

Iter ad Avernum

Travel to the Underworld

Avernus

- Avernus is said to be the entrance to the Underworld
- The Romans believed that an actual place near Cumae, Italy was the entry point of access to Hades



The Underworld

- The important thing to note about the Underworld is that it is not synonymous with the Christian version of Hell and is therefore not a place for suffering but for living out the afterlife.
 - The type of afterlife one would have depended on the former life

The Underworld

- At the point of death, the soul left the body. It maintained the shape of the corpse from which it departed and was transported to Avernus and then into the intricate system within the Underworld

The Underworld

- Some believed that placing a coin in the mouth of the dead would help pay the toll for the ferry
- Those improperly buried or unable to afford the toll had to wait for 100 years before they could pass from the river's bank to their final destination in the Underworld



DEITIES OF THE UNDERWORLD

Charon

- The ferryman of the underworld
- Carries the souls of the recently dead across the rivers Styx and Acheron
- Often depicted as a foul old man, easily swayed by gold



Cerberus



- The three-headed hound guarding the entrance to the Underworld
- Allows souls to enter but not to leave

Erinyes

- Deities of Vengeance
 - Avenged through torture crimes of murder, familial crime, crimes against the gods and lying under oath
- Known as the Furies in Roman mythology
- Served in the Dungeons of the Damned



Hermes

- Intercessor between mortals and the gods
- Conducts the recently dead into the Underworld
- Often seen in this role with the epithet *Psychopomp* which means “guide of souls”



