

Gaia (mythology)

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Gaia (pronounced /ˈdʒiː.ə/, sometimes also /ˈɡeɪ.ə/ or /ˈɡaɪ.ə/) ("land" or "earth", from the Greek **Γαῖα**; variant spelling **Gaea**—see also **Ge** from Γῆ) is a Greek goddess personifying the Earth.

Contents

- 1 In Greek mythology
- 2 Family tree
- 3 Interpretations
- 4 In other cultures
- 5 In Neopaganism
- 6 In modern ecological theory
- 7 In popular culture
- 8 References
- 9 External links

Greek deities series

- Titans and Olympians
- Aquatic deities
- Personified concepts
- Other deities

Primordial deities

- Chaos
- Aether
- **Gaia**
- Uranus
- Eros
- Erebus
- Nyx
- Tartarus

Chthonic deities

Hades and Persephone, **Gaia**, Demeter, Hecate, Iacchus, Trophonius, Triptolemus, Erinyes

In Greek mythology

Hesiod's *Theogony* (116ff) tells how, after Chaos, arose broad-breasted Gaia the everlasting foundation of the gods of Olympus. She brought forth Uranus, the starry sky, her equal, to cover her, the hills, and the fruitless deep of the Sea, Pontus, "without sweet union of love," out of her own self. But afterwards, Hesiod tells, she lay with Uranus and bore the World-Ocean Oceanus, Coeus and Crius and the Titans Hyperion and Iapetus, Theia and Rhea, Themis and Mnemosyne and Phoebe of the golden crown and lovely Tethys. "After them was born Cronus the wily, youngest and most terrible of her children, and he hated his lusty sire."

Hesiod mentions Gaia's further offspring conceived with Uranus, first the giant one-eyed Cyclopes, builders of walls, later assigned individual names: Brontes ("thunderer"), Steropes ("lightning") and the "bright" Arges: "Strength and might and craft were in their works." Then he adds the three terrible hundred-handed sons of Earth and Heaven, the Hecatonchires: Cottus and Briareos and Gyges, each with fifty heads.

Uranus hid the Hecatonchires and the Cyclopes in Tartarus so that they would not see the light, rejoicing in this evil doing. This caused pain to Gaia (Tartarus was her bowels) so she created grey flint (or adamantine) and shaped a great flint sickle, gathering together Cronos and his brothers to ask them to obey her. Only Cronos, the youngest, had the daring to take the flint sickle she made, and castrate his father as he approached Gaia to have intercourse with her. And from the drops of blood and semen, Gaia brought forth still more progeny, the strong Erinyes and the armoured Gigantes and the ash-tree Nymphs called the *Meliae*. From the testicles of Uranus in the sea came forth Aphrodite. For this, a Greek etymologist urged, Uranus called his sons "Titans," meaning "strainers" for they strained and did presumptuously a fearful deed, for which vengeance would come afterwards; for, as Uranus had been deposed by his son Cronos, so was Cronos destined to be overthrown by Zeus, the son born to him by his sister-wife Rhea. In the meantime, the Titans released the Cyclopes from Tartarus, and Cronos was awarded the kingship among them, beginning a Golden Age.

After Uranus' castration, Gaia gave birth to Echidna and Typhon by Tartarus. By Pontus, Gaia birthed the sea-deities Nereus, Thaumás, Phorcys, Ceto and Eurybia.

Zeus hid Elara, one of his lovers, from Hera by hiding her under the earth. His son by Elara, the giant Tityas, is therefore sometimes said to be a son of Gaia, the earth goddess, and Elara.

Gaia also made Aristaeus immortal.

Gaia is believed by some sources (Joseph Fontenrose 1959 and others) to be the original deity behind the Oracle at Delphi. She passed her powers on to, depending on the source, Poseidon, Apollo or Themis. Apollo is the best-known as the oracle power behind Delphi, long established by the time of Homer, having killed Gaia's child Python there and usurped the chthonic power. Hera punished Apollo for this by sending him to King Admetus as a shepherd for nine years.

Family tree

- Parthenogenesis
 - Uranus
 - Pontus
- With Elara
 - Tityas
- With Oceanus
 - Creusa
 - Spercheus
- With Pontus
 - Ceto
 - Eurybia
 - Phorcys
 - Nereus
 - Thaumas
- With Poseidon
 - Antaeus
 - Charybdis
- With Tartarus
 - Echidna
 - Typhon
- With Uranus
 - Cyclopes
 - Arges
 - Brontes
 - Steropes
 - Hecatonchires
 - Briareus
 - Cottus
 - Gyes
 - Titans
 - Coeus
 - Crius
 - Cronus
 - Hyperion
 - Iapetus
 - Mnemosyne
 - Oceanus
 - Phoebe
 - Rhea
 - Tethys
 - Theia
 - Themis

- With Hephaestus
 - Erichthonius of Athens
- Unknown father
 - Mimas
 - Pheme
 - Python

Interpretations

Some sources, such as authors Marijas Gimbutas and Barbara Walker, claim that Gaia as the Mother Earth is a later form of a pre-Indo-European Great Mother who had been venerated in Neolithic times, but this point is controversial in the academic community. Belief in a nurturing Earth Mother is a feature of modern Neopagan "Goddess" worship, which is typically linked by practitioners of this religion to the Neolithic goddess theory. For more information, see the article Goddess.

