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A
HISTORY
OF THE
GODDESSES

A Brief Cultural History of the Goddesses
Featured in the Goddess Power Oracle by Colette Baron-Reid



PREFACE

I invite you to get to know the goddesses featured in the Goddess Power Oracle with this very brief cultural history. Since this is only a short introduction to the cultural history and mythology of these goddesses, I urge you to be curious and seek out more information if there are particular ones who call to you.

While I've done historical research on all these goddesses, there are people who have spent their lives studying them and others who have learned about different traits and aspects, because an abundance of information and possibilities exists for each of them. It would be impossible to fit every detail and bit of history in an oracle deck.

And, honoring the respectful spirit in which this oracle was created, it's important to note that in no way am I trying to appropriate or claim these goddesses in a new image to replace their traditional ones. This is especially true when it comes to the Hindu goddesses, who are part of a living culture, and the Indigenous goddesses that belong to their respective spiritual traditions. This multicultural oracle deck would not have been meaningful if these goddesses were left out. The commitment to the Great Goddess and how She expresses herself in every woman, every person—seeing each goddess as an archetype within a unified whole rather than representing the actual traditional deity—was the impetus for me to create this deck and shaped the choices for the art.

So, again, I urge you to discover your teachers and do further research if you are so called. The more acquainted you are with the magic and energy of the individual goddesses, the more they will inspire you and, in turn, the more you'll carry their messages of empowerment and hope to those around you. Magic is in you and all around you, and the Great Goddess will help you claim it.

A HISTORY OF THE GODDESSES



Aine

Aine is both a sun goddess and the daughter of a faery king. She belongs to the Celtic pantheon Tuatha Dé Danann, meaning “Children of the Goddess Danu,” who inspired legends of faeries. She derives her name from the Gaelic word for “bright,” and on the summer solstice, the day of the year when the sun’s brightness shines the longest, the farmers and peasants would honor her with bonfires.

Aine was known to use her shape-shifting abilities to travel between the faery world and the mortal world. In one story, she turned herself into a swan in order to swim in an enchanted river. In another story, Aine used her magic to help the faery king conquer the inhabitants of a hill in Ireland where he wanted to settle with his family. At her request, he renamed the hill Cnoc Aine, the “Hill of Aine,” after her.

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Aphrodite

Aphrodite is the Greek goddess of romantic love. The daughter of Ouranos, she rose from the sea-foam, fully grown, and floated to the shore to join the other gods on Mount Olympus. Although many admired her beauty, she chose the god Hephaestus, who had a clubfoot, for her husband. But the amorous goddess had affairs with many other gods and men, including Ares, the god of war; Hermes, the messenger god; and the beautiful mortal Adonis.

Worshipped on the island of Cyprus, Aphrodite would often play matchmaker for those who prayed to her. She had the power to compel both humans and gods to fall in love. When the sculptor Pygmalion fell in love with a beautiful statue, Aphrodite allowed him to bring his creation to life with a kiss. But these requests were subject to her divine timing. She asked her mortal lover Archises not to tell anyone when she conceived their son, Aeneas, who grew up to be the first hero of Rome. When Archises drank too much alcohol and told her secret, Aphrodite struck him with lightning.



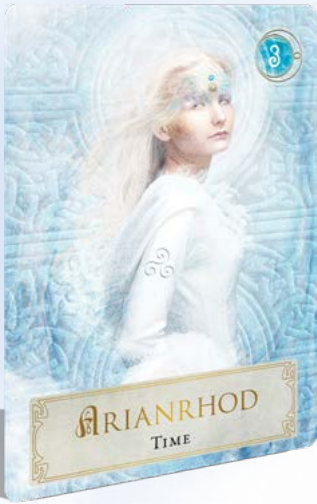
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Arianrhod

Arianrhod is the Celtic goddess of time. She embodies the essence of divine timing: after being tricked into giving birth to a son, she waited until she was ready to acknowledge the boy before giving him a name. Though her enemies tried to rush her, in the end her son received his name just as Arianrhod had predicted—when she said the time was right. By reclaiming her time, she reclaimed her power.

In Welsh, her name means the “Silver Wheel,” evoking the image of the moon, which marks the passage of time as it waxes and wanes. Just as the new moon grows full and bright without any human intervention, so will an unfinished project or cherished dream effortlessly come to fruition with Arianrhod at the wheel.

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Artemis

Artemis is the Greek goddess of the hunt and the moon. Wielding a bow and arrow, the beautiful young huntress roams the fields, forests, and mountains in the moonlight. She is also considered to be the mother of all wildlife: fierce like a bear, elusive like a deer, and destructive like a boar. She defends young girls and animals, and no matter how far away she aims, the goddess never misses her target. She successfully slew the giant Tityus, who tried to rape her mother.



When Artemis first met her father, Zeus, he granted her wish for hunting weapons, clothing suitable for running in, space to roam, and eternal chastity—but not before his wife, Hera, had punished her mother, Leto, with a difficult labor. After nine days and nine nights, Leto gave birth to Artemis and her twin brother, Apollo, on the remote island of Delos. Artemis, who was born first, served as the midwife in delivering her brother. For this reason, mothers called on her for a swift delivery to end the pain of childbirth. The Temple of Artemis at Ephesus, located in modern-day Turkey, was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world.

