

Geography of the Underworld¹

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Joachim Patinir: Charon crossing the River Styx (Prado Museum, Madrid)

SUMMARY

The world of Greco-Roman myths is one of the main pillars of European culture, alongside the Judeo-Christian religion and morality and the Celtic-Germanic traditions. This study presents one of the great 'geographic' units of Greek belief, the Underworld, through the art of painting and sculpture and the most ancient legends of European civilisation. The image of the Underworld in Greco-Roman mythology appears frequently in myths; its knowledge is part of the European culture. Think of the visits of Heracles, Orpheus, Aeneas and Odysseus to the Underworld, the marriage of Persephone, the fate of Sisyphus and Tantalus, or the punishment of the Danaides. Charon the ferryman, Cerberus the monstrous watchdog, or the waters of the rivers Styx and Lethe, the Hatred and Forgetfulness representing the Underworld. The ruler of the Underworld, Hades lent his own name to the Greek afterlife, which lay deep beneath Europe from the Atlantic coasts to the Black Sea and the Caucasus. When, after the union of Earth and Sky (Gaea and Uranus), the gods took over the world after the reign of the Titans led by Time (Cronus, or Saturn in Latin), his three sons divided it among themselves. The youngest son, Zeus (Jupiter), ruled the Earth and Sky; the middle son, Poseidon (Neptune), the Seas; while the eldest, Hades (Pluto), became ruler of the Underworld, the virtual 'geographical' landscape of which is the topic of this study.

¹ The study – without illustrations – was published in Hungarian language in the *Polgári Szemle* (Civic Review) Vol. 16, No. 4-6, 2020, pp 243-257.

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WHERE NO BIRD GOES

Charon's ferry does not leave with us when our eyes close freeze with death. 'We, the harsh crossers, go on the fatal waters with our eyes wide open', writes Gyula Illyés, in his poem 'On Charon's Ferry'. It refers to the ancient idea, widespread in European culture, that after death our souls are guided by the god Hermes, our soul's after death companion, to the far west, to the Atlantic Ocean, where we must descend and cross a river on the boat of a grim and rugged ferryman, Charon, provided we can pay him with a coin placed on our eyes or mouth by our relatives after our death. This river, which lies in the depths beneath the Atlantic coast of Europe, is a river of ice-cold, motionless water, and her name is Styx, she is the personification of the goddess of Hatred. She bounds the Underworld beneath Europe, named Hades after its ruler, the elder brother of Zeus.

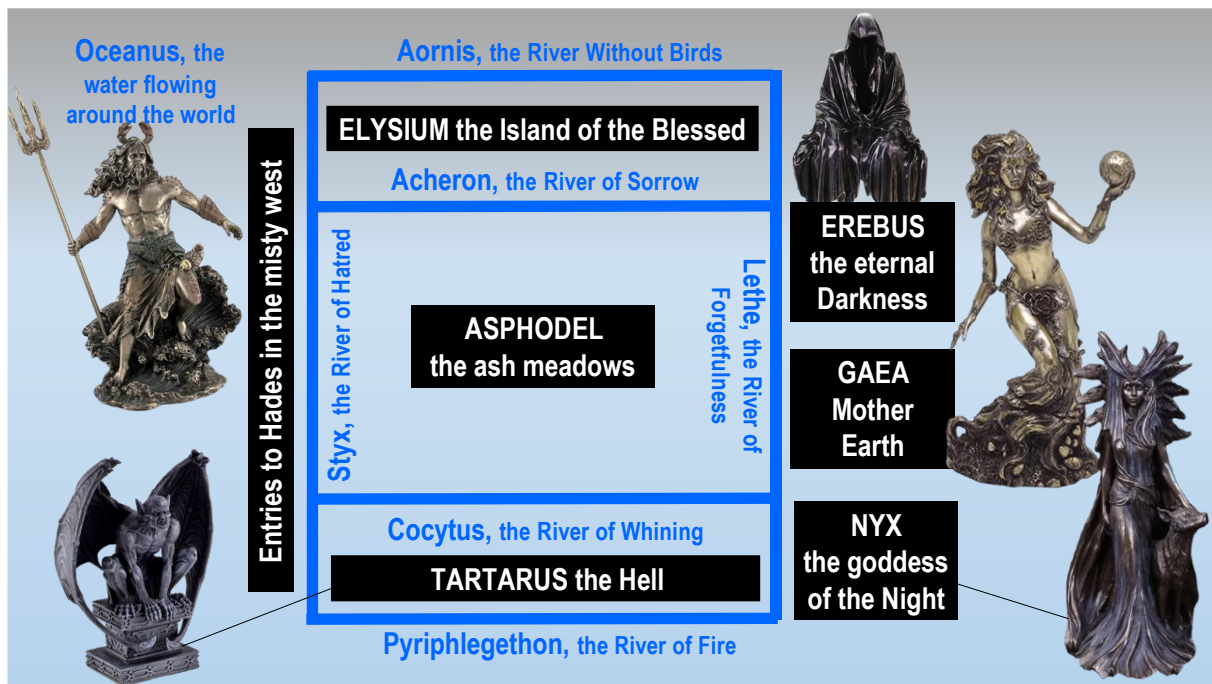
The Underworld is divided by five other rivers in addition to this western boundary river, the Styx. After Charon transports the souls of the dead across the Styx, they change into the form of translucent ghostly mists, floating across the vast, grey ashen meadows of Asphodel, where the complete silence is broken only by the distant barking of the ore-sounding hellhound, Cerberus, the watchdog of the Underworld. The asphodel flower is a type of white lily that was planted in ancient times on tombs; this little flower is the personification of the goddess of Tears. Asphodel in the Underworld lies beneath Western and Central Europe; it is bordered to the north, roughly below the North and the Baltic Seas, by the river of Acheron, impersonating the god of Joylessness, or Sorrow. The gods of the Underworld Rivers, like those of the upper world rivers, are all descendants of the mighty Titan Oceanus, the Titan of the Atlantic Ocean, and of the Titanide Thetis, the Titanide of the Mediterranean Sea. Asphodel is bounded from the south, roughly below Southern Europe, by the River Cocytus, the River of Whining. To the east, below Eastern Europe, the ill-famed waters of the River Lethe border the ash fields of Asphodels. This is the Water of Forgetfulness, where dead souls go to drink under the black skies of the Underworld. The more they drink from the Lethe, the more they are forgotten by their relatives and descendants in the upper world of the living. Only the dead souls who are often remembered by the living, are not thirsty. In ancient times, sacrifices were made in memory of the dead; the blood of the sacrificial animals was spilled on the ground and was seeping into the earth, and down into Hades, the Underworld, where the dead soul for whom the sacrifice was performed, could drink it and could feel itself alive again, for a short time. Thus, the rest of the dead souls, who were not remembered by the living with sacrifices, were thirsty and went to drink to the Lethe, got paler and paler until they faded away in a couple of generations.

Beyond the waters of the Lethe to the east – that is, beneath Eastern Europe and the Caucasus – there is a vast, eternal darkness behind a terrible ore threshold. The name and ruler of this region is Erebus, the deity of eternal Darkness, one of the first four beings to emerge from Chaos, and brother of Mother Earth, Gaea. Here dwells Nyx, Erebus' other brother, the goddess of the Night, who ascends to the upper world every twilight and drapes her night-coloured veil over it. Here also stands the palace of Hades, the Lord of the Underworld i.e. Hades and his wife, the goddess Persephone, the Bringer of Destruction. Here live all the gods and goddesses of the Underworld. The most famous of these is the beautiful and vicious Hecate, the goddess of Witchcraft and Charms. It is also the home of the children of the Night (Nyx). They are the descendants of Nyx and Erebus, the Darkness. First and foremost, the iron-hearted Thanatos the god of Death, and his brother, Hypnos the god of Sleep, and Eris, the goddess of Discordance and Hostility. In addition to them, there are many other deities who are also the offspring of Nyx and who ascend the upper world with her and go among the living people

when the night comes. They are the malevolent gods and goddesses of Money, Sickness, Murder, the hilarious Old-age, Envy, Revenge, Mockery, Deceit, Stupidity, Lovemaking, Lust, Misery, Poverty, Anger, Error, Madness, Malevolence and the bronze-legged vampires who take children.

