal, or even vegetable or mineral, to human shape. The earth is typically a goddess; often sun and moon are goddesses as well. Finally, goddesses connected with the realm of the dead are common.

Not all Pacific Islands are small; Australia is a continent that presents a different picture than the generally lush Pacific Islands. At European contact, some 550 cultural groups existed there, mostly seminomadic groups, each occupying a limited region. As few as a million people populated Australia, where the difficult terrain could not support a huge population. By contrast, rainforested New Guinea boasts both a large population and impressive cultural density. Almost a quarter of the earth's languages are compressed into the island's territory. The western portion belongs to Indonesia (see Southeast Asia), while the eastern part, called Papua New Guinea, is home to some 850 distinct cultural groups.

Less than half the size of New Guinea, the islands of New Zealand were populated a thousand years ago by migrants from central Polynesia, who created a rich culture. With the arrival of Europeans in 1840, the Māori began the process of transcribing their myths and sacred histories. Through these Māori myths, scholars have learned much about the religion of Polynesia.



**Māori Ancestor.** From the Auckland Institute and Museum in New Zealand House comes this image of the Polynesian earth goddess Papa. Because she lay in perpetual intercourse with her consort, the sky god Rangi, leaving no room between them, their children forcibly separated the deities. This image of Papa dates from the mid-nineteenth century.

The remaining Pacific cultures are divided into Micronesian, Melanesian, and Polynesian. Micronesia (“tiny islands”) extends over a vast area of the western Pacific and includes Guam, the Marshall Islands, and the Federated States of Micronesia. In addition to New Guinea, Melanesia (“dark islands,” for its dark-skinned residents) includes the Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, and Fiji. Finally, the “many islands” of Polynesia stretch across the central Pacific and include Samoa, Tahiti, and the Hawai’ian islands; the New Zealand Māori descend from Polynesians and are often counted as part of that cultural group.

The Pacific region provides several important religious concepts, especially those of “totem” and “taboo.” The first term refers to a belief that human families are descended from other beings—most often animals, but occasionally reptiles, insects, or plants. Typically a person would not eat such relatives, although religious ritual might call for such a communion. “Taboo,” meaning a religious prohibition, is the Tongan word introduced into English by the sailing Captain James Cook in 1777. Both terms are used casually, sometimes with secular connotations, but retain their religious definitions in scholarly writing.

The most significant Australian religious concept is that of “The Dreaming,” a space-time reality wherein creation is continuous and divinity still walks the

earth. The Dreaming exists simultaneously with our world, yet is unreachable in ordinary consciousness. Into this fertile, powerful Dreaming, humans can venture through mystical states and ritual, as well as when they are unconscious. Religious leaders adept at making the transition from Dreaming to ordinary consciousness use this talent in healing their communities.

The land actively participates in Dreaming, being a sacred place wherein creative acts occur continuously. It is humanity’s duty to be aware of this sacredness and to mark those creative acts. Thus “walkabout,” the tradition of walking the land and marking its “songlines” with ritual words and prayers, is an important action to

traditional Australian peoples. Through these actions, Dreamtime is strengthened, and humanity is strengthened as a result.

The role of women is vital in this ongoing endeavor. When early European researchers wrote about Australian religion, cultural biases became evident. Because traditional Australian society is divided into male and female spheres, male researchers, unable to gather information about women's role in religion, assumed that there was none. Woman was declared "profane," while men were "sacred." But when women researchers began to gather information from aboriginal communities, the existence of women's rituals and their importance to social continuity were realized.

Although much of the blame for this decades-long derogation of the values of women to Australian traditional society must rest with biased researchers, the secrecy in which rituals are conducted is also a factor. Men in a community might be unaware of the ritual workings of the women within it. "Sacred" equals "secret" in Australian religion. The conveyance of spiritual and religious information took place in carefully structured settings at specific locations and times. Nothing was written down; myths and their meanings were conveyed orally, often in songs.

Indigenous religions continue to be practiced across the Pacific, although monotheistic religions discourage native practices, leading to syncretism or secrecy. In addition, the ongoing effects of colonization impact indigenous residents. In some areas, notably in Hawai'i, indigenous religions have been connected to movements for native rights and/or environmental concerns. Knowledge of indigenous Pacific religions by non-native people is rare, although the region's art has drawn collectors from around the world. As much of that art, like the complex and evocative paintings of Australia, is based in religion and myth, such art draws the attention of outsiders to native traditions.

## PACIFIC ISLANDS PANTHEON

Abere *Papua New Guinea; wild woman, seductress.*

Ala-muki. *See Mo-o-inanea*

Araanaia. *See Riina*

Ariki *Polynesia; stars.*

Aroonoona *Austral Islands; guardian.*

**Atanua**

**Aukam**

Butailfáde. *See Dogai I*

**Dogai I**

**Enda Semangko**

Eram *Papua New Guinea; sun.*

Fakahotu. *See Papa*

**Fu'uña**

Gíze. *See Dogai I*

Gooleho. *See Hikule'o*

Gufa *Papua New Guinea; moon.*

Hakahotu. *See Papa*

Hana. *See Honabe*

**Haumapuhia**

**Haumea**

Havealolofonua. *See Hikule'o*

Have Hikule'o. *See Hikule'o*

Hekeheke-i-papa. *See Pokoharua-te-po*

Higgolayo. *See Hikule'o*

**Hi'iaka**

**Hikule'o**

**Hina**

Hinaereeremonoi. *See Hina*

Hinakuluiau *Hawai'ian; rain.*

Hina-Titama. *See Hina*

**Hinauri**

Hine. *See Hina*

Hinekura. *See Hina*

**Hine-Marama**

Hine-nui-te-Po. *See Hina*

**Hine-pokohu-rangi**

Hine-tangiwai. *See Poutini*

**Hit**

**Honabe**

**Ho'ohoku-i-ka-lani**

**Hopoe**

Hotu-papa. *See Pokoharua-te-po*

Huli-honua *Māori*; *earth*.

Ia Kupia *Tolai*; *volcano*.

Ina. *See Hina*

Iro Lei. *See Qatgoro*

Iro Quatgoro. *See Qatgoro*

Iro Ul. *See Qatgoro*

Iro Vigale. *See Qatgoro*

**Jari**

**Jina**

**Jugumishanta**

Ka Ahu Pahau. *See Kaahu-pahua*

**Kaahu-pahua**

Kahoupokane. *See Poliahu*

**Kalaipahoa**

Kapo. *See Kalaipahoa*

Kasudara. *See Jina*

**Kelea**

Ke-ola-hu-honua *Hawai'i*; *primal woman*.

Kepáde. *See Dogai I*

Ketaunapíti. *See Dogai I*

Kihawahine. *See Mo-o-inanea*

**Kio**

**Koevasi**

Kowára. *See Dogai I*

Kuahupaha. *See Kaahu-pahua*

**Kura**

**La'ila'a**

**Laka**

Lalo-honua *Marqueses*; *earth*.

**Latmikaik**

**Leutogi**

Li mauí tukituki *New Hebrides*; *moon*.

Ligoapup *Micronesia*; *creatrix*.

**Lilavatu**

Lilinoe. *See Poliahu*

Liomamar. *See Lorop*

**Lorop**

Lua-vai *Samoa*; *fresh water*.

Mafuike. *See Mahui-iki*

**Mahora-nui-a-rangi**

**Mahui-iki**

Ma-ri-riko *Māori*; *ancestral mother*.

Matakiate *Pukupuka*; *healing*.

Mau-ola. *See Mo-o-inanea*

**Meanderi**

Mekélpal. *See Dogai I*

**Miru**

Moa'ri *New Guinea*; *stone*.

**Mo-o-inanea**

Mortlock. *See Lorop*

**Muriranaga**

Namaka. *See Pele*

Na-maka-o-ka-hai *Hawai'i*; *ocean*.

**Nevinbimbaau**

**Niwareka**

Nomoi. *See Lorop*

Nuakea *Hawai'ian*; *prophecy*.

Oopera. *See Opiira*

**Opiira**

**Pani**

**Papa**

**Pare**

**Pele**

Pelehonuamea. *See Pele*

Pítan. *See Dogai I*

**Pokoharua-te-po**

**Poliahu**

**Poutini**

Pu. *See Kalaipahoa*

Punga *Māori*; *insects*.

**Putawi**

**Qatgoro**

Raronaia. *See Riina*

Raukata-mea. *See Raukata-uri*

**Raukata-uri**

**Riina**

Roi. *See Kio*

**Rona**

Ruahine-mata-morari. *See* **Whaitiri**

Samúnu. *See* **Dogai I**

**Sina**

Tagisomenaja *New Guinea; evening star.*

**Tahia**

**Taranga**

**Taua**

Táugin. *See* **Dogai I**

Te Mohine-Tikoropunga. *See* **Kio**

Te-ata-tuhi *Polynesia; dawn.*

Tofol *Micronesia; mountain.*

Toririhnan *New Caledonia; storms.*

**Touiafutuna**

**Tuli**

Tu-metua. *See* **Var-ma-te-takere**

Tumuteanoao. *See* **Var-ma-te-takere**

**Ubu**

**Var-ma-te-takere**

Vari-ma-te-takere. *See* **Var-ma-te-takere**

Vina. *See* **Jina**

Wahini-Hai *Polynesia; demon mother.*

Waiau. *See* **Poliahu.**

Wai-wa Tiwi; *primal woman.*

**Waliporlimia**

**Walutahanga**

Wenalalfáde. *See* **Dogai I**

**Whaitiri**

**Wutmara**

Yama Edna *New Guinea; forest spirit.*

Yugumishanta. *See* **Jugumishanta**

**Atanua** The dawn goddess of the Marquesas and Society Islands was the daughter of the high divinity Atea. Some scholars say that Atea, cited in most sources as a male deity, was an overarching sky mother. In the Marquesas Atanua created the sea when she miscarried, filling the earth's hollows with amniotic fluid. (Best; Dixon)

**Aukam** On Nagi (Mt. Ernest Island) off Australia's northern tip, a woman lived with her lazy brother Poapun and their maternal uncle Waw. Every day she went fishing, while her brother never put net in water. He expected Aukam to feed him and, on top of that, wanted the biggest fish she caught. She was generous, so she fed her brother as he asked. But their uncle grew envious of the rich fish she gave Poapun and killed Aukam's son, a boy named Tiai. Heartbroken, Aukam made a necklace of her son's bones but, suspecting that his soul was not at rest, went through the islands until she found him. Drawing him away from a game with other young men, she broke the news to him that he was a ghost. Tiai returned to his friends and asked them to beat a drum and then, running towards his mother, disappeared into the ground, to be followed by the loyal Aukam.