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Athena

Athena is the Greek goddess of intellect and strategy. Before she was born, an oracle told her father, Zeus, that her mother, Metis, would have two children: one who would be powerful and wise, and one who would kill him. Zeus thought he could stop his pregnant wife from giving birth by turning her into a fly and swallowing her. Because Metis loved Zeus, she willingly made herself small. But Zeus couldn't contain Athena. He complained of a headache one day, and when he had his head cut open with an ax, his powerful daughter emerged, fully armed.

On her shoulder sits her totem animal, the owl, who represents wisdom. In times of war, she would use her gift of strategic thinking to aid her champions in battle. It was her idea for Perseus to use a reflective shield to avoid looking directly at Medusa's face, which turned men to stone, and it was her hand guiding his sword as he delivered the fatal blow to claim the Gorgon's head. In times of peace, Athena could be called upon for help with pottery and weaving, using her knowledge of crafts to bring projects to fruition. But worshippers were wise to remember that Athena was very loyal to her father. She turned a mortal woman, Arachne, into a spider to punish her for weaving a tapestry that depicted Zeus's affairs.

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Benzai-Ten

Benzai-Ten is the Japanese goddess of beauty. The patron deity of geishas, she is highly skilled in music, art, dance, and conversation.

Benzai-Ten is the only woman among a group of deities called the Shichi Fukujin, or the “Seven Gods of Luck.” Traveling together in a dragon-headed boat, the Shichi Fukujin bring good fortune and prosperity to those who have earned it. Benzai-Ten is especially helpful with matters of love, wealth, the arts, and accessing feminine power.



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Branwen

Branwen is a Celtic goddess and queen, best known for her compassion and deep connection to the land. Praised as being the fairest woman in the world, she agreed to marry the king of Ireland to establish peace between his kingdom and hers, the Island of the Mighty.

Unfortunately, her brother challenged their union, ruining her relationship with the king and his subjects. To keep the peace, she forgave her husband, endured his abuse, and raised their son. Meanwhile, she trained a starling to warn one of her other brothers, Brân, that she was being mistreated. But when war broke out between the two islands, destroying them both, she blamed herself and died of a broken heart.

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Brigid

Brigid is the Celtic goddess of fire who stokes creativity. She inspires poets while warming the hearth and heating the forge—creating, transforming, and healing everywhere she goes. Brigid is a member of the Celtic pantheon Tuatha Dé Danann, meaning “Children of the Goddess Danu.” With her help, the Dananns forged superior weapons that gave them an advantage over their enemies, the Fomorians.

But her inspiration to poets may have had the opposite effect. Her husband, Bres, was king of the Dananns until a satirical poem damaged his reputation and forced him to give up his throne. When his mother revealed that his birth father was a Fomorian, Bres joined the enemy tribe and fought against the Dananns who had turned on him. He sent Brigid’s son Ruadan to the Danann camp as a spy, where he was killed. (Brigid’s other sons died in battle as well.) But the goddess remained creative, even in her grief. Her outpouring of tears was so intense that it required a new name: keening, which is part crying and part shrieking or singing.

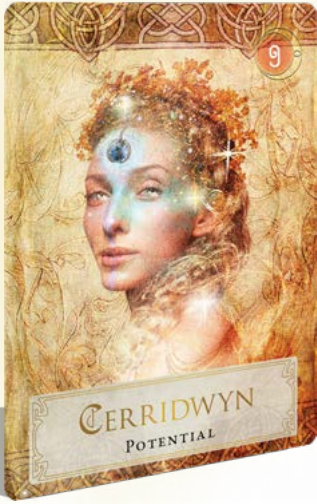


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Cerridwyn

Cerridwyn is the Celtic goddess of rebirth. Along with her husband, Tegid Foel (“the Bald”), and their children, she lives on a remote island in what is now known as Bala Lake in Wales, where she tends to the cauldron of knowledge.

For one year and one day, she worked on a magic potion to cure her son, who was ugly and depressed. But when the benefits of the potion went to her apprentice Gwion Bach instead, she was furious. She chased him across the sky, land, and water, shape-

shifting into different animals along the way. When she finally cornered him in a barn, hidden in a pile of grains, Cerridwyn changed into a red hen and ate him. But he took root inside her and was reborn. The goddess tried to dispose of him in a river, but he was rescued, adopted, and renamed. With the drops of inspiration he got from the potion, he fulfilled his potential as Cerridwyn’s apprentice and grew up to be a poet. Thus proving her cauldron was the symbol of ultimate potentiality.

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Danu

Danu is the earth mother and namesake of the Celtic pantheon Tuatha Dé Danann, or “Children of the Goddess Danu.” These gods and goddesses battled for control of ancient Ireland, and they ultimately made their home in the caves and trees, around which legends of fairies, leprechauns, and other magical creatures still live on.

Danu’s name may be linked to the Danube River, near where the Tuatha could have lived before they came to Ireland. In the creation stories of the Shannon and Boyne rivers, Danu may also be the force behind the magical Well of Segais, from which the rivers flow. Inside the well swim the salmon of wisdom, feeding on the hazelnuts that fall from the surrounding trees of knowledge. In these legends, Danu is both the source of magic and the sustainer of life on Earth, nourishing the land to allow the crops to flourish always reminding us that life will always return.



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Demeter

Demeter is the Greek goddess of grain who was celebrated as the mother of agriculture. The golden sheaf of wheat she holds in her hand symbolizes both the abundance of the earth and the cycle of death and rebirth. During sowing season, she'd give the planted seeds to the god of the underworld, and during harvest time, he'd return them to the living world, transformed into life-sustaining grain. But the nurturing goddess is best known for her fierce devotion to her daughter, Persephone.

