

## Venus: Goddess of Love

**Katherine Young**

Whether you enjoyed Valentine's Day this year with a significant other, with family, with pets, or even with yourself, I am sure that love was somewhere in the air. Although we do not associate a deity with the purpose of this holiday in modern times, in ancient times the Romans did. This deity is the goddess Venus. Venus, or Aphrodite to the Greeks, is the goddess of love, beauty, and desire, among other things. She also happens to be the ancestor of the Roman people, since Aeneas, the founder of the Roman people, is her son. Venus has two symbols, the rose and the common myrtle. Today, roses are seen as the flower of love. Because the Romans viewed Venus as the embodiment of love and sexuality, she is often depicted nude in paintings and sculpture.



Venus has many different myths surrounding her, including one detailing the birth of a second son. This second son is Cupid. Cupid is said to have been the child of Venus and the war-god Mars. Cupid is a Roman love-god, with two different names. The first name, Cupid, means lust or desire. The second name, Amor, means affectionate love. Just as Venus embodies love and desire, so does her son. Furthermore, Venus has many Roman festivals honoring her and her powers. Many of them center around her power of fertility. Venus had the power of fertility both in plants and animals, and humans. Because of this central theme, Venus was allotted the month of April, which was the beginning of spring and fertility in all things.

Venus was worshipped in many different temples, by multiple cult followings. The first temple erected to Venus was in 295 BCE. It was built on the Aventine Hill by Q. Fabius Gurges. Another temple was built and offered to a foreign image of Venus that was found in Eryx. It was this image that became the Roman's main ideal of her. They called it *Venus Genetrix*, or "Venus the Mother". A cult formed around this image on the Capitoline Hill, yet it was reserved only for the higher classes. In 181 BCE, temples were built to *Venus Erycina*, and a cult was dedicated to this image. Similarly, in 114 BCE, temples were built to *Venus Verticordia*, and another cult was dedicated to this image. Both of these images are similar because both cults were created for the plebeians, or the common people. Also, both image names mean "Venus the changer of hearts".

Although Venus was not worshipped until later in ancient times and adopted most of her mythology from her Greek counterpart Aphrodite, she was still of great importance to the Roman people. As mother of Aeneas and ancestor to Julius Caesar, she was the key deity to the Roman people. Ultimately, she was an idol for all Roman women, and brought a focus to one of the strongest emotions, love.

Want to test your skills? Try to find all the words associated with the goddess of love in this word search!



GODDESS  
VENUS  
LOVE  
BEAUTY  
DESIRE  
APHRODITE  
ROSE  
MYRTLE  
CUPID  
FERTILITY  
APRIL  
SPRING

## *Greek Heroes and Their Rankings*

### *Aeres Zhou*

Having studied all the Greek heroes scattered throughout the mythos, one inevitably begins to wonder: which one is the best? Each hero has his own set of unique skills, accomplishments, and character, all of which will be factored into the following ranking. I will examine the heroes I consider the most well-known: Perseus, Theseus, Jason, Hercules, Achilles, Odysseus, Aeneas, and Bellerophon.

#### 8. Jason



Bottom of the list is without a doubt Jason. Besides being nice enough to carry an old lady across a river (who turned out to be Hera), Jason's life is completely devoid of any notable event that he did on his own. Although being able to gather as many legendary heroes as he did into the Argonauts might speak to his skills in persuasion, the rest of the quest for the Golden Fleece is basically done by others. Zetes and Calais save Phineus from the Harpies, who in turn guides the Argonauts through the Symplegades. Medea essentially overcomes the trials of King Aetes for Jason, and is even the one to hold off their pursuers. Orpheus guides them past the Sirens, and Medea disables Talos. After assuming the crown of Corinth, Jason becomes engaged to Glauce and essentially blows off the seemingly all-powerful witch whom he relied on for everything that he has (stupid), resulting in Medea killing Glauce, her two sons with Jason (did I forget to mention they already had children?), and riding off in a chariot of Helios (coolest mic drop in history). Jason doesn't even get the dignity of a hero's death, dying after being crushed by a rotting plank of the once-great Argo. Simply put, nothing Jason does is outstanding, even with the help of others. His many flaws and general lack of strengths land him solidly last on this list.

## 7. Bellerophon



Bellerophon, much like Jason, is not one of the more illustrious ancient heroes. After having refused the advances of Queen Sthenoboea, he is sent to King Iobates with an envelope instructing that Bellerophon be killed. Iobates then sends Bellerophon on his most famous quest: kill the Chimera. Along the way, Bellerophon obtains a golden bridle from Athena and tames Pegasus. As the famous story goes, Bellerophon attaches a chunk of lead to his spear and, when the Chimera's flames melt it, the lead blocks its and kills it. The ease with which Bellerophon dispatches the Chimera speaks more to Bellerophon's ingenuity than the Chimera's ineptitude. As a son of Typhon and Echidna, sibling to monsters like the Hydra and Cerberus, it was a legendary, terrifying (lead melts at 621.5 degrees Fahrenheit), and nigh-invincible monster. Although one could (rightfully) claim that Bellerophon only succeeded because of Pegasus, Pegasus is less of a panacea to Bellerophon's problems and more of a partner. Iobates then sends Bellerophon on more deadly quests, during which Bellerophon taught warriors like the Amazons the importance of air superiority, a tactic millenia before his time. Bellerophon's undoing ultimately is his pride, resulting in him trying to ascend Olympus on Pegasus and being struck down by Zeus. Like Jason, Bellerophon lives out the rest of his life pitifully, wandering blind and crippled until he died alone.