On Saibai Island, Aukam was described as a weaver who made mats by moonlight, refusing to do any other work. The moon-man, seeing her diligence, came down to earth and took her up to heaven, where she sits weaving in the moon all night. This motif suggests that Aukam may have some connection to **Hina**. (Lawrie)

**Dogai I** On Mabuiag island north of Australia, this boogiewoman was used to frighten children. Merely mentioning her name made her draw near. Once, when a mother tried to silence her child, Dogai I stole the girl. But she could not get the girl to stop crying either, so Dogai I killed her. When the family realized what had happened, the men set out to hunt down Dogai I. They found her near the water, rocking the child's body. Although she tried to screw herself into a rock wall, the men pulled off one of her arms



before she escaped. They brought the arm back to the village, where they decided to use it for target practice. That night, Dogai I was drawn back to her arm. As she approached, it reattached itself.

The term “dógai” or “ghost-woman” is also used of the following figures on Dauan island of Torres Strait: Mekélpal, Samúnu, Kepáde, Gíze, Kowára, Táugin, Butailfáde, Wenalalfáde, Ketaunapíti, and Pítan. These women would pursue hunters and fishers, hiding in trees until they came near and could be captured. (Lawrie; Wirz)

**Enda Semangko** A goddess of earthly and human fertility in the western highlands of New Guinea, Enda Semangko was represented by a stone honored with a five-year cycle of ceremonies that culminated in the sacrifice of hundreds of pigs and a dance festival. (Lawrence and Meggitt)

**Fu’uñña** Among the Chamorro people of the Marianas Islands, this girl ruled the primal world with her brother, Puntan. There was no food or water, no earth or ocean, only death. Puntan, dying, told Fu’uñña he imagined a world with land and sea, animals and plants, and people. Grieving Fu’uñña tore out his eyes, which she flung into the air, making sun and moon. She dismembered him and built the universe, then threw herself into the sea, where she became a rock. After eons, the rock shattered into sand, each grain of which bears a portion of Fu’uñña’s spirit. These grains are the many people of the world. (Flood)

**Haumapuhia** The abusive father of this Māori girl turned his other children to stone. Nonetheless, she did not fear him. When her father demanded she draw him water, she refused. To punish her, he held her head down in a stream until she drowned. She transformed herself into the huge lake of Waikaremoana. (Te Awekotuku)

**Haumea** Originally, Hawai’ian myth says, human women swelled with pregnancy but had to be cut open to deliver. Haumea taught women how to push children out between their legs. As a result, she was honored as goddess of birth. In early times she lived among humans, sleeping with handsome men who were her descendants. One was Wakea, who was chosen as a sacrificial victim by his people. But Haumea refused to let him die, carrying her lover to safety through tree trunks and leaving shreds of her skirt blooming as morning glories.

Because she owned all wild plants, Haumea could withdraw her energy when angry, leaving people to starve. More often Haumea was a kindly goddess. Found throughout Polynesia, Haumea was a goddess of both fertility and sovereignty. The Māori called her Haumia-tiketike, a term that also referred to edible roots and other wild foods. (Alpers; Diab; Dixon; Kame’eleihiwa; Poignant)

**Hi’iaka** This primary Hawai’ian goddess was the opposite of her sister **Pele**, for Hi’iaka ruled the clouds while Pele ruled the fiery volcano. Some sources say that there was not a single Hi’iaka but many goddesses of the same name. They may represent different kinds of clouds: Hiiaka-wawahi-lani, “heaven-rending cloud-holder”; Hiiaka-noho-lani, “heaven-dwelling cloud-holder”; Hiiaka-kaalawa-maka,



“quick-glancing cloud-holder”; and Hiiaka-ka-pu-enaena, “red-hot-mountain-lifting clouds.”

One myth tells how a drowned man came back to haunt his daughters, who appealed to Hi’iaka for help. Through magic and a seawater bath, she coaxed the man’s soul into his body, which washed up on the shore, returning the man to his daughters. But the major myth of Hi’iaka is the same as that of her sister: she was sent to bring back a man for whom Pele lusted and, betrayed by Pele, in turn betrayed her sister. (Beckwith; Handy; Kalahaua; Kame’eleihiwa; Luomala)

**Hikule’o** The Tongan underworld goddess has been described as female, male, and of both sexes. The confusion suggests missionary discomfort with “god” being female, as images of Hikule’o show her as obviously female. Born of brother-sister incest from her mother Havealolofonua (herself a daughter of incest), Hikule’o owned a land called Pulotu, to which men traveled to seek food. There they had to engage in drinking, diving, and surfing contests. The men performed superlatively, but the gods still refused to share their food. Hikule’o chased the humans away, but they had hidden the seeds of yam and taro in their clothing. (Collocott; Herda)

**Hina** The greatest goddess of the Pacific was a complex figure. Like other major divinities, Hina was associated with many aspects of life and had many symbols. She was the tapa-beating woman who lived in the moon; she was the death mother; she was a warrior queen of the Island of Women. In varying guises, Hina appeared in the myths of many Pacific cultures.

In Tahiti, Hina was the primordial goddess for whose pleasure the first man was created. From her fertile womb fell innumerable offspring, many bearing her name, so that the number of women named Hina grew endlessly. In the Society Islands, Hina was daughter of the high god Taneroa, with whom she created the heavens and earth. Together, they created humanity.

In Hawai’i, Hina populated the world with her mate Ku. She once lived at the bottom of the sea but came to land to marry a chief. She sent a diver to gather her luggage, from which the moon flew out and began circling the sky. Using this as their guide, her brothers turned into fishes and created a flood that people escaped by climbing the island’s high mountains.

Among the Māori, Hine-ahu-one was formed when **Papa** died, leaving her all-male descendents no way to reproduce. Papa’s last instructions were that the heroic Tane should sculpt a woman from red clay. He followed Papa’s instructions, and Hina came to life. The Māori also describe Hina as the dawn maiden, a beautiful girl seduced by her father through deceit. Ashamed, Hina ran away to the underworld, where she planned to live with Papa, from whose dust she had been formed; this was the first death. Hina transformed herself into the goddess of the underworld. She announced her intention to kill any children begotten by her father, thereby assuring that death would remain a force on earth. Her daughter, Hine-atauirā, was taken sexually by her father Tane, and hid herself and her children in the underworld as well.

Once the hero Maui wagered that he could crawl into the goddess’s vagina, through her body, to her heart. He boasted that he would eat her heart and conquer death. Maui

turned himself into a lizard and prepared to enter the goddess. But his bird companion burst into laughter at the sight of the shrunken hero crawling into Hine-titama's pubic hair. The laughter woke the goddess, who crushed Maui between her sturdy legs. The name of the goddess in this myth is sometimes **Mahui-iki**.

Living on earth as a mortal woman, Hina bathed in a quiet pool where she had intercourse with an eel. Her people killed him, only to find that he was a god. Hina buried the eel's head and, five nights later, the first coconut sprang up. Another version of the story, from the Cook Islands, said that Hina's eel lover warned of a flood and instructed her to cut off his head. She followed his instructions and planted the head on the highest cliff, whereupon the floodwaters abated. From the amputated head grew the first coconut tree.

Numerous myths tell how Hina found a home in the moon. In Tahiti, Hina was a canoeist who paddled to the moon, which proved to be such a good boat that she stayed there, guarding earthly sailors. Others said Hina's brother, hung over from indulgence in kava, became infuriated at the noise Hina made beating tapa cloth. When she would not cease her labors, he hit her so hard she sailed into the sky. Finally, a Hawai'ian variant said that Hina, a married woman, grew tired of picking up after her family and left the earth to become the moon's cloth-maker. (Alpers; Anderson; Dixon; Kalahaua; Kame'eleihiwa; Orbell; Poignant; Reed 1963; Williamson.)

**Hinauri** Sister of the Māori hero Maui, Hinauri married the man Irawaru over her brother's objections. Although his sister's husband was unobjectionable to others, Maui found everything about Irawaru annoying. This reached a crisis when Hinauri's husband went fishing with Maui. Maui failed to catch anything, but Inawaru pulled in fish after fish. Finally, Maui realized that Inawaru was using a barbed hook, while Maui used a smooth one. This cleverness drove Maui into a rage, and he turned Inawaru into a dog.

When Maui returned to the village, he lied to Hinauri, telling her that Inawaru was on the shore awaiting her. But Hinauri found the dog, her transformed husband. In grief, she put on a magical belt and threw herself into the sea. The belt kept her afloat, and she remained in the sea for so long that she became covered with barnacles. In this ruined fashion, she washed up on shore, where she was found by two brothers who cleaned up her to reveal her beauty, then fell in love with her. She stayed with the brothers for a time, but having heard of a handsome chief nearby, decided to make him her husband.

Vain chief Tinirau liked to admire himself in clear water, so much so that he had several pools fenced for his personal use. It was to one of these that Hinauri went to float naked. Instantly he became enamored of her, and she kept him beside her through magic, calling down food from the sky to nourish them. When she conceived his child, she agreed to return to his village, where to her dismay he stopped loving her. When she was pregnant and desired fish, he locked her up behind a fence of nettles.