When Persephone was kidnapped, Demeter refused to go back to Mount Olympus or let anything grow until her daughter was safely returned to her. She was wandering the earth, disguised as an old nursemaid, when she learned that Hades, the god of the underworld, had taken Persephone as his bride. Her brother Zeus tried to appease her with gifts, but she sat in her temple in Eleusis and would not be moved. Finally, Persephone was allowed to come home, but just like the seeds, she would have to return to the underworld for a few months each year. Demeter's search for Persephone inspired the Eleusinian Mysteries, secret religious rites performed in Eleusis every year to help people overcome their fear of death.

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Elen

Elen is the Celtic goddess of paths and patterns. Elen's father was a chieftain who ruled in Britain during the reign of the Roman Empire. According to legend, the Roman emperor Magnus Maximus first saw her in a dream and was so enchanted by her that he sent a search team to find her.

Once he did, they got married and moved to Gaul, where Elen raised their children and studied philosophy. After Magnus died, she returned to Britain and ruled on her own. She set up three strongholds within her kingdom to protect the land from invaders and built roads between them, establishing new patterns for travel that brought prosperity and security to her people. For this, she earned the nickname "Elen of the Ways" or "Elen of the Roads." In the Welsh church, she is revered as a saint.



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Eostre

Eostre is the Germanic goddess of the springtime and the dawn. Her name shares its roots with the Christian holiday Easter. A beautiful maiden dressed in white, Eostre brings joy, light, and new beginnings.

On Easter Sunday, the Germans would light bonfires for her, and the girls would wear white dresses and wander up rocky cliffs. Water drawn on that morning was believed to contain her magical healing powers. The Anglo-Saxons also celebrated her, holding feasts in her honor during the month of April to celebrate the end of winter.

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Epona

Epona is the Celtic goddess of leadership and guidance. Worshipped in the ancient French town of Alesia, she was especially helpful in facilitating the trade, healing, and fertility of horses and other domestic animals.

After Julius Caesar and his army defeated the Gauls, the horse goddess continued to offer her guidance to the Romans. The emperor would invoke Epona on behalf of the imperial house by placing a shrine to her inside the stable.



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Freya

Freya is the Norse goddess of war. Decorated with falcon feathers, she could change into a bird and fly across the battlefield, but she was also known to ride in a chariot pulled by two cats. To end a battle with the Aesir pantheon of gods and goddesses, Freya made the best of the situation and joined them in Asgard, taking her brother and father with her.

There, Freya found new purpose as the leader of the Valkyries, who collected dead soldiers for Odin, the god of victory in battle. Once the souls were harvested, they would be carried to the Hall of Valhalla and trained for the battle of Ragnarok, which would determine the fate of gods and men in the new world order. Most importantly she even struck a deal with Odin in which she could carry half of the undead army to her own hall instead of his where they could rest and recuperate after their deaths.

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Gaia

Gaia is the Greek goddess of the earth and the original mother of the gods. The ancient Greeks called on her for help with young children and plants, and she also gave them dreams. Her first children embody the natural world: Pontus is the god of the sea, Ouranos is the god of the sky, and Typhon is a monster with 100 heads who represents the destructive power of the earth's volcanoes.

In the story of how Gaia created the Titans, who reigned before the gods of Mount Olympus, the goddess became the wife of her son Ouranos. He would lie so close to her that she couldn't give birth to their children. So she gave their son Kronos a sickle to castrate his father, separating heaven from Earth to make room for new life.



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Green Tara

Green Tara is the Tibetan goddess of enlightened activity. She is the youthful manifestation of the mother goddess known as “she who saves.” (The others are Red Tara, Blue Tara, White Tara, Black Tara, and Yellow Tara.)

Tara offers her followers the gifts of longevity and salvation from danger. (In ancient times, this meant the “eight great fears”: lions, elephants, fires, snakes, thieves, false imprisonment, drowning, and ghosts, which symbolize the psychological dangers of pride, delusion, envy, anger, false views, greed, desire, and doubt.)

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Gula

Gula is the Babylonian goddess of healing and medicine. She is the daughter of Anu, the father of the gods. She is also the consort of Ninurta, the god of thunderstorms and the plow.

Referred to in ancient writings as the “Great Physician” or the “Great Lady,” Gula is revered for giving and preserving life. Her totem animal is the dog, whose tongue was believed to cure sores.



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Hecate

Hecate is the Greek goddess of crossroads and the in between. Associated with the dark moon and the underworld, she illuminates the blackness of night and the mystery of the unknown. When the goddess Demeter was searching for her lost daughter, Persephone, Hecate took the distraught mother to the sun god Apollo to find out the truth about her disappearance. Once Persephone became queen of the underworld, Hecate served as her companion in the darkness.

In ancient Greece, worshippers would leave offerings for Hecate at a Hecaterion: a pillar with three faces that was placed at a fork in the road. The faces looked out in three different directions, representing the potential outcomes of divergent paths, as well as the past, present, and future. Her name means “she who has power far off,” and her power reached the supernatural realm of ghosts, demons, and witches. In the underworld, she guided souls who were stuck between death and the afterlife. In the living world, she could also be called on for help with childbirth and other important transitions.

