WOMEN IN GRECO-ROMAN MYTHOLOGY

The third path presents the roles of women in antique mythology and sheds light on their artistic depictions

Venus, Diana, Hercules, or Odysseus – the legends about the heroes, heroines, gods and goddesses of Greco-Roman mythology are famous and shape the world of European images and imagination to this day.

Ever since Christianity was declared the state religion of the Roman Empire in the late 4th century, pagan rites and cults based on ancient mythological deities were suppressed or »christianised«. However, Greco-Roman mythology continued to survive and to be passed down, since ancient authors were part of the educational canon.

During the Renaissance – an epoch that, starting in the 14th century, spread from Italy and marked the re-birth of the philosophy, art, and culture of antiquity – ancient mythology flourished. Drawing on antiquity allowed artists of both genders to expand upon mythological themes and develop new forms of representation. Throughout the entire early modern period (15th–18th centuries), ancient mythology played an important role in the visual arts and literature and was also utilised to represent politics and royal courts.

In the context of that epoch, antique myths were adjusted, updated, and adapted to the changing needs. They clarified the order of the world, the society, and the gender roles, and they reflected patriarchal standards. Many of the concepts of woman's nature that had already been formulated in antiquity were taken up by Christianity and survived over the centuries even to today. The ideal characteristics for women were the exact opposite of those for men: while the ideal man was aggressive, independent, articulate, competitive, and self-disciplined, the woman had to be modest, passive, submissive, silent, fertile, diligent, and preferably unseen.

In antiquity, a woman was considered an inferior counterpart to a man. As supposedly sexually insatiable beings, women represented a threat to society and the family. In order to avert the danger they represented and to control them, they were largely excluded from public political activity, other than their participation in religious festivals or as priestesses (see p. 10). Upper-class girls received only a rudimentary education and were married off young. As wives, they were assigned a subordinate role, along with children and slaves, to their male heads of household, and were primarily responsible for raising children. Women worshipped powerful goddesses like Venus (Greek: Aphrodite), Diana (Greek: Artemis), Minerva (Greek: Athena), and Ceres (Greek: Demeter) for a variety of reasons: to protect their children and young girls, to have an uncomplicated pregnancy, to have a happy marriage. Goddesses and women from ancient mythology embodied various role models, traits, and aspects that were considered female and could be blended together: virginity, beauty, passion, motherhood, seduction, marital fidelity, evil, etc.

While the virginity of female deities like Minerva and Diana was a central part of their life stories, it is conspicuous that in mythology, not a single male deity was celibate. Quite the contrary: the rape of goddesses and mortals by gods – most prominent among them being Jupiter (Greek: Zeus) – and by men is an integral part of classical mythology. Just in the *Metamorphoses* by the Roman poet Ovid (43 BC–17 AD) alone, 50 stories deal with rapes, with the victims, besides women and female deities, also including boys. The *Metamorphoses* have played an important role for the artistic perception of antiquity since the Renaissance, when rapes also became a popular subject – for example in the *Rape of Proserpina*: a myth that exists in a variety of versions and tells of the abduction and rape of the virgin Proserpina (Greek: Persephone). Proserpina is the daughter of Ceres and Jupiter. After Pluto (Greek: Hades), the god of the underworld, is struck by an arrow shot by Cupid (Greek: Eros), he suddenly falls madly in love with Proserpina and carries her off to his realm. While searching for Proserpina, her mother Ceres finds her daughter's lost girdle – in ancient Greece and other cultures, a symbol of virginity. Now she realises what has happened, and in her despair and sadness allows the land to wither away. At Jupiter's behest, Pluto frees Proserpina, but by means of a ruse he ensures that she must spend part of the year with him in the underworld.

In Renaissance and Baroque sculpture, the *Rape of Proserpina* – the violent grasping after a naked woman frantically trying to defend herself – was a popular motif. Some works dealing with this theme are also found in the Bode Museum – for example, in the form of a larger-than-life-size bronze group (fig. 3-1) or a

3-1
Adrian de Vries (ca. 1545–1626)
The rape of Proserpina, 1621
Bronze, 192 × 67 × 83 cm

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3-2
Matthias Steinl (1644–1727)
Pluto and Proserpina, ca. 1690
Ivory 38,1 cm

