

📖 Topic Page: [Eos \(Greek deity\)](#)

Definition: **Eos** from *Philip's Encyclopedia*

In Greek mythology, the goddess of dawn, identified with the Roman goddess Aurora. Daughter of Hyperion, and sister of Helios and Selene, she rode the sky in a chariot.



Image from: [Eos with the corpse of Memnon. in World Mythology: Handbook of Classical Mythology](#)

Summary Article: **EOS**
from *Gods, Goddesses, and Mythology*

Eos was the ancient Greek goddess of dawn. She took many mortal lovers, who usually suffered as a result of her attentions. The most famous was Tithonus, who was cursed to grow old while his divine lover remained young.

Eos was the daughter of Hyperion, who was associated with the sun, and Thea, both of whom were Titans, children of the sky god Uranus and the earth goddess Gaia. Eos's siblings included a brother, Helios, another solar deity, and a sister, Selene, goddess of the moon, which, like the sun, casts light on Earth.

In art, Eos has traditionally been depicted as a beautiful young woman with wings; like Helios and Selene, she is often shown driving a flying chariot. Her youth is probably a metaphor for the start of the day, and her ability to fly is probably a reference to the fact that dawn appears to start in the sky. She is commonly referred to as "rosy-fingered" in poetic descriptions of pink-tinted dawn.

Eternal lust

Eos was by nature sexually voracious, and her obsession was intensified after she had an affair with the god Ares. Another of Ares' lovers, the goddess Aphrodite, became jealous and cursed Eos with perpetual lust. Thereafter, Eos became insatiable and started to take men as well as gods as lovers. Mortals were usually not strong enough to rival gods, and thus tended to be the victims in any relationship between them. In one version of the story of Orion, Eos carried off the mortal hunter against his will; Artemis became jealous but was powerless to take revenge on her fellow goddess, so she killed Orion instead.

Eos also abducted Cephalus, whose wife, Procris, also became jealous. Procris hid in a bush to keep an eye on him while he was hunting. Cephalus heard rustling in the undergrowth, thought it had been made by an animal, and hurled a spear, killing her.

Among the many other mortal lovers of Eos was Kleitos, one of a family of soothsayers. Although he died, he did better than most out of his association with Eos, because he was granted the consolation of immortality. Not surprisingly, in view of the attendant dangers, mortal characters in myth were usually disinclined to mate with gods, but often they had no choice.

As a result of her numerous affairs, Eos gave birth to many children. These included Phaethon, her son by Cephalus; he in turn was destined to be carried off by a goddess, in this case Aphrodite. Eos was also the mother of three wind gods, Zephyrus, Boreas, and Notus; their father was Astraeus, another child of the Titans.

Eos and Tithonus

The most famous story of Eos concerns her attraction to Tithonus. This man and his family suffered from an excess of good looks, for their beauty attracted the gods. One of his brothers, Ganymede, was taken to Mount Olympus by Zeus; while Paris, the son of another brother, Priam, king of Troy, was seduced by the nymph Oenone. Most of the gods were perfect in their beauty, so when they seized mortals they naturally went only for specimens in the prime of life, and either immortalized them, as happened to Ganymede, or discarded them once they grew old.

Eos abducted Tithonus, and, pleased by her catch, not long afterward appealed to Zeus to grant him eternal life. Her wish was granted, to the letter, but unfortunately she had forgotten to request eternal youth for him as well. As a consequence, Tithonus could not die; but when he began to age, Eos refused to be with him any longer, and shut him away in a room, where he babbled endlessly to himself. Eventually he changed into a cicada whose chirps preserve the remnants of his once beautiful voice.

Tainted heredity

The son of Eos and Tithonus, Memnon, also met a tragic end. He became king of the Ethiopians and led them to defend his ancestral home of Troy against the Greek invaders during the Trojan War. In battle, Memnon killed Antilochus, a friend of Achilles, who then killed Memnon in revenge. Eos was grief-stricken and petitioned Zeus to immortalize her son. This time she phrased the request carefully to avoid the mistake she had made with his father.

The stories of Memnon and Achilles are very similar. Both have divine mothers and mortal fathers; both die at Troy; and Achilles is also immortalized at his mother's request. These heroes are likely to have derived from a common myth pattern, in which a mortal hero and a goddess sire a glorious son who dies young on behalf of his community, which then worships him as a god.

Indo-European roots

Many cultures conceive of natural phenomena—sunshine, rain, thunder, and so on—as gods or the manifestation of gods. In ancient India, the dawn goddess was called Usas; like Eos, she drove a flying chariot and was sexually aggressive. Usas was often described as having "reddish breath," a description that recalls "rosy-fingered," the epithet most commonly applied to Eos. These parallels are not coincidental, for the peoples of ancient Greece and ancient India seem to have descended in part from common Indo-European ancestors, and it is likely that the names Eos and Usas both derive from the same Indo-European root word meaning "dawn." The ancient Romans were also of Indo-European descent, and the Latin word *aurora* which, like the Greek *eos*, is used for both the dawn and the goddess associated with it, seems also to be derived from the same Indo-European source.

The idea of a dawn goddess was not, however, uniquely Indo-European. In ancient West Asian myths, for example, the goddess Ishtar (or Inanna)—who was the daughter of either the sky god or the moon god—was associated with the morning star (the planet Venus), and, like Eos and Usas, preyed on mortal men. The Greeks came into contact with long-established West Asian cultures when they separated from Indo-European culture and settled in southeast Europe, probably sometime in the late third millennium BCE. Thus Eos is likely to have been a synthesis of Indo-European, West Asian, and indigenous Greek themes.

Rites of dawn

Unlike many of her relatives, lovers, and children, Eos has no known links to any specific religious rite. That does not necessarily mean that she was never worshiped formally —modern evidence for ancient Greek religion in general is sketchy at best—but it does suggest that she was at most a minor figure in the pantheon. The same seems to have been true of Aurora, the equivalent goddess of the dawn in Roman religion. Roman poet Ovid (43 BCE–17 CE) seems to confirm this in *Metamorphoses*, in which he has Aurora remark: "I am lesser than all whom golden heaven holds, for my temples are very rare in all the world."

Yet, although Eos may never have been among the first rank of Greek deities, her very human frailties —particularly her indiscriminate lust for men and her devotion to her children—have made her an abiding favorite subject for writers and artists since antiquity. Greek painters and sculptors represented Eos both as a seductress and as a bereaved mother. These facets of her character are also revealed in Ovid's description of Aurora, who is jealous and spiteful in her dealings with Cephalus but tender and vulnerable when later confronted with the death of their son, Memnon.

The character of the Greek Eos and the Roman Aurora continued to inspire European artists from the Renaissance onward. One of the most famous paintings on this theme is *Cephalus and Aurora* by French master Nicolas Poussin (1594–1665), which recaptures the contrast between mortal revulsion and divine desire that animated Greek vases two thousand years earlier. Another famous painting, *Aurora*, is by Italian baroque classicist Guido Reni (1575–1642). The theme remained popular in the 18th century; one of the greatest works of that epoch is *Aurora* by French rococo painter Jean-Honoré Fragonard (1732–1806).

See also: ARES; GANYMEDE; HELIOS; ORION; SELENE; TITANS; TITHONUS.

Further reading

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