Aimee Hinds, "Entry on: Barbie® Classical Goddess™ Collection (Series): Goddess of Beauty™ Barbie® by Mattel, Inc. ", peer-reviewed by Susan Deacy and Lisa Maurice. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2021). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/1183. Entry version as of October 30, 2026.

Mattel, Inc.

Barbie® Classical Goddess™ Collection (Series): Goddess of Beauty™ Barbie®

United States of America (2000)

TAGS: Aphrodite Venus





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

General information	
Title of the work	Barbie® Classical Goddess™ Collection (Series): Goddess of Beauty™ Barbie®
Country of the First Edition	United States of America
Country/countries of popularity	worldwide
Original Language	English
First Edition Date	2000
First Edition Details	Mattel Inc., *Goddess of Beauty™ Barbie®*. January 1, 2000.
Official Website	barbie.mattel.com (accessed: February 16, 2021)
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 Goddess of Beauty, in which Mattel conflate Aphrodite and Venus (while these two goddesses are similar, they are not necessarily interchangeable, but the box text makes it clear that the doll is meant to stand in for both goddesses). The doll is separate from the later Barbie as Aphrodite doll from 2009, also surveyed in this database. The doll was the first of the *Classical Goddess Series*. Unlike the later *Goddess Series*, this series is based on historicised versions of the goddesses depicted; while the sources used are not clear, these dolls illustrate an engagement with the ancient world through historical dress and the specificity of their mythical stories as explained on the boxes. The *Goddess of Beauty* doll wears a pale blue gown with golden motifs on the bodice, Greek-key print on the waistband and a pleated, layered skirt. She also wears a sash-style cloak attached at her wrist with a golden bangle, described as a "toga" on the website, adorned with golden, Greek-style motifs. Her hair is swept into an updo with hanging curls, and she wears a diadem that also features a Greek-key pattern.

The text on the box highlights the dual identity of the doll as Venus and Aphrodite, explaining that she was "born of the sea", and that as "the embodiment of perfection", "she remains the ultimate symbol of romance and majesty". The text idealises the mythical past and the deities within it through references to the "glorious days of antiquity", the "awe and reverence" for the gods in their "heavenly home", in a "mythical paradise". The Goddess of Beauty is described in terms of her connection with love and romance.

Analysis

Much like the 2009 *Barbie as Aphrodite* doll, this doll lacks visual motifs to clearly identify her as Venus/Aphrodite; this is doubtless an issue that arises from the fact that ancient representations of both Aphrodite and Venus were often recognisable partly due to her nudity*, and into the imperial period, the image of Venus on the Ara Pacis in which she is identifiable by a set of associated images (including infants and vegetation due to her associations with motherhood, the spring and three other goddesses signifying Venus' triple aspect as belonging to the sky, earth and sea) was so recognisable it was used formulaically to describe Venus in poetry**. Only the name of the doll gives away her identity, as even on the box

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there are no identifying images (unlike the later Aphrodite doll, which features imagery of the clam shell in a reference to the story of the birth). The doll's status as the goddess of beauty is only defined by her name, although this also feeds into expectations around what Barbie looks like and her femininity. Barbie is designed as an embodiment of beauty, and thus the addition of historical dress is enough to allow her the title of "Goddess of Beauty".

Like the other two dolls in the series (*Goddess of Wisdom* and *Goddess of Spring*, also surveyed on this database), *Goddess of Beauty* appears very traditional, with the doll and box text presenting a "classic" history of ancient Greece and Rome through the idealisation of ancient history ("glorious days of antiquity"). As with the other *Classical Goddess* dolls, this aspect of the "classic" is fed by the doll's clothing and its decorative motifs, as well as the emphasis on romance in her box text; like the *Goddess of Spring*, it is likely that Aphrodite/Venus was chosen for this series because of her existing association with love and romance. This traditionalism is ultimately used to sell the doll as an image of Barbie, through her specific, narrow version of femininity***. This control over gender and sexuality – which is displayed through a set of criteria appropriate to Barbie, including in this case whiteness and a desexualised beauty – makes way for the erotic aspect of Aphrodite/Venus to be entirely pushed aside. This both ensures that the doll is appropriate for children (although a collectors' item, it can still be played with and is likely to be purchased by or for young adult and children) and solidifies the (platonic) romantic element that the doll's story heavily relies on.

Unlike the other two dolls, while her dress is similarly pseudo-historical she is difficult to mistake for a figure from anywhere else than Greco-Roman mythology. Her dress is obviously based on both a chiton and a toga, clearly illustrating both her status as a classical goddess and her ambiguity as a doll embodying two goddesses. While the eroticism of the ancient Greek Aphrodite can create issues in depicting her for children, here she has been successfully conflated with – or perhaps subsumed by – the more romantic figure of Venus who was, into the Imperial period, considered a maternal figure. Cyrino**** highlights how Venus' dominance over Aphrodite in terms of expressing love, sex and desire in reception, which seems to be the case here.

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	* Mary Beard, John Henderson, *Classical art from Greece to Rome* (Oxford History of Art), Oxford: University Press, 2001, 115. ** Karl Galinsky, "Venus in a Relief of the Ara Pacis Augustae", *American Journal of Archaeology* 70.3 (1966): 223–243, 233. *** Kristina Milnor, "Barbie® as Grecian Goddess™ and Egyptian Queen™: Ancient Women's History by Mattel®", *Helios* 32.2 (2005): 215–233, 222. **** Monica S. Cyrino, *Aphrodite*, London: Routledge, 2010, 130–131.
Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	Aphrodite Venus
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Femininity Gender Gender expectations/construction Gender, female Girls Past Play* Religious beliefs Romance
Further Reading	Barbie, *About Barbie*, barbie.mattel.com (accessed: February 16, 2021). Barbie, *Goddess of Beauty Barbie*, barbie.mattel.com (accessed: February 16, 2021). Cyrino, Monica S., *Aphrodite*, London: Routledge, 2010. Galinsky, Karl, "Venus in a Relief of the Ara Pacis Augustae", *American Journal of Archaeology* 70.3 (1966): 223–243. Milnor, Kristina, "Barbie® as Grecian Goddess™ and Egyptian Queen™: Ancient Women's History by Mattel®", *Helios* 32.2 (2005):

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