Hesiod's separation of Rhea from Gaia was not rigorously followed, even by the Greek mythographers themselves. Modern mythographers like Karl Kerényi or Carl A. P. Ruck and Danny Staples, as well as an earlier generation influenced by Frazer's *The Golden Bough*, interpret the goddesses Demeter the "mother," Persephone the "daughter" and Hecate the "crone," as understood by the Greeks, to be three aspects of a former Great Goddess, who could be identified as Rhea or as Gaia herself. In Anatolia (modern Turkey), Rhea was known as Cybele. The Greeks never forgot that the Mountain Mother's ancient home was Crete, where a figure some identified with Gaia had been worshipped as *Potnia Theron* (the "Mistress of the Animals") or simply Potnia ("Mistress"), an appellation that could be applied in later Greek texts to Demeter, Artemis or Athena.

In Rome the imported goddess Cybele was venerated as Magna Mater, the "Great Mother" and identified with Roman Ceres, the grain goddess who was an approximate counterpart of Greek Demeter, but with differing aspects and venerated with a different cult.

In other cultures

The idea that the fertile earth itself is female, nurturing mankind, was not limited to the Mediterranean. In Norse mythology the Great Mother, the mother of Thor himself, was known as *Jord*, *Hlódyn*, or *Fjörgyn*. In Lithuanian mythology Gaia - Žemė is daughter of Sun and Moon. Also she is wife of Dangus (Varuna). In Pacific cultures, the Earth Mother was known under as many names and with as many attributes as cultures who revered her for example Māori whose creation myth included Papatuanuku, partner to Ranginui - the Sky Father. In South America in the Andes a cult of the Pachamama still survives (in regions of Bolivia, Peru, Ecuador, Argentina and Chile). The name comes from Pacha (Quechua for change, epoch) and Mama (mother). While ancient Mexican cultures referred to Mother Earth as Tonantzin Tlalli that means "Revered Mother Earth". In Indian religions, the Mother of all creation is called "Gayatri", a surprisingly close form of Gaia.

In Neopaganism

Many modern Neopagans, particularly *Hellenistic* Neopagan sects in the United States, actively worship Gaia. Beliefs regarding Gaia vary, ranging from the common Wiccan belief that Gaia is the Earth (or in some cases the spiritual embodiment of the earth, or the Goddess of the Earth), to the broader Neopagan belief that Gaia is the goddess of all creation, a *Mother Goddess* from which all other gods spring. Gaia is sometimes thought to embody the planets and the Earth, and sometimes thought to embody the entire universe. Worship of Gaia is varied, ranging from prostration to druidic ritual.

Unlike Zeus, a roving nomad god of the open sky, Gaia was manifest in enclosed spaces: the house, the courtyard, the womb, the cave. Her sacred animals are the serpent, the lunar bull, the pig, and bees. In her hand the narcotic poppy may be transmuted to a pomegranate.

Some who worship Gaia attempt to get closer to *Mother Earth* by becoming unconcerned with material things and more *in tune with nature*. Others who worship Gaia recognize Gaia as a great goddess and practice rituals commonly associated with other forms of worship. Many sects worship Gaia, even more than worship Themis, Artemis, and Hera. Some common forms of worship may include prostration, attempting to reach a greater connection to the earth, shamanistic practices, tithing, praising and praying, creating inspired works of art dedicated to the goddess, burning oils and incense, rearing plants and gardens, the creation and maintaining of *Sacred Groves*, and burning bread or spilling drink as offerings. Other forms of worship may indeed be common, as worship of Gaia is very broad and can take many forms.

In modern ecological theory

The mythological name was revived in 1969 by James Lovelock for his Gaia hypothesis, which was later developed by Lynn Margulis into a Gaia theory. The hypothesis proposes that living organisms and inorganic material are part of a dynamic system that shapes the Earth's biosphere. Earth itself is viewed as an organism with self-regulatory functions.

In popular culture

Main article: Gaia in popular culture.

The embodiment of the Earth Mother, Gaia entered popular culture following the publication of James Lovelock's *Gaia: A New Look at Life on Earth* in 1979. Further books by Lovelock and others popularized the Gaia Hypothesis, which was widely embraced and passed into common usage as part of the heightened awareness of planetary vulnerability of the 1990s.

Gaia is the name of one of the gundam moble suits in the japanese anime, Gundam SEED Destiny.

References

- Joseph Fontenrose, *Python: A Study of Delphic Myth and its Origins*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1959; reprint 1980
- Karl Kerényi, *The Gods of the Greeks* 1951
- Carl A.P. Ruck and Danny Staples, *The World of Classical Myth*, 1994.

External links

- Gaea (<http://www.marvunapp.com/Appendix/gaeathor.htm>) , a profile of her version in the Marvel Universe

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Categories: Greek goddesses | Nature goddesses

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