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small ivory sculpture (fig. 3-2). The genteel description of an »abduction« (»Raub«) hides the fact that this motif deals not only with an abduction but also, as a consequence, a rape. The pursuit of a frightened young woman is an expression of male dominance and aligns itself with the common ancient metaphor of women as wild animals that need to be hunted, dominated, and tamed by men. This is made plain by the story of Daphne and Apollo (Greek: Apollon) – a popular subject in sculpture since the Renaissance that the German architect and sculptor Andreas Schlüter (1659–1714) also took up in two sandstone sculptures (figs. 3-3 and 3-4). The virgin nymph Daphne is coveted by the god Apollo, who pursues her so that he could rape her. Ovid accentuates her flight with hunting metaphors and the supposedly »natural« male hunting instinct: for example, through expressions such as wolf and lamb, lion and doe, hunting dog and hare. The fleeing nymph's fear even adds to her pursuer's desire, who sees her escape from him as bringing out her beauty even more. In the end, Daphne's cry for help is answered by her being transformed into a laurel tree, although even in this form she still has to endure Apollo's invasive behaviour.

3-3
Andreas Schlüter (1659–1714)
Daphne, 1712
Sandstone, 210 × 82 × 105 cm
Inv. Nr. 8659 © Skulpturensammlung und Museum für Byzantinische
Kunst der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin / Antje Voigt
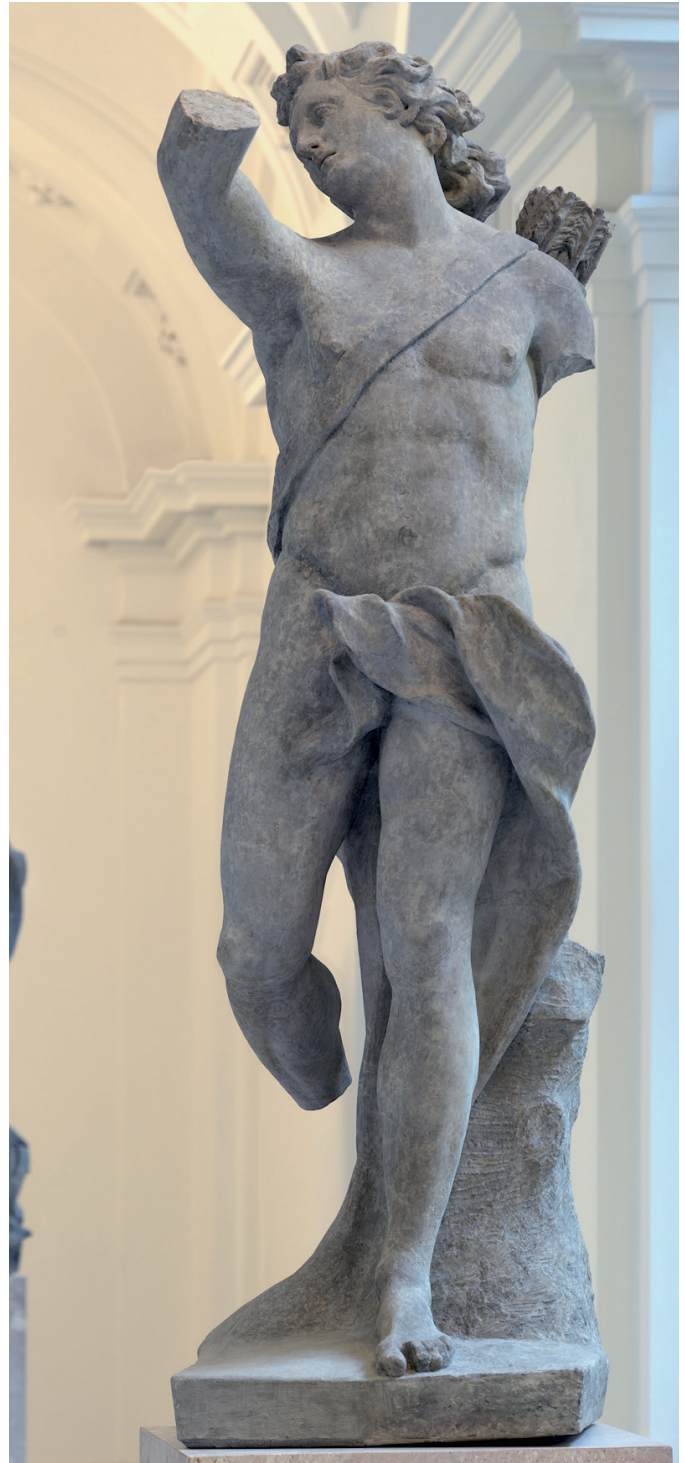
3-4
Andreas Schlüter (1659–1714)
Apoll, 1712
Sandstone, 200 × 59 × 82 cm
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Mythological scenes of rape offered the mostly male artists the opportunity to portray naked figures, but beyond that, to also let the perpetrators and / or their use of force remain out of sight. This is demonstrated by countless sculptures, starting with *Jupiter and Io* – Jupiter, disguised as a mist, rapes Io – through *Jupiter and Danae* – Jupiter, disguised as a shower of gold, rapes Danae – ending with *Leda and the Swan*. In the latter story, Jupiter lusts after Leda, who is married to the Spartan king Tyndareus. He approaches her in the form of a swan and rapes her. From this liaison is born Helen, who later will play a central role in the Trojan War. The tale of Jupiter and Leda is a popular erotic