Beyond the whining River Cocytus that runs under southern Europe, dark, glowing mountain ranges can be seen beneath the Mediterranean Sea. This is Hell itself, whose name and deity is Tartarus, one of the four first beings. Here the guilty are being punished and tortured. Tartarus is bordered from the south, below the coasts of North Africa, by the blazing Pyriphlegethon, the River of Flaming and Fire, the deepest region of Hell.

Finally, on the other bank of the sorrowful River Acheron, to the north, that is, below Northern Europe and Scandinavia, is the Underworld ‘Paradise’, where the ghostly shadows and souls of the good people, the rulers and the celebrities are taken. Here, under a grey, desolate sky, there are endless apple tree orchards. This is Elysium, the dull island of the blessed, ruled by Cronus (Saturn in Latin), the Titan of Time – father of Zeus the lord of all the gods and goddesses. Elysium is an island, because it is bounded from the north, roughly below the Arctic Polar Circle by another river: the Aornis – meaning the one ‘without birds’. That is, where no bird goes, where the world ends. It is also the end of the Underworld, where no birds, not even the bat-like floating dead souls go.



The geographical map of the Underworld with the main provinces in black and the rivers in blue. Note the locations of the first divine entities emerging from Chaos as the act of primordial creation: Gaea – the Mother Earth, Nyx – the Night, Erebus – the Darkness and Tartarus – the Hell.

Source: own design, using the Veronese bronze art models



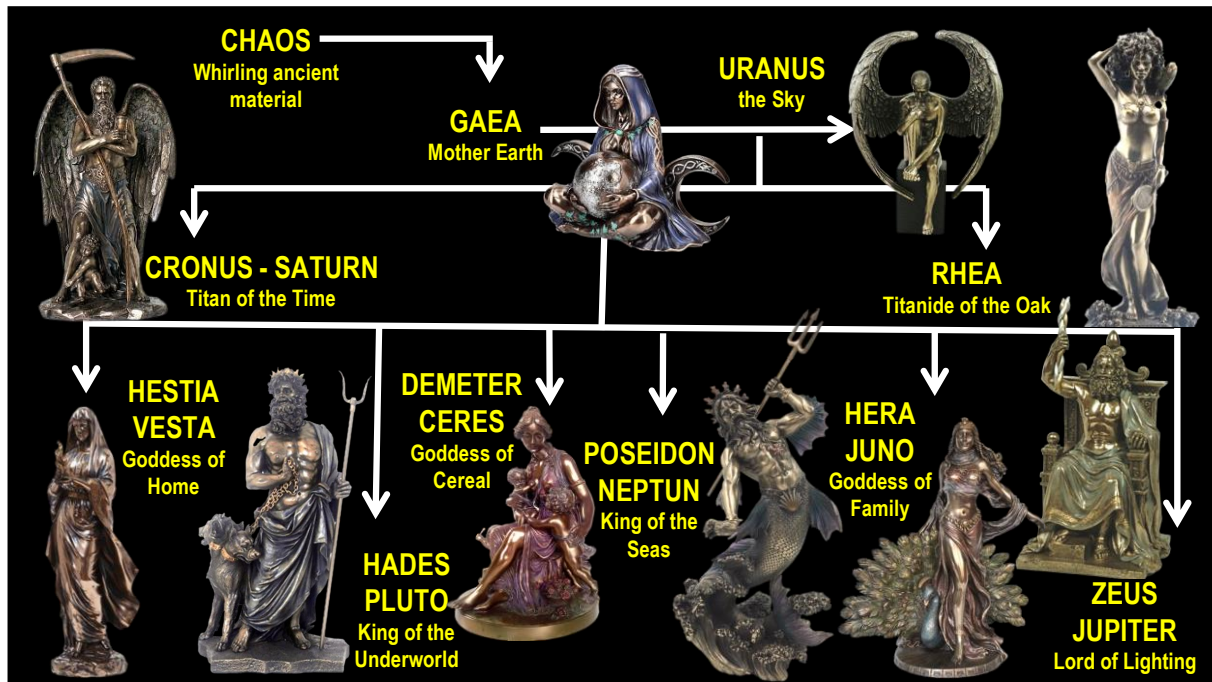
The projection of the Underworld on Europe's map

Source: own design

HADES

The oldest European creation story, Theogony, is associated with the Greek poet and historian Hesiod in the eighth century before Christ. According to the Theogony, the theory of the origin of the gods, the four first existing entities emerged from the all-preceding, swirling primordial matter of the Chaos. Two males: the eternal Darkness (Erebus) and the abyss of the Underworld, the Hell (Tartarus); and two females: the goddess of the Night (Nyx), who casts a dark veil over the whole world every evening, and the goddess Mother Earth (Gaea), 'who brings up the young'. Gaea, Mother Earth, herself created her own mate, the first lord of the earth, the king of the skies, Uranus. From the union of the Earth and the Sky were born the 'ambitious' Titans and their female counterparts, the Titanides. The leader of the Titans, the 'treacherous' Time (Cronus or Saturn in Latin), killed their father Uranus and he, the Time, took control of the world. He married the Titanide Rhea, the goddess of the most time-resistant tree in Europe, the oak; and swallowed their five immortal children, lest they should one day deprive him of his power as he had done his father, Uranus. Three of their six children were daughters. The eldest, Hestia (Vesta), is the guardian of the home and the hearth. The middle, Demeter (Ceres), is the goddess of grain and fertility. The youngest is Hera (Juno), goddess of the family. Of the three sons, Hades (Pluto) and Poseidon (Neptun) were also swallowed by the Titan of the Time. But Rhea, the goddess of the oak tree, had had enough of Cronus' treatment and gave birth to her sixth child in secret in Arcadia, in the cave of Mount Lykaion. To endure her pain in silence, she clamped an oak branch between her teeth and dug her fingers deep into the cave floor in the pain of childbirth. Since Rhea was a powerful goddess, the cave soil thus excavated immediately gave rise to small deities: the Fingers (Dactyls); Iron, Steel, Hammer, Anvil, and Knife – they mark the birth of the Iron Age in European prehistory, which began with the birth of Zeus (Jupiter). Rhea, the oak goddess, put a stone in the swaddling bands of the youngest son, Zeus, and gave it to the Titan Cronus to swallow. Meanwhile the child was hidden in the cave of Mount Dicte on the island of Crete. He entrusted the child to a goat nymph named Amalthea – whose horn later became the horn of plenty, the symbol of the goddess of fortune,

Tyche (Fortuna) – and two armed nymphs, the Courts, who beat their shields of bronze ore whenever the infant Zeus cried, lest the father should hear the child's cry. Cronus, realising that he had been deceived, ‘searched heaven and earth’ for Zeus, but found him neither in heaven nor on earth. The reason was that Rhea had hung Zeus' cradle on an oak branch outside the cave, so that the child was neither on earth nor in the sky. Hence the origin of the phrase ‘searching for something in heaven and earth’, which is widespread throughout European culture. Zeus grew up and became stronger, defeated the Time, and freed his immortal brothers and sisters from the prison of Time. The victorious youngest son – as in the European folk tales – ruled the earth and sky as the god of lightning. The middle one, Poseidon, received the seas from him, while Hades, the eldest, got the Underworld.



The genesis of the first gods and goddesses, with Hades among them

Source: own editing with Veronese bronze art models

This is a description of the geography, landscapes and inhabitants of the mythological Underworld ruled by **Hades**, known to few. Ancient Greek mythology reflects the first true and exclusively European religion, the first to survive from the Bronze Age to the Iron Age, and for thousands of years. Its knowledge is a cognitive part of the European identity. The stories and figures of the Greek mythology, the family of the Olympian gods, are still known here and there, although since the complete elimination of Latin language studies from primary and secondary education in the seven decades after the Second World War, based on the works of Horace, Virgil and Ovid, the Europeans' active knowledge of Greek mythology has also dwindled. Even most of Europe's classical works of art, paintings and sculptures in the museums can now only be interpreted with the help of smart phones. And perhaps the least known region of Greek mythology is precisely the subject of this study, the Underworld, the Hades, imagined by the ancient Greek civilisation under Europe.