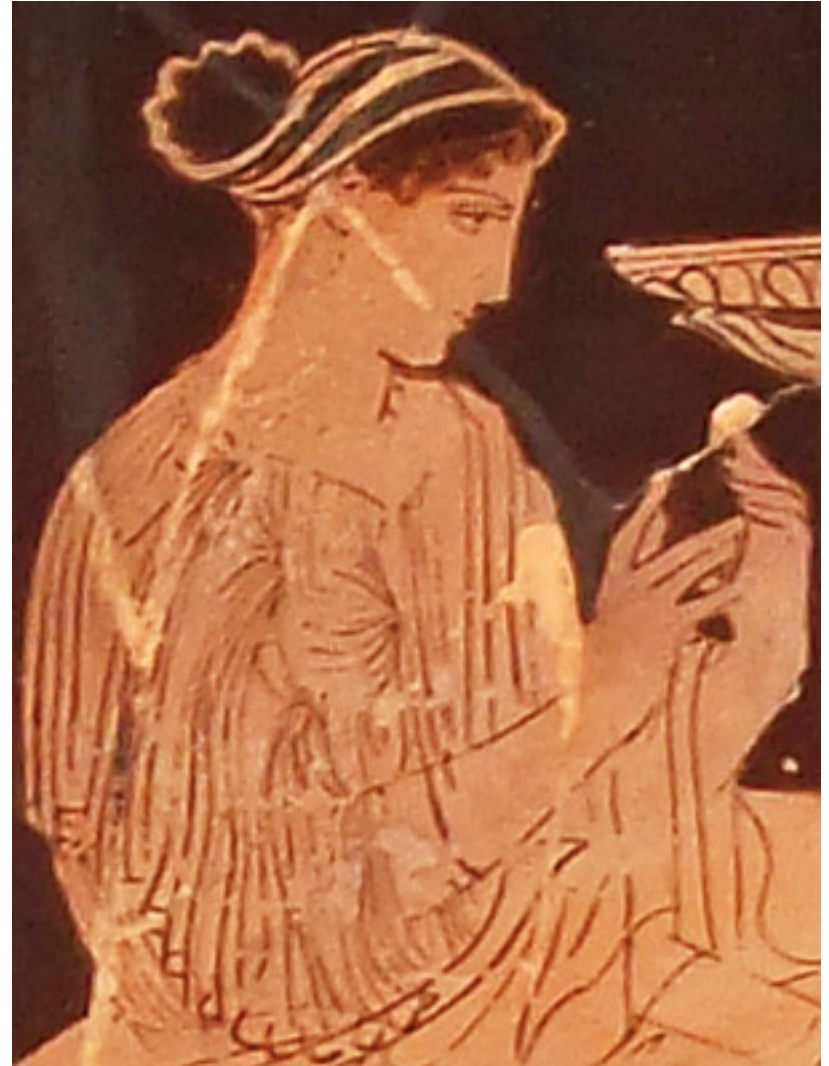
Minos, Rhadamanthys, and Aeacus

- The judges of the dead who decide the fates of the souls within the underworld
 - **Rhadamanthys** judged souls from Asia Minor
 - One of the rulers of the Elysian Fields
 - **Aeacus** judged souls from Europe
 - The guardian of the keys of the Underworld
 - **Minos** judged souls from Greece and was the ultimate deciding vote



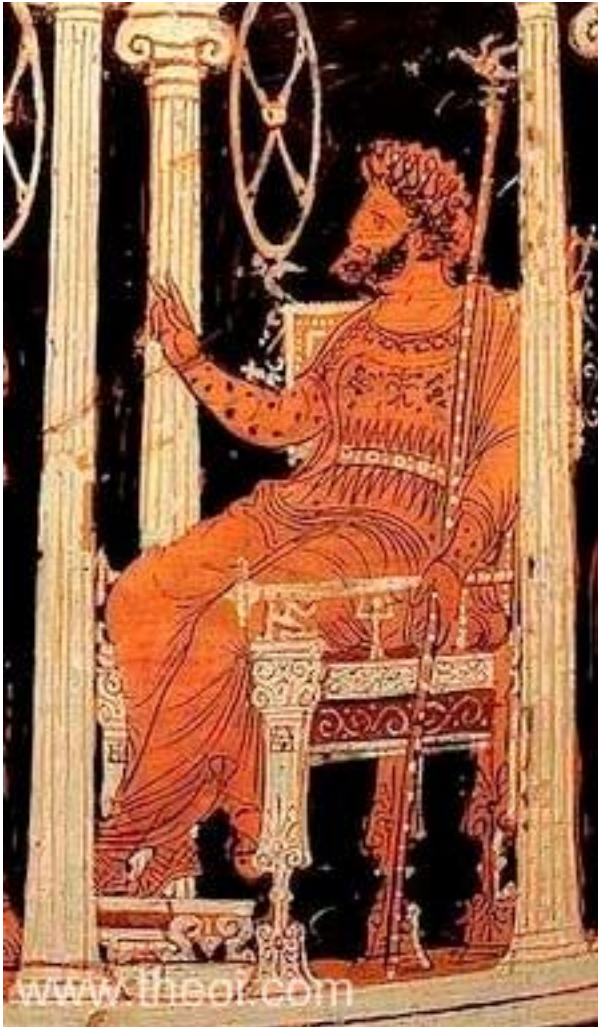
Proserpina

- Daughter of Demeter and Jupiter
- Spouse and niece of Hades
- Ate pomegranate seeds and became trapped in the Underworld
 - Those who have eaten the food of the dead may not rejoin the living