3-5
Pierino da Vinci (1529–1553)
Leda with the swan, 1547
Marble, 46,5 × 62 × 7 cm
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motif in art history that is also found in multiple examples in the collections of the Bode Museum (figs. 3-5 and 3-6). In the vast majority of the sculptures, the aspect of Jupiter's sexual violence takes a back seat to a sensual love scene in which the woman willingly surrenders herself. Playing down sexualised violence has a long tradition and even today is a current theme, for example when a rape is designated as a »sex crime« and thus trivialised and de-emphasised.

But there is also a divine protectress of virginity: Diana, daughter of Jupiter and the goddess Latona (Greek: Leto) and twin sister of Apollo. As the chaste goddess of the hunt and wild animals, of virginity, and of childbirth, she punishes importune male behaviour and takes a central and active role in the pantheon, as demonstrated by the expansive marble sculpture *Diana as Huntress* in the Bode Museum (fig. 3-7). Diana protects little girls and adolescent young women. Her entourage of nymphs includes Callisto, Maira, Arethusa, and Daphne, among others.

The best-known mythological tale about Diana is her encounter with the hunter Actaeon. In the Greek version of the myth, Actaeon claims to be a better hunter than Diana; furthermore, he lusts after Semele, Jupiter's mistress. As punishment, Diana transforms him into a stag, after which he is torn to bits by his own hunting dogs. In the Roman version of the myth, while Actaeon is hunting, he accidentally sees Diana's naked body as she is

3-6
Jacob Gabriel Müller (1721–1780)
Leda with the swan, 1765
Lead and marble, 34,5 × 23 × 23 cm
Inv. Nr. 6/65 © Skulpturensammlung und Museum für Byzantinische Kunst der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin / Antje Voigt

3-7
Bernardino Cametti (1670–1736)
Diana as huntress, 1720/50
Marble, 258 cm
Inv. Nr. 9/59 © Skulpturensammlung und Museum für Byzantinische Kunst der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin / Antje Voigt

3-8
Giuseppe Mazza (1653–1741)
Diana with nymphs and Acteon, ca. 1710
Marble, 56 × 72 × 8 cm

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bathing – strictly forbidden. Even though he did not happen upon her on purpose, his fate is sealed: he is changed into a stag and is devoured by his dogs. In both cases, the hunter becomes the hunted. While the sculptures referencing the Greek aspect mainly show Actaeon's gruesome end, ultimately the Roman version prevailed in the artistic tradition – the moment he catches sight of Diana's naked body, surrounded by her group of also naked nymphs. A marble relief in the Bode Museum illustrates the motif through a harmonious-appearing setting, where the violent theme is shifted to the background and the focus is on the beautiful female bodies (fig. 3-8).

This scene – especially its covetous gaze on the barely concealed nude female body – was frequently depicted in European art history, particularly often in the art and literature of the Renaissance and Baroque eras. One reason might be the popularity of hunting among the nobility, which could be reflected in mythological terms through this subject.

The episode with Actaeon opens up several layers of meaning in the context of antiquity. The hunt was considered one of the essential forms of expression of masculinity and an ideal preparation for war, but also features sexualised aspects. The stag hunter Actaeon overstepped his boundaries with respect to sexuality: in antiquity, wild animals, especially roe deer, were associated with women as well as with Diana. Equating wild animals with women might also refer back to the veneration of a woman's fertility and of her inborn ability to bear children.