## 6. Perseus



Perseus is all of Bellerophon's positive qualities with none of the hubris. Born to Danae and Zeus, Perseus grew up on Seriphos raised by the fisherman Dictys. To protect his mother from King Polydectes' advances, Perseus agrees to take on a seemingly impossible quest: slay the Gorgon Medusa. Just like Bellerophon, Perseus receives a good helping of divine assistance. After getting (read: extorting) information from the Graeae, Perseus receives a sword from Zeus, Hades' Helm of Darkness, Hermes' Winged Sandals, and a very polished shield from Athena. Having traveled to Medusa's cave, Perseus uses the reflection of his shield to avoid getting turned into stone and cuts off her head. On the way back, he uses the head to rescue Andromeda, whom he eventually marries, from a sea monster. Perseus, upon returning to Polydectes' court, petrifies him and makes Dictys king. Although he doesn't exactly die in a blaze of glory, Perseus founds the great city of Mycenae as his final crowning achievement, setting the stage for future legends.

## 5. Aeneas



Although he's not a Greek hero, Aeneas is nevertheless one of the most famous mythological heroes. Although Aeneas gets severely overshadowed in the Iliad, he was second only to Hector on the Trojan side. Despite needing divine intervention to survive his battles with Diomedes and Achilles, Aeneas was still a formidable warrior. Above everything else, however, Aeneas' main attribute is piety to his family, country, and the gods, which will play a much larger part in the Aeneid. Although the first half of the Aeneid treats Aeneas rather unflatteringly, his strong moral character is (for the most part) on full display. Aeneas morphs into a more "Roman" and heroic figure in the second half of the Aeneid, defeating the Rutulian king Turnus and showing everyone why he was so respected in Troy. As the mythical founder of Rome, Aeneas edges out Perseus to take the number 5 spot.

#### 4. Theseus



Although most people know about Theseus and the Minotaur, they are perhaps less familiar with how he got there. Along the way to meet his father Aegeus, he defeated five bandits and the Crommyonian Sow, known as his Six Labors. By the time Theseus arrived, Aegeus had married Medea (remember her?), who recognized Theseus immediately. Medea sent Theseus to capture the Marathonian Bull and, when he was successful, tried to poison him to secure her status. Luckily, Aegeus recognized the sandals and sword of Theseus, which Aegeus had left behind, and saved Theseus from the poison. Theseus volunteered as one of the 14 youths sent to the Minotaur in Crete, kills it unarmed, and navigates the Labyrinth with the help of Ariadne's string. Despite Ariadne's love for him, he abandons her on Naxos, where Dionysus takes her as his wife. Among his other feats, Theseus captured Helen and was able to invade the underworld with his friend Pirithous, though Heracles had to save him from being trapped there. Theseus is honored as the founder of Athens and receives little to no divine assistance in his feats, making them all the more impressive. Although he wasn't quite as heroic as the next few on this list, his impressive strength, cunning, and overall heroism, land him fourth on this list.

### 3. Odysseus



Odysseus, the man of many ways, is perhaps the most intelligent character in Greek myths. Odysseus also possesses enough brawn to match his brain, something that might tend to be overlooked. Although in pure battle prowess he was not as powerful as Achilles or Diomedes, his strategies and wit more than make up for the difference. The architect of the end of the Trojan War, he is perhaps better known for his exploits returning home to Ithaca. Although he doesn't directly kill and overcome any legendary monsters, Odysseus' admirable hardiness and persistence allow him to power through the various divine challenges presented to him. The sheer amount of abuse that Odysseus endures, coupled with how cleverly he maneuvers through them, means that, in my book, he's a worthy hero. Although he didn't found any major cities, his adventures in the Odyssey cement his #3 ranking on this list.

## 2. Achilles



Not many people in any time period can claim themselves to be the undisputed best, but Achilles was one of those great few. Achilles was such a great warrior that even his mere presence could turn the tide of battles. Although he spends less of the Iliad in action compared to his comrades due to his feud with Agammemnon over Briseis, when he does step up, he absolutely dominates everyone. Against the dozens of legendary heroes in the Iliad, Achilles was acknowledged and feared by every single one. The rage of Achilles is a common theme throughout the Iliad, and how cooperative he feels essentially determines the fate of the Greeks. Despite truly heroic efforts of heroes like Ajax the Greater and Diomedes to decisively rout the Trojans, only Achilles could secure a Greek victory. He was so powerful that Apollo himself ran from him, and he killed Hector with much less struggle than expected. Although one may assume that Achilles was just bravado, he was favored and often assisted by Athena, showing he had a more calculated side to his fighting. Though perhaps lacking some impulse control, as the most fearsome warrior of the Trojan War, Achilles' legendary combat prowess secures the second place spot on this list.

