Aimee Hinds, "Entry on: Barbie® Classical Goddess™ Collection (Series): Barbie® Doll as Goddess of Wisdom™ by Mattel, Inc. ", peer-reviewed by Susan Deacy and Elżbieta Olechowska. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2020). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/1127. Entry version as of September 14, 2026.

Mattel, Inc.

Barbie® Classical Goddess™ Collection (Series): Barbie® Doll as Goddess of Wisdom™

United States of America (2001)

TAGS: Athena Minerva

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

General information	
Title of the work	Barbie® Classical Goddess™ Collection (Series): Barbie® Doll as Goddess of Wisdom™
Country of the First Edition	United States of America
Country/countries of popularity	Worldwide
Original Language	English
First Edition Date	2001
First Edition Details	Mattel, *Barbie® Goddess of Wisdom*, 2001.
Official Website	barbie.mattel.com (accessed: September 22, 2020).
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)
Author of the Entry	Aimee Hinds, University of Roehampton, aimee.hinds89@gmail.com
Peer-reviewer of the Entry	Susan Deacy, University of Roehampton, s.deacy@roehampton.ac.uk Elżbieta Olechowska, University of Warsaw, elzbieta.olechowska@gmail.com

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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).

Prepared by Aimee Hinds, University of Roehampton, aimee.hinds89@gmail.com

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Additional information

Summary

This collector's edition doll depicts the Goddess of Wisdom, which is not attributed to one specific goddess but could represent either the Greek Athena or Roman Minerva (or both); this doll is distinct from the 2010 Barbie as Athena doll, which is also surveyed in this database. The doll is dressed in a gold pleated sheath dress draped with ivory chiffon and an ivory cape with gold, Greek-inspired printed patterns. A metallic medallion is attached to her dress between her breasts, with a hanging chain and an abstract pattern which is reflected in her earrings. Her long hair is dark with lighter highlights and elaborately braided into several twists, and she wears a gold laurel wreath on her head. She also has a gold cuff, atop which sits an owl. Like the other two dolls in the collection (Goddess of Spring and Goddess of Beauty, both 2000), she wears flat, strapped sandals tied up to the knee.

The text on her box reads identifies her as analogous with Athena and Minerva, and tells us she "is ruler over war and peace, a patron of the arts and crafts, a guardian of the welfare of kings. Royal and magnificent, she is the goddess of wisdom and reason". No specific mythical stories are attached to her through the accompanying text, although it is mentioned that stories of her "strength and inspiration" associated with her are still remembered today. She is finally described as "heroic and cerebral, yet wonderfully romantic".

Analysis

In contrast to this doll's later incarnation (Barbie as Athena, 2010, also surveyed on this database), this doll represents the Goddess of Wisdom as a non-specific Greco-Roman deity, and thus her presentation is very different from the later doll. Where Barbie as Athena is both fashion oriented and leaning heavily towards her warrior attributes, the Goddess of Wisdom doll (as is clear in the name) is focused on Athena/Minerva's less physical attributes, and her more 'classic' style of dress makes a clear attempt to illustrate her origin culture and time period. The absence of any war or battle type elements do make it difficult for the casual observer to identify this doll as Athena or Minerva. Despite the apparently deliberate ambiguity over which deity or specific culture (Greek or Roman) the doll is representative of, her statue as a goddess is made clear through her golden dress, golden laurel crown and floor length hair,

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as well as the golden owl she carries which provides the biggest clue as to her identity. The owl not only lets us know who the doll represents, but also signifying which side of the goddess we are supposed to see, as Athena and Minerva are commonly identified with the owl as a goddess of wisdom (Eason, 2008:71), thus visually explaining the lack of other identity markers for Athena, such as her shield or helmet. A simplistic version of the *aegis* is present holding together her chiffon wrap, but in keeping with the peaceful and wise Athena/Minerva on show here, it does not depict the Gorgoneion.

The lack of battle regalia on show in this doll is perhaps a method of controlling the presentation of Barbie's femininity. While the later Barbie as Athena doll uses the masculine elements of Athena's dress to emphasise her womanliness through fashion, this doll avoids all masculine aspects entirely in favour of Athena/Minerva's more peaceful pursuits. This is reflective of the postclassical Christian appropriation of Athena for her allegorical possibilities, especially her associations with craft and wisdom (Deacy 2008: 145). Barbie's famous figure is not only present but highlighted in the box text: "slim silhouette". The Goddess of Wisdom also gains a rather unexpected attribute of romance, just in case we are in any doubt as to how feminine she is; her capacity for romance is highlighted alongside her heroism and intellectualism, thus ensuring she does not read as masculine through traditional gender roles and attributes. This traditionalism is underscored by the connection with the Greco-Roman past through the "classic" element of these dolls (all three in the series, itself named "Classical Goddesses", make clear their link with the ancient past is forged through an engagement with, for example, "classic splendour", pushing an element of traditionalism). For the consumer (especially for children and young people), this prioritises and sells a specific, Western ideal of gender through Barbie's femininity (Milnor 2005: 222), through a rejection of the more complex and nuanced exploration of gender displayed in ancient representations of Athena.

While the Goddess of Wisdom's dress (as with the other dolls in the series – Goddess of Beauty and Goddess of Spring, also surveyed on this database) is perhaps more historically inspired than we might expect, given that she is a fantasy (as opposed to historical, like the Great Eras collection) doll, her costume does reflect the kind of costumes seen in films featuring classical deities; for example, the Goddess of Wisdom is not unlike Athene (played by Susan Fleetwood) in the 1981 film *Clash of the Titans*, in which Athena is similarly

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	marked out almost solely by her owl companion. While this pseudo-historical style of dress was easily identifiable with Greco-Roman history and myth when this doll was produced (the 2003 Princess of Ancient Greece doll has a more historically accurate version of ancient Athenian dress), we might be more likely today to assume this doll represented an elf such as Arwen from the *Lord of the Rings* films due to her long hair and flowing gown, which may be responsible for the move towards the more modern interpretations of the clothing on the Barbie as Athena doll.
Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	Athena Minerva
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Animals Femininity Gender Gender expectations/construction Gender, female Girls Play* Pop culture references Religious beliefs
Further Reading	Barbie, *About Barbie*, available at barbie.mattel.com (accessed: January 27, 2020). Barbie, *Goddess of Wisdom Barbie*, available at barbie.mattel.com (accessed: August 6, 2020). Deacy, Susan, *Athena,* London: Routledge, 2008. Eason, Cassandra, *Fabulous Creatures, Mythical Monsters, and Animal Power Symbols: A Handbook,* Westport: Greenwood Publishing Group, 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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