Far away, her brother Maui missed Hinauri and traveled to heaven to ask the high god where he could find her. Maui arrived just as Hinauri was about to give birth and, disguised as a bird, took her off into the sky with him, her newborn son in her arms. Seeing the child's father below and realizing that the boy would need human

companionship, Hinauri let the boy drop into Tinirau's arms. But despite the beauty and gentleness of his mother, Tinirau's son brought evil into the world, including wars and cannibalism, until they were all killed by other Māori. (Alpers; Reed 1963)

**Hine-Marama** This Māori woman lived with two brothers, one of whom was her husband. Hine-Marama was a kindly, hardworking young woman who kept her family well-fed and happy. But she fell ill suddenly and died, leaving her husband Rangirua desolate. He decided to go to the land of ghosts to reclaim her. His brother Kaeo, seeing that the bereaved husband could not be dissuaded, went along. The pair tricked their way into the otherworld and, finding that Hine-Marama had not eaten any food there, stole her back to earth. When she arrived, she realized that she was in spirit form and instructed the brothers to dig up her body. When they did, she reentered it and returned to life. (Reed 1963)

**Hine-pokohu-rangi** The Māorimist-maiden fell in love with a human man, Uenuku, from whom she extracted a promise that he would not reveal their love until she had conceived a child. He forgot and she, singing a soft farewell song, disappeared into a column of mist. Her disconsolate lover wandered the world in the form of a rainbow. (Best)

**Hit** In the Caroline Islands in Micronesia, this name was given to an octopus goddess. Hit's daughter started an affair with a god who already had a wife in heaven. The sky woman followed her husband, trying to drag him away from his mistress, but Hit began dancing lewdly. So erotic was her performance that the sky woman fainted from excitement and had to be carried back to heaven. Each time the wife tried to stop her husband from making love to his mistress, Hit began dancing again, allowing for the conception of the culture-hero Olifat. (Poignant)

**Honabe** The primal deity of the Huli of New Guinea, Honabe was so hot that she could cook food by placing it near her vulva. All gods were born from her, as well as the first birds and animals, who emerged from her menstrual blood. She had one daughter, the moon goddess Hana, who lived on earth until violated by her brother. Hana liked to wrap herself around a tree. When her brother saw this, he inserted a sharp rock to cut Hana and then, when he saw her bleeding, raped her. She ran away, rising into the sky; he followed her, becoming the sun as she turned into the moon. (Lawrence and Meggitt; Swain and Trompf)

**Ho'ohoku-i-ka-lani** Hawai'ian mythology tells of this primordial woman who was raped by her father Wakea. Although wedded to **Papa**, Wakea plotted to sleep with his daughter. To do so, he initiated nights when spouses were to sleep separately, then entered his daughter's bed. But one day he overslept, and Papa found his crime and left him. Ho'ohoku-i-ka-lani bore a child to her father, a deformed stillborn shaped like a root. Wakea buried its body, and from the tiny grave grew the first taro plant. Then Ho'ohoku-i-ka-lani bore a child named Haloa; the boy grew up to be the ancestor of all Hawai'ians, who were related to the taro plant.

A variant myth says that Wakea, the god of light, was unable to approach the earth goddess Papa without injuring her. So he cast a ray of light upon her head, whereupon she conceived Ho'ohoku-i-ka-lani, born from her head. Through beams of light, Wakea caused Ho'ohoku-i-ka-lani to conceive the hero Haloa. (Hopkins)

**Hopoe** Hopoe was a gifted hula dancer who taught the art to other goddesses. Hopoe also knew the art of making leis to wear as she danced. The cloud goddess **Hi'iaka** fell in love with her, covering the forests with red-and-white lehua flowers in her honor. When **Pele**, believing herself betrayed by Hi'iaka, erupted in anger, Hopoe was at the seashore, unable to escape the fiery lava. She began to dance, and when the lava reached her, she was transformed into a pillar that resembles a dancer. (Beckwith; Emerson 1906)

**Jari** A culture heroine of New Guinea, the snake-woman Jari inaugurated the institution of marriage. Her husband did not know her real form because she never allowed her snake-bodied mother to visit except while he was fishing. But one day he came home early and, finding their child in the clutches of a snake, killed the viper grandmother. When she discovered her mother's death, Jari departed. Filling her vulva with everything she needed to set up housekeeping elsewhere—pots, house posts, taro roots—she walked until she encountered another man. Because he was wild and uncivilized, she brought out the treasures she hid in her vulva and created a home for them. But she would not mate with him until she figured out why he smelled so bad. He had been born without an anus and defecated through his mouth. So Jari asked him to turn around and, stabbing him with a piece of bamboo, made him an anus, after which she was able to live happily with him. As the world's first married couple, Jari and her husband were the ancestors of all people. (Hogbin)

**Jina** Jina lived with her sister, Kasuara, in their mother's home, from which she was sent to get fire when their cooking fire went out. Encountering two young brothers, she attracted their interest. They decided to marry the sisters but argued over who should get which girl. Jina settled the argument by saying that, as eldest, she would marry first, and took the elder boy as her husband. But the envious old woman Vina blinded Jina on her way to the wedding and, donning the bridal attire, wed the older brother. While hunting the next day, the younger brother found Jina and cured her with herbs, then wed her despite his brother's fury at being tricked. Vina's trickery led to the world's first murders, because the older brother killed Jina's husband. After Jina's son grew up, he killed the murderer, then escaped to another island with his bereaved mother. (Hogbin)

**Jugumishanta** Ancestral mother of the people of Papua New Guinea, Jugumishanta liked privacy. Although married, she built herself a little hut away from her village and told everyone to leave her alone. Around her place she planted wild ginger, and within the wild ginger she hid a little handmade flute, wherein she placed one of her pubic hairs, which cried out if touched.

Often Jugumishanta took out her flute to play plaintive melodies. Her husband heard the sad sound and sought to discover what caused it. Watching Jugumishanta, he saw not only how she made the sounds, but also where she hid the instrument. The next day he stole it. But the flute raised the alert, and Jugumishanta demanded its return. In the ensuing fight, the flute fell onto the ground—and a forest of bamboo sprang up, where Jugumishanta's people could gather material for flutes.

With her consort, Jugumishanta set down rules for human behavior and established religious rituals. She now sits at the base of the world-tree, holding the planet steady. Red croton plants represent her blood, and salt her body. (C. Berndt 1966; Lawrence and Meggitt)

**Kaahu-pahua** In Hawai'ian mythology, Kaahu-pahua, an enormous shark, was queen of the ocean. She guarded the entrance to Pearl Harbor together with her brother, Kahi'u-ka. Born human and later transfigured, they remained friendly to humans. In the early 20th century, belief in this goddess was so strong that, when a newly built dock collapsed at Pearl Harbor, an offense to her was presumed. (Beckwith)

**Kalaipahoa** The Hawai'ian goddess of poison, Kalaipahoa and her sisters Kapo and Pua migrated from an unknown land. On Molokai, Kalaipahoa imbued the trees with a poison so deadly that birds fell dead from the sky. An evil king demanded a sculpture made from the poisoned trees, killing scores of workers in the process. The king used the completed sculpture to threaten his opponents. (Kalahaua)

**Kelea** This Hawai'ian girl was the world's best surfer. She spent all her time on the waves, thrilling those who watched her. She had little interest in marriage, but she was the daughter of the king of Maui, so it was expected that she would make an alliance with an important family. She married the chief of Oahu, Lo-Lale, who had sought her hand by sending the handsome Kalamakua to arrange the match. Although he fell in love with her as they traveled back to Oahu, Kalamakua was too loyal to his cousin, Lo-Lale, to interfere with the marriage.

Years later, however, Kelea found she could not remain a passive queen. She yearned for the freedom of riding the waves and for the man who had brought her to Oahu. Her husband, guessing the reason for her sadness, released her to pursue her dreams. And so she lived out her days with her chosen lover, surfing in the great Hawai'ian waves. (Anderson)

**Kio** This spirit-woman appears in legends of the Tuamotu islands, west of Tahiti. The human woman Roi, out fishing with her husband Tu, gathered a fine catch of clams. Tu wanted to go back home, but Roi wanted one more dive. As she swam below the surface, she was captured by Kio, who shoved Roi's hair under a rock to keep her captive, then rose to the surface having transformed herself into an exact likeness of Roi. Tu, not realizing the deception, began to row home, but Roi freed herself and called out from the water. In the boat, Kio said that the voice they heard was a water spirit and convinced Tu to resume rowing.



**Māori Ancestor.** *Māori art includes magnificent wood carvings like this female poutokomanawa, that supports the ridge-pole (a symbolic backbone) of an important house; this figure is from the collection of the National Museum of New Zealand. Although close to Australia, New Zealand has indigenous myths similar to those found throughout Polynesia.*

Once home, Kio defecated in a bowl and tried to feed her feces to Roi's children, who went to their father to tell them of her disgusting supper offering. Realizing what he had done, Tu set fire to the hut where Kio was pretending to weave, and she exploded, leaving a litter of shells that she had stuffed into her belly in order to appear pregnant. But Roi was still missing. In variant versions of the tale, she bore her twin sons on a distant island and was eventually rescued by her older children; or the twin boys grew up and, asking for their father, learned the truth and reunited their parents. (Emory)

**Koevasi** Although suffering from a bad cold, this Melanesian creatrix walked through the world making humans. Because her speech was so difficult to understand, people did their best to approximate it, which is why they speak in different dialects. (Codrington 1881)

**Kura** In the Cook Islands, among the Mangaia people, this woman was gathering flowers with her sister when she fell from a tree. The earth swallowed her, pitching her into a land where she was held captive, tied to a post and guarded by a blind old man. Kura's husband, desolated, followed her to the underworld and freed her by throwing food where rats would scuttle around to get it. Covered by their noise, he slipped in and freed Kura, with whom he fled to the upper world. (Dixon)

**La'ila'a** Among the Hawai'ians, this was the name of the first woman born after chaos settled into form. By mating with the sky, she produced humanity. She is sometimes identified with the primal mother **Haumea**. (Poignant)

**Laka** Patron of hula dancers, this Hawai'ian goddess ruled the islands' uncultivated areas, while her dancers represented the untamed element of human nature. Originally, hula troupers were satirists and puppeteers as well as dancers. They worshiped Laka in a piece of wood covered with yellow cloth and decked with wildflowers. She was close to her sister Kapo, so close that sometimes they are considered aspects of the same goddess. Kapo had a useful anatomical feature: a detachable vagina, which can still be seen in the rocks and mountains of Hawai'i. (Beckwith; Diab; Poignant; Robertson)



**Latmikaik** This Micronesian clam-mother grew from an ancient volcano where it touched the sky. She took up the whole mountainside, for she held within herself the souls of all beings. But her clamshell stayed closed, so that the beings could not be released. At last, a great wave crashed against her. Her shell was forced open, and life was born. (Flood et al.)

