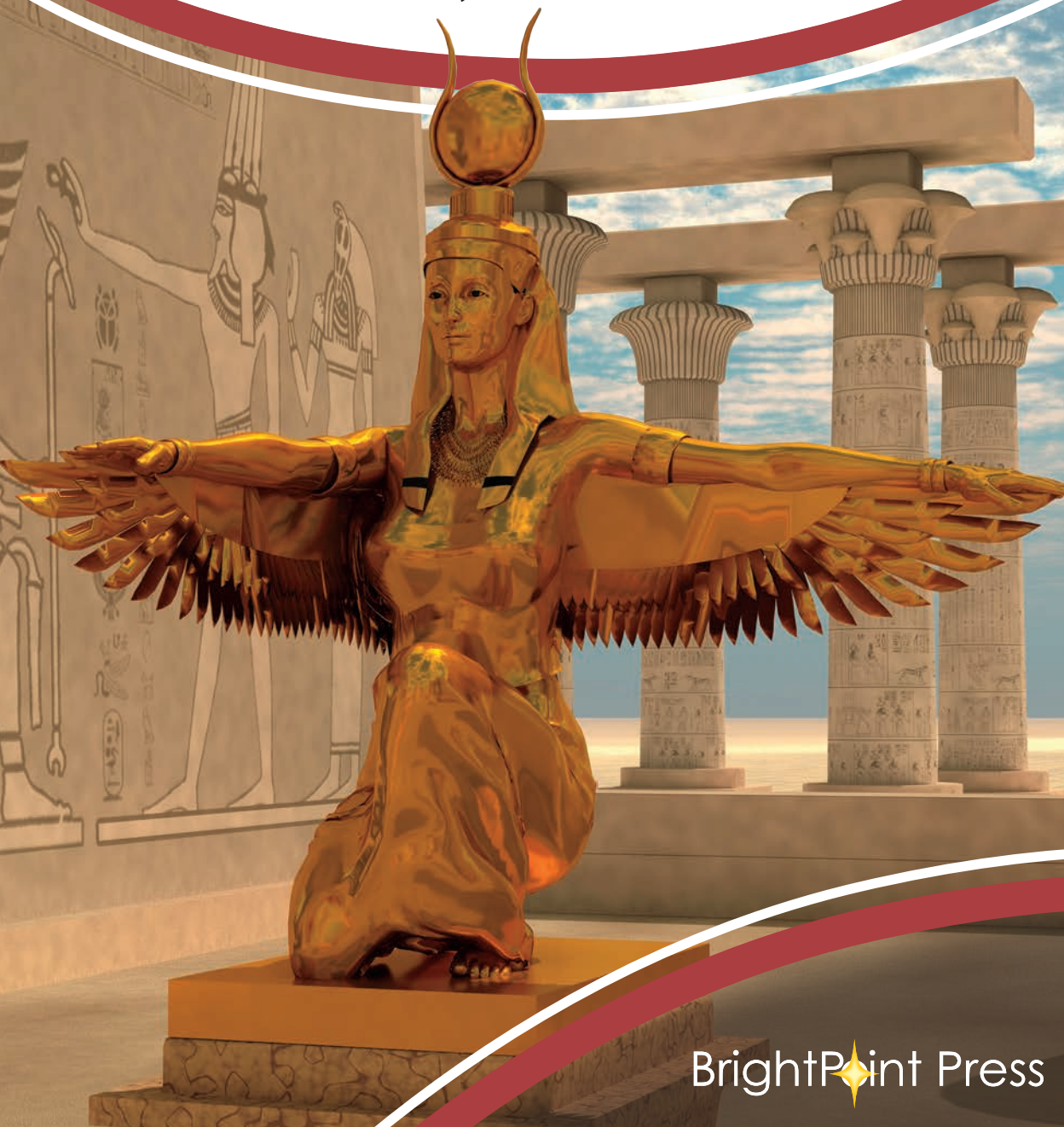


MYTHOLOGY OF THE WORLD

GODDESSES OF WORLD MYTHOLOGY

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BrightPoint Press

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AT A GLANCE

- Goddesses were important in the mythology of many cultures. The divine beings in the earliest stories were likely female.
- Goddesses played central roles in many creation myths. These are stories about how the world, parts of nature, and humans came to be.
- In many of these myths, parts of the world were made from a goddess's body.
- Many ancient people appealed to goddesses for easy and safe childbirth.
- Goddesses were also believed to help and protect mothers and children.
- Some cultures connected goddesses to death and the afterlife. Some of these goddesses were cruel, while others were merciful.



- Many myths tell of goddesses giving gifts or blessings. These gifts might help just one person or the whole world.
- Stories of goddesses from the past still influence modern cultures.