The Underworld is made up of four large domains, separated by six rivers. In the west, on the Atlantic coastline, just below the present-day Portugal, flows, or rather stands still, the icy and poisonous **Styx**, the 'Hatred', the largest border river of the Underworld. Four rivers flow into it: the **Aornis**, the 'birdless' river, which borders the northern reaches of the

Underworld from the north, below the Arctic, hence the European folktale saying: where do you go where no bird goes? It is fitting to know: at the end of the world. The **Acheron**, the "joylessness", or River of Sorrow, borders the largest province of the Underworld, the abode of most of the dead souls, from the north. The abode of the dead is bounded from the abode of the gods of the Underworld and the palace of Hades by the waters of the **Lethe**, or 'Forgetfulness', where the dead go to drink. The more they drink of the waters of the Lethe, the less their living relatives and acquaintances think of them. The two border rivers of the Underworld's depths, Hell, are **Cocytus**, the 'Whining' and **Pyriphlegethon** the "Fire".

One of the great domains of the Underworld is the 'Paradise' which is the **Elysium**, the Isle of the Blessed between the waters of Aornis and Acheron. This region was imagined by the Greeks to lie beneath Europe, in the misty north, or, in retrospect, stylistically speaking, beneath present-day Scandinavia and Northern Europe. This landscape is geographically rather desolate: it is made up of misty, endless apple orchards, covered by a grey sky, a vault of the Underworld. Here, alongside the good people, are the ghostly spirits of kings and rulers. One of the remote exits from Elysium is the barren Snake Island off the coast of the Black Sea, which the Romans used as a place of exile, a prison island. Here, for example, John the Evangelist wrote the Book of Revelation in exile. The small island was long a shrine to Achilles and Helen of Troy, who were considered a dream couple in Elysium in ancient times. Achilles, however, told Odysseus, who exchanged a few words with him when he met him at the gate (mouth) of Acheron during his wanderings, that he would rather be the most miserable, but living ploughman than a king in the realm of the dead.



*Ghosts of the dead souls in Elysium.
Arthur Bowen Davies: Elysium Fields
(Phillips Collection, Washington)*



Elysian landscape.
Dosso Dossi: Aeneas at the entrance to the fields of Elysium
(National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa)



*The distant gateway to the Underworld in the misty west,
with dead souls streaming in across River Styx .*

Image source: <http://cypriotnews.blogspot.com/2017/07/where-was-river-styx-situated.html>



'The Gate of Hades', which Jesus also visited. There was once a lake of immense depth in the cave, practically the source of the River Jordan, which now flows out of the cave in the northern part of the State of Israel, near Caesarea Philippi, due to an earthquake

Source: http://www.generationword.com/Israel/caesarea_philippi.htm



The ruins of the 'official' entrance to Hades today: a temple built in ancient Hierapolis in the Roman times (now Pamukkale in Türkiye), built on a cave entrance that was – and still is – the product of a volcanic after-effect, releasing poisonous gases

Source: <https://time.com/5171047/turkey-gate-to-hell-pamukkale-hierapolis/>



The gloomy Underworld judgment seat where the chief justice, Minos (son of Zeus, and founder of the great Minoan Empire in the Island of Crete) judges the dead souls to go to Asphodel, Elysium or Tartarus (Gustave Doré: King Minos; illustration from 1880 to Dante's Divine Comedy – Inferno)



Top row: Asphodel landscape, where the spirits of the dead flutter like bats. Bottom row: the 'iron-hearted' Thanatos, the god of death, who was depicted in European myths with the symbol of Time (Cronus/Saturn), the sickle (later the scythe) that reaps life (grain).

Asphodel: flower of the dead. (Image source: Internet)

When humans died at the dawn of civilization and in ancient times, those who buried (burned) them put a copper coin under their tongues or over their eyes as an *obulus*. This was the fee of the ferryman (Charon); without it, the souls of the dead could not cross the River Styx and descend to the Underworld, and they came back to haunt their living relatives or murderers. To avoid being recognized by the returning and haunting dead souls, the mourners smeared their faces with soot, tore their clothes, scratched and bled their faces so that the spirits of the deceased would not recognise them. Hence the black colour of the European mourning dress, although the colour of death in ancient time used to be red, associated with blood, since violent death was very common in historical times. The dead souls were accompanied by the god of the travellers, Hermes – one of the great Olympian gods – one of his attributes was the 'soul guide', leading the dead westwards to the endless ocean that borders Europe. There – beneath the present-day Portugal – is the main entrance to the Underworld, where the spirits of the dead wait in a misty grove of black poplars on the banks of the icy, motionless, poisonous, deadly and hateful River Styx.

There is also a river named Styx in Hungary, running along the Domica Branch of the huge, more than 25 km long Baradla Cave between Aggtelek and Jósvalfő. The more than 5 km long Domica Branch, however, is in Slovakian territory since 1920. The Styx, arriving under Hungarian territory in the Aggtelek part of the Baradla Cave flows into another underground river of mythological name, the Acheron in the Concert Hall. From there it flows under the name Acheron along the main branch of the Baradla, from Aggtelek towards Jósvalfő, and disappears in a sinkhole in front of the gigantic Hall of Giants. It flows for a few kilometres in the still undiscovered, active, water-filled Lower Cave, and in Jósvalfő, near a lake named 'Sea Eye' it emerges as the spring of the Jósvalfő brook. Due to the lack of systematic knowledge of Greek mythology, the two underground streams in Hungary, the Styx and the Acheron, were named the other way round; the Styx does not flow into the Acheron, but the other way round, and therefore the underground part of the Jósvalfő brook should have been named Styx, not Acheron.



The Acheron (Joylessness) River in Greece, whose underground projection separates Elysium (the Underworld Paradise) from the central region of the Underworld, the Asphodel Meadows

Image source: <http://www.aelia-sivota.gr/en/location-sivota/kontines-diadromes/21-axerontas-potamos>



The underground river in Hungary is the Styx; it originates in the Domica Branch of the Baradla Cave, what is now under Slovak territory and reaches the main branch of the cave in the giant Concert Hall

Image source: <https://www.napalete.sk/jaskynu-domica-objavil-pred-90-rokmi-jaskyniar-ian-majko/>

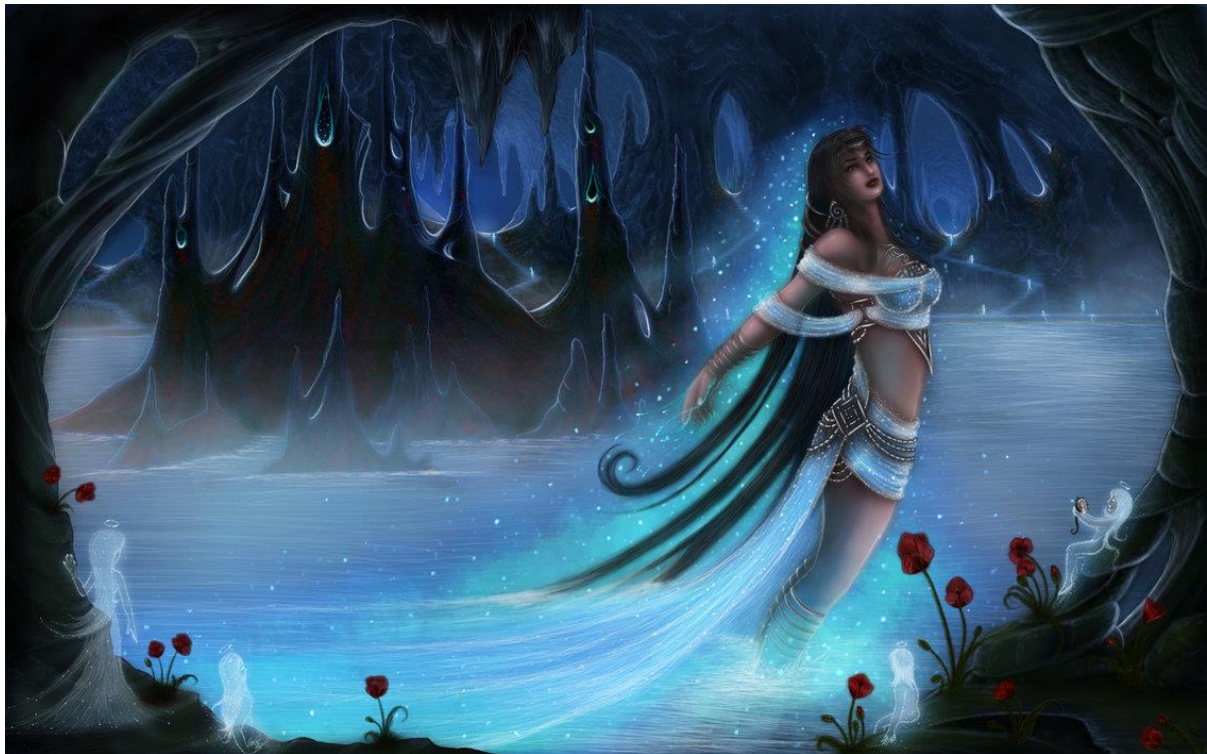


*Where the dead go to drink, on the border of Asphodel; the Elysian Fields can be seen in the background. The more they drink, the more they are forgotten by the living. John Roddam Spencer Stanhope: *The Water of Lethe* (Art Gallery, Manchester.)*

