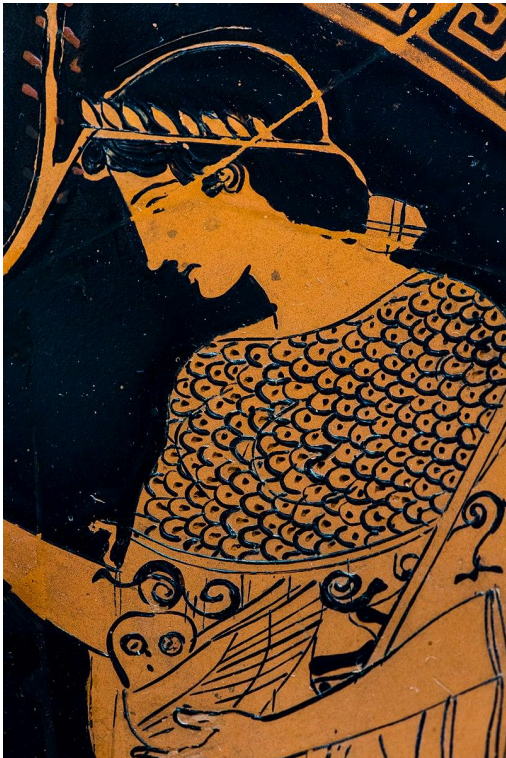


The Sacred Bird

The owl is commonly recognized as a bird with bold features and the unique ability to see in the dark. In many cultures, the owl is also a well-known symbol—a sacred bird representing wisdom, good fortune, and wealth. In other cultures, however, the owl is a bad omen.

In ancient Greece, Athena, the daughter of Zeus, was given the nickname "owl-eyed" or *glaukopis* (ancient Greek: γλαυκῶπις). As the goddess of wisdom and war, she was often referred to as "bright-eyed" or "grey-eyed" because of her exceptional intelligence. She was also associated with domestic crafts and military strategy.



Today, Athena is also recognized for the battle between her and Poseidon, in which she won and was named as the patron goddess of Athens. She was chosen as such because she gave the city the gift of the olive tree. Apart from the olive tree, some of Athena's major symbols include snakes, the Gorgoneion (a type of amulet), and, of course, the owl.

As her most famous symbol, the owl represents the soul and intellectual wisdom. The myth behind the owl begins with the princess Nyctimene of Lesbos Island. After being mistreated by her father, Nyctimene ran away and hid in the neighboring forest. She remained there in the lonely darkness until Athena found her and transformed Nyctimene into her animal companion, an owl. In owl form, Nyctimene perched on Athena's shoulder and helped her navigate places that she could not see and revealed the truths of the world to her. The owl thus became Athena's symbol and sacred animal.

The owl was also known as a symbol of protection in Greece, serving as the "protector" of

the army before a battle. If an owl was flying over the Greek soldiers, it was a sign of victory. The Greek victory over the Persians, for instance, was said to be due to the flight of an owl that Athena sent as a messenger. The owl was also the protector of the Athenian trade, and its image was depicted on one side of the Athenian coin.

Over the years, the owl has been displayed as the symbol of wisdom in various items and logos. Around 454-415 B.C. Athena and her owl were featured on the four-drachma coin. The owl was also used on the one-drachma coin before Greece joined the Eurozone and the currency was changed to the euro. Greece became part of the Eurozone in 2001 and belonged to the first wave of countries to launch euro banknotes and coins at the beginning of 2002. The Greek Euro coin, designed by Georgios Stamatopoulos, depicted the symbol of the owl on one side and was based on the four-drachma coins. The owl symbol is not limited to coins or banknotes, however. In Greece, the symbol of the owl can also be found usually in school logos or school textbooks as a symbol of knowledge or wisdom.



The Owl in Different Cultures

In Europe, the symbol of the owl is considered positively or negatively depending on the specific country. In France, it is believed that when a pregnant woman hears an owl, it means her child will be a girl. Meanwhile, in Germany, there is a theory that if an owl hoots when a child is born, then the child will live an unhappy life.

In Japan, owls possess an entirely different significance and symbolize good fortune and good luck. When breaking down the Japanese word for owl, *fu* means “luck,” *ku* means “to come,” and *ro* is a suffix for boys’ names. So, *fukuro* signifies a lucky charm to welcome good fortune. In Chinese culture, the owl is associated with lightning, because it is imagined as a similar source of light during the night. It is also linked to the drum since it hoots and breaks the silence. The owl is a symbol of *Yang*, emblemizing good energy, positivity, and brightness. In other parts of Asia, the owl symbolizes protection as it does in Greece. It is also considered the bird of wisdom among the Indonesian people of the Isle of Sulawesi. Known as “Burung Manguni,” the owl is very important to consult before embarking on missions or journeys.

In other cultures, the owl is not always recognized as a symbol of wisdom or intelligence. In North America, owls are often interpreted as a bad omen, namely messengers of death. In Navajo and Apache culture, the sighting of an owl holds a negative connotation, and it is advised that one even cancel plans and stay home if they come across it. The same applies

in South Africa and Nigeria, where owls are associated with bad luck and witchcraft. One of the highest insults is to call someone an “owl.”

As we have seen, the owl carries a different meaning among different cultures and countries. Over the last few years, the owl has most commonly been seen as a symbol of wisdom, good fortune, and knowledge.

This article was inspired by Ohanga Garden City’s large hand-made felted owl, found [here](#) on the Ohanga Marketplace.



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