Dis/Pluto

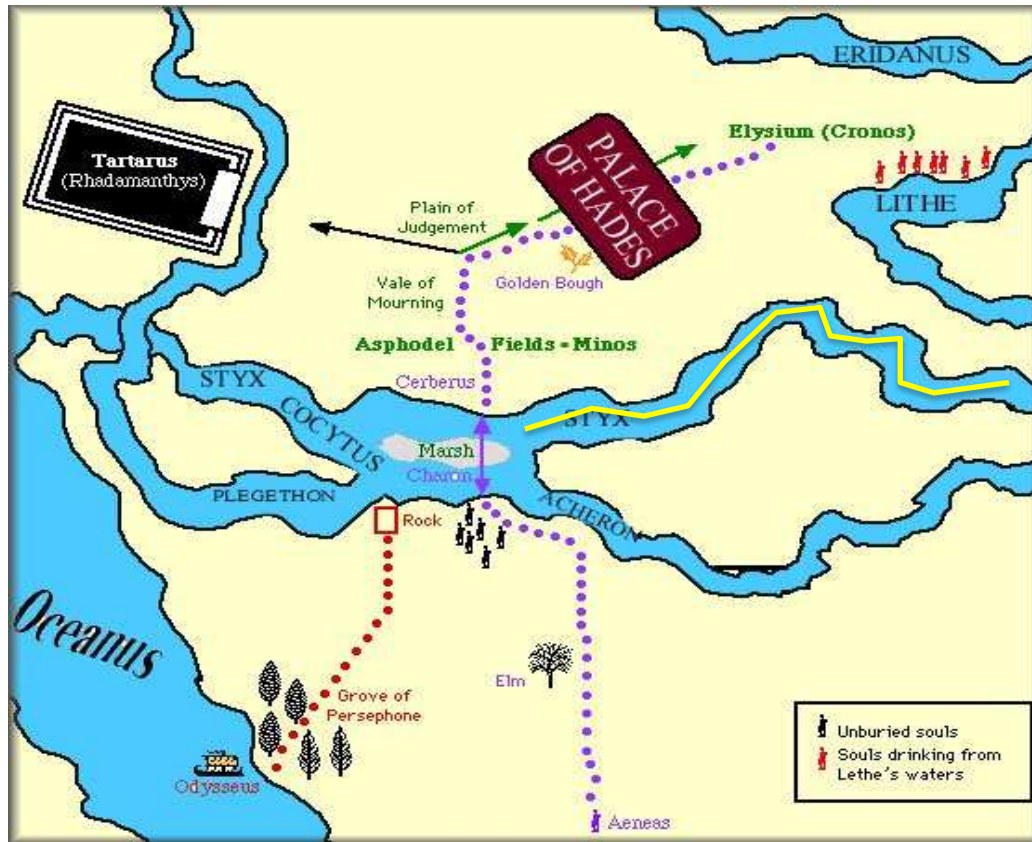
- Ruler of the Underworld
- While often portrayed as evil in modern adaptations, he was considered to be a passive or even altruistic god