The aspect of female fertility and sexuality is incorporated by the arguably best-known mythological goddess: Venus, wife of Vulcan (Greek: Hephaestus) – god of fire and blacksmithing – and prominent lover of the

3-9
Germain Pilon (ca. 1525–1590)
Venus and Cupid, 1550–1600
Marble, 210 × 80 × 61 cm
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god of war, Mars (Greek: Ares). Her many affairs with gods as well as mortal men resulted in the births of Cupid, Hermaphroditus (Greek: Hermaphroditos) und Aeneas, among others. As a divine forebear of the Roman people – her son Aeneas is considered the founding father of Rome – Venus was especially venerated during the Roman imperial period, above all starting with Julius Caesar (100–44 BC).

While Venus is also the goddess of sea travel, she is primarily revered as the goddess of love and beauty. As the epitome of femininity, she is seen in the visual arts as the prototype of an ideally beautiful female nude and is – often together with her companion Cupid – also portrayed in myriad works in the Bode Museum (fig. 3-9). Until the late 4th century BC, she was – unlike her male divine counterparts – not portrayed naked, but her beauty was emphasised by sumptuous garments and adornments. With his sculpture known as the Aphrodite of Knidos, sculpted between 350 and 340 BC and already famous in antiquity, the Greek sculptor Praxiteles created the first monumental female nude figure and at the same time established the type of figure called the Venus pudica (»bashful Venus«): an ideally beautiful female nude who tries to hide her pubic area with her hand. This erotic visual motif, which subsequently spread far and wide, allows the gender-specific power structures and the construct of female sexuality to become clear: the naked female figure, who tries to protect herself from the desirous regard of the viewers, stands in direct contrast to the male nude in antiquity, who doesn't give his genitals a second thought. The difference between the two genders is demonstrated on the naked body, the construct of femininity likewise includes passivity, chastity, and eroticism. This calculus does not change in the Renaissance, when the nude took on a central role as the utopia of the free, autonomous – and male – subject. In the tradition of the Venus pudica, a small bronze in the Bode Museum takes up a motif, known as the Venus marina, that found favour in the 16th century (fig. 3-10).

Venus was extremely popular in the visual arts from the 15th until the 18th century. As a mythological figure, she could be depicted more revealingly than the prevailing notions of morality would have allowed for historical or living persons. Especially in the Rococo era (ca. 1720–1780), the idealised deity became a seductive naked figure.

Included among the attributes of Venus – besides the sea shell, the dolphin, and the mirror – is the apple, as a reminder of *the Judgment of Paris*. In this story, Discordia (Greek: Eris), the goddess of strife, throws a golden apple with the inscription »To the most beautiful« among the attendees of the wedding of Peleus and Thetis. As a result, an argument breaks out among Venus, Minerva, and Juno (Greek: Hera) as to who among them really deserves the apple. Jupiter decides that Paris, the young prince of Troy, should make the judgment. Venus promises him the most beautiful woman, Minerva military fame, and Juno power. Paris chooses Venus. With her help, he abducts »the most beautiful woman«, Helen, and thus triggers the Trojan War. The »Judgment of Paris« allowed artists to show three female nudes in different poses and has been frequently depicted in the visual arts since the Middle Ages. Sculptors were only happy to update their works such that the figures wore contemporary clothing or carried the facial features of the people commissioning the sculpture. One such adaptation is seen in the relief The Judgment of Paris (fig. 3-11) in the Bode Museum. It was produced on the occasion of the marriage of Count Palatine Ottheinrich (1502–1559) and Susanna of Bavaria (1502–1543) and even makes an alteration of the scene's content: instead of choosing Venus, Paris, portrayed as a knight, selects the goddess Juno.

Venus, whose ability to inflame passions in mortal men as well as gods gives her great power, is renowned for her sexual adventures. In contrast to the other female deities, she was never sexually harassed or raped. As a sexually liberated woman, she is anything but passive and often takes the initiative. The list of her lovers is long, one prominent name being the young mortal Adonis: to this day the embodiment of youth and beauty. Venus meets him while hunting and begins a passionate romantic affair with him, which finds its expression in a Baroque ivory relief in the Bode Museum (fig. 3-12). Ignoring her warnings, Adonis goes hunting (fig. 3-13) and is killed by a wild boar that had been sent by the jealous Mars. Since then, Adonis lives part of the year in the underworld and the rest with Venus. In the Mediterranean region of antiquity, the death and resurrection of Adonis was marked with celebrations. Due to their close parallels to Christianity – whose central message is the death and resurrection of Christ – they were prohibited in 392 AD by the Eastern Roman emperor Theodosius (347–395), along with other pagan cults.