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Hera

Hera is known as the formidable wife of Zeus. Their marriage put her at the top of the Greek pantheon as the ruling goddess of Mount Olympus. Though Zeus had many other consorts, Hera never let another woman diminish her power. Semele, a mortal woman, was incinerated for daring to taunt Hera about her affair. Hera's totem animal is a peacock, and the eyes of its tail feathers are emblems of the goddess's watchful nature. But her marriage to Zeus wasn't always unhappy. Their honeymoon was said to have lasted 300 years. At one point, Hera grew tired of Zeus's infidelity and went into hiding. In response, Zeus staged a wedding to another woman, who was really just a statue, hoping the ruse would incite his wife's jealousy and lure her back. Hera wasn't fooled, but she appreciated Zeus's humor, and she went back to him.

In ancient Greece, Hera was revered as the goddess of marriage. In the spring, worshippers would bathe her statue to symbolically restore her virginity. In the summer and fall, they'd stage a wedding to celebrate her powerful alliance with her husband. In the winter, they'd reenact her separation from Zeus. These rituals honored the three roles a married woman plays throughout her life: the maiden, the wife, and the widow. Her name means "great lady," and to her followers, she was a powerful goddess before and after she married the leader of the gods.



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Hestia

Hestia is the Greek goddess of home and hearth. The first daughter of the Titans Rhea and Kronos, Hestia and her siblings—Demeter, Hera, Hades, and Zeus—challenged their father and overthrew the Titans, claiming Mount Olympus as their new home.

Hestia refused to be married, swearing to Zeus that she would remain a virgin. While the other gods and goddesses followed Zeus in his winged chariot to a heavenly banquet and festival, Hestia stayed behind to take care of her home. But Zeus rewarded her commitment by granting her the best part of the house—right by the hearth, where the sacrificial offerings are made.

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Iris

Iris is the winged messenger of the Greek gods. She is the daughter of the sea god Thaumus and the cloud nymph Elektra, and she shares the sky with her sisters, the Harpies. A facilitator of peaceful communication, she pays visits between heaven and Earth, events marked with a rainbow.

At Zeus's request, Iris carried water from the River Styx in a golden jar to quarrelsome gods to make them take an oath and punish those who lied. During the Trojan War, she carried messages from Zeus to his favored soldiers, changing her voice and appearance to deliver the news on Earth. In Roman mythology, she also served as the attendant to Juno (Hera), sliding on a rainbow to run her errands.



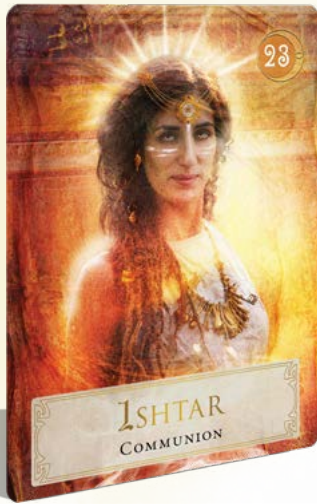
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Ishtar

Ishtar is the Mesopotamian goddess who was known as “She Who Directs the Oracles.” She would commune with her priestesses on behalf of those who had come to the goddess’s temple for help. She was also honored in an annual ritual celebrating her marriage to her husband, Tammuz. When Tammuz died, Ishtar traveled to the underworld to find him, granting them both everlasting life.

Ishtar was also believed to have watched over King Sargon I. After his father died, his distraught mother placed the baby boy in a basket in the Euphrates River. The basket floated downstream and stopped in a garden, where the child was adopted and raised as a gardener’s son. With Ishtar’s foresight and protection, the child grew beyond his humble surroundings and became the king of southern Mesopotamia.

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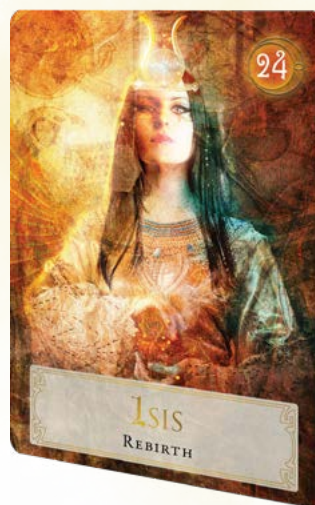
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Isis

Isis is the Egyptian goddess who is known for great feats of resurrection, soul retrieval, and rebirth. Worshipped in ancient Greece and Rome as well as Egypt, she was also revered for healing the sick and protecting the dead. Apothecaries and healers would invoke Isis's name while they were mixing remedies for their patients.

Isis brought her husband and brother, Osiris, back from the underworld to give him eternal life. Osiris was once the king of Egypt, and Isis was his trusted advisor. In a jealous rage, their brother Seth trapped Osiris in a sarcophagus and threw it in the Nile. When Isis retrieved the body, Seth dismembered it and scattered the pieces. The goddess put the body back together to conceive their son, Horus, before Osiris left for the underworld. After his death, Osiris became the ruler of the underworld and the judge of the dead. Meanwhile, Isis protected Horus until he was old enough to challenge Seth for the Egyptian throne. The name Isis means "throne," and her role in restoring Osiris's legacy makes her an enduring symbol of resurrection.



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Kali

Kali is the Hindu goddess who brings about revolution and liberation through destruction. In ancient scripture, she's both a warrior and a manifestation of the mother of the universe. She appears most prominently in the *Devi Mahatmya*, meaning "The Great Praise of the Goddess."

In this story, the gods were unsuccessful in defeating an army of demons, so they surrendered their powers to the goddess Durga, who then fought using the different strengths of all the gods. During the battle with the demons Charda and Munda, Kali sprang from Durga's forehead as a manifestation of her anger. Later, she reemerged from Durga to fight the demon Raktabeeja, who multiplied with every drop of his blood. Durga split herself into two forms: Chandi, who beheaded the multiplying demons; and Kali, who drank their blood before it hit the ground. By unleashing her anger at just the right moment, Kali freed the gods from the clutches of their enemies.