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GODDESSES OF CREATION

Goddesses were important in many creation stories. As with Tiamat, creation myths sometimes began in a watery chaos. Another example is the story of Luonnotar (LOH-nuh-tahr) from Finland. In the beginning of time, she was the only being. In 1835, the poet Elias Lönnrot wrote

about this goddess of the air. He wrote,
“Her existence [was] sad and hopeless, thus
alone to live for ages.”¹

Finally, a duck flew over, looking for a
nesting place. When Luonnotar raised her
knee out of the water, the duck landed on
it. The bird built a nest and laid seven eggs.

***For a while, the Finnish goddess Luonnotar was the
only being. She then helped create the sun, the
moon, and the rest of the world.***



The eggs grew hot. Soon, the heat burned Luonnotar. She shook the nest from her knee. This caused the eggs to shatter. The earth and sky formed from pieces of the shells. The moon was made from the egg whites. The sun came from the yellow yolks. Luonnotar saw the beauty of the world. She then formed all the other features of the land and ocean.

CREATING NATURE AND OTHER GODS

In many myths, nature forms from a goddess's own body. Tiamat's body

becoming the earth and the sky is an example. Ancient people saw that a woman's body created babies. This may have led to stories about the body of a goddess becoming parts of the natural world. Sometimes, as with Tiamat, the goddess is killed or injured.

OFFERINGS AND SACRIFICES

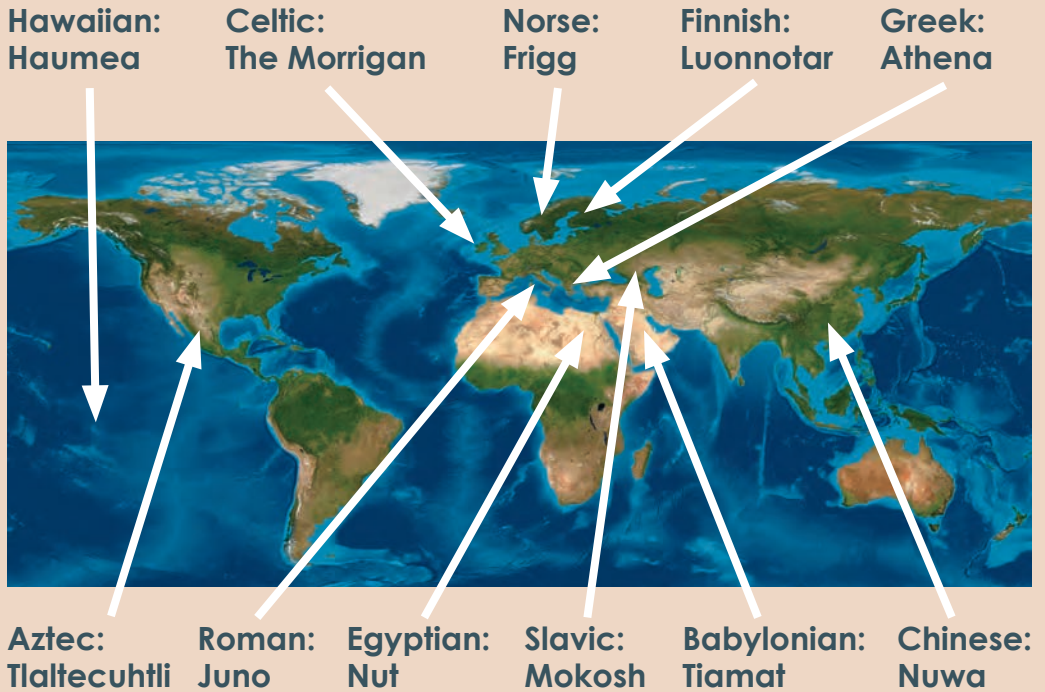
Ancient people often made offerings to goddesses. They wanted to ask for favors or avoid punishment. Offerings could include food, jewelry, wine, oil, or **incense**. Sometimes animals were sacrificed as offerings. The Aztecs believed the goddess Tlaltecuhltli wanted human sacrifices. Some other cultures, such as the Inca and Assyrians, also sacrificed people.



The Aztec deity Tlaltecuhltli could appear as either male or female. She is shown here as a woman.

A similar fate befell the fierce Aztec goddess Tlaltecuhltli (TLAHL-tuh-KOOT-lee). She had extra mouths on her elbows and knees. They often snapped open, hungry for blood. Two powerful gods wanted

GODDESSES OF WORLD MYTHOLOGY



Each ancient culture had its own set of goddesses and myths that told the goddesses' stories.

was a scholar who studied mythology. He thought the goddesses of the past would help to shape “the possibilities of the feminine future.”⁸

GLOSSARY

bridle

a set of straps that encircles a horse's head and allows the horse to be directed

chaos

disorder and confusion

deities

gods and goddesses

famine

a severe lack of food for a large number of people

incense

spices or other materials that make a pleasant smell when burned

levees

ridges or walls, usually made of dirt, that hold back water

patron

a person or god who supports and helps a group or cause; in return, the group honors its patron

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