#### 1. Heracles



A hero who needs no introduction, Heracles/Hercules sits safely at the top of this list. His Twelve Labors (done mostly with his own power) are legendary feats not matched by any other hero, not to mention the various other adventures he embarked upon. Although he did end up killing his first wife and children, that was due to the influence of Hera, not his own will. He was strong enough to take the sky from Atlas, brave enough to steal Cerberus from the underworld, and clever enough to divert a river to wash the stables of Augeas. Even the legendarily poisonous blood of the Hydra was not enough to kill Hercules, though he didn't exactly recover from it either. Although Hercules does receive some divine assistance, that didn't amount to much more than advice, rather than having the solution handed to him. Using his unmatched power and surprising intellect, Hercules blasted through every challenge in his way. He was even able to achieve godhood after his death, the ultimate crowning achievement. Hercules' resume outshines any others by far, making him the most heroic classical hero (by my estimation).



## Roman Artifacts in the Detroit Institute of Arts

Isabella Merucci

Many of us may think that the only way to experience real Roman artifacts is by traveling to Italy. But in actuality, the Detroit Institute of Arts is home to an extensive collection of classical pieces spanning hundreds of years. While the museum is often more celebrated for its iconic murals painted by Diego Rivera or its ownership of paintings by Vincent Van Gogh, the DIA also houses thousands of classical masterpieces that tell just as important of a story.

The first artifact is a Roman gladiator helmet from between the 1st and 3rd century CE. The helmet is made of bronze. Originally, gladiator games were a part of funeral games to honor the life of the person who had died. With time, gladiator games evolved into a political event where politicians sponsored the games to display their power, influence, and wealth in an attempt to gain popularity and favor. Most gladiators were prisoners of war, slaves, or criminals. The famous Spartacus himself was a gladiator, whom led a revolt in his gladiator school in Capua and started the Third Servile War until he was supposedly killed in 71 BC. Gladiators also did not often fight wild beasts, as believed. They usually only fought other gladiators and not always to the death, as replacing gladiators was expensive. If you are interested in learning more about gladiators, the DIA probably has other gladiatorial artifacts, perhaps even some of their weapons or armor.



Next, we have a pair of Roman earrings from the 3rd century CE. Not much is known about this artifact. They obviously belonged to the wealthy as gold was expensive and they are quite ornate in appearance. Jewelry was often a status symbol and a display of wealth. I like this specific artifact because I think the design looks quite different than our earrings now. I believe they would be quite heavy earrings to wear. Moreover, Roman women also wore necklaces and bracelets, while men often wore signet rings. Signet rings were used in business agreements. There is also evidence of jewelry being a part of the dowry for Roman marriages. There are numerous other Roman jewelry pieces, especially rings, in the DIA if you are interested in learning more about Roman fashion and jewelry.

Finally, we have this masterpiece of a mosaic from the 4th century CE. I cannot express how much joy this piece brings me. I simply cannot stop starrng at it, I love it so much. If I had to give it a rating, I would give it an 11/10. The title of the piece is simply *Fish*, and I think that the title fully embodies this work. Mosaics are made of hundreds, sometimes thousands, of tiny squares called tesserae. Mosaics take days to create and were often placed on floors of the houses of the wealthy. I hope one day to become the proud owner of a floor mosaic so magnificent as this fish. I like to imagine the artist toiling for days over this fish and I hope they were completely satisfied with their work. They did such a good job after all that it survived until present day. Imagine making something that survives for over one thousand years. Pretty amazing. I think that if I could have any job in the ancient world, it would be a mosaic artist just so I could make fish like this. Anyway, if you are absolutely enamored by mosaics such as this, then take a little visit to the DIA where there are other mosaics of flowers, people, and animals.



While the ancient world may seem long dead, the Detroit Institute of Arts helps to preserve the rich history and keep it alive. We are very fortunate to have such a well of knowledge right at our fingertips. So next time you are bored and are hankering to see a spectacular fish mosaic, stop by the DIA. They also have many artifacts not referenced, such as funerary urns, vases, tools, spoons, and more.

## **MJCL Meme Contest!!!!**

Submit up to 3 classical related memes for a chance to win an Amazon gift card! The memes must be original and created by you, but you can use a meme generator or template. The meme can be in English or Latin. You can use ideas from topics you have talked about in class. **The teacher of the winning student also receives a gift card, so tell all of your students.** Teachers may also submit their own memes to the contest to be eligible for a gift card.

Email all submissions to [michiganMJCL@gmail.com](mailto:michiganMJCL@gmail.com) and include your name, name of your teacher, and name of your school.

Deadline is March 15th.