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Kuan Yin

Kuan Yin is the Chinese goddess of compassion. An ageless beauty dressed in robes, she sprinkles the sweet dew of compassion on sufferers' heads using a sprig of willow. Her name means "hearer of the world's cries," and she can be called on to feed the hungry, heal the sick, protect those in danger, and free the unjustly imprisoned. Young couples also ask for her help in having children. As long as the request isn't evil, Kuan Yin will answer the prayer.



Kuan Yin is also known as Princess Miao Shan, a mortal woman who begged her father to let her be a nun. Her father agreed, but he compelled the other nuns to make life hard for her, hoping she'd grow tired of the role and consent to be married instead. When Miao Shan cheerfully fulfilled her duties, her father set the monastery on fire. When she put out the fire, he tried to cut off her head. When the sword failed to pierce her throat, he strangled her to death. After she went to hell, she continued to help others until the god of the underworld sent her back, threatened by her good deeds. Back on Earth, she gave her eyes and arms to help her father, who by then was very ill. In one version of her story, the Buddha sent her to the island of P'u T'o for nine years to perfect herself. She is now revered as a bodhisattva, a being who devotes her life to helping others achieve enlightenment.

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Lakshmi

Lakshmi is the Hindu goddess who brings luck and prosperity. When the gods and demons churned the ocean of milk in search of amrita, the nectar of immortality, Lakshmi rose to the surface along with the coveted treasure. Beautiful and radiant, she wears gold and silver jewelry and is often shown with a lotus, a symbol of fertility and power.

Although Alakshmi, the goddess of quarrels, often accompanies her, Lakshmi does not condone conflict or greed. In a union of prosperity and virtue, she chose to

marry the god Vishnu after he gave the nectar of immortality to the gods to punish the demons for trying to keep it for themselves. Lakshmi is honored in festivals throughout the year, including Diwali, the Hindu festival of lights.

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Leizi

Leizi is the Chinese goddess of lightning. The wife of the thunder god Leigong, she uses mirrors to flash bolts of lightning across the sky, illuminating the heavens and revealing what had been shrouded.

Once, there was a fir tree tall enough to reach the sky that humans would climb in order to appeal directly to the gods. But Leigong struck it down, tired of responding to their endless requests. Instead, the people on Earth would have to signal the gods by tying white streamers to the top of the tallest tree they could find. To communicate with them, Leizi and the other gods created thunderstorms using their combined powers of thunder, lightning, wind, and rain—and could also send a storm to punish the guilty for their crimes.



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Lilith

Lilith was the original wife of Adam, the first man on Earth, in the Jewish creation story. Adam expected her to be subordinate to him, but she was made from the same dust as her husband and considered herself to be his equal. She refused to be dominated by him and so she left Adam and fled to the Sea of Reeds.

Three of God's angels tried—and failed—to bring her back. As a result, Lilith's children were cursed to die, and Eve was sent to be with Adam in her place. Lilith was also demonized for her actions, blamed for infant deaths and arousing men in their sleep. But she earned her freedom and is now an icon of feminine independence.

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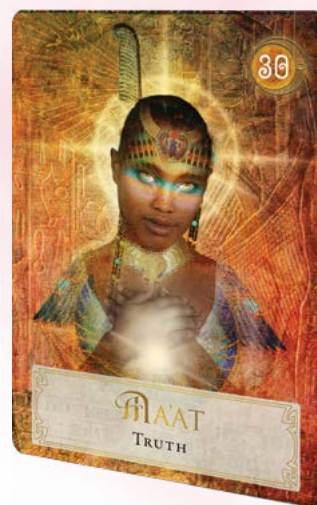
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Ma'at

Ma'at is the Egyptian goddess who maintains the cosmic order. The name Ma'at refers to the general concept of order, balance, and justice. In ancient Egypt, farmers who relied on the ebb and flow of the Nile for their livelihood prayed to Ma'at, hoping to atone for any imbalance in their lives that could affect their crops. Her sanctuary was part of the Karnak temple complex in Thebes.

Wife of the moon god Thoth and daughter of the sun god Ra, Ma'at appears with a sun disk around her head. She also wears an ostrich feather in her hair to represent the spirit. The ancient Egyptians believed that after death, a person's heart would be put on a scale and weighed against Ma'at's feather to reveal the truth about that person's character before his or her fate was sealed. If the heart was as light as the feather, the soul would ascend to paradise. If not, the soul would be punished to correct the imbalance.



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Mary

Mary is the Christian mother of God. She was a virgin when the angel Gabriel appeared to her to foretell the impossible birth of her son, Jesus. When Jesus was executed for his beliefs, Mary's grief was short-lived: Jesus miraculously rose from the dead to offer eternal life to all people. She witnessed the truth that anything is possible when it is aligned with divine will.

Although Mary was a mortal woman, people now direct their prayers to her as a compassionate mediator between humans and God. In Europe, cathedrals and churches dedicated to her were sometimes converted from shrines built for other goddesses, as her propensity for producing miracles was considered nothing short of divine.

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Mama Killa

Mama Killa is the Incan goddess of the moon and the protector of women. The daughter of Mama Qocha, the goddess of the sea, and Viracocha, the ruler of the Incan gods, Mama Killa illuminates the night sky. She and her brother and husband, the sun god Inti, were equally bright until Inti got jealous and threw ashes in her face.

