Aimee Hinds, "Entry on: Grecian Goddess™ Barbie® Doll (2001) by Mattel, Inc. ", peer-reviewed by Susan Deacy and Daniel A. Nkemleke. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2022). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/1490. Entry version as of November 06, 2026.

Mattel, Inc.

Grecian Goddess™ Barbie® Doll (2001)

United States (1996)

TAGS: Athena Athens Zeus





We are still trying to obtain permission for posting the original cover.

General information	
Title of the work	Grecian Goddess™ Barbie® Doll (2001)
Country of the First Edition	United States of America
Country/countries of popularity	Worldwide
Original Language	English
First Edition Date	1996
First Edition Details	Mattel, *Grecian Goddess™ Barbie® Doll*, 1996.
Official Website	barbie.mattel.com (accessed: August 2, 2022).
Genre	Collectables*, Dolls*
Target Audience	Young adults (Mattel suggest that this doll is for adult collectors, which they define as those aged 14 and up)
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Creators

Mattel, Inc. (Company)

Logo retrieved from Wikipedia, public domain (accessed: January 11, 2022).

Mattel Barbie

Originally launched in 1959, Barbie was founded by businesswoman, inventor, and co-owner of Mattel, Ruth Handler as an opportunity for girls to play with dolls that allowed them a wider range of imaginative roles, in line with the range of toys available to boys at the time. From the early 1960s, Barbie has had over 200 careers to date.

Source:

barbie.mattel.com (accessed: January 27, 2020).

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Additional information

Summary

This collector's edition doll depicts the 'Grecian Goddess'. Although not clear from her name, the doll is supposed to represent the goddess Athena, as distinct from the 2010 *Barbie as Athena* doll and the 2001 *Goddess of Wisdom* doll (both surveyed on this database). The doll is dressed in a white pleated dress (identified by the box text as an Ionic chiton) with tulle overskirt and a scalloped tunic (referred to on the box as a peplos), all gold-bordered. She also wears a purple cloak decorated with a gold Greek-key pattern border, identified with a himation in the box text. The neck of her dress is decorated with golden leaves, which also appear at her wrists and on her belt. She wears a white, cylindrical crown, also adorned with golden leaves.

The box is decorated with a variety of objects including images of the Discobolus (the Discus Thrower) and the Delphi Charioteer, a lyre, the Parthenon, vine leaves, and a lekythos (long-necked jug). The box text alludes to Athena's context as a goddess of Athens, asserting that the doll represents Athena but is dressed as a historical Athenian woman would have been, including dress, hair, and cosmetics. Athena herself is referred to as Zeus' favourite child, and through her associations with weaving, craft, and the Parthenon.

Analysis

Unlike the two later Athena dolls (*Goddess of Wisdom*, 2001, and *Barbie as Athena*, 2010, both also surveyed on this database), this doll has no nods to the attributes of Athena, which on the later dolls include her helmet and owl. The lack of physical representation of her attributes makes it hard to identify the doll as Athena without the context of the box, even for the expert observer. As the box text asserts, while she is based on the goddess she is also representative of the everyday woman, despite her dress and her gold accessories bringing her in line with the other Greco-Roman goddess Barbie dolls. Like the Goddess of Wisdom, the doll focuses on a more traditional style of dress to clearly indicate the time period and culture of origin.

Apparently of more importance than her identity as Athena is the clear narrative of femininity and womanliness that Barbie usually embodies. Here, it is pushed through the focus in the box text on the feminine behaviours of Greek women: "Ancient Greek women were known for their skills in weaving and embroidery"; "Grecian women paid careful

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attention to their hair which they would braid, scent with perfumes, or curl into a style like that of Grecian Goddess Barbie"; "Radiant and beautiful as any woman during the fifth century B.C.". The women of ancient Greece are assumed to be homogeneously beautiful and feminine, just like Barbie, and the doll itself is described in correspondingly stereotypical terms, with her "delicate, creamy face", "classic look", "dainty waist", "beautiful, swan-like neck" and "long eyelashes". The only part of Athena's mythology that is mentioned in the box text is her relationship with her father, Zeus, as his favourite child, feeding a patriarchal idea of women as obedient, which, along with the frequent references to her beauty, undermine the mentions of Athena's connections with wisdom and learning. Like the other two Athena dolls, the Grecian Goddess rejects the masculine aspects of Athena's character, with the allusions to art and learning on the box reflecting postclassical Christian concerns in portrayals of Athena (Deacy 2008: 145).

Like the 2001 *Goddess of Wisdom*, the *Grecian Goddess* presents and sells to the consumer (especially its younger audience) a Westernised femininity through the association of Athena's feminine attributes with Barbie's womanliness (Milnor 2005: 222). Like all the collector's edition Barbies, the doll is not intended to be played with as a toy but displayed as an object. The box text invites the consumer to engage with the doll in the same way the Athenians engaged with Athena, celebrating not the goddess herself but the doll that represents her. Milnor argues that this comparison serves to have Barbie embody the ancient myth and history, allowing the consumer not only education about the ancient Greeks but to join them in the past (ibid. 2005: 223). Thus the potted history presented by the box becomes a definitive version of the history of ancient Athens for the doll's owner.

The doll's dress is clearly historically inspired, although is not in itself historically accurate despite naming the garments in the box text. For example, the tunic-style overdress identified as a peplos has sewn sleeves, not a feature of ancient Greek dress, while the underdress is identified as an Ionic chiton, which was actually a garment with its own integrated sleeves. The cloak, referred to as a himation, is more like the smaller chlamys; the himation was a larger wrap garment that could cover the body and be used to cover the head. Like the other ancient history doll in the Great Eras series (*Princess of the Nile*), the box text is preoccupied with dress and fashion, in contrast with more fantasy-inspired dolls in the series (Milnor 2005: 229). As with the later *Goddess of Wisdom* doll, the dress is pseudo-historical but easily

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	identifiable with Greco-Roman history as illustrated in pop culture. *The Grecian Goddess* appears to be inspired by images of ancient Greek mythical women in popular culture; she is readily identifiable with Nancy Kovack as Medea in the 1963 *Jason and the Argonauts*, and even more so with Judi Bowker as Andromeda in the 1981 *Clash of the Titans.* The easy comparison with cinematic mythical heroines rather than goddesses may be due to the memorability of the female main characters as opposed to the less involved goddesses (Athena does not appear in *Jason and the Argonauts* and is a minor character in *Clash of the Titans*).
Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	Athena Athens Zeus
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Fashion Femininity Gender Gender expectations/construction Gender, female Girls Learning Play* Pop culture references Religious beliefs
Further Reading	Barbie, *About Barbie* (accessed January 27, 2020). Barbie, *Grecian Goddess Barbie* (accessed September 20, 2020). Deacy, Susan, *Athena,* London: Routledge, 2008. Milnor, Kristina, “Barbie® as Grecian Goddess™ and Egyptian Queen™: Ancient Women’s History by Mattel®”, *Helios* 32.2 (2005): 215–233.

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