Venus stands in a long line of mother goddesses who originate in the Middle East, among them the Egyptian female creator deity, Isis. This wife of Osiris and mother of Horus was worshipped as the ruler of heaven, life, and death. Starting in the early 1st century BC, the exceedingly popular image of the enthroned Isis nursing

3-10
Girolamo Campagna (1549–1625)
Venus Marina, ca. 1600
Brass, 25,8 × 7,5 × 6,6 cm
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Kunst der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin / Jörg P. Anders

3-11
Doman Hering (ca. 1510–1549)
Judgment of Paris, ca. 1529
Solnhofen stone, 22,1 × 19,8 × 2,1 cm
Inv. Nr. 1959 © Skulpturensammlung und Museum für Byzantinische
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her son Horus (known as the Isis lactans) appears. Several sculptures in the Bode Museum show the nursing Isis, among others a limestone figure that has been heavily re-worked (fig. 3-14). Even the pharaohs had themselves portrayed in the place of Horus at her breast, in order to legitimise their earthly power through her divine milk. In the depictions of Isis lactans, she usually wears cow horns and a sun disc on her head and offers her breast with one hand while the other holds the child Horus. Her milk symbolises life and divinity. Many sculptures of Isis lactans were left behind as votives at holy sites or, in the private sphere, functioned as amulets that one hoped would protect one's family. The cult of Isis spread from Egypt throughout the entire Mediterranean region. The motif of Isis lactans and its iconography was successively adopted in early Christianity, as illustrated by a Christian gravestone from the 4th or 5th century in the Bode Museum (fig. 3-15).

3-12
Joachim Henne (1629–ca. 1707)
Venus in the arms of Adonis, ca. 1670/80
Ivory in tortoise shell frame, 11 × 12 cm

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3-13
Adrian de Vries (ca. 1545–1626)
Venus and Adonis, 1621
Bronze, 172 × 60 × 60 cm

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Starting in the 6th century, the Christian visual image of the Virgin Mary nursing the baby Jesus – known as Maria lactans – appears, which then in the 13th century, against a backdrop of an increasing devotion to the Virgin, becomes prevalent as a three-dimensional model image in the Western world. One of the earliest known sculptures of Maria lactans is found in the Bode Museum (fig. 3-16). Mary's milk, as divine nourishment, was also purported to have supernatural powers. Especially from the 14th century to the 18th century, the portrayal of Maria lactans became an important theme in European art. One reason for its increasing appearance is the songs of praise and visions of the French Christian monk Bernard of Cluny (ca. 1090–1153) in the late Middle Ages. According to legend, he was given the gift of eloquence by a squirt of milk from the nursing Mary. Consequently, Bernard of Cluny was shown in the visual image Lactatio Bernardi as having the Virgin Mary's milk sprayed right into his mouth – any erotic connotations were tolerated. Other Christian mystics – in other words, people who undergo a religious or divine experience – had similar visions, for example Mechthild von Magdeburg (ca. 1207–1282). She had started her religious life as a beguine around 1230 and stayed for 40 years in a beguine community – a type of religious community of mostly unmarried or widowed women who, freely and without taking vows, lived a life of poverty and chastity while providing for their own livelihood.

3-14

Egypt

Isis enthroned with Horus child, 3rd c.

Limestone, 88,6 × 40 × 40 cm

3-15

Medinet el Faijum (Egypt)

Nursing woman, 4th–5th c.

Limestone with color setting, 56 × 32 × 7 cm

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3-16
Rhine-Maas area (?)
Nursing Madonna, 1200–1250
Lime wood, polychromed, 41 × 17 × 14 cm
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At the time, the nursing Mary was made an ideal image of maternal care in the catechetical treatises – i. e. those that introduce the Christian practice of faith – as well as those dealing with medicine. Her model of maternity certainly stood in contrast to the fact that in the late Middle Ages, many women in the aristocratic and bourgeois classes left the breast-feeding of their children to wetnurses. The glorification of motherhood is, to this day, part of many cultures and religions and often implies that women are only good women when they bear children. This view is strongly influenced by a heteronormative world view, according to which opposite-sex attraction represents the social norm and the only »natural« sexual orientation. Beginning in the 4th century, the Christian church also saw bearing children as a woman's only purpose outside of a convent; for example, the German Christian reformer, Martin Luther (1483–1546), defined motherhood as a woman's vocation.