But Mama Killa was very important to the ancient Incas, as she regulates the calendar, the changing of the seasons, the planting and harvesting of crops, and fertility celebrations, all of which the Incas linked to the moon's cycles. She and Inti have two children together: the fertility goddess Mama Ocllo and the Incan ruler Manco Cápac, who is known for founding the Incan capital at Cuzco and bringing agriculture and a codex of laws to Incan civilization.



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Mama Qocha

Mama Qocha is the Incan goddess of the sea. She is the first goddess in the Incan pantheon. Her husband, Viracocha, is the creator of the universe and the god of the sun, storms, fire, and lightning. Together, they have two children: the moon goddess Mama Killa and the sun god Inti.

The sea goddess brings life-sustaining water to the earth in its varied forms, from oceans, lakes, and rivers to clouds, rain, and snow. Sailors and fisherman relied on Mama Qocha to protect them by calming the ocean. She was also believed to bring good health to the ancient Incas when they went swimming.

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Maya

Maya is a multicultural goddess. She is the Hindu goddess of illusion; in Greek mythology she is one of the Pleiades, the seven daughters of Atlas; and in Buddhism she is the virgin mother of Buddha. Cross-culturally Maya personifies the perceived reality of the material world that human beings experience through the five senses. She reminds us that our sense of separateness is illusion, that what we perceive may not be true, that essence is greater than form. Important to note is that in Greco-Roman mythology she gave birth to the messenger god Hermes (Mercury), also known as the trickster.



In Buddhist myth Maya's son Buddha's first symbolic act was to accept a dish of curds from a maiden on Full Moon Day in the month of May, which became one of the most important Buddhist festivals.

The archetype of the goddess Maya is widely found in many other cultures, myths, and traditions.

"She was more than the Maia who mothered Hermes; she was also Maga the Grandmother-goddess who bore Cu Chulainn's mother; and the Mandaean Christian's Almaya, called "Eternity," or "the World," or "Beings"; and Maga or Maj the May-maiden in Scandinavia. Like the Hindu Maya who brought forth earthly appearances at creation, the Scandinavian one personified the pregnant womb of chaos before the beginning: Ginnungagap. In this the World-virgin was associated with the idea of magical illusion, creating "appearances" like her Hindu counterpart."

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Metis

Metis is a wise goddess of the Titans, the race of gods who preceded those of Mount Olympus, and Zeus's wife before Hera. Her name means "wise counsel" or "practical wisdom," and it was Metis's good advice that allowed Zeus to defeat the Titans and become the new leader of the gods. The chief Titan was Zeus's father, Kronos, who had swallowed his children to keep them from challenging his power. Following Metis's advice, Zeus slipped a poison into his father's drink that made him throw up and release Zeus's siblings, including Poseidon and Hades, who helped their brother defeat the Titans.

But when an oracle told Zeus that one of his two children would similarly take his place, he followed in his father's footsteps and swallowed Metis to keep her from giving birth. Because she loved Zeus, Metis made herself small and allowed Zeus to keep her that way. But their daughter, Athena, emerged from Zeus's head, dressed for battle. She rejected her mother, and Metis disappeared from Greek mythology. But like other women whose legacies have been diminished or forgotten, Metis exerted an influence that could never be erased. She continued to counsel Zeus from his belly.

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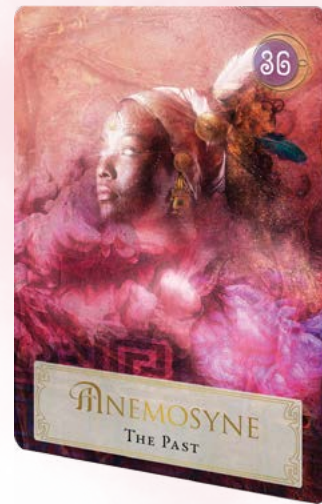
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Mnemosyne

Mnemosyne is the Greek goddess of memory. From her name comes the word mnemonic, describing something that assists with memory.

Known to the gods for her beauty, Mnemosyne was one of Zeus's many consorts. But she is best remembered as the mother of the nine Muses, who inspired poets, dancers, historians, orators, astronomers, comedians, and others in the arts—all of whom depended on memorization to hone their crafts and preserve their traditions. She points to the past to remind us of what we don't want to repeat as well as wisdom we must learn from.



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Morrighan

Morrighan is the Celtic goddess of death and magic. Born to the earth mother Ernmas, Morrighan fights alongside her sisters Badb and Macha as a goddess of war, but she can also bring prosperity. Her tryst with the fertility god Dagda on the banks of the Unshin River in Connaught, Ireland, represents the cycle of death and rebirth.

The goddess wields her powerful magic to predict and shape the outcome of people's lives. Known as the "Phantom Queen," Morrighan sometimes appears as

a washerwoman cleaning the bloody rags of doomed soldiers. She can also shape-shift into a crow. With her ability to look into the future, Morrighan can determine a warrior's fate in battle. She warned Dagda when his enemies, the Fomorians, were planning an attack. She also foretold the death of the Irish hero Cú Chulainn, who fought with her many times but eventually earned her favor by healing her injuries.

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Nike

Nike is the Greek goddess of victory. Swift to overcome any obstacle, she wears the wings of a messenger and the laurel wreath of a warrior victorious in battle. Her ambition led her and her family to be the first gods to join Zeus on Mount Olympus after he defeated the Titans.

