

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

Definition: **Hebe** from *The Hutchinson Unabridged Encyclopedia with Atlas and Weather Guide*

In Greek mythology, the goddess of youth; daughter of Zeus and his sister-consort Hera; and cupbearer to Zeus before the abduction of the mortal boy Ganymede.

She married the deified hero Heracles, with whom she was worshipped at Athens. Later she was credited with powers of rejuvenation.



Image from: [The graceful figure of Hebe \(1796\) was so popular... in Gods, Goddesses, and Mythology](#)

Summary Article: **HEBE**

From *Gods, Goddesses, and Mythology*

Hebe, meaning "bloom of youth," was worshiped by the Greeks as the goddess of youth. She was the daughter of Hera and Zeus, although one account suggests Hera became pregnant with Hebe after touching a lettuce.

After Hebe's birth, the gods competed to honor her with their gifts. Both Athena and Poseidon gave her intricate toys, while Apollo tried to surpass them by soothing Hebe with his music. Hebe grew into the form of a beautiful youth—Greek poet Pindar (c. 522–c. 438 BCE) described her as "fairest of all goddesses," and coins discovered near the Greek city of Argos depict her as

a young woman in a sleeveless dress.

Cupbearer and wife

As a minor deity, Hebe performed tasks for the other gods. In his epic poem the *Iliad*, Greek writer Homer (ninth-eighth century BCE) describes how she prepared her mother Hera's chariot for battle, harnessing the horses and helping Hera into the chariot. Homer also relates how she looked after her brother, the war god Ares, when he was wounded during the Trojan War by Greek hero Diomedes. According to Homer, Hebe "washed him clean and put delicate clothing on him." Her most famous role, however, was as the gods' cupbearer, providing them with their favorite drink, nectar. She did not retain this role for long. According to one myth, Zeus gave her cupbearing duties to the handsome mortal Ganymede, with whom Zeus had fallen in love. He abducted the youth, installed him on Mount Olympus, and then made him immortal.



Permission: Corbis, Araldo de Luca

The graceful figure of Hebe (1796) was so popular that Italian sculptor Antonio Canova (1757–1822) carved four replicas of his original statue.

Another myth relates that Hebe stopped acting as cupbearer when she married Heracles, who achieved immortality after his death. Hera, who had previously hated Heracles, reconciled herself with the new god by adopting him and arranging his marriage to her daughter. Hebe bore Heracles two sons, Alexiades and Anicetus. It is possible that Hebe's change of status reflected the changing nature of ancient Greek society, which became increasingly patriarchal, or male dominated. An early name for Hebe was Ganymede, which suggests that the concept of this deity split into two entities: the male, Ganymede, who took over the active role of cupbearer, and the female, Hebe, who adopted the more passive duties of a wife.

A different Hebe

Classical scholar Robert Graves (1895–1985) suggested that the deity who married Heracles might have been an entirely different Hebe from the Greek goddess of youth. He cited evidence from a collection of Greek songs addressed to the hero Orpheus, the Orphic Hymns, which were produced between the third century BCE and the fourth century CE. Two songs in this collection state that Heracles married a goddess called Hipta, whose many alternative names included Hebe. Hipta was worshiped as Mother Earth by the people of Mitanni, an empire in northern Mesopotamia (present-day Iraq) that flourished from approximately 1500 to 1360 BCE. This version of Hebe, known throughout the Middle East, might reflect Heracles' association with Anatolia (part of present-day Turkey), where, according to myth, he carried out 3 of his 12 famous labors.

Youth-giving qualities

As the personification of youth, the Greeks identified Hebe with qualities such as vigor, bravery, and generosity, as well as recklessness, arrogance, and inconsistency. In myths she had the power to restore people to their youth. The sorceress Medea made an altar to Hebe when turning the hero Jason's father, Aeson, into a young man again. Iolaus, Hercules' nephew and assistant on earth, prayed to be restored to his youth in order to kill Eurystheus, the king who had set Heracles his 12 tasks and mistreated both Iolaus and his family. As Heracles' wife, Hebe readily granted Iolaus his request.

Hebe's two main centers of worship in ancient Greece were at Phlios and Sicyon, both cities on the Peloponnese peninsula that held allegiance to the region's chief city, Sparta. The Greek traveler and geographer Pausanias, who lived in the second century CE, wrote that one of the main things people requested from the goddess was forgiveness for wrongdoing. Released prisoners in Phlios honored Hebe by leaving their prison-chains on trees in a sacred grove.

See also: ARES; GANYMEDE; HERA; HERACLES; JASON; MEDEA; ORPHEUS; ZEUS.

Further reading

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