

Everyone is familiar with some of the women of classical myth. Athena, goddess of wisdom, and Aphrodite, goddess of love and beauty are particularly well-known, as are the snake-haired Gorgon Medusa, and the vicious harpies, half woman, half beast. Humans, too, have their place in the ancient lore: Medea, who killed her own children to gain revenge upon her husband Jason, and Helen of Troy, whose abduction by Paris incited the ten-year Trojan War. But these figures represent only a handful of the hundreds and hundreds of female characters who played essential roles in the poetry, drama, and folklore that arose from Greek and Roman mythology. And despite the rich diversity of these figures, standard reference works on mythology and related subjects often give them short shrift. This fascinating book is the first and only comprehensive biographical dictionary devoted to mythological women. It offers unprecedented access to information on hard-to-find women in Greek and Roman myth, as well as a fresh look at the better-known figures. From the famous to the obscure, all of them are here--from Cardea, a Roman divinity who protected the hinges of doors, to Echidna, a half-woman, half-serpent who mated with her fire-breathing brother Typhon, to Ate, the goddess of error. In addition, readers will learn new facts about old favorites: how Zeus ordered the proverbially garrulous Echo to distract Hera while he enjoyed sexual relations with Echo's sister nymphs; that Melpomene, muse of tragedy, was reputed to be mother of the sirens; that Diana--known as the Roman equivalent of Artemis, goddess of chastity and the hunt--had been worshiped as a Latin and Sabine deity from a much earlier era.

The approximately 2,600 lively, engagingly written entries are arranged alphabetically and completely cross-referenced for easy access, and vary from one sentence to several pages. Each entry places its subject both in the overall context of classical myth, and in the frame of reference of her better-known male counterparts. For each figure there is a description of her particular contribution to folklore, and a list of the various poems, tragedies, epics, and other types of stories in which she plays a central role. In addition, the handy special index *The Men in Their Lives* makes it simple to locate a particular woman known primarily through relations, for instance, Theseus's mother, or Achilles's wife. Heroines, murderers, lovers, wives, animals, hermaphrodites, monsters, and transsexuals--the *Women of Classical Mythology* offers a unique and rich guide to an aspect of ancient literature often overlooked. It will provide readers not only with a valuable reference source, but with hours of delightful browsing.

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