For their loyalty, Zeus rewarded them all with gifts and vowed to keep Nike and her siblings at his side. She is the daughter of the goddess Styx, who is the personification of the river in the underworld, and the Titan god Pallas. Her siblings are Kratos, the god of strength, and Bia, the goddess of force.



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Nyx

Nyx is the primordial Greek goddess who embodies the mystery and secrets of the night. Though she is cloaked in darkness, the stars shine brightly around her head. Nyx is the offspring of Chaos, and she had many children with her brother Erebus, the god of the darkness. Her twin sons are Hypnos, the god of sleep, and Thanatos, the god of death.

But from the darkness also came her daughters: Aether, the goddess of the light, and Hemera, the goddess of the day. Nyx lived in the underworld with Hemera, but the two were never home at the same time. At the end of each day, Hemera returned to the underworld by chariot. At the gates, she would pass by Nyx, who was driving her own chariot past the setting sun to veil the sky in unknowable darkness.

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Oshun

Oshun is the Yoruban orisha, or goddess, of the Osun River in Nigeria. Beautiful and sensual, she is the favorite wife of the thunder orisha Shango. Oshun was the only female out of the 17 original orishas on Earth. When the men ignored her suggestions for creation, she gathered a group of women to stage a protest. Together, the women kept the men from working, roaring until their voices were heard.

Oshun provides good health, wealth, and fertility to those living in the towns along her river, who depend on her to protect them from droughts or floods. To thank her for her generosity, worshippers have built shrines to her along the banks of the Osun River and in the Osun-Osogbo Sacred Grove. She is also honored every year in the Oshun festival, which is held in Osogbo, Nigeria, the sacred place where Oshun and human beings first met.



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Parvati

Parvati is a benevolent Hindu goddess who became the wife of Shiva, one of the main Hindu deities, through her religious devotion. At the time, Shiva was living in a cave as a hermit. The other gods tried sending Kama, the god of love and pleasure, to draw him out, but Shiva wasn't motivated by desire alone. To tempt him, Parvati proved her faith in him by refusing to eat, drink, or move until Shiva agreed to marry her—which, of course, he did.

In Sanskrit, the name Parvati means “Daughter of the Mountain.” Her father is Himavan, the god of the Himalayan mountain range, and her brother is another important deity, Vishnu. After she married Shiva, he was reluctant to have children, so Parvati created their two sons on her own: Skanda, the war god who offers protection, and Ganesha, the elephant-head god who removes obstacles.

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Persephone

Persephone is both the Greek queen of the underworld and the lost daughter of the goddess Demeter. Young and naïve, she is depicted as a slender and beautiful maiden. She was picking flowers in a meadow when the beautiful god Narcissus caught her eye. In that brief moment of distraction, the ground split open and Hades emerged from the underworld. With permission from Persephone's father, Zeus, Hades captured the goddess, took her home with him, and held her there against her will. At her mother's insistence, she was eventually allowed to return to the living world.

When the messenger god Hermes came to collect her, Hades tricked Persephone into eating pomegranate seeds, robbing her of her innocence and forcing her to stay with him in the underworld for a few months out of the year. But this time, she took ownership of her fate, serving the underworld as a ruler of the dead and a guide to the living, helping Greek heroes such as Odysseus and Heracles on their quests. The Eleusinian Mysteries, secret religious rites that took place in Eleusis, marked her annual return from the underworld as a celebration of renewed life.



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Rhea

Rhea, a primordial Greek goddess, is revered as the mother of the goddesses Hestia, Demeter, and Hera and the gods Poseidon, Hades, and Zeus. Her Titan parents, Ouranos and Gaia, were the respective rulers of heaven and Earth. The father of Rhea's children was her brother Kronos. Rhea's name shares its root with the Greek word for "flowing, and ease" and from her womb flowed a new generation of gods and goddesses, who eventually ruled Mount Olympus.

Rhea overcame obstacles with ease. When she was pregnant with Zeus, Kronos swallowed their other five children. He feared that they would grow up to challenge his rule as he had once challenged his father's. Rather than fighting or arguing with Kronos, Rhea simply went with the flow and prayed to Ouranos and Gaia for help. Before Kronos could swallow Zeus, Rhea swaddled a stone in the baby's place. Then, taking her parents' advice, she hid Zeus in a cave in Mount Ida on Crete. She appointed nymphs and young warriors called kouretes to guard Zeus in her absence. To keep Kronos from discovering his son, the kouretes would bang their swords on their shields to muffle the boy's cries. This allowed Zeus enough time to grow up and free his siblings. Together, they fought and won against the Titans.

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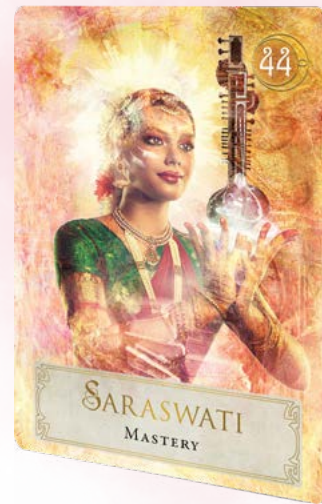
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Saraswati

Saraswati is the Hindu goddess of knowledge and the arts. She is often shown holding a vina: a stringed instrument similar to a lute. She shares her name with the mythical Saraswati River. Like the goddess Vak, she assists with the mastery of speech, language, and meaning. Through her, thoughts and words flow freely.

She is often paired with the god Brahma, both as his daughter and his consort, in a union of knowledge and creation. Other times, she and the goddess Lakshmi are portrayed as the two wives of Vishnu. In India, she's honored in a festival celebrating the commencing of spring, and students call on her to help them excel in their exams.



