

From: www.mythology.net

Clytemnestra

By Prof. Geller – Updated October 21, 2016

Who is Clytemnestra?

Clytemnestra is the daughter of the King and Queen of Sparta. Her siblings are Castor and Pollux, said to be the twins pictured in the constellation Gemini, and the famous Helen of Troy, whose face launched a thousand ships

Those ships were launched by Clytemnestra's husband, King Agamemnon. After Helen disappeared across the sea to Troy, her husband asked his brother Agamemnon to help him retrieve her. Whether Helen left her husband willingly or was forcibly kidnapped by the Trojans varies by source.

Unlike her famous siblings, Clytemnestra was doomed to an unhappy life and a bad reputation. She is best known for her role in the murders of both her husband Agamemnon, and the Trojan princess Cassandra, whom he had brought back as a prisoner of war.

Though Clytemnestra was viewed as an agent of evil because of the killings she committed, it is easy for modern audiences to sympathize with her when they've heard the whole story.

In most versions of the myth, Agamemnon is Clytemnestra's second husband. He married her by force after killing her first, and chosen, husband, and in some versions also killed the infant son she had with her first husband.

Years later, he tricked Clytemnestra into thinking he had arranged for their daughter, Iphigenia, to marry Achilles. But when Clytemnestra sent the girl to him, he killed her as a sacrifice in order to procure favorable winds to send his war fleet to Troy.

Armed with the winds blowing in his favor, Agamemnon took his thousand ships across the sea to fight a bloody 10-year war against the Trojans.

Versions of the Myth

Homer

In Homer's account, developed in the epic poems *Illiad* and *Odyssey*, Clytemnestra played a passive role in Agamemnon's death, merely permitting her lover, Aegisthus, to murder Agamemnon.

In this version, Aegisthus is portrayed as an unmanly coward who was one of the few Greek men to refuse to join Agamemnon's fleet and fight the Trojans.

In this narrative, the driving force of Agamemnon's death is Aegisthus' desire to avenge his brothers and uncles, and take the throne which he believes belongs by right to his family.

Orestia

In the play *Oresteia*, written by Aeschylus, Clytemnestra is the motivating force who plans to kill Agamemnon to avenge her murdered family members. She commits the killing herself, with a **double-edged axe** [my emphasis] called a pelekus.

Clytemnestra kills Agamemnon using the same method that would be used to sacrifice an animal to the gods: three blows, with a prayer to the gods uttered before striking the third. This is doubtless a reference to the sacrificial killing by Agamemnon of their daughter.

In this version, Clytemnestra also plays the active role of peacekeeper after Agamemnon's death. She **uses her axe** [mine] and compelling words to prevent fighting between her lover and the Greek elders as her lover takes Agamemnon's throne, telling them all that enough blood has been spilled.

In his absence, Clytemnestra took a lover named Aegisthus. Aegisthus had his own grievances against Agamemnon: Agamemnon's father had killed Aegisthus' uncles and brothers. As a result, Aegisthus had vowed to kill Agamemnon and take the throne from him.

By the time Agamemnon returned from war, Clytemnestra and Aegisthus were ready for him. Between the two of them, they conspired to kill Agamemnon by entangling him with a net and then stabbing him while he bathed.

In some accounts, it was Clytemnestra herself who killed her husband to avenge her daughter (and possibly first husband and infant son). In others, it was Aegisthus who did the killing, with Clytemnestra's permission, in order to procure the throne.

<https://mythology.net/greek/mortals/clytemnestra/>

From: www.greeklegendsandmyths.com

The Death of Clytemnestra

Aegisthus would remain as king for just seven years, for by that time Orestes was of age, and the son of Agamemnon and Clytemnestra returned to Mycenae to seek revenge upon the killers of his father.

Aegisthus was thus killed by Orestes, as was his half-brother, Aletes, but it was also said that Orestes committed a great wrong when he killed his mother despite her pleadings and prayers. The killing of Clytemnestra would bring forth the wrath of the Erinyes upon Orestes, and indeed it was said that the very ghost of Clytemnestra cajoled the Erinyes in their persecution of her son.

Eventually, Orestes was released from the hounding of the Erinyes when he was cleared of murder by Athena, and **Orestes would subsequently marry his half-sister by Clytemnestra, Erigone** [my emphasis].

<https://www.greeklegendsandmyths.com/clytemnestra.html>