**Leutogi** A Samoan princess sent to Tonga to become the second wife of its king, Leutogi found herself treated with disrespect. When she took pity on a baby bat and nursed it back to health, she was derided for her kindness. But the bats did not forget. Made a scapegoat by the Tongans when misfortune befell the king's family, Leutogi was sentenced to die by fire. But thousands of bats urinated on the flames, keeping Leutogi safe. So she was placed on a barren island, where the Tongans expected she would starve to death. But she lived there happily in the company of bats who brought her luscious fruit for every meal. (Flood et al.)

**Lilavatu** In Tonga, this goddess was the highest female divinity and the source of healing, but she could also cause disease, especially swollen necks. She spoke in a high squeaky voice and turned vindictive towards people who failed to make offerings to her. (Poignant)

**Lorop** The creatrix goddess from the island of Yap, Lorop was the daughter of an earlier creator goddess named Liomamar, who tossed sand into the ocean to form islands, then squatted on one to bear her daughter. Lorop had three sons whom she fed miraculous food. They did not know where Lorop got the plentiful rations, and two did not care. But the youngest was curious to see where his mother gathered dinner. Seeing Lorop dive into the sea, chanting a spell, he followed her to the underworld, where she filled baskets with food. Being discovered at her task meant she had to remain below the earth, but Lorop provided for her offspring, sending fish each day. A similar goddess was called Nomoi or Mortlock in other parts of Micronesia. (Poignant)

**Mahora-nui-a-rangi** In New Zealand, this was the name of the formless but feminine primordial heaven who, with her mate Maku ("wetness") gave birth to the first divinities. An alternative name, which means "spreading forth of light," suggests that she was envisioned as a goddess of heavenly light. (Dixon)

**Mahui-iki** The underworld, said many Pacific Islanders, was a fiery realm whose queen was Mahui-iki. Her grandson Maui decided to extinguish her power, despite warnings from his mother **Taranga**. Maui traveled to Mahui-iki's domain, where he found her stirring a cooking pot. Maui said he needed fire to cook some food. When Mahui-iki pulled out a fingernail for him, he secretly quenched it. Maui asked for another, then another, until Mahui-iki had given all her fingernails and nine of her toenails. As Maui was asking for her last toenail, Mahui-iki realized what was happening and, pulling out the nail, set the earth on fire. Maui called down rain to extinguish the



blaze, but what landed in the trees remained there, so that humans could thereafter kindle fire from wood. (Alpers; Dixon)

**Meanderi** This primal woman of New Guinea invented taro and sugarcane, then hid them under her skin while she sought humans with whom to share it. She raced through the land, offering food where she was dealt with respectfully but moving on when insulted. (Lawrence and Meggitt)

**Miru** Throughout the Pacific, the queen of the last three circles of the underworld was a goddess, with Miru being one of her common names. The soul upon death went to a cliff facing the setting sun, where a wave appeared. The soul took a leap, hoping to land safely in the arms of ancestors. But Miru stood nearby with a net to catch weaklings and evildoers, whom she threw into her oven after stupefying them with an intoxicating juice. They were instantly consumed, while better souls lived calmly in an eternal world that was otherwise identical to earth. (Gill; Handy)

**Mo-o-inanea** This dragon goddess of Hawai'i migrated, with her many brothers, from a hidden land to the visible world. Her brothers wandered about, but she stayed in beds of wet clay that people used for hairdressing. Such places had large stones within them, which were considered goddesses (Aku-wahines), to whom prayers and flower-offerings were made. One of Mo-o-inanea's favorite clayspits was declared taboo by Queen Kaahumanu, Hawai'i's last traditional queen. Other dragon goddesses, who may derive from Mo-o-inanea or be entirely separate, were Ha-puu, Mau-ola, Ala-muki, and Kihawahine. (MacKenzie)

**Muriranaga** The jawbone of this primal Māori cannibal goddess bestowed wisdom and the power of sorcery, so the demigod Maui wanted it for humanity. He traveled to Muriranga's home on the world's farthest edge and kept her from eating until, half starved, she took her jawbone from her head and gave it to him. With it, she gave humanity gifts that have been with us ever since. (Grace; Orbell)

**Nevinbimbaau** The cannibal ogress of southern Malekula, Nevinbimbaau created the earth by hauling soil from within a giant clamshell on her back to form the island on which her people lived. She was never seen but could be heard during ceremonies in the voice of the bullroarer. (Poignant)

**Niwareka** Mata, a Māori warrior, fell in love with Niwareka, daughter of the underworld. They wed and were happy for a time, before the man's impatience caused him to strike Niwareka. She disappeared, returning to the world of death, where no violence ever occurred. Mata traveled to the underworld, where he underwent an agonizing ritual tattooing before Niwareka would agree to return with him. Her father, the tattooist of the underworld, gave him a cloak of night, warning him that at the boundary of light he had to reveal that he had it. But, happy to be with his beloved again, Mata forgot, for which offense humans cannot travel to the underworld now except after death. (Flood et al.)

**Opiira** In several areas of the Pacific region, this goddess was known as the ancestral mother of humankind. She was the child of the high god Tanageroa, as was her mate, the god Tiki (Ti'i); through their incestuous love, the human race was established. In Tahiti, the goddess's name was spelled Opeera. (Williamson)

**Pani** This Māori plant goddess was impregnated by a man who had stolen yam seeds from heaven and hidden them in his testicles. Pani gave birth to a plant beside a stream, then retreated to the underworld, where she tended a magical yam patch. (Poignant)

**Papa** This earth goddess, found in many Pacific cultures, existed from the beginning in perpetual intercourse with her lover, the sky god Rangi. There were 10 layers of heaven, suffocating the earth and keeping light from its surface. Finally, the gods decided to separate their parents. Although apart, the pair remained lovers; the earth's damp heat rose to the sky, and the rain fell to fertilize Papa.

The Māori said that a god tried to keep food away from people, but Papa hid yams and fern roots for them. She is sometimes considered the mother of **Hina**, who was formed out of red dust from earth's surface. Several of her names refer to coral, indicating the connection of earth to this reef-building animal. (Alpers; Buck; Dixon; Orbell; Poignant; Reed 1963; Williamson; Wohlers)

**Pare** Among the Māori, Pare was said to have been a flirtatious young woman who led on, and then rejected, a young man named Hutu. He exploded in fury at her; ashamed of toying with his desires, she hanged herself. Hutu was so anguished at the news of Pare's death that he decided to convince her to return to life. He traveled to the underworld but could find no traces of her. Hoping to lure her from hiding, Hutu began to play Pare's favorite sports. Secretly she began to draw near. Then Hutu pulled saplings down to his height, soaring with them as they snapped upward. Pare found this new sport irresistible. As soon as she joined Hutu, he swung a tree so high that he dragged Pare back into the light. This name is also found as that of a volcano goddess on several Pacific islands. (Anderson; Dixon)

**Pele** Daughter of **Haumea**, Pele always had a fiery temperament. She spent her girlhood setting things aflame, displeasing her sister, the sea goddess Namaka. After Pele caused a conflagration by toying with underworld fires, Haumea realized there would be no peace while fire and water lived in the same household. She convinced Pele to move. Pele set off in a canoe with several siblings, including the cloud goddess **Hi'iaka**. For many days on the empty sea, the family found only atolls too tiny to support life. So Pele used a divining rod to locate likely places to build islands, then caused them to be born in eruptions from undersea volcanoes.

But Pele found no peace, for Namaka soon arrived. Ocean and fire met in a tremendous brawl, of which Pele got the worst, dissolving into a plume of steam above Maui. She disappeared into the Hawai'ian volcanoes, where she still lives. Her people still honor her as creator and destroyer. Into her craters, they cast offerings: cut hair, sugarcane, white birds, money, strawberries, and hibiscus flowers. Some legends claim

that human beings were once tossed into the lava, but few scholars find evidence for such rites.

Pele sometimes dozed in her crater, sending her spirit wandering. One night, hearing flute music, she followed the sound until she came upon a group of sacred hula dancers. Among them was the graceful Lohiau, whom Pele seduced. They spent three days making love before she decided to return to her mountain. Promising to send for him, Pele disappeared.

Pele sent her sister Hi'iaka to fetch Lohiau. Hi'iaka was a kindly goddess, given to singing with **Hopoe** and to picking tropical flowers. She asked Pele to tend her gardens, then set off. Passing through many trials, often relying on magic to defeat monsters, Hi'iaka reached Lohiau's home just as he died of longing for Pele. Hi'iaka caught his soul and pushed it back into his body. Then they set off for Kilauea.

