

## Greek Mythology

Athena was a weaver and the Goddess of Wisdom. She was described as having shining gray eyes and She would always be accompanied by an owl now a symbol of wisdom. Often, Athena is accompanied by the Goddess of Victory, Nike. Athena is always depicted wearing armor and a helmet. She is described as a virgin and there are no instances of her having any male lovers. The Partheneon is dedicated to Athena.

A woman called Arachne used to boast that she was the best weaver ever and Athena challenged her. Arachne, in her vanity, wove a scene of Zeus in trouble with his many wives at which Athena became furious and burned the tapestry down along with Arachne. Later on, she regretted it, and turned Arachne into a spider so that she would weave her beautiful designs forever. After Greece was conquered by Rome, Athena was incorporated with a similar goddess from Roman Mythology called Minerva.

"The Voice of the Shuttle" comes from Sophocles and refers to Polymela, a young woman who was savagely raped by her brother-in-law, a Thracian king. To prevent her from telling her sister (his wife) what had happened, he cut out her tongue. Desperate, Polymela used the only means she had available -- she let her wooden shuttle speak for her as she wove the scenes of her rape and mutilation into a tapestry. When her sister saw it, she understood what had happened and took a terrible revenge upon her husband, killing their son thereby severing the political ties of the marriage.

## Japanese Mythology

Ama-Terasu "Great Shining Heaven" is the Japanese sun goddess, guardian of the Japanese people and ruler of all deities. One of her tasks was to weave sacred robes for the gods. After an altercation with her brother she hid in a cave and wouldn't come out so that no sunlight could reach the earth.

The gods met to plan a way to free her and the lewd dancer Uzume stepped forth. She danced so that the gods all were delighted and laughed so much that the cave shook.

Ama-terasu opened the door of the cave to see what was going on. Uzume said that they were happy because a new, better, more beautiful sun goddess has come to replace her. Amaterasu immediately demanded to see this goddess, and was shown a mirror. She was startled and spellbound by her own reflection long enough for the gods to draw her from the cave, and so the world was light again and there was much rejoicing.

Ama-terasu symbolizes warmth, harvest, love, fertility, goodness, wisdom, peace, light, sun, compassion.

## European Goddesses

Dalia is the Goddess of weaving and fate in the Lithuanian mythology. She was the giver and taker of goods and property and the omniscient goddess of childbirth and destiny. Dalia was a spinner, weaver, and seamstress. She is also believed to cut off the cloth of life.

Perchta or Berchta (English: Bertha), Goddess in Southern Germanic paganism in the Alpine countries. Perchta is often identified as stemming from the same Germanic goddess as Holda and other female figures of German folklore (see Frijia-Frigg). With Holda she shared the role as a "guardian of the beasts" and came during the Twelve Days of Christmas when they checked on the spinning. In Bavaria and German Bohemia, Perchta was often represented by St. Lucia. "January 6 the Twelfth Night was once known as her festival day, though it was later replaced by Epiphany in Christianity when the church adopted the Gregorian Calendar, thereby moving the holiday from the 19th to the 6th. The festival included a feast of traditional foods of dumplings and herring." (Wikipedia)

## Central America

Ixchel, is the Mayan Goddess of weaving, healing and childbirth. Mayan women say that fabric made on a back-strap loom is not woven, it is "born". Although associated with floods and rains, Ixchel was commonly worshipped as the patron goddess of weaving and especially childbirth.

Myth has it that Our Mother Moon, the goddess Ixchel, taught the first woman how to weave at the beginning of time. Since then, Maya mothers have taught their daughters, from generation to generation uninterruptedly for three thousand years, how to wrap themselves around the loom and produce exquisite cloth.

In addition to its important religious and social aspects, historically weaving has been central to indigenous women's economic contribution to their households. In a traditional Maya context, when a girl is born, the midwife presents her with the different instruments of weaving one by one and she says:

Well then, little girl,  
This will be your hand  
This will be your foot  
Here is your work  
With this, you'll look for your food,  
Don't take the evil path,  
Don't steal  
When you grow up  
Only with these will you work  
With your hand With your foot

Weaving is impregnated with spiritual elements. Girls begin learning the long and difficult process of weaving when they are eight or nine years old by watching their mothers and older sisters. Around the age of 11 they make their first pieces of cloth and take them to the feet of the patron saint of weaving, Santa Rosa, in Chamula's Church. They go there often with their mothers to pray to the saint that she might grant them the art of weaving.

Please lend me the ten toes of your feet  
The ten fingers of your hands, Engrave heavily on  
my mind Engrave heavily on my heart  
How to use the three points of your bobbin  
How to use the three points of your loom  
The three points of your spindle  
The three points of your basket  
Please, I beg you, Put (the skill) in my foot  
In my hand Please, Holy Mother, Please, Sacred  
Mother.

If after the first few supplications the girl has still not learned, she will take more offerings of candles and incense and new prayers. The emotional verses are long and repetitive as if to

ensure that the deity hear them and take pity on the child who, in order to be a useful member of her family and community, must become an expert weaver. Throughout their careers as weavers, women regularly go to church in Chamula to ask for the saint's blessings so they may continue their work of clothing their families and honor the Moon who instructed the first weaver. Every time she has a new difficult weaving project, a weaver will pray and make offerings to the deity and often dream that the deity is by her side assisting her. Handling sacred symbols of her culture and keeping in touch with the deities empowers Mayan women.