Returning to the mythological Styx, the spirits of the dead used the coin they had carried, to pay the harsh Underworld ferryman, Charon, who took them – who had been decently fare-billed by his relatives – first to the Underworld judgement seat of King Minos, then to the Asphodel Meadows. There is no return from there. A terrible, ore-toned barking, three-headed, hellish dog guards the shores of the Styx – the Cerberus.³

³ Cerberus is the dog of Hades. One of this infernal dog's brothers is the prototype of the seven-headed dragon of European folktales, the Hydra, who lived in the Lernaean marshes and was defeated by Heracles. Another sister of Cerberus is the Theban Sphinx, the winged lion with the head of a woman, who committed suicide because Oedipus, later king of Thebes, solved her riddle. Europe's oldest riddle went like this: 'what walks on four legs in

Charon, the ferryman – son of Nyx, the Night, and Erebus, the Darkness – speaks very little: when he is asked by the dead souls where they are going and what the destination is, he only says: *‘the road is long, and the destination has no name’*. On the dark other side, the dead souls are brought before an Underworld court. Minos is the chief judge. He was a mortal son of Zeus by the Phoenician princess Europa and was the founder of the Cretan Minoan Empire⁴. Two other mortal sons of Zeus; Aeacus is the judge of the European dead and Rhadamanthys is the judge of the dead from Asia Minor. If the deceased is noble or royal birth, their souls go to the relatively pleasant Elysium, along with the souls of the good people. The spirits of the bad and the evil must go to Tartarus, the Hell to suffer for eternity. The dead souls of those who had neither been good or bad – like most people – can go to the Asphodel Meadows in the form of transparent ghost figures.



Lethe, the goddess of the waters of Forgetfulness and Forgiveness. The more the spirits of the dead drink of Lethe's water, the more translucent they become, the more they are forgotten by their living relatives and acquaintances. Since Lethe is also the goddess of forgiveness, hence the European saying ‘of the dead nothing, but good is to be said’ – De mortuis nil nisi bonum in Latin –, since their sins are both forgotten and forgiven

Image source: <https://www.lethe-daimonawas-the-personified-spirit-or-daimona-of-forgetfulness-and-oblivion/999983643504868/>

the morning, two legs in the afternoon and three legs in the evening?’ Every educated European should know the answer, since Oedipus has already guessed it. The father of Cerberus, the Hydra and the Sphinx is the most horrible monster, Typhon defeated by Zeus and buried under the volcano Etna, in Sicily; and their mother is Echidna, the serpent woman.

⁴ The remains of the Minoan Empire on the island of Crete are the ruins of the palace of Knossos, which may have been destroyed by a tsunami following the eruption of the Santorini volcano, an event that many identify with the destruction of Atlantis mentioned by Plato. The European custom of bullfighting also originated in the Minoan culture, when, in honour of King Minos' half-bull son, the Minotaur in the Labyrinth, young girls would somersault over the charging bulls in an arena, grabbing the horns of the bulls that rushed towards them, according to mosaic remains.



Dead souls around the 'soul guide' god Hermes, on the banks of the Underworld River Acheron. Adolf Hirémy-Hirschl: The Souls of Acheron (Dorotheum Palace, Vienna)



Tartarus, the personification of Hell, one of the first entity in creation; father of Typhon (Typhoon), the gods' attacker, lying beneath the volcano Etna on the banks of the flaming river Pyriphlegethon. From his name comes our word Tatar or Tartar – applied to the Mongols invading Eastern Europe in the 13th century – as children of Hell

Image source: <https://i.pinimg.com/originals/c1/54/bc/c154bc78731b069b9c5b3268e7fd3691.jpg>

TARTARUS LANDSCAPES

The Asphodel province is bordered from the south by the River of Reconciliation, the Cocytus, beneath Southern Europe. Roughly below the Mediterranean Sea lies Hell itself, **Tartarus** – hence the later name given to the ruthless Mongol conquerors, Tartars, or Tatars in Europe. Tartarus is the deepest part of the Underworld, resembling a rocky, precipitous, terrifying dark mountain range. Its black and hot rocks are illuminated in red light by the Pyriphlegethon, a blazing river of fire that flows from the south under North Africa. The image of Hell for later European Christians was inspired by Tartarus: the blazing, wailing, burning sinful souls, the eternal suffering. In terms of sound effects, while in the Elysium there is complete silence; in the Asphodel there is only the low chirping of the bat-like dead souls, in Tartarus the incessant howling and wailing of the ghosts tormented on the banks of the river Cocytus and the red flames of the southern boundary river create a sinister and terrifying atmosphere.

The punishment of some mythological figures is well-known. In Tartarus, the Titans who attacked the gods are chained – except for Oceanus, the Titan who personifies the Atlantic Ocean. Mother Earth, Gaea resented the authoritarian rule of her grandson Zeus, and she once unleashed the Giants (the half-serpent, half-human 'earth-born' monsters) on the gods. On another occasion, she sent her own son, born of Tartarus himself, a volcano-like, fire-breathing giant, against Zeus and the Olympian gods. The latter is Typhon, whose name gave rise to the word typhoon, and on whom Zeus finally threw the island of Sicily. Now Typhon is nailed to the ground in the centre of Tartarus, with Mount Etna smoking above him. The Giants are also imprisoned in Tartarus.

The best-known punishments represent the futility of labour; the punishment of the 49 Libyan princesses, the Danaids – for killing the 49 sons of the Egyptian ruler on their wedding night – are to carry water into a barrel with holes in it, until it is full.

Sisyphus, for deceiving Zeus, Thanatos, and Hades himself, was sentenced to such 'Sisyphean labour' that he had to roll a stone up a mountainside, and it would roll back down the valley, always having to start again.

The punishment of Tantalus⁵, who had served up his own child at the banquet of the gods, is eternal thirst and hunger, while he stands in water, with a branch of fruit above his head, but whether he bends up or down, drink and food are withdrawn from him; this is called the endurance of Tantalus' torments or tantalizing pains.

Heroes of such great power are found here, who in their presumption have measured themselves to the gods. Such is Ixion, chained to a fiery spinning wheel; for he had attacked Hera, whom Zeus at the last moment replaced with a cloud in the form of Hera, that is, Nephele, the cloud-goddess, and thus was conceived Centaurus, the first Centaur, a half-man, half-horse creature who considered themselves children of the cloud.

The mighty Aeolus brothers threw burning logs from Mount Pelion to Mount Olympus, the dwelling place of the gods. The reason for their presumption was that a prophecy had said

⁵ Tantalus was also one of Zeus' mortal, favourite sons. It was his son Pelops, who founded the first great Greek kingdom, Mycenae, which defeated the Trojan Empire. The kings of Mycenae wore ivory armour on their left shoulders to commemorate the fact that when Tantalus served Pelops at the gods' banquet, the gods, realising the horror, did not touch the food, except for one, Demeter, who, mourning his lost daughter Persephone, carelessly ate a shoulder crop. This, when the gods assembled Pelops, had to be replaced with an ivory plate as part of their armour over their left shoulder.

that neither other people, nor gods could kill them. So, they swore by the waters of the Styx that they would rape one of Zeus' daughters, the virgin Artemis, goddess of the Hunt and untouched Nature, on Olympus. Eventually Artemis herself leapt among them in the form of a white stag. The two brothers made a simultaneous dart at the beautiful beast, but missed the target and hit each other, thus invalidating the prophecy – they could have killed each other – and they died. They sit on the banks of the Styx, chained to a pillar in Tartarus, to remember forever their unkept vow.