Hi'iaka fully intended to fulfill her task, despite the man's beauty and his expressions of a growing love for her. But Pele burned, imagining Hi'iaka in Lohiau's arms. Her crater spit lava. Hi'iaka, recognizing the warning signs, hastened along. But when she reached Pele's crater, Hi'iaka found her sister had not kept her part of the promise. In her jealous fury, the volcano goddess had killed the dancer Hopoe and scorched Hi'iaka's gardens.

On the rim of the crater, Hi'iaka made love to Lohiau. Furious Pele burned the man to death but could not destroy her sister. Hi'iaka followed Lohiau into the underworld and freed his soul. Pele was unwilling to give up the beautiful man, but Lohiau's attractive comrade Paoa arrived to distract the goddess. Then Pele found her match in the combative hog god Kamapua'a, inventor of agriculture, whose idea of courting a goddess included dousing her flames with heavy rain and stampeding pigs across her craters. To this day, their turbulent affair continues on Kilauea.

Pele remains a living goddess on her islands, despite an attempt in 1824 by a converted Christian woman to show that Pele had no power by breaking her taboos (picking sacred berries without making offerings, throwing stones into the volcano) and remaining unharmed. But Pele's power was unbroken, especially after Princess Ruth Keelikoaani stopped a lava flow in 1881 by offering silk scarves and brandy to the goddess. Pele is reputed to appear on volcanic slopes as a wizened old woman who asks for a cigarette, lights it with a snap of her fingers, then disappears; or as a red-robed woman dancing on the crater's rim. Sometimes accompanied by a white dog, Pele tests the generosity of those who meet her. Her temper erupts when visitors are disrespectful; she especially punishes those who steal lava rocks from her volcanoes.

Offerings are still made to Pele when eruptions threaten, but more modern measures are viewed with suspicion. In 1935, a river of lava was diverted from Hilo by the U.S. Army, which bombed the lava flow. Shortly after, six of the airmen who flew the planes were killed in a midair collision. The story is cited as evidence of Pele's continuing power.

Recently, the goddess's name has been given to an ecological movement. The Pele Defense Fund opposes drilling and building geothermal power plants in volcanoes, both because such development threatens the last significant tropical rainforest in the

United States and because it involves sacrilege toward the goddess. (Anderson; Beckwith; Diab; Emerson 1906, 1978; Kalahaua; Kame'eleihiwa; Poignant; Skinner)

**Pokoharua-te-po** The Māori grandmother of winds, Pokoharua-te-po gave birth to the storm god and, through him, became ancestor to all weather divinities. Similar minor goddesses of the early period of creation were Hekeheke-i-papa, mother of earth and grandmother of food plants, and Hotu-papa, mother of war. These divinities preceded the major goddess, **Papa**. (Reed 1963)

**Poliahu** Snow-capped Hawai'ian volcanoes are envisioned as goddesses lounging in the sunshine. Lilinoe, goddess of extinct Haleakala, was invoked as a power of desolation. Waiau was goddess of Mauna Kea, who bathed in a deep volcanic pool at the summit. But the best-known snow maiden was Poliahu, goddess of Mauna Kea. She revealed herself to chief Aiwohikupua, and he proposed that they wed. The chief went to prepare, while Poliahu gathered her sisters. When he returned with his retinue, the goddesses wore gorgeous white robes that caused the humans to shake with cold. So the goddesses took off their mantles and showed themselves in garments made of sunshine. Suddenly a woman appeared, accusing Aiwohikupua of betraying a promise to wed her. Poliahu covered the woman with her robe, freezing her, then threw a garment of fire over her. The woman retreated, but so did the goddess and her sisters, who returned to their mountains. ("Laieikawai")

**Poutini** According to the Taranaki people of New Zealand, this goddess lived on what they called Tuhua (now Mayor Island) with her brother Tama. It was rich in jade, about which Poutini argued with the residents, finally leaving in a canoe to travel to jade-rich Kotore-pi. She then traveled onward, leaving other deposits of jade wherever she tied her canoe. Her brother traveled after her, but his wife Hine-tangiwai ("woman of bowenite") was turned to that stone, which appears to have drops of water within it, described as Tama's tears. (MacKenzie)

**Putawi** In a Māori legend, this woman's lover, Wetenga, was kidnapped in the forest and tied up by a cannibal who intended to use him as bait to lure a firm-fleshed human woman. The ruse worked, for loyal Putawi soon came into the forest in search of Wetenga, and the cannibal captured her. Taking her to the secret world of such beings, he left to gather wood. But while he was away, a friendly spirit named Manoa told Putawi that, if she would become his wife, he would save her. Although she loved Wetenga, Putawi saw no other way to survive. She became Manoa's wife but soon escaped from him, returning to her first love. Not long after their reunion, a child crying in the night awakened Wetenga. In the dimness, he saw Putawi nursing a child. She explained that he was Manoa's spirit-child and could never be seen in the daylight. When the child was weaned, he disappeared back to his father's people. Afterwards, Putawi and Wetenga became parents of a large family. (Reed 1963)

**Qatgoro** This Melanesian primal mother was originally a stone, which grew larger until it burst and produced a son. This god, Qat, created the first woman, Iro Vigale,

from bits of twigs; when completed, she began to smile. Then Qat took a spirit wife, Iro Lei, who drew the predatory attention of Qat's brothers. They came to Qat's camp to steal her, but Iro Lei disguised herself as an old woman, and they left without recognizing her. (Codrington 1891)

**Raukata-uri** With her sister Raukata-mea ("red Raukata"), Raukata-uri ("dark Raukata") introduced fun to humanity, in the forms of dancing, music, and games. The Māori said these sisters lived in the forest, where they were visible in the delicate shapes of leaves, and audible in the sounds of insects. (Orbell)

**Riina** The great warrior woman of the Solomon Islands was called when cannibal ghosts stole two women, Raronaia and Araanaia, from a village, taking them to a remote island. The women feared for their lives, but the flying cannibals decided to keep them as pets, feeding them fish when the women refused to dine on human flesh. Several rescue parties were mounted, but none were successful, with many men dying in the attempts.

Riina set out to free the prisoners, easily finding the island on which they were held. As they approached, Riina's warriors crouched so that it seemed only a single woman was rowing toward shore. When one of the ghosts came swooping down, thinking to make a meal out of Riina, she grabbed him by the hair while the other women clubbed him into submission. In fear of his life, the ghost admitted that his power resided in three objects, which Riina found and, with women's magic, disempowered. Then she led her women to shore to hunt down the other ghost, whom she found cowering in a cave full of human skeletons. With her boomerang, she swiftly dispatched the second ghost and freed the women. (Flood et al.)

**Rona** To the Māori, the moon was a teasing man. One night when Rona was going to draw water, the moon covered himself with a cloud so that she could not see, and Rona stubbed her toe. Annoyed, she cursed him. He came down to argue with her. When the moon reached earth, Rona was still so angry that he grabbed her by the shoulder and took her back to the sky, where she clings to the moon's face. Other legends say that Rona was the moon's sister or the daughter of the god of fishes. (Anderson; Best; Te Awekotuku)

**Sina** This Polynesian goddess may be connected to **Hina**, for similar legends are told of them, including the Samoan story of the woman in the moon, ceaselessly beating tapa cloth. When she saw the moon rising, Sina joked that it looked like a breadfruit. The moon, angry at this impertinence, snatched up Sina, her tapa-making equipment, and her child, holding them captive in the moon. (Anderson; Chadwick; Flood et al.; Orbell; Williamson)

**Tahia** This romantic heroine of the Marquesas Islands smelled of flowers. She was also beautiful, and many men wished to marry her, but one greedy man decided she would be his. Taking advantage of a time when her relatives were out gathering wild

foods, he seduced her. When her mother returned she recognized the man—Tahia's own father, who had abandoned them when Tahia was a baby.

Grief-stricken Tahia refused to eat. But her brothers and uncles knew what would cure her: a beautiful man for a husband. They found one on a nearby island, and the young man agreed to marry Tahia. The couple was blissfully happy until the new husband said he wished to visit his family. Tahia warned him that she could not endure his absence for more than a month and, when he did not return, hanged herself in sorrow. Her ghost visited her husband, who was shamed and sorrowful at what his lengthy absence had caused. When he begged Tahia to return to him, she told him a secret ritual that would bring her back. With berries and wild ginger and coconut, he prepared a brew that he left behind a curtain for three days. At the end of that time, a reborn Tahia walked back into her lover's arms. (Flood et al.)

**Taranga** The mother of the Polynesian hero Maui did not carry him to term. She gave birth prematurely, then wrapped the fetus in her magical hair and tossed him into the sea, offering prayers to protect the unborn child from turning into a demon, the usual fate of such children. In the sea's womb, the child was carried to term and then raised by gods until he was old enough to see Taranga's home. Happy to see her miscarried babe, Taranga welcomed Maui, who became her favorite son.