## Egypt

Nit (Net, Neit, Neith) was the predynastic goddess of war and weaving, the goddess of the Red Crown of Lower Egypt and the patron goddess of Zau (Sau, Sai, Sais) in the Delta. In later times she was also thought to have been an androgynous demiurge - a creation deity - who had both male and female attributes (yep, she has a penis). The Egyptians believed her to be an ancient and wise goddess, to whom the other gods came if they could not resolve their own disputes.

It is thought that Neith may correspond to the goddess Tanit, worshipped in north Africa by the early Berber culture (existing from the beginnings of written records) and through the first Punic culture originating from the founding of Carthage by Dido. Ta-nit, meaning in Egyptian the land of Nit, also was a sky-dwelling goddess of war, a virginal mother goddess and nurse, and, less specifically, a symbol of fertility. In this context virgin means woman who created herself, who's identity and creation is not dependant on a man.

Her symbol is remarkably similar to the Egyptian ankh and her shrine, excavated at Sarepta in southern Phoenicia, revealed an inscription that related her securely to the Phoenician goddess Astarte (Ishtar). Several of the major Greek goddesses also were identified with Tanit by the syncretic, *interpretatio graeca*, which recognized as Greek deities in foreign guise the deities of most of the surrounding non-Hellene cultures. A Hellenistic royal family ruled over Egypt for three centuries, a period called the Ptolemaic dynasty until the Roman conquest in 30 A.D.

Neith was a goddess of war and of hunting and had as her symbol, two crossed arrows over a shield. Her symbol also identified the city of Sais. This symbol was displayed on top of her head in Egyptian art. In her form as a goddess of war, she was said to make the weapons of warriors and to guard their bodies when they died.

Her name also may be interpreted as meaning, water. In time, this meaning led to her being considered as the personification of the primordial waters of creation. She is identified as a great mother goddess in this role as a creator.

Neith's symbol and part of her hieroglyph also bore a resemblance to a loom, and so later in the history of Egyptian myths, she also became goddess of weaving, and gained this version of her name, Neith, which means weaver. At this time her role as a creator changed from being water- based to that of the deity who wove all of the world and existence into being on her loom.

As a goddess of weaving and the domestic arts she was a protector of women and a guardian of marriage, so royal woman often named themselves after Neith, in her honour. Since she also was goddess of war, and thus had an additional association with death, it was said that she wove the bandages and shrouds worn by the mummified dead as a gift to them, and thus she began to be viewed as a protector of one of the Four sons of Horus, specifically, of Duamutef, the deification of the canopic jar storing the stomach, since the abdomen (often mistakenly associated as the stomach) was the most vulnerable portion of the body and a

prime target during battle. It was said that she shot arrows at any evil spirits who attacked the canopic jar she protected.

In the late pantheon of the Ogdoad myths, she became identified as the mother of Ra and Apep. When she was identified as a water goddess, she was also viewed as the mother of Sobek, the crocodile. It was this association with water, i.e. the Nile, that led to her sometimes being considered the wife of Khnum, and associated with the source of the River Nile. She was associated with the Nile Perch as well as the goddess of the triad in that cult center.

As the goddess of creation and weaving, she was said to reweave the world on her loom daily.

## Maori Traditions (New Zealand)

Maori passed their knowledge and wisdom between generations through stories and permanently recorded them in the carving and weaving of the various tribes. Weaving was a gift from the Gods. Weaving is one of the Treasures of Hine-te-iwaiwa, the female personification of the moon (Marama) and also the Maori goddess of weaving, plaiting and other arts. The Maori developed the craft of weaving and plaiting to a fine art to make a variety of articles for use in daily life.

Hineteiwaiwa is the principal goddess of Te Whare Pora – The House of Weaving. In some iwi (tribes) she is said to be the daughter of Tāne and Hine Rauamoā. She is known to the peoples of Polynesia as well as to Māori.

Hineteiwaiwa represents the arts pursued by women. Along with this, she is a guardian over childbirth. In the past, all female children were dedicated to her. Hineteiwaiwa also began the important office of ruahine where a woman takes a critical role in the ceremonies lifting the tapu (sacred restriction) from newly-built houses.

She is the head of the aho tapairu, an aristocratic female line of descent. Sometimes this goddess is referred to as Hina, the female personification of the moon.

Te Whare Pora has been described as a 'state of being' as well as a place. Weavers who were initiated into this house had their levels of consciousness raised to be in a state of optimum readiness to receive knowledge. This was achieved through karakia (prayers) and initiation ceremonies.

It was believed that the karakia endowed the student with a receptive mind and retentive memory. They would become possessed with quick understanding and a thirst for deeper knowledge. Initiated weavers became dedicated to the pursuit of a complete knowledge of weaving, including the spiritual concepts.

Very few weavers today experience this initiation ceremony. The practice was discouraged by missionaries, who considered it anti-Christian.

Ngā mahi a te Whare Pora or the products of the House of Weaving include tāniko, a technique used to decorate the borders of fine garments, as well as bird cages, bird traps, and eel baskets. Tāniko is similar to European twining. These days tāniko is used to make belts, purses, bodices, armbands, headbands, and bandoliers.