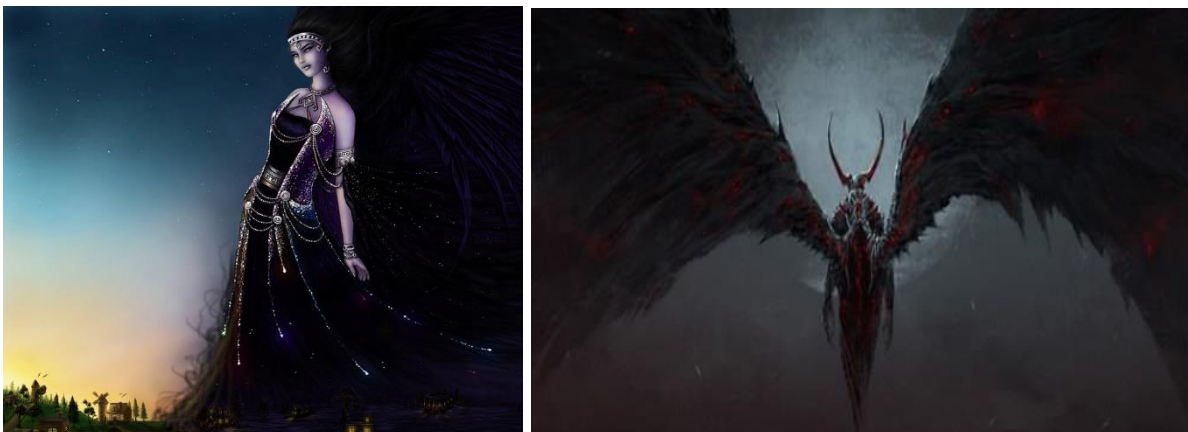


Left: the tortures of Tantalus, condemned to eternal hunger and thirst in Hades (Engraving from the 17th Century in the Flemish School). **Middle:** Titian: Sisyphus (Prado Museum, Madrid). **Right:** Sisyphian labour – since Sisyphus was a Corinthian king, where originally sun worship was the religion, the round rock going up and down might symbolize the Sun.

Sources of the images:

Left: <https://www.art.com/products/p55384713243-sa-i7044463/flemish-school-the-tortures-of-tantalus-condemned-to-eternal-hunger-and-thirst-in-hades-engraving-17th-century.htm>

Right: <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/reversal-burden-proof-relation-hague-visbys-liability-juan-e->



Two of the first four living entities: Nyx, the goddess of the Night, and her counterpart Erebus, the eternal Darkness.

Image sources: Right: <https://hu.pinterest.com/pin/495607133976873009/>
left: <https://erebusconquer.blogspot.com/2017/09/this-is-test-post.html>



Martin Johann Schmidt: The Punishment of the Danaids (National Gallery of Slovenia, Ljubljana)



Alexander Litovchenko: Charon transports dead souls (Russian State Museum, St Petersburg)

LANDSCAPES OF EREBUS

The darkest region of the Underworld is **Erebus**, named after one of the four first ones of creation, and home to him (the Darkness) and Nyx, the goddess of the Night. The Underworld aspect of Erebus is imagined lying beneath the vast Eastern European Plain and the Caucasus, according to the ancient Greeks. In this Underworld province, it is easy to describe the landscape: total and immense darkness and silence. Anyone can easily experience this on an adventure tour in one of the large caves of the Aggtelek Karst limestone region of Hungary for example, if the whole group turns off the lights and everyone remains silent. If there are only a few of you, or if you are alone in the depths of the big caves or mines deep under the ground, the silence is so perfect that sooner or later you will hear – loudly – your own heart beating.

Erebus is separated from Asphodel by Lethe, the River of Forgetfulness, and by an iron wall, the Threshold of Metal. This Underworld region can be imagined as Eastern Europe, the Black Sea and the Caucasus below Europe. It is there where the dark palace of the ruler of the Underworld, Hades, rises, invisible because of the total darkness – as is Hades himself. Here dwell – but only by day – Nyx and her children of the Night. At night they go to the upper world. The best-known siblings are Death (Thanatos) and Sleep (Hypnos), and the Dream Image (Phantasy, hence our word for fantasy). The ancient association of Death and Sleep is that they are brothers. The children of the Night are largely harmful, undesirable, but unfortunately very real deities. They are: Old Age (Geros, hence the name of gerontology as a discipline dealing with old age), Envy (Battus, represented by the viper), the ‘red-lipped’ goddesses of Murder (the Keres, representing violent deaths), Poverty (Penia), Misery (Miseria), they are all the daughters of Nyx, the goddess of the Night, and Erebus, the god of Darkness. Further children of the Night are the god Momos (the personification of Blame and Stupidity), Anger (Manae or Mania the spirit personifying insanity, madness, and crazed frenzy. Error and Malevolence. In Greek mythology, powerful sorceresses were often depicted as malevolent figures, but not every mythological witch had ill intentions. The nightly, donkey-footed kidnapping ghost and demon (Empusa and Lamia), Deceit (Apatheia), Execution and Vengeance (Nemesis), the god of Greed and Money (Mammon). Lastly, the ultimate instigators of the Trojan War with the golden apple for the 'most beautiful goddess', the Discord (Eris) and the Lovemaking (Philotes) – thus distinguishing sex from the goddess of Beauty (Aphrodite or Venus) and her son the god of Love (Eros or Amor), who are not children of the Night.



Hades and Persephone, rulers of the Underworld (State Collection of Antiques, Munich)

Interestingly, Zeus also had a daughter, Ate, the goddess of Flattery and Debauchery, born to Eris, the goddess of Strife and Discord, who could speak so beautifully that the vain Zeus kept her by his side on Olympus. Once, however, when the events surrounding the birth of Heracles were interfered with by the jealous Hera – Zeus' wife – who delayed the birth of Heracles, Ate distracted Zeus by flattering him at his request. Thus, the throne of Mycenae passed not to Heracles, Zeus' last and most powerful demigod son, but to his cousin. Zeus was therefore angry – not with his wife, Hera, but with Ate; he hurled the goddess by her floor length golden hair and spun her around, throwing her from Olympus to the earth – among humans – wherever since then the ‘sweet voiced’ flattery and debauchery have been present.

Erebus is home to Hecate, one of the goddesses of the underworld. Her mother is Asteria, the sister of the Leto who gave birth to Artemis and Apollo for Zeus. The three figures of Hecate are reminiscent of the ancient goddess of the pre-Iron Age mother goddess of the Mediterranean region, a dark, mystical version of her: she can appear in the form of a mare, a bitch and a lion, the torch-bearing goddess of enchantment and witchcraft, to whom the ancients sacrificed a black dog at midnight on crossroads to protect themselves from the witches' curses. Hecate is even the guardian of the treasures of the dead, with columns erected in the tombs to honour her and ensure her presence. She is also responsible for women's labour pains – she can make childbirth easier or more difficult – as the goddess of labour, known as Prothyraia. Her sacred plant is the black poplar tree; her sacred animal is the weasel along with the black dog – for which Hera is responsible.



Some of the most famous inhabitants and deities connected to the Underworld. Hecate (the witch queen) Tartarus (the Hell), Erebus (the Darkness), Hypnos (the Sleep), Thanatos (the Death), Nyx (the Night), Persephone (the Queen), Geras (the Old Age), Styx (the Hatred), Hermes (the dead souls' guide), Charon (the Ferryman), Hades (the King), Erinyes (the Revenge), Eris (the Discord) and Sisyphus (the Futile Work).

Image source: own editing with the Veronese art models

The birth-delay of Heracles, already mentioned, was performed by Hera assuming the form of Hecate, as the goddess of labour (Prothyraia): disguised as an old woman, she sat down in front of the house with her legs and arms crossed. While she was sitting there, her own

daughter, the 'helper' Eileithyia, the goddess of Childbirth, could not come to the house where Alcmena, the mother of Heracles, was in labour. The people of the house saw this, they suspected that the goddess of labour was sitting there with folded legs in the form of an old woman, but in vain they prayed to Zeus, he was nowhere to be found, as he was listening to the chatter of Ate, the Flatterer. And the householders dared not tangle with a goddess. Then one of the servants deceived Hera. She ran out of the house and cried out that Heracles was born. Hera, playing the part of Hecate, jumped up in surprise, abandoning the position that prevented her from giving birth, and Heracles was born. Hera had still achieved her goal, because Heracles did not become king of Mycenae, but as soon as she left, she turned the servant girl into a weasel, who had deceived her by a lie spoken through her mouth, therefore Hera condemned the servant girl to give birth through her mouth. The ancient Greeks, seeing the weasel carrying her young ones in her mouth, thought that the weasel gave birth through her mouth! This is how the weasel became one of the sacred animals of Hecate, the goddess of labour.