Taranga spent each day far from home, and her children did not know where she went. One day Maui followed her to where she tended the miraculous underworld gardens from which all food on this earth derives. Because of his daring, Taranga allowed Maui to go through the manhood rituals earlier than other boys. This name is also used of the fire goddess **Mahui-iki**, who may be the same figure. (Grace)

**Taua** The guardian of women in Pukapuka, an island north of Samoa, Taua punished any man who hit a woman by afflicting him with cancer of the armpit. She protected women's possessions by causing thieves to lose their balance. She protected human corpses by making taboo the use of any part of them, including bones. This goddess could make entire islands invisible if danger threatened. (Beaglehold and Beaglehold)

**Touiafutuna** The creator goddess of Tonga was made of stone. When she gave birth, the earth shook and thundered. Every time she went into labor, Touiafutuna gave birth to two children, male and female twins named Piki and Kele, who had no father. (Collocott; Williamson)

**Tuli** As the Samoan father god Tangeroa watched over watery chaos, the bird goddess Tuli flew across it. As she tired, he threw stones, giving her temporary perches; these became the Pacific Islands. While resting on a rock, Tuli grew weary of the sun, so she flew to heaven and brought herself a fresh vine as an umbrella. She left the vine behind, and from it swarmed maggots that became the first human beings. Some versions of the myth say that Tuli was Tangeroa's daughter and that because she yearned for company, he instructed her to plant vines and harvest them; from the decaying vines crawled the first humans. (Anderson; Williamson)

**Ubu** The owner of fire to the people of Mabuiag (Jervis Island) north of Australia was a woman who kept fire between her fingers. There was no fire in that land until the lizard-man Walek went to his sister Ubu, who gave him coal to take back to his people. But it went out as he tried to return. So Walek stole the fire from his sister's hand, then ran away as she yelled at him that the fire was meant for her daughter, Surka. To swim back to the island, Walek had to put the fire in his mouth, so lizards have red scars on their tongues to this day. (Lawrie)

**Var-ma-te-takere** On the Hervey Islands, the Mangaian people said that the universe was a coconut, at the bottom of which lived this woman who sat doubled-up, knees to chest. Taking pieces of her flesh, she formed a fish-man from her right side, and another fish-man from her left side. Then she created several other sons and two daughters—Tumuteanoao, a woman of stone, and Tu-metua, who never left her mother. (Anderson; Williamson)

**Waliporlimia** The New Guinean goddess Waliporlimia hid inside human women, causing them to become sexually aroused. When men attempted to mate with these women, they were injured or killed by Waliporlimia's force. Women occupied by the goddesses used their sensuality to attract men to their deaths. (Lawrence and Meggitt)

**Walutahanga** This eightfold snake goddess of the Solomon Islands was born to a human mother who, afraid of her husband, hid the serpent girl. But he discovered the deception and cut Walutahanga into eight pieces. After eight days of rain, the girl's body rejoined into a whole; she traveled through the islands, tormenting humans in retaliation for her murder. Captured, she was chopped into eight pieces and her bones thrown into the sea. Then everyone except a woman and her daughter ate the flesh of the goddess's body. After another eight rainy days, the bones under the sea formed themselves into the goddess. To punish her attackers, Walutahanga covered the islands with eight waves, which killed everyone but the woman and her child who had not eaten her flesh. The goddess gave them many gifts, including coconut and clear-water streams, before retreating to the ocean. (Fox and Drew; Poignant)

**Whaitiri** Common to the mythologies of many Pacific people was a powerful cannibal goddess who owned the thunder. Once she descended to earth to marry a warrior chief, thinking his title "man-killer" suggested compatibility. But when Whaitiri had taken up residence with her husband, she found that he did not share her affection for eating humans. Not only that, but he complained about the smell of their children's excrement. So she invented the latrine and showed humans how to use it, then returned to the sky. To the Māori, this figure was the powerful force who separated **Papa** from her lover; her daughter was Hema, goddess of procreation. (Dixon; Orbell; Poignant; Reed 1963)

**Wutmara** This culture heroine from New Guinea was co-wife with a ghost from the underworld, whom she resented because visiting her kept their shared husband away from the human world for long periods. She brought about the discovery of the



coconut palm, because she convinced her husband to bring the ghost-wife to the surface world so that they might all live together. She intended to murder her rival, not realizing that ghosts are immortal. Wutmara killed the woman and left the body in the jungle, but the ghost transposed the genitals of Wutmara and her husband, then killed Wutmara and turned herself into a pubic hair on the husband's groin. Finally, the husband tricked the ghost into revealing herself and killed her. But she reemerged shortly thereafter as the coconut palm, on which to this day you can see the face of the angry ghost. (Hogbin)

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# AUSTRALIA

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## AUSTRALIAN PANTHEON

**Abobi**

Bara. *See Walo*

Belah. *See Bila*

**Bila**

Bildjiwuraroiju. *See Djanggawul Sisters*

Boaliri. *See Wawalag Sisters*

Bralgah. *See Dinewan*

Brolga. *See Dinewan*

Bumerali. *See Quork-Quork*

**Dinewan**

Djang'kawu Sisters. *See Djanggawul Sisters*

**Djanggawul Sisters**

**Erathipa**

**Gambil Gambil**

Garangal. *See Wawalag Sisters*

**Gnowee**

**Goolagaya**

Gungman. *See Wawalag Sisters*

Imberombera. *See Mutjingga*

**Julunggul**

Kadjari. *See Kalwadi*

**Kalwadi**

**Karakarook**

Karwadi. *See Kalwadi*

Kliarin-Kliari. *See Kunapipi*

**Krubi**

**Kuggun**

**Kultana**

**Kunapipi**

**Lumerai**

Madalait. *See Walo*

**Makara**

Manark. *See Memembel*

Maralaitj. *See Djanggawul Sisters*

**Meamei**

**Memembel**

Minma Milbali *White goanna.*

Minma Waiuda *Opposum.*

Miralaidj. *See Djanggawul Sisters*

Mrs. Kurwingie. *See Dinewan*

Mujingga. *See Kalwadi*

Mumuna. *See Kunapipi*

**Mutjingga**

**Myee**

**Nerida**

**Ngalyod**

**Numma Moiyuk**

**Nurrun**

Pildjiwuraroiju. *See Djanggawul Sisters*

**Pirili**

**Pukwi**

**Quork-Quork**

Snaninja Arrarreka *Sun.*

Tomituka. *See Quork-Quork*

**Vena**

Wadjumunoi. *See Wuradilagu*

**Wai-ai**

**Walo**

Walu. *See Walo*

**Waramurungundji**

Waramurungundji. *See Ngalyod*

**Wawalag Sisters**

Wiraboibib. *See Wuradilagu*

Wiribibi. *See Wuradilagu*

Wirikul. *See Wawalag Sisters*

**Wuradilagu**

Wurajububu. *See Wuradilagu*

Wuramidjanba. *See Wuradilagu*

Wurati-laku. *See Wuradilagu*

**Wuriupranala**

**Yhi**

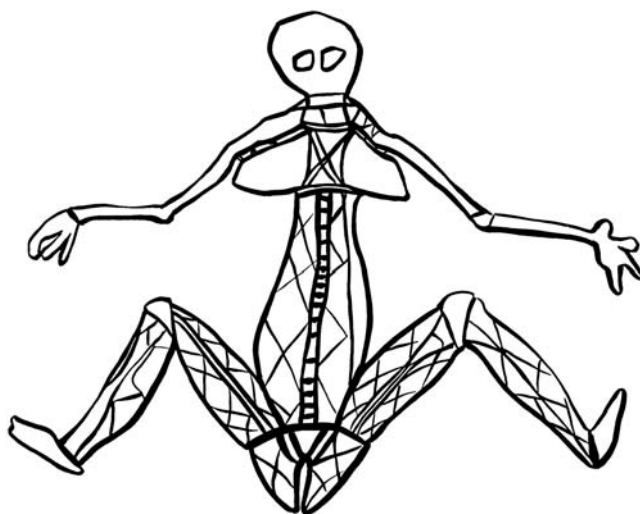
**Yirbaik-Baik**

Yogamada. *See Abobi*

Yurlunggur. *See Julunggul*

**Abobi** The Ngulugwongga (Mulluk Mulluk) people of northern Australia say this woman grew tired of her husband and turned herself into a star. But she left her seven daughters, the Yogamada, with her husband and he soon began to desire them. He detached his penis and sent it after one girl. As it began to penetrate her daughter, Abobi saw what was happening from her new home in the sky. She dropped a rope from the heavens, and the girls climbed up to safety. Their father tried to climb up after them, so Abobi cut the rope and he fell back to earth. Still lusting after his daughters, he turned himself into the moon and chases them through the sky. Clustered together as the Seven Sisters, they protect each other from him. (Bozic and Marshall)

**Bila** On the Flinders Range, this cannibalistic sun goddess lit the world by cooking her victims over an open fire. When lizard-man Kudnu wounded her with his boomerang,



**Barrginj.** *The petroglyphs, or rock paintings, of Australia show powers that live in the Dreaming, a parallel reality populated by divinities and other spirits. This woman figure represents the wife of the spirit of thunder. The painting is on Nourlangie Rock in Kakadu National Park.*

she disappeared, plunging the world into darkness. Kudnu sent his boomerang off into the north to recover the sun, but to no avail. Then he shot it to the west, and the south, but still no light came forth. Finally, the lizard-man threw his boomerang east, where it carried the sun goddess high above the horizon, then down again in the west. Because the lizard-man saved the world, the Flinders Range people never killed a goanna or a gecko. (Eliade 1973; McLeod et al.)

**Dinewan** The people of the Murray River say that in the Dreaming, the now flightless emu had enormous wings, until the female emu Dinewan encountered the evil crane Brolga. Dinewan was fascinated with the crane's dances. Hiding her wings behind her back, Brolga told Dinewan that she had to amputate her wings, which would otherwise be in the way when she tried to dance. The unsuspecting emu chopped off her wings. Immediately, Brolga unfolded her own wings. In a nearby tree a kookabura laughed. This is why the emu cannot fly, and why the kookabura, remembering the trick, laughs.

Dinewan recovered slowly. She began to explore her earthly home, to taste its new fruits. She built a nest and laid her first brood. Then she sat to hatch them. Seeing the vast number of emu eggs, the crane decided to play another trick. Hiding all but one of her offspring, she sang the praises of few children until she convinced the emu to break all her eggs but one. Then she flaunted her substantial brood before the unhappy emu.