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Shakti

Shakti is the essence of the Great Goddess, or Devi, of Hinduism. In Sanskrit, her name means “power.” Though she is called by other names and takes on many forms, she represents the divine energy that creates and destroys all life.

In the form of Kali or Durga, she is a strong warrior. In the form of Parvati or Lakshmi, she is a loving wife. As the consort or sister of the supreme god Shiva, Shakti is the feminine aspect of divine power that transforms thoughts into action.

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Skuld

Skuld served as one of the Valkyries: Norse death maidens and oracles who could determine how men died on the battlefield by weaving on a magic loom to either free them or immobilize them with fear. In addition to collecting the souls of slain soldiers, Skuld and the other Valkyries performed the magic of Galdr. By chanting or singing runes in a specific order, they could manifest the outcome they desired.

In Norse, Skuld's name means "she who is becoming." She is the youngest of the three Norns, or Fates, who weave each person's destiny into the tapestry of time. She shapes the future. These deities help water the great ash tree that supports the universe, connecting the earth to the worlds of the giants, the gods, and the dead through its roots.



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Sophia

Sophia is the Gnostic goddess of divine wisdom. The primordial descendant of Pistis, the goddess of faith, she mediates between heaven and Earth.

From the void of chaos, Sophia created Yaldabaoth, who fathered the seven original gods who ruled the heavens. But Yaldabaoth mistakenly thought he was alone in the cosmos. He didn't know Sophia existed until she revealed herself to him in the form of pure light.

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Spider Woman

Spider Woman is the Navajo goddess of weaving. At the beginning of creation, Spider Woman taught Navajo women how to weave on a loom. (Learning to weave was especially empowering to them, as it provided an extra source of income.)

Her husband, Spider Man, had built the loom with sunbeams, lightning, rock crystal, and shells, representing the marriage of Father Earth and Mother Sky. The loom's children were the rugs and other woven crafts they made: all symbols of beauty and harmony. In a broader sense She represents the weaving of the world and all its manifestations.



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Uzume

Uzume is the Shinto kami, or goddess, who brings laughter and mirth with the light of the morning sun and the joy of dance. She wears a headdress of spindle-tree leaves, drapes club moss on her shoulders and arms, and holds bamboo-grass ornaments in her hands, which she picked from Mount Kagu in Japan.

In the creation story Kojiki, Uzume used her sense of humor to coax out the sun goddess Amaterasu, who was hiding in a cave, depriving the earth of heat and light. To get Amaterasu's attention, Uzume laid

a sounding board outside the cave, where she started dancing and banging her feet. As she danced, she allowed her clothing to come loose, flashing the other kami in the audience to make them laugh. Hearing the commotion, Amaterasu poked her head out to take a look. When she asked why Uzume was dancing and they were laughing, the kami told her they were celebrating another goddess who had brightened their day. In truth, they had hung a mirror and jewels just outside the cave. Assisted by Uzume's good humor, the kami finally captured Amaterasu as she stopped in front of the mirror, thinking it was the other goddess, and became mesmerized by her own reflection.

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White Buffalo Calf Woman

White Buffalo Calf Woman is the Lakota Sioux goddess of ceremony, culture, and bison. In a time of famine, the Lakota tribe sent a couple of scouts to look for food. In the distance, the two men saw a white bison. As they got closer, the bison became a beautiful woman dressed in white buckskin: White Buffalo Calf Woman. The first man threatened to assault her, so she incinerated him, reducing him to a pile of bones. The second man was reverential, so she paid his tribe a visit. The Lakota prepared a feast for her with what little food they had.

In exchange, White Buffalo Calf Woman taught them how to use a sacred pipe to reach the spirit world. The bowl of the pipe represents the earth, the wooden stem represents plant life, and the feathers hanging from the stem represent the birds of the air. She also gave them seven ceremonies to connect humans with the earth and the divine. After she walked away, she rolled on the ground, and when she rose again, she turned into a bison, changing her coat to a variety of colors, from black to brown to red to white.



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Yhi

Yhi is the Aboriginal Australian goddess of the sun and the mother of all creation. Along with the god Baiame, she is revered in Karraur culture as the creator of humankind. She emerged from a primordial state of being called Dreamtime.

Awakened by the sound of a whistle, Yhi opened her eyes, and as she walked the earth in all directions, she created life in her wake. She sank beneath the earth and dispelled the darkness, defeating the evil spirits below, melting caves of ice, and bringing insects and

other animals into the light. Then she formed a ball of light and disappeared into the horizon, upsetting the animals but promising to return. When she did, she granted the animals their unique qualities and created the first woman and man.

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Yuki-Onna

Yuki-Onna embodies the stillness of winter and the end of life. In Japanese folklore, she emerges from the snow in the form of a beautiful woman as a harbinger of death, but she can also show mercy, especially to the young.

She appeared to an old woodcutter named Mosaku and his apprentice, Minokichi, who were stranded in the snow and had taken shelter in a ferryman's hut. In the middle of the night, Yuki-Onna entered the room in a gust of icy wind. She had come to take the old man's life, but she agreed to spare the boy as long as he promised not to tell anyone what he'd seen. When he was older, Minokichi confessed to his wife, O-Yuki, that the only woman he knew whose beauty matched hers was Yuki-Onna. That's when he found out that O-Yuki was Yuki-Onna in disguise. Yuki-Onna opted not to kill him because of their children, but she disappeared into a mist and was never seen again.



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