In ancient mythology, however, there is also an episode in which the gender-specific role models are switched: Omphale and Hercules. After Hercules – son of the father of the gods Jupiter and the mortal woman Alcmene – has completed his twelve labours, he kills his friend Iphitus in a fit of madness. As punishment, he is made the slave of the Lydian queen Omphale for three years. The two fall passionately in love and marry. Hercules starts wearing women's clothing and undertaking household tasks understood as women's work – such as spinning and weaving – while Omphale wears his lion pelt and carries his wooden club: attributes that also feature in the ivory sculpture *Omphale with Cupid* in the Bode Museum (fig. 3-17). At the end of the three years, Hercules remembers his masculine heroism and returns to combat. The central motif of his sensual stay with Omphale is the reversal of the traditional gender roles. Already in Roman literature, for example in the works of Ovid and the Roman philosopher Seneca (ca. 1–65), this episode, as an expression of the hero's seduction and infatuation, was employed for farce under the topic of a »gynocracy«. At the same time, the theme confirms the male anxiety about being seduced by women and acted as a means of deterrence: even the strongest man in mythology is rendered »weak« and »effete« by his love for a woman. The satirical-comical potential of the motif was ideal material for humorous plays and has been utilised repeatedly since the 5th century BC. The theme offered artists the opportunity to combine an erotic image with an ironic commentary on the established gender stereotypes, in keeping with the traditional subject of the world turned upside down: the club – symbol of Hercules' masculine power – and the pelt of the Nemean lion – a reference to his first heroic deed – (fig. 3-18) are now borne by Omphale, who likewise now uses them to slip into the role of a hero (fig. 3-19). The subject was extremely popular in the visual arts starting in the Renaissance and was also used as a political-moral warning of the loss of power and masculinity. At the end of the 17th century and during the 18th century, the portrayals were given a positive connotation by linking them to the great love between Omphale and Hercules. The episode can even be interpreted as a de-hierarchisation of gender relations that makes alternative images of masculinity and heroism possible: the hero as a man who is blissful, enjoying and loving.

3-17

Northern Germany
Omphale with Cupid, end of 17th c.
Ivory, 25 × 31 × 15 cm
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While spinning and weaving are negatively construed for Hercules as occupations with feminine connotations, they are positive traits for Penelope, the wife of Odysseus. As the Greek poet Homer (8th / 7th century BC) relates in his well-known epic *The Odyssey*, she waits faithfully for a full 20 years after the end of the Trojan War for the return of her husband (who, however, commits adultery with the sorceress Circe during his odyssey). During this time, Penelope rules the kingdom of Ithaca, raises their son Telemachus, and cares for her elderly in-laws. Meanwhile she is besieged by suitors and urged to re-marry. Firmly convinced of Odysseus' eventual return, she delays the decision by employing a subterfuge: she promises to choose a suitor
as soon as she has finished weaving a shroud for her (definitely still among the living) father-in-law, Laertes.
At night, she and her maidservants would secretly unravel what had just been woven, in order to stall for time. When the ploy is revealed by a disloyal maidservant and the suitors demand a decision, Penelope looks for another alternative: she promises to marry whoever is able to use Odysseus' bow to shoot an arrow through the holes of twelve axe heads lined up one after the other – in the hope that only Odysseus would be capable of such a feat. Meanwhile, he has returned, dressed

3-18
The Netherlands or France
Omphale with the club of Hercules, ca. 1800
Terracotta, 41,5 × 22 × 21 cm

as a beggar. He prevails in the archery competition and then kills the suitors and the disloyal maidservants. Penelope's loyalty seems particularly exemplary, given that other wives of participants in the Trojan War – for example Clytemnestra – were not at all faithful to their husbands. In post-antiquity, because of her loyalty, perseverance, and sagacity, Penelope came to represent the ideal wife who also thoroughly conformed to Christian moral value. As the embodiment of martial loyalty, she found her way into art and literature starting in the Middle Ages – with the Italian author and poet Boccaccio (1313–1375) among others. Pictorial representations of Penelope were popular in women's living quarters. For example, in 1561 Eleanor of Toledo (1522–1562) – wife of Cosimo I de Medici (1519–1574), grand duke of Tuscany – had a room in the Palazzo Vecchio in Florence painted with frescoes of the Penelope myth. Among the most popular motifs are Penelope at her loom and her happy reunion with Odysseus after his return. In the style of ancient sculptures, she is also often portrayed in a sitting position, holding her head in her hand in grief. Depending on the context of the time, she could be updated in such a way as to represent a wife, complete with helmet and shield, waiting for her soldier husband, as a statuette in the Bode Museum demonstrates (fig. 3-20). No matter how the figure of Penelope was (and is) interpreted and evaluated: through her clever, judicious conduct, Penelope safeguarded the kingship of her husband as well as her own survival in a patriarchal system where she, as a woman, was given very little room to manoeuvre.