The next breeding season, troublesome Brolga came back to Dinewan where she sat proudly on nestful of eggs. Although the emu told the crane to leave, Brolga tormented Dinewan with cruel names until she lured the emu off her nest. Brolga rushed forward and smashed the emu's eggs. Dinewan tried to save her brood, but all but one of the eggs had been crushed. Carrying the last emu egg, Brolga rose into the air and threw it as hard as she could into the sky. It struck a pile of wood in the sky, which caught fire and became the sun. (Dixon; Flood et al.; McLeod et al.; Parker 1898, 1993)

**Djanggawul Sisters** The elder daughter of the Yirrka sun goddess was Bildjiwuraroiju; her younger sister was Miralaidj; together they were the Djanggawul Sisters. In the Dreaming, they traveled with their brother Djanggawul, carrying sacred objects that made women powerful: carvings of parrot, goanna, porpoise, and ant, together with a uterus-shaped mat in a sacred pouch. With these totems and with sacred songs that only they knew, the Djanggawul sisters could raise power.

Djanggawul begged to be taught the songs, but his sisters told them that only their sacred objects protected women from men's violence. But the brother found a way to own the totems. First he seduced the older sister, Bildjiwuraroiju, and because they had to find a place to raise the child she conceived, he prepared to move to this world. But the younger sister, Miralaidj, was afraid of being left alone, so she made love with her brother and, conceiving a child, demanded the right to continue traveling.

When they reached this world, it was dry and infertile. The sisters drew water with their digging sticks and created plants from their poles. They sanctified the land with sacred songs and the display of totems. The women grew heavier, but they kept

traveling to make fertile their new world. Finally, the women had to stop and give birth. Through them, the land was populated.

When their children began to argue, the sisters invented laws and rituals. But even in the new land their brother plotted to steal their sacred objects. When he succeeded, the women decided that the power of the womb was sufficient and that they would not attempt to gain back the sacred objects. (R. Berndt 1951, 1952, 1974; Berndt and Berndt; Eliade 1973)

**Erathipa** In central Australia, a huge boulder in the shape of a pregnant woman bears this name. Down the side runs an opening where the souls of children are imprisoned. They watch until a woman of suitable age walks by, then slip into her womb to be reborn. Women of childbearing age who do not wish to become pregnant stoop as they walk past Erathipa's rock, pretending to be too old to conceive. (Powdermaker)

**Gambil Gambil** Among the Weilwan people of New South Wales, this star woman was originally a cannibal. A shape-shifter, she pretended to be a kind old woman to tempt an old man. But he had come prepared, for he carried a rope made of the hair of all the women in his village. When she came close enough, he leaped upon her, intending to strangle her. But she leapt into the air and became a falling star. (McLeod et al.)

**Gnowee** Among the Wotjobaluk of Southeastern Australia, the sun mother's name was Gnowee. She lived on earth where there was no light, so she always carried a torch. In such a dark world, Gnowee found it difficult to find food for her child. Further and further she wandered, but no food was to be found. Finally, concerned that she had walked so far, she turned to go back, but found that she no longer knew her way. She walked and walked, until she rose into the sky, across which she walks still, searching for her lost child. (Massola; Reed 1993)

**Goolagaya** An envious barren woman, Goolagaya lived alone with a white dingo, both of them shunned by her people. But Goolagaya made friends with some children by giving them treats. Her intention was not innocent, however. When a woman angered her, Goolagaya stole her baby and hid it under a shrub near a pond. The baby slid into the pond and drowned, and in retaliation the people killed Goolagaya and her dingo, burying them deep in hopes that their spiteful spirits would be contained. But the two managed to escape every evening, walking among humans and trying to steal children who wander away from the campfire. (Ellis; Mountford and Roberts 1965)

**Julunggul** The rainbow snake goddess could transform herself into male, neuter, or androgynous form. She was embodied in the ocean and waterfalls, in pearls and crystals, and in deep pools. As goddess of initiations, Julunggul was the primary spirit presence when boys became men. The boys approached her in ritual, to be symbolically swallowed and regurgitated out as men. Her voice was heard in the bullroarer, the ritual instrument used in initiations. (R. Berndt 1951, 1974; Eliade 1967; Poignant; Reed 1993)

**Kalwadi** An old woman with the human name of Mujingga, this goddess worked as a baby-sitter. Because she craved infant flesh, occasionally one of her charges would disappear. Her children were upset, because Kalwadi took care of their offspring. Then Kalwadi too disappeared. They tracked the goddess to an underwater lair and killed her, then released the children from Kalwadi's womb, where they were awaiting rebirth. Australian people celebrated this second birth in initiation rituals. Some scholars feel that Kalwadi was identical to **Kunapipi**. (R. Berndt 1951, 1974; Eliade 1968; Poignant)

**Karakarook** Aboriginal Australians from near Melbourne said that two women were set upon by snakes and, while protecting herself, one broke her staff. Flames flew out of it, attracting the attention of a bird who caught it. When two men ran after the bird, it dropped the flame and started the earth on fire. People hid in fear, and when the fire burned itself out, they were without fire altogether. Without fire to frighten them, snakes began to reproduce wildly. But Karakarook came from the sky to guard the women, bringing a flaming brand with her, which she shared with women so that they could be safe. (Dixon)

**Krubi** According to the people of the Illawarra region, the red-flowering waratah tree was originally the girl Krubi, beloved of the handsome Bahmai. She watched for him whenever he was away, sitting high on a hill. Always, she wore her bright red cloak, so that he could see her and wave as he returned. But one day, she saw the village's men coming back from a defensive raid. Bahmai was not with them. Stricken with grief at her loss, Krubi faded away. Where she died, the first red flowers of the Waratah tree were soon seen. (McLeod et al.)

**Kuggun** According to the Ngulugwongga (Mulluk Mulluk) people, the mother of bees was Kuggan, who was married to Vamar, the fly. But she disliked the rotting flesh Vamar fed her, preferring nectar. When he killed all the flowers in their area so that she would have to eat his food, she made sure all their children were like her. As they were born, they all flew away to find food in the hearts of flowers. (Bozic)

**Kultana** In southeastern Australia, this Dreamtime woman lives with her husband far to the west, where they light fires to attract spirits of the dead. She controlled cold winds called *jiridja*. (R. Berndt 1974)

**Kunapipi** Eternally pregnant, the mother goddess of northern Australia created every living being. Sometimes represented (like **Julunggul**) as a rainbow snake, Kunapipi is the overseer of initiations and puberty rituals. She came from a sinking land to establish herself and her worship. Both the goddess and the rituals connected with her go by the name of Kunapipi.

Along the Roper River, people say that Kunapipi used her daughters as bait for her favorite meal: human men. Kunapipi ate so many men that it attracted the attention of a hero who, catching her in the act, destroyed her. But the moans she made while dying struck into all the trees in the world and can be heard if the wood is carved into



bullroarers, which cry out “Mumuna,” Kunapipi’s ritual name. (Eliade 1973, 112–13; Poignant, 112, 120–34)

**Lumerai** The rainbow serpent Lumerai slept in the earth’s center for immeasurable eons, then crawled to the surface and across the empty land. Where she passed, earth’s features show her track: rivers, lakes, and water holes. She pressed her nose into the earth, forming mountains, and watered the land with milk, causing it to flower. She awakened the earth’s creatures. Then she went below the earth to awaken a man and woman, who became ancestors of all people. (McLeod et al., 41–42)

**Makara** This collective name describes seven primordial emus, all sisters, who were hounded by the Wanjin, the dingoes. The women were not interested in the wild dogs and kept flying away. So the dingoes set a fire around the rocks where the emus nested, thinking to burn off the women’s wings. The trap worked, but the dingoes injured their own legs trying to run over the burning grasses, so that now emus are flightless and dingoes have short legs. When the Makara found that the Wanjin continued to follow them, the women rose into the air, becoming the Seven Sisters who watch over other preyed-upon women. (Mountford and Roberts 1965)

**Meamei** The stars of the Seven Sisters once lived on earth as a bevy of beautiful sisters notable for their long hair and the icicles that covered their bodies. They hunted alone, never joining with other families. But some young men, the Beraï-Beraï, began to follow them and leave them love-offerings of honey. The girls took the honey but ignored the boys. But an old man captured the girls and tried to melt their ice, whereupon the girls escaped to the sky and became stars. The Beraï-Beraï pined away until they, too, were translated to the sky where they shine as the constellation Orion. Once a year, the girls throw ice down to earth to remind those who remained behind of their presence in the sky. In response, people take the ice particles and use them to pierce the noses of children, which endows them with the gift of song. (Parker 1898)

**Memembel** Among the Ngulugwongga (Mulluk Mulluk) of northern Australia, the primal porpoise Memembel lived by the sea, avoiding everyone but her own children. She had many of them, but none were very attractive, so she set out to find a prettier one. The sweetest child was the son of Manark, the kangaroo. She crept along behind the pair until she caught them in an unguarded moment, then lured Manark’s son away and ran toward the sea with him.