The inhabitants of Erebus are also the dog-like, female-headed, bat-winged goddesses of Revenge and Remorse (the Erinyes, or more commonly known by their Latin names, the Furies), born from the blood of Uranus dripping into the sea. Their symbol is the whip, with which the sinner is incessantly pursued. There are three of them: Alecto (the Unceasing) Tisiphone (the Retribution), Megaera (the Wrath).



Christoph Schwartz: Pluto (Hades) kidnaps Persephone (Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge)

The main adjective of the 'steel-haired' Hades was 'relentless', because everyone dies, so people did not beg him, nor did he have any temples or shrines. People only 'prayed' to him in the form of reproach, driven by helpless rage: they pounded the ground with their fists. Hades chose as his wife the daughter of one of his sisters, Demeter, the goddess of the grain. This girl was Cora or Core, the goddess of the passing Girlhood, whose father was Zeus himself. Hades approached Zeus with the request, who gave his brother his consent, but as they both suspected

that their sister, Demeter, would not allow her beloved daughter to leave for the Underworld, they agreed to the marriage by kidnapping in secret. The apple of Demeter's eye, Cora, was picking flowers near Nyssa in a meadow, when the earth opened, and the ruler of the Underworld roared to the surface in a chariot drawn by night-black horses. He picked Cora and disappeared with her. In the palace of the Underworld, he offered Cora food and drink, and from then on, she was known as Persephone (the one 'bringing perish'), the queen and mistress of the Underworld. The girl knew the custom: in ancient times, marriage became 'legal' when a woman first accepted food from her husband's hand. Hence the European custom that a woman could accept sweets, flowers and perfume from a man without showing her affection for him. However, if she accepts food – an invitation to dinner – she is showing her willingness to accept the suitor as a spouse. Persephone therefore did not eat anything in the House of Hades.



Joseph Heintz: The Abduction of Persephone (Alte Meister Gemälde Galerie, Dresden)

Demeter began a long search for her daughter, and finally, on Hecate's advice, the sun god Helios told her where Cora had disappeared. Demeter took revenge on Zeus by not giving the people a harvest of grain, by not doing her job, and by failing to make the sacrifices to Zeus. Eventually, Zeus agreed to a deal with Demeter to make a deal with Hades so that Persephone would only have to spend a certain time of the year in the Underworld – this became, in style, winter –, when the grain-giving goddess, Demeter mourns her daughter. When Demeter descended into the underworld to the palace of Hades, her first question was: have you eaten anything, my daughter, in the House of Hades? No, she replied, but Ascalaphus, Hades' gardener, interjected: he had seen Persephone accept a pomegranate seed from Hades' hand, and was now 'legally' his wife. Since then, the red pomegranate – a plant with a red inside, i.e. related to death – has been Persephone's sacred plant. Demeter, as a goddess of great power – the gods of Greek mythology were in their original form two and a half metres tall – rolled a huge boulder over Ascalaphus, and changed him into a hooting owl, a night bird, the bearer of

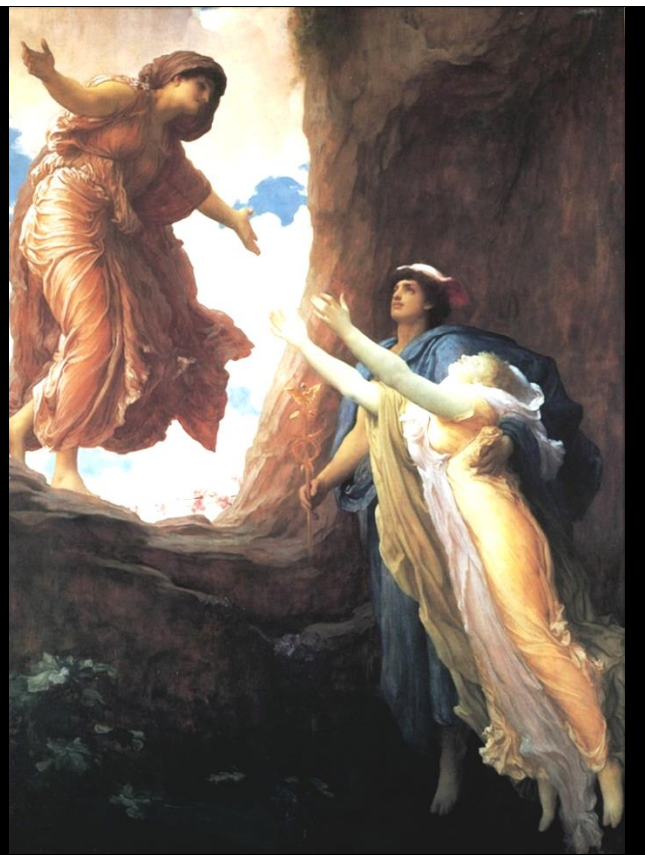
bad tidings; and then with the help of Hermes, the god of the soul guide, brought her daughter to the surface – though only until autumn.



Nicolas Mignard: The Abduction of Persephone (private collection, Italy)



*Lorenzo Bernini:
The Abduction of Persephone
(Borghese Gallery, Rome)*



*The god Hermes brings up Cora the Underworld to his
mother, the goddess Demeter. Lord Frederick Leighton:
The Return of Persephone (Leeds Museum, Leeds)*



*When Demeter finds Cora in the House of Hades
(Debtosh Bose's Sacred Source model: Demeter Hugging Persephone,
with AI edited background)*

INFERNOS

Visitors to the Underworld are famous mythological figures. The way down to the Underworld – for the living – was not through the main entrance, in the far west, in the black poplar grove on the shores of the Ocean; for only the spirits of the dead permitted to enter there. The living descended in deep caves in the crevices of the earth. First, the Athenian hero Theseus, son of Poseidon, the slayer of the Minotaur, tempted fate with a journey to the Underworld. His friend Pirithous had taken it into his head to propose to Persephone from Hades himself. Theseus bravely accompanied him on the impossible undertaking. Hades listened politely and offered them a seat on a huge stone chair in front of his dark palace, from which, petrified, they were unable to rise again. Later Heracles, the greatest mythological hero who ever lived, arrived in the Underworld, during the last of his twelve famous labours, with the equally impossible wish to bring up the dreaded hell-dog Cerberus. But Heracles knew no impossible. He descended into the Underworld. He trudged across the meadows of Asphodel towards Erebus, the ash-fields were shaking far away from his footsteps, and the spirits of the dead scattered in terror. Only two figures waited for him without fear. One was Medusa, the snake-haired Gorgon slain by Perseus the Destroyer with the help of the goddess Athena. The other was the ghostly mask of a Greek hero, Meleager, the leader of the Calydonian Boar Hunt, a former comrade-in-arms of Heracles himself. Meleager asked Heracles to take care of his sister Deianira and marry her. Heracles promised and fulfilled the request, and it was the jealousy of this girl, his last wife, that caused his downfall.⁶

⁶ In Hungarian literature we know, for example, the verse by János Arany: *'The wages of my career are burning like the blood of Nessus.'* When Heracles was on his way home with his last wife, Deianira, they crossed a river where a centaur named Nessus was the ferryman. At first, he took her across, but in the middle of the river he wanted to rape her, and Heracles shot him with an arrow. In revenge, the dying Nessus urged the girl to take his blood, and if she felt that Heracles no longer loved her, he would give her a shirt dipped in his blood. For the centaur knew that all the arrowheads of Heracles were poisoned after he had dipped them in the blood of the Hydra he had

In the Underworld, Heracles first went to the palace of Hades to ask his uncle's permission to take the dog. 'Take him if you can' answered Hades. This was done, and on the way back, Heracles saw his former fellows, Theseus and Pirithous sitting on the stone stool. He freed Theseus, Poseidon's son, with a mighty jerk, but Pirithous could not be moved, and they had to leave him there. Heracles also rolled the rock off Ascalaphus; but the gardener, under the curse of the goddess Demeter, immediately flew up to the upper world, being transformed into a night owl. Ever since, the owl has been a bird of death, and hooting is a sign of bad tidings in European cultures⁷. When Heracles dragged Cerberus to the ground, the splattering saliva of the barking hellhound scared from the sunshine, gave rise to a poisonous plant called the helmet flower.



