

CHAPTER 1: SOURCES TO STUDY

Source 1.1: Vulcan's forge

In the 1st century BC the poet Virgil wrote a dramatic description of the weapons for Jupiter, Mars and Minerva made by the Cyclopes in Vulcan's cave.

In this passage, Virgil uses the Greek name Pallas Athene for Minerva and he describes the aegis which was part of her armour. This aegis was a breastplate with the head of the monstrous Gorgon Medusa, whose gaze turned people to stone.

The Cyclopes Brontes, Sterope and Pyracmon were forging steel, working naked in that vast cavern. In their hands was a thunderbolt which they had roughed out, one of those the Father of the Gods and Men hurls down upon the earth in such numbers from every part of the sky. Some of it was already polished, some of it unfinished. They had attached three shafts of lashing rain to it, three shafts of heavy rain clouds, three of glowing fire and three of the south wind in full flight. They were now adding to the work the terrifying lightning and the sound of thunder, then Fear and Anger with its accompanying flames. In another part of the cave they were working for Mars, busy with the wing-wheeled chariot in which he stirs up men and cities to war. Others were hard at work polishing the armour worn by Pallas Athene when enraged, the fearsome aegis with its weaving snakes and their reptilian scales of gold, and the Gorgon Medusa herself, rolling her eyes in her bodiless head on the breastplate of the goddess.

Virgil, Aeneid Book 8, 424–438 (trans. slightly adapted)

Source 1.1: Questions

- 1 How many Cyclopes were working in the cave and what were their names?
- 2 For which god were they making a thunderbolt?
- **3** What had the Cyclopes added to the thunderbolt to make it so powerful and frightening? What were they adding next?
- 4 What were the Cyclopes making for Mars?
- **5** What does the description of Minerva's armour tell us about her as a goddess?
- **6** Based on what you have read in this passage, which god do you think would have been most terrifying to look at?

