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^[PDF] provisional agenda - World Tourism Organization UNWTO

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Themis

For other uses, see Themis (disambiguation).

Themis (Greek: Θέμις) is an ancient Greek Ti-



Themis from the Temple of Nemesis, Rhamnous, Attica, signed by the sculptor Chairestratos, c. 300 BCE

taness. She is described as “of good counsel”, and is the personification of divine order, law, natural law and custom. *Themis* means “divine law” rather than human ordinance, literally “that which is put in place”, compared with *tithēmi* (τίθημι), meaning “to put”.

To the ancient Greeks she was originally the organizer of the “communal affairs of humans, particularly assemblies”.^[1] Moses Finley remarked of *themis*, as the word was used by Homer in the 8th century, to evoke the social order of the 10th- and 9th-century Greek Dark

Ages:

Themis is untranslatable. A gift of the gods and a mark of civilized existence, sometimes it means right custom, proper procedure, social order, and sometimes merely the will of the gods (as revealed by an omen, for example) with little of the idea of right.^[2]

Finley adds, “There was *themis*—custom, tradition, folkways, *mores*, whatever we may call it, the enormous power of ‘it is (or is not) done’. The world of Odysseus had a highly developed sense of what was fitting and proper.”^[3]

1 Mythology



Statue of Themis, Chuo University, Japan.

The personification of abstract concepts is characteristic of the Hellenes. The ability of the goddess Themis to foresee the future enabled her to become one of the Oracles of Delphi, which in turn led to her establishment as the goddess of divine justice.

Some classical representations of Themis (*illustration, above*) did not show her blindfolded (because of her talent for prophecy, she had no need to be blinded) nor was she holding a sword (because she represented common consent, not coercion). The sword is also believed to represent the ability Themis had from cutting fact from fiction, to her there was no middle ground. Themis built the **Oracle at Delphi** and was herself oracular. According to another legend, Themis received the **Oracle at Delphi** from **Gaia** and later gave it to **Phoebe**.^[4]

When Themis is disregarded, **Nemesis** brings just and wrathful retribution, thus Themis shared the *Nemesis* temple at **Rhamnous**. Themis is not wrathful: she, “of the lovely cheeks”, was the first to offer **Hera** a cup when she returned to Olympus distraught over threats from Zeus (*Iliad* xv. 88).

Themis presided over the proper relation between man and woman, the basis of the rightly ordered family (the family was seen as the pillar of the deme), and judges were often referred to as “*themistopóloi*” (the servants of Themis). Such was the basis for order upon Olympus too. Even **Hera** addressed her as “Lady Themis.” The name of Themis might be substituted for **Adrasteia** in telling of the birth of Zeus on Crete.

Themis was present at **Delos** to witness the birth of **Apollo**. According to **Ovid**, it was Themis rather than Zeus who told **Deucalion** to throw the bones of “his Mother” over his shoulder to create a new race of humankind after the Deluge.

1.1 Hesiod’s description and contrast to Dike

In Greek mythology, **Hesiod** mentions^[5] Themis among the six sons and six daughters of **Gaia** and **Uranus** (Earth and Sky). Among these **Titans** of primordial myth, few were venerated at specific sanctuaries in classical times.

Themis occurred in Hesiod’s *Theogony* as the first recorded appearance of *Justice* as a divine personage. Drawing not only on the socio-religious consciousness of his time but also on many of the earlier cult-religions, Hesiod described the forces of the universe as cosmic divinities. Hesiod portrayed temporal justice, **Dike**, as the daughter of Zeus and Themis.

Dike executed the law of judgments and sentencing and, together with her mother Themis, carried out the final decisions of **Moirai**. For Hesiod, Justice is at the center of religious and moral life, who, independently of Zeus, is the embodiment of divine will. This personification of **Dike** will stand in contrast to justice viewed as custom or law, and as retribution or sentence.^[6]

2 Children

The only consort for Themis mentioned in the sources below is **Zeus**. One of her few children was called **Natura**, the Greek goddess of the forest.

2.1 Horai: the Hours

With Zeus she more certainly bore the **Horae**,^[7] those embodiments of the right moment – the rightness of Order unfolding in Time – and **Astraea**.

2.1.1 First Generation

- Auxo (the Grower)
- Carpo (the Fruit-bringer)
- Thallo (the Plant-raiser)



Statue of Themis, outside the former Law Courts, George Street, Brisbane, Queensland, Australia.

2.1.2 Second Generation

- Dike (Justice)
- Eirene (Peace)
- Eunomia (Order of Law)

2.2 Moirai: the Fates

Followers of Zeus claimed that it was with him that Themis produced the Moirai, Three Fates.^[8] A fragment of Pindar,^[9] however, tells that the Moirai were already present at the nuptials of Zeus and Themis; that in fact the Moirai rose with Themis from the springs of Okeanos the encircling World-Ocean and accompanied her up the bright sun-path to meet Zeus at Mount Olympus.

Moirai, Three Fates:

- Clotho (the Weaver)
- Lachesis (the Lot-caster)
- Atropos (the Inevitable)

3 Justitia

A Roman equivalent of Dike, the daughter of Themis and Zeus and personification of one aspect of Hellenic Themis, as the spirit of the divine rightness of law, was Iustitia (Anglicized as Justitia). Her origins are in civic abstractions of a Roman mindset, rather than archaic mythology, so drawing comparisons is not fruitful. Portrayed as an impassive woman, holding scales and a double-edged sword (sometimes a cornucopia), and since the 16th century usually shown blindfolded, the sculpted figure outside a courthouse is typically *Justitia* or Lady Justice, not Themis. In the Law Courts at Vancouver, British Columbia, however, the statue is explicitly of Themis.

4 See also

- Lady Justice
- Scales of Justice
- Astraea
- Dike
- Adikia

5 References

- [1] (University of Washington School of Law) Themis, Goddess of Justice
- [2] Finley, *The World of Odysseus*, rev. ed.(New York: Viking Prewss) 1978: 78, note.
- [3] Finley, *op. cit.* p. 82.
- [4] Aeschylus, *Eumenides* 1 ff.

[5] Hesiod, *Theogony* 132; this origin was part of Orphic tradition as well (Orphic Hymn 79).

[6] Donna Marie Giancola, "Justice and the Face of the Great Mother (East and West)"

[7] Hesiod, *Theogony*, 901ff.

[8] Hesiod, *Theogony*, 904

[9] Pindar, fragment 30.

6 External links

- Theoi Project: Themis

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