*Christian Griepenkerl: Heracles frees Theseus from the Underworld
(Museum of Art and Cultural History, Oldenburg)*

On another occasion during his travels, Heracles happened to visit a friend, King Admetus of Thessaly, just as his wife, Alcestis, was dying. Previously, Admetus had learned the exact time of his inevitable death from the god Apollo, with the proviso that he could redeem it if someone else was willing to die in his place. Years before his death, Admetus sought out the poorest beggars and sickest people, offering them treasures and good life until the fatal date if they were willing to die in his place. No one undertook to do so, even the most miserable man clung to his life. Not even the king's parents – who were sick and old people – wanted to redeem their sons' lives with their own. The only person Admetus did not approach with this option was his beloved and loving wife, Alcestis. However, she inadvertently learned it, and without his knowledge, Alcestis offered her soul instead of Admetus to Thanatos, the god of Death, who had come up from Hades for the king or for the person who was ready to redeem him. Here

killed, and so the blood of his victims became poisoned, too. And so it was, and Heracles (the last mortal son of Zeus and the greatest of Greek heroes), when he could no longer bear the unrelenting, searing pain of the Hydra's poison, i.e. Nessus blood, took his own life by burning himself at the stake.

⁷ It is memorable that Asclepius, the gardener of Hades, the owl, later the bird of death, told the goddess Demeter the bad news that his daughter had become the wife of Hades, who could not be saved. The night predator, the owl, also served as a symbol of the bird of death, as in the old days, the candle or the lampion was only lit at night if there was a very sick person in the house, and the light attracted the night predator, the owl, to the window. The deaths that occurred at this time were then attributed to the unfortunate, hooting owl.

again the power of love is shown to be stronger than death. Admetus was in despair when he realised what had happened, and just as he did so, his house was visited by the illustrious guest Heracles. The intrepid and unbridled hero was in for a sumptuous feast, and he could not understand why his host was not having fun with him. When he learned the cause of his grief, he sought out the spirit of Alcestis, who was going to the Underworld, and after a brief exchange of words, he knocked the ‘iron-hearted’ Death, Thanatos, to the ground so that he let Alcestis go, and so Heracles brought her back from the grave to her husband.

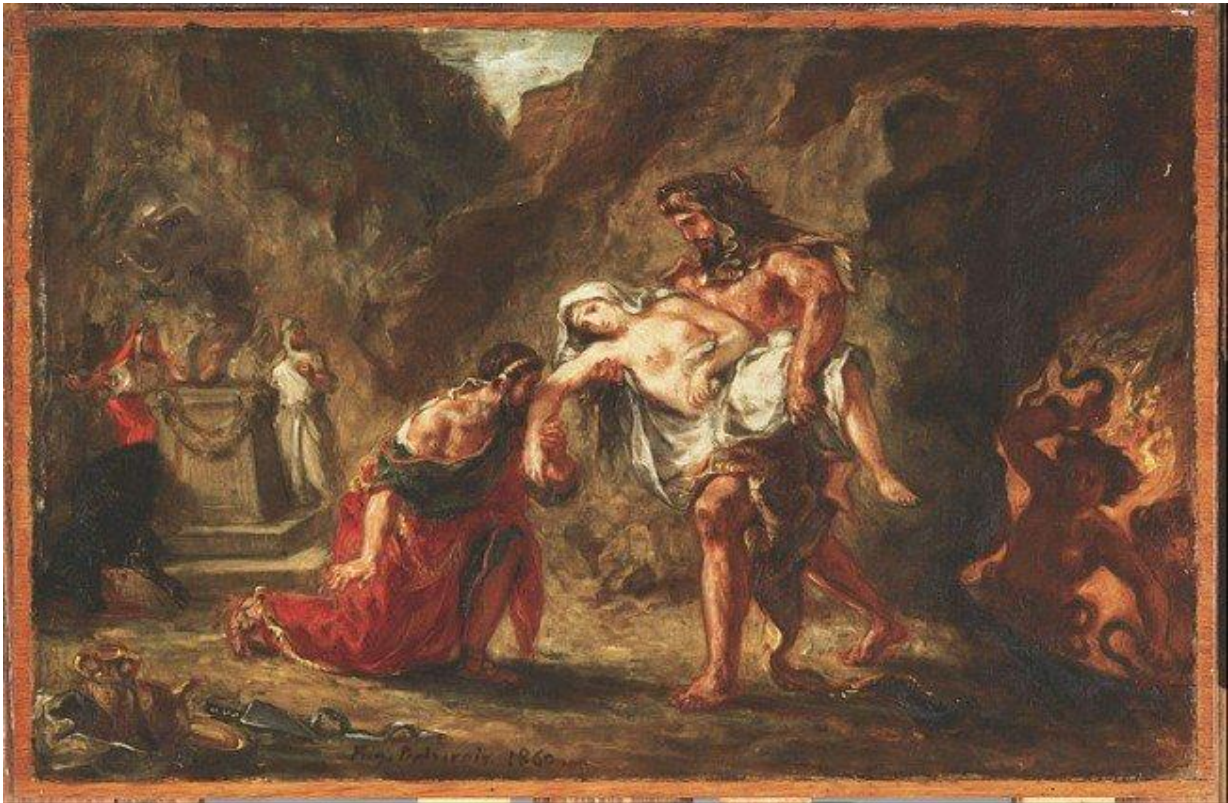


Lorenzo Mattielli: Heracles takes Cerberus to the upper world in his twelfth labour (Hofburg, Vienna).

Cerberus the guardian of the Underworld (illustration to Ian Lester: Sonata for Tuba Hades God of the Underworld)



Frederic Leighton: Hercules wrestles with Thanatos, the Death, to take back Alcestis (Wadsworth Athenaeum Museum, Hartford, Connecticut)



Ferdinand-Victor-Eugène Delacroix: Heracles brings Alcestis back from the dead to Admetus (Phillips Collection, Washington DC)

When the god of Love himself, Eros (Cupid or Amor), fell in love, his beloved Psyche (the personification of the Soul) was sent to the Underworld by Aphrodite, the goddess of beauty, who proved to be a bad mother-in-law, by entrusting her with a box which Psyche, as a curious woman, knew to contain some kind of beauty ointment. She opened it, of course, but it contained a profound Underworld dream that killed her instantly. Eros later brought his beloved up from the Underworld.

Besides Psyche, another woman escaped from the Underworld after her death. Semele, who was a mortal lover of Zeus and who – encouraged by Hera, disguised as an old woman – kept on begging Zeus to show himself in his true form, until Zeus finally had to obey, and Semele burned to ashes in the presence of the god of Lightning. However, Zeus could save their child, who became the youngest and most powerful Olympian god, Dionysus (Bacchus), the god of Wine and Joy. When Dionysus grew up, he naturally descended to the Underworld, sought out the dead soul of his mother Semele and brought her back and made her immortal as Semele Thyone, the personification of Orgy.

The next visitor to return from the underworld was Orpheus, the Thracian singer prodigy who could achieve anything with his songs. His lover Eurydice was bitten by a viper and died. Orpheus, in his deep grief, descended into the Underworld and softened the hearts of Hades and Persephone with his song; they let Eurydice back – on the condition that Orpheus never once look back to see if Eurydice would follow him. When approaching the end of their journey to the upper world, Orpheus could not stand it any longer and did look back, thus Eurydice's ghost floated back to Asphodel for good.



Spencer Stanhope: Charon and Psyche (private collection, England)



*Hades and Persephone are listening to Orpheus in the Underworld
Francois Perrier: Orpheus before Pluto and Persephone in the Underworld (Louvre, Paris)*



*Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot: Orpheus guides Eurydice in the Underworld
(Museum of Fine Arts, Houston)*

Thetis, the sea mermaid, goddess of the Organising Principle, was given in marriage by the gods to a mortal, Peleus. Her mortal son Achilles became the most famous hero of the Trojan War. After his birth, Thetis took the child into the Underworld and dipped him by the heel in the waters of the Styx – thus making him invulnerable everywhere except at the heel, where he was held and where he was later struck by the arrow of Paris. Hence the reference to the weak point of something: the "Achilles' heel."