Manark, desperate to save her child, grabbed a pole and hit Memembel on her head. The porpoise dropped the child, who ran crying back to Manark. Memembel was so angry at losing the pretty child that she hit Manark with a stick, breaking her arms. Since then, the kangaroo has kept its children hidden away in a belly-pouch and has shrunk arms from where Memembel broke them. The porpoise shows the results of the fight as well, as it has a deep cleft in its head where Manark hit Memembel. (Bozic)

**Mutjingga** Among the Murinbata people, Mutjingga was the all-creating primal mother. She was left to baby-sit some children of her village. When the parents returned to find the children missing, they followed suspicious markings leading to a water hole. There they speared Mutjingga and retrieved the children from her belly, still breathing. Although she was dead, her voice survived as that of the bullroarer used in initiation ceremonies. Another creatrix, Imberombera of the Kakadu, walked out of the ocean pregnant and walked around giving birth to many children and planting edible vegetables; she also formed the hills and rivers. The relationship of this figure to the similarly named **Mujingga** is unclear. (Charlesworth, 85–103)

**Myee** Inquisitive Myee was a moth with multicolored wings, according to the people of New South Wales. Despite warnings, she could not resist flying to the mountains to see why they gleamed. Tired from the long flight, she fell onto the snow, where she was trapped until spring. When the rains came, they melted off her colors, which stained the spring flowers. Myee found herself a dull gray, as her children remain. (McLeod et al., 78–79)

**Nerida** The young girl Nerida and her friend Birwain used to play beside a big water hole where no one else went out of fear of a water monster who lived there. As years went by, Nerida grew into a lovely young woman, and the friendship between her and Birwain grew into love. But the water monster had been watching the girl mature, and he desired her for his own. One day he caught her alone and, disguising himself as a friendly old woman, told Nerida that she would have to leap into the pool to save her people from the anger of the water-monster. To save her people, Nerida did what was asked of her. Birwain sat by the water weeping until Nerida appeared in the form of a red water lily, then he jumped into the pool and was transformed into water reeds, which always grow with water lilies as a token of this doomed love. (Parker 1993)

**Ngalyod** Another form of the great rainbow serpent, the creator goddess Ngalyod of Arnhem Land brings life to creation through her continuing existence in the Dreaming. She appeared as the woman Waramurungundji, traveling with her husband Wuragog, an importunate man who kept pressing himself sexually upon her. Tired of his insensitivity, she turned herself into a snake, which did not stop Wuragog from seeking intercourse. She gave birth to the original people and taught them the rules of peaceful society. (Allen)

**Numma Moiyuk** Ocean goddess of the Yulengor of Arnhem Land, she created herself as a very fat woman, full of unborn children. Though she came from the sea, she created the first pools. Then she gave birth to humankind and taught her descendants necessary crafts, including the weaving of fishnets and the painting of sacred designs. Finally, she died, offering her body as food to her children. (Chaseling)

**Nurrun** The primordial turkey of the Ngulugwongga (Mulluk Mulluk) people was Nurrun, who in the Dreamtime was married to a man named Manor, who knew how to use fire while Nurrun did not. When he tried to teach her how to bank a fire for

the night, she poured sand mixed with hot ashes over him and burned him badly. Nur-run remained liable to make mistakes. When Manor went to a men's corroborree, Nur-run was frightened of the dark and built a fire so huge that it escaped, causing a conflagration across the land. In fear, she began to beat her arms until she rose in the air and thus became a turkey. But Manor, because his arms were burned, could not fly; instead he began to run and turned into an emu. (Bozic)

**Pirili** When an old man desired her for a wife and the other old men agreed, vibrant young Pirili refused to accept her fate. But a man she selected instead tried to rape her. Pirili rose into the heavens, her attacker following her and tearing out stars in his furious pursuit. The women of the Milky Way hid her within the Seven Sisters and, to punish her attacker, sentenced him to remain on earth. Other versions of the myth say that the couple, having married happily, were tracked and killed by the jealous old man. Their blood was transformed into red spring flowers. (Ellis; Mountford and Roberts 1965; Parker 1898, 1993)

**Pukwi** The sun goddess of the Tiwi people, Pukwi created the world in the Dreaming. She made the ocean from her urine, which is why it tastes salty. She travels the sky in the daytime and goes along the Milky Way to the place of dawn every night. The reason it is so hot at midday is that she builds a fire to cook her lunch. (White)

**Quork-Quork** In northern Australia, this onomatopoetically named green frog goddess was the mother of the lightning goddess Bumerali, the rain goddess Tomituka, and the man of thunder, Pakadringa. Native Australians were careful not to injure green frogs, for fear that Quork-Quork's children would deluge them with unseasonable monsoon rains. During the rainy season, Quork-Quork could be seen hopping about and enjoying the noise her children made. During the dry season they retreated to the sky while their mother hid in rocks and trees. (Mountford and Roberts 1965)

**Vena** The sun's wife to the people of Tasmania, Vena traveled with Parnuen across the sky. Because he had longer legs, he carried her, dropping seeds of rain as they traveled. When Vena grew tired, she rested on the icebergs of the great southern sea, but her heat melted the ice and she sank, appearing later as the moon. In anger, her husband melted the icebergs that covered Tasmania, revealing the land. (McLeod et al.)

**Walo** The people of Arnhem Land said this sun goddess lived with her daughter Bara and her sister-in-law, the world-mother Madalait, far to the east. Each day Walo journeyed across the sky accompanied by Bara, until one day the sun goddess realized that the earth was parched from their combined heat. She sent her daughter away so that the earth could become fertile and bloom.

Once, in the Dreaming, Walu slept in an underground cave. When she woke and stretched, light streamed into the sky. Walu climbed over the world's edge. She stroked the soil, and trees and plants burst forth. Spirits emerged to help. They dug rivers, piled up hills, sculpted animals and birds. Then Walu sought a place to sleep. Off on the western horizon she saw the Island of Bralgu, where she rested. The next morning,

when she saw the lovely green land, she was pleased with herself. Spirit people, observing the land's beauty, made it their home. (R. Berndt 1952, 46)

**Wai-ai** This primal goddess of the Tiwi people off Australia's north coast lived in the Dreamtime when everyone was immortal. There the moon man Tapara seduced Wai-ai, convincing her to leave her baby son Jinaini alone during their assignments. Angry at what she saw, the sun goddess Wyah scorched the child to death. When she found the dead child, Wai-ai was confused, because she had never seen a corpse. She tried to nurse the child back to life but failed. In grief, the boy's father, Purukapali, created funeral ceremonies and cursed everything on earth to die as his son had done. After creating the ceremony, Purukapali walked into the sea to his death. (Holms)

**Wuriupranala** In northern Australia, this sun goddess carried a torch through the sky from east to west. At the western sea, she dipped it in the water then used the embers to guide her under the earth to reach her eastern starting point. The brilliant skies of dawn and dusk came from Wuriupranali's red ochre body paints misting the sky as she powdered herself. Her companion, the moon man Japara, bore a smaller torch and therefore gave less light. (Mountford and Roberts 1965)

**Waramurungundji** The creatrix of Arnhem Land, a figure similar to **Kunapipi**, Waramurungundji gave birth to the earth and fashioned its creatures. She taught her creations to talk and divided each language group from the next. All people were considered relatives through descent from Waramurungundji. (R. Berndt 1974; Swain and Trompf)

**Wawalag Sisters** Two sisters came from the Dreaming. The elder, Gungman, was pregnant by a relative, while the younger Wirlkul was virginal. Carrying stone spears and sporting feather headbands, the women wandered the continent domesticating plants, evolving languages, and naming all the land's creatures. As they traveled, Gungman had her child, continuing to bleed and leaving a trail of blood.

They camped next to the pond where **Julunggul** lived, a taboo place where women's blood was prohibited. A heavy rain began, and the women built shelters. As rain ran into the pond, it carried some of Gungman's blood. Julunggul reared out of the water, ready to devour the women. The women began to dance, hypnotizing the snake. Finally, worn out, the Wawalag Sisters fell asleep, and Julunggul swallowed them.

But the snake goddess felt ashamed of eating the women and their children. So she vomited them up, and the women were revived by ant bites. But Julunggul could not restrain herself and ate them again. Again she vomited them up, in an endless cycle. According to some versions of the myth, the women remain within the snake, speaking from her belly. (R. Berndt 1951, 1974; Caruana and Lendon; Charlesworth; Eliade 1973; Swain and Trompf)

**Wuradilagu** In Arnhem Land, Wuradilagu wandered across the land, naming its features and endowing them with meaning. Throughout, she kept herself covered with a

mat of bark so that no man could look at her. Carved images often show her pregnant or giving birth; she is honored in a long song-cycle. (R. Berndt 1966.)

**Yhi** The goddess of light of the Karraru of southwest Australia, Yhi lay asleep in a world of windless mountains. Suddenly, a whistle startled her. She opened her eyes, flooding the world with light. The earth stirred. Yhi drifted down to this new land, walking north, south, east, west. As she did, plants sprang up from her footprints. She walked the world's surface until she had stepped everywhere. Then the goddess rested on the treeless Nullabor Plain.

As she glanced around, she realized that the new plants could not move, and she desired to see something dance. She descended beneath the earth, where she found evil spirits who tried to sing her to death. But they were not as powerful as Yhi. Her warmth melted the darkness, and tiny forms began to move. The forms turned into insects that swarmed around her. She led them into the sunny world. But there were still caves of ice in which other beings rested. Yhi stared into the cave's interiors until water formed. Fishes and lizards swam forth. Cave after cave she freed from its darkness, and birds and animals poured forth onto the face of the earth.

Then Yhi told her creatures she would return to the Dreaming. Turning into a ball of light, she sank below the horizon. As she disappeared, darkness fell. There was sorrow and mourning, and finally there was sleep. And, soon, there was the first dawn. A bird chorus greeted Yhi, and the lake and ocean waters that had been rising in mists, trying to reach her, sank down calmly.

For eons the animals lived in peace, but then sadness began to fill them. She had not planned to return, but she slid down to the earth's surface and asked the creatures what was wrong. Wombat wanted to wiggle along the ground. Kangaroo wanted to fly. Bat wanted wings. Lizard wanted legs. Seal wanted to swim. The confused Platypus wanted something of every other animal. Yhi gave them what they wanted. From the beautiful regular forms of the early creation came the strange creatures that now walk the earth. Yhi then swept up to the sky again.

She had one other task yet to complete: the creation of woman. She had already embodied Thought in male form and set him wandering the earth. But he was lonely. Yhi went to him as he slept near a grass tree. As he woke, he saw a flower stalk shining. He was drawn to it, where Yhi concentrated her power. The flower stalk began to move rhythmically. Then it changed into the first woman, mother of all people. (McLeod et al.; Reed 1993)

**Yirbaik-Baik** This cannibal woman kept a pack of dingoes with which she hunted humans. She played a trick on her victims, pretending she knew where fat wallabies could easily be killed. But a group of humans surrounded and killed Yirbaik-Baik and her canine companions. The dogs became snakes, and the cannibal woman a small brown bird. Even as a bird, however, she remained powerful, for with her calls she brought forth rain and thunder. (Mountford and Roberts 1965)

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