

## Source 1.3: Venus and Mars' love affair

At the very start of the 1st century AD, the Roman poet Ovid wrote a poem called the Metamorphoses. In this poem he told many different stories about the gods. In this passage, Ovid tells us that the Sun caught Mars and Venus having an affair. The Sun then told Vulcan that his wife was cheating on him. Vulcan created a clever trap to catch the lovers and embarrass them before the gods.

The Sun, people think, was the first god to see Venus committing adultery with Mars. This god is the first to see everything. Pained by what he saw, the Sun told Venus' husband, Vulcan, son of Juno, about the pleasures stolen from his marriage-bed, and showed him the site of the betrayal. Shocked, Vulcan let the artwork he was making fall from his skilful hands. Straightaway he fashioned from bronze tiny links of bronze, a net invisible to the eye to use as a snare, handiwork finer than the finest thread, finer than a spider's web hanging from a ceiling. He arranged the net carefully above the bed, setting it to drop at the slightest touch, the smallest movement.

When his wife and her lover made love in the bed, by means of a husband's skill they were caught in each other's arms, stuck fast to each other by this new kind of net. Vulcan immediately threw open the ivory doors of the bedroom and let in the gods. There the lovers lay, body bound to body - a shocking sight - and various gods (all amused) wished out loud that *he* could be part of a shocking sight like that. It gave them all a good laugh, and for a long time this was the most repeated story in all of heaven.

Ovid, Metamorphoses, Book 4.171–189 (trans. slightly adapted)

## Source 1.3: Questions

- 1 Why do you think the Sun is described as 'the first to see everything'?
- 2 Why did the Sun tell Vulcan that Venus was cheating on him?
- 3 How did Vulcan feel when he heard this, and what did he do next?
- **4** Why did Vulcan summon the other gods? What do you think he was expecting them to do?
- **5** Are you surprised by the way the other gods reacted? Explain your answer.
- **6** Write a character description of Vulcan based on what this passage tells us about his feelings and his actions.