On his return from the Trojan War, Odysseus wandered the Mediterranean for ten years, and among other places he reached – far to the west – the Ocean, where the Acheron flows into the waters of the Styx. There, on the edge of the Underworld, at the Gate of Acheron, he could talk to the ghost-like dead souls of some of his dead acquaintances by sacrificing black sheep, after allowing them to drink the blood of the sacrificial lamb. It was there that he learned that his mother had died during his absence, as had Agamemnon, the commander-in-chief of the Greek army, and how he would finally be able to return home.

The last known traveller from the Underworld was Aeneas, the mortal son of the goddess Aphrodite, who helped the Trojans during the Trojan War and, after the fall of Troy, made an adventurous voyage across the Mediterranean Sea, like Odysseus did. He settled in Italy and became the ancestor of the first Roman kings. He was accompanied in a vision by Sibyl, the Oracle of Delphi, who showed him the future of his descendants in the Roman Empire until the reign of Emperor Augustus. Jan Brueghel depicted the landscape of the Underworld in a series of paintings in the context of Aeneas' visit to the Underworld.



Donato Creti: Thetis dips Achilles in the Styx (Pinacoteca Nazionale, Bologna)



Jan Brueghel: Aeneas and Sibyl in the Underworld (Museum of Art History, Vienna)



Jan Brueghel: Aeneas and Sibyl in the Underworld (Museum of Fine Arts, Budapest)



Jan Brueghel: Aeneas and Sibyl in the Underworld (Thorvaldsen Museum, Copenhagen)



*Jan Brueghel: Aeneas and Sibyl in the Underworld
(Salomon Lillian Gallery, Amsterdam)*



Orpheus sings to Pluto /Hades/ and Persephone (Johnny van Haefst Ltd, London)



Aeneas and Sibylla descend to the Underworld (Unknown painter, Yale Univ., New York)



*Ancient depiction of
Hades and Cerberus
(Archaeological Museum, Crete)*

*A modern depiction of Hades and Persephone.
Ignacio Bazan Lazcano: Hades
www.artstation.com/artwork/ZarZ8*



*Odysseus, meeting the dead souls of his deceased acquaintances and relatives at the Gates of Acheron, after sacrificing a black sheep (scene from the film *Odyssey* directed by Andrei Konchalovsky, 1997)*



The three Moirae, the Fates, dwellers of the Underworld (Veronese art models)

THE ROLE OF HADES IN ANCIENT EUROPEAN CULTURE

The Olympian gods are generally not connected with the Underworld, and have rarely ventured down into the Hades, although there have been a few exceptions. Dionysus, for example, went down there to bring his mother back from the dead as it was mentioned earlier. Or Hermes, for example, whose job it is to escort the souls of the dead to Hades. Demeter, as the fertility goddess, also had Underworld characteristics, since the seeds she planted in the earth symbolised both death and rebirth (burial and rebirth). The deities who dwelt in the Underworld rarely ventured out of it during the day, only at nighttime. The worship of the gods

of the sky and that of the gods of the Underworld reflected the contrasts between light and darkness, the living and the dead, the world above and below the earth. Consequently, the sky gods were worshipped during the day, with sacrifices presented in temples or on altars. Since the gods of the Underworld dwell underground, the sacrifices to them were presented at night and directly into the ground. The sacrifice of milk, blood or honey was poured into a pit, and if it was an animal sacrifice, the animal had to be black.

In the ancient, pre-Christian European image of the Underworld, where Hades is the lord and rules over the souls of the dead, he does not cause people to die, he does not take their souls, and he does not correspond to the Satan of Christianity either. Hades was not a fallen angel, he was not evil, and he did not lure mortals into sin like Satan, also known as Lucifer – God's once favourite but rebellious archangel. Accordingly, the Underworld realm of Hades does not correspond to the Hell of the Christian religion. The Underworld, as reflected in ancient Greco-Roman mythology, is simply the gloomy abode of disembodied ghost-like dead souls. Hades had no real places of worship in ancient Greek civilisation. There was, for example, no temple to Hades, nor were there many statues of him – even in antiquity. The only exception was his cult site in Greece near Elis, on Mount Mint, in the form of a fenced-off sacred area, as described by Strabo. Mint was a sacred plant to Hades to suppress the smell of decay before burials.

Hades was more feared than revered, since even the ancient Greeks were not sure what death meant, whether there was life after death for sure. Even his name was reluctantly pronounced, preferring positive epithets instead. Most often, in reference to the riches of the subterranean wealth, or the fertility of the earth, he was referred to as 'rich', or Pluto. This was later adopted by the Romans, when the Roman equivalent of Hades became Pluto. Hades, as the ruler of the Underworld, was tasked with keeping the living out of his realm and the dead in the Underworld.

However, if Hades is not the cause of death, who is? In ancient European religion, then, no mythological figure in the ancient Greeks can be equated with the Judeo-Christian 'angel of death'. Death had its own god, Thanatos, but this personified death is rarely mentioned or depicted in ancient Greek art. When he is mentioned, he is usually mentioned along with his twin brother Hypnos, the Sleep. Death is not fearsome, but rather swift and gentle, like the Sleep and the Dream. Thanatos does not usually kill people, nor does he take their souls. According to old European culture, the soul, the psyche, is a small winged, swallow-like creature that flies away at the moment of death, only to take on a body resembling a human being again down in Hades, in the ash fields of Asphodel. The moment of death – old age, sickness, accident, or in ancient times, most often murder – is decided by the goddesses of Fate and Destiny, the Moirae. Their will cannot be influenced by Hades, the lord of the Underworld, or by Zeus himself, the king of all the gods. Not one of his mortal sons, such as Sarpedon or Heracles, was lost for example against Zeus' will.

The three Moirae goddesses are very ancient. They represent the survival of the matriarchy, the matriarchal society that ruled the Mediterranean for thousands of years from the late Stone Age through the Bronze Age to the Iron Age in ancient Greek religion. One of the daughters of the Night, Ananke is the Underworld goddess of Necessity. She has three daughters, the three goddesses of Fate or destiny, the Moirae, or in Roman times, the Parcae, born of their father Erebus, the eternal Darkness. The first of the Moirae is Clotho; she is the Spinner who weaves the fate of mortals – namely from flax, the sacred plant of the goddesses of Fate. The second is Lachesis, the one who distributes the flax thread that determines the fate of people at the time of their birth. The third goddess of fate is Atropos, the Indestructible, who determines the length of a person's life – as the length of the flax thread represents the length

of life in European cultures. Their symbol is a mortar made of heavy stone or metal, also without mercy. Although the goddesses of fate live – geographically speaking – in the darkest province of Hades, in their father's narrowest region, Erebus, far away from everything, uninfluenced by anyone, they carry out their eternal work of making, distributing and cutting the thread of human life – at the time of which the soul is separated from the body, which is about to die. This soul is rarely accompanied to the river Styx by Thanatos, or Hypnos. This final escort is the task of the god of the journey, the 'thrice great' *Trismagistus* Hermes, who is therefore also called the 'soul escort or guide'.

*'No one ever comes back from there,
There is a doorknob only outside,
The souls are shutting down
Of whoever drinks the waters of the L  the
And there, the name of the one
Who is there is none'*

(Mih  ly Babits: Laodameia)

SOURCE

Graves, Robert: *The Greek Myths I-II*. Penguin Books, 1955 (First edition) I-II. 370 p 410 p
ISBN: 9780241982358

Closing comment of the main source of the above writing. Robert Graves' *Greek Myths* have been heavily criticised by scientific scholars of ancient Greek culture, for having tried to construct a comprehensive explanatory interpretation of the Greek mythology based on the prehistoric transition between matriarchate and patriarchate. One characteristic opinion: *The Greek Myths* is 'either the greatest single contribution that has ever been made to the interpretation of Greek myth or else a cranky nonsense'. Having read quite a few interpretations of Greek mythology, including the scientific ones, as a plea, allow me to ask who knows the names or works of his scientific critics compared to the very many popular editions of *The Greek Myth* and his other famous books with his intelligible, clear interpretations like *I Claudius*, *King Jesus*, *The Golden Fleece* or *Count Belisarius*?