The sorts of catastrophic consequences that could follow when women did not conform to female ideals are shown by the representations of the goddess Hecate throughout art history. At first probably a maternal deity, she was adopted from a cult in Asia Minor into the Greek pantheon and there was worshipped, overwhelmingly in the private sphere, as the goddess of change and transitions and was the mediator between the world of the living and the underworld. The Greek poet Hesiod (before 700 BC) describes Hecate in the 8th century BC as an all-encompassing deity who is caring, helpful, and generous. But already in the works of the Greek tragic poets Aeschylus (525–456 BC), Sophocles (497/496–406/405 BC), and Euripides (480 or 485/484–406 BC), she appeared as a demonic goddess of magic, the spirits, and the night, who is conjured up at night and sends spirits and bad dreams to people. In

3-19

Italy (Padua?)

Resting Hercules, 1525–1550

Bronze, 20,1 × 10 × 6,7 cm

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3-20
Valentin Sonnenschein (1749–1828)
Mourning Penelope, ca. 1780
Terracotta, 19,5 × 18,2 × 12 cm
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Kunst der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin / Antje Voigt

the ancient literature, the figure of Hecate was gradually depicted in a more negative light. Starting at the end of the 5th century BC, she was primarily portrayed with three bodies or three heads – signifying past, present and future. Counted among her attributes are the torch, the key, the apple, the dagger, the dog, the snake, and

the whip. The statuette of Hecate in the Bode Museum (fig. 3-21) has three faces, holds a torch in one hand and a burning heart in the other. It is currently under discussion as to whether the work represents Hecate or is an allegory of time. That being said, the aspect of time had already been connected with Hecate in antiquity.

In late antiquity, Hecate was often put on an equal footing with Diana, but also appeared in the company of the most famous sorceresses of antique mythology, Medea and Circe. However, she assumes an independent status in the Greek pantheon and helps Ceres, for example, to search for her daughter Proserpina, eventually tracking her down in the underworld. Although magic was legally criminalised after Christianity was elevated to the status of a state religion in the 4th century AD, the shamanistic magical customs and rites continued to spread. They persisted even into the Middles Ages – frequently in combination with fertility rituals.

When climate changes, famines, and epidemics emerged with the beginning of the »Little Ice Age« at the end of the 14th century, they were explained as being due to an increase in the power of Satan, the adversary of the Christian god. According to this belief, he approaches women in particular to make a pact with them, according to which they would worship and serve him instead of the Christian god. During night-time gatherings – known as witches' sabbaths – led by Hecate and Diana, they carouse, have sexual orgies, and kill and devour children and adults. The accusation of these women's heterosexual and homosexual promiscuity – that is, sexual contact with frequently changing partners – can be traced back to the consistently negative stance of the Christian church to (female) sexuality. In 1486, the treatise *Hexenhammer* (Malleus maleficarum, or »Hammer of Witches«) by the theologian Heinrich Kramer (ca. 1430–ca. 1505) appeared. The work legitimised witch-hunts, which reached a climax between 1560 and 1630 and in which the accusation of taking part in a witches' sabbath often played a key role. Even in William Shakespeare's (1564–1616) tragedy *Macbeth* and Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's (1749–1832) tragedy *Faust*, published in 1606 and 1808, respectively, witches are featured – among them Hecate – as personifications of a perverted femininity that threatens the masculine order. Many components of images of witches feed on the perceptions of Hecate that were already attached to her in antiquity. Her beginnings as an all-encompassing mother goddess ended in a fatal transformation into a witch – a demonised figure that cost thousands of women in Europe their lives, in some regions even to this day.

3-21
Italy (Padua?)
Hecate or Prudentia, ca. 1500
Bronze with marble base, 27 × 16,3 × 12,7 cm
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