RIVERS OF THE UNDERWORLD

Styx

- The river that formed the boundary between Earth and the Underworld

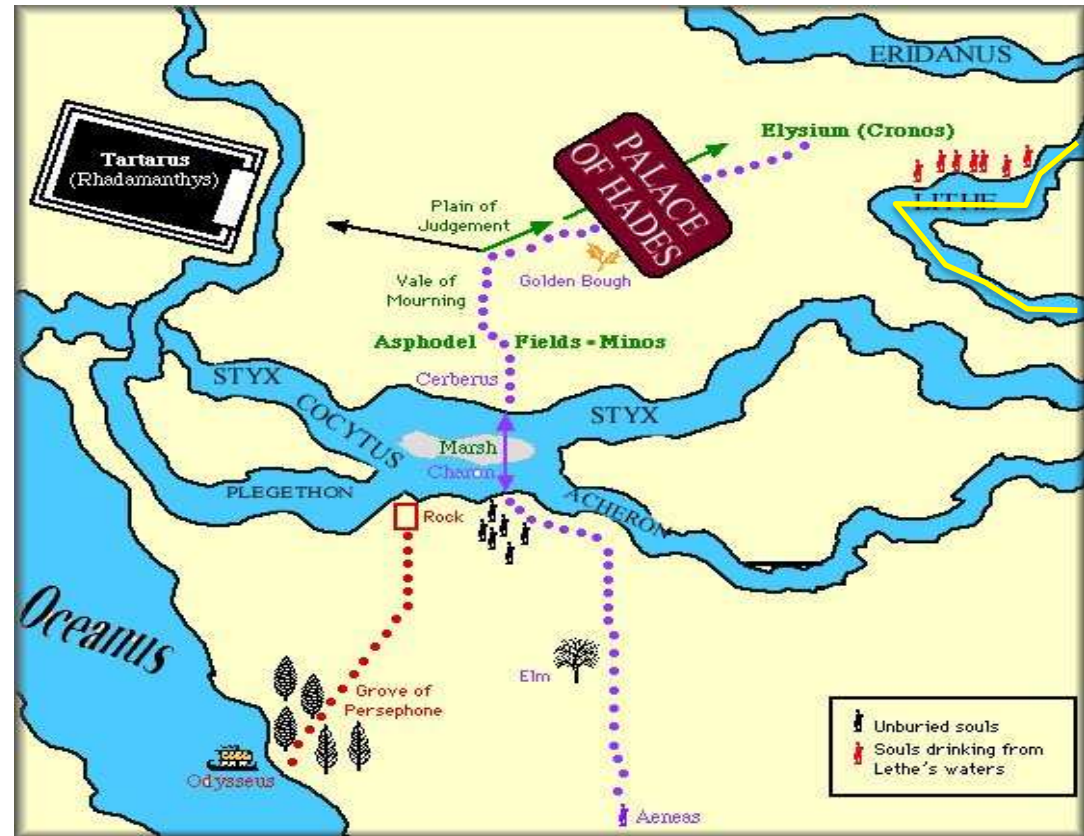


- Sometimes called the river of hatred
- Gods often swore by the waters of this river
- Waters had miraculous powers that could grant invulnerability

Said to circle the Underworld nine times

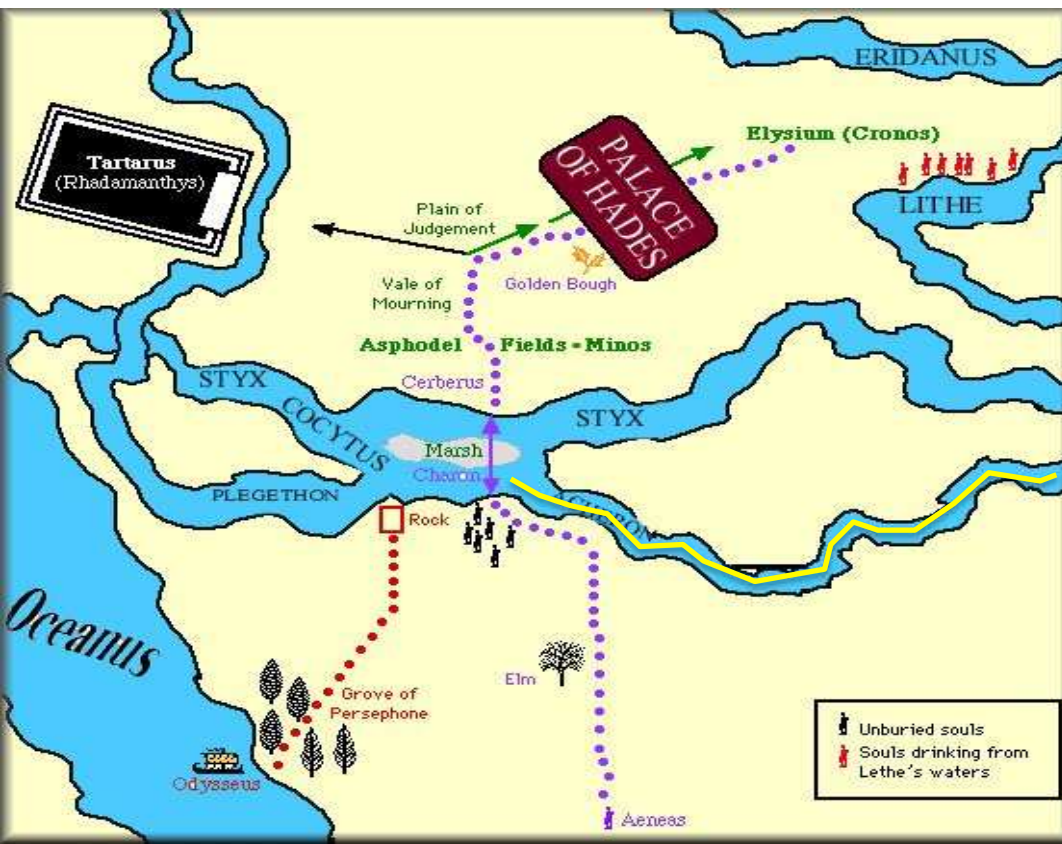
Lithe (Usually seen as *Lethe*)

- The river of forgetfulness
- All who drank its waters forgot all things
- Shades were to drink from its waters in order to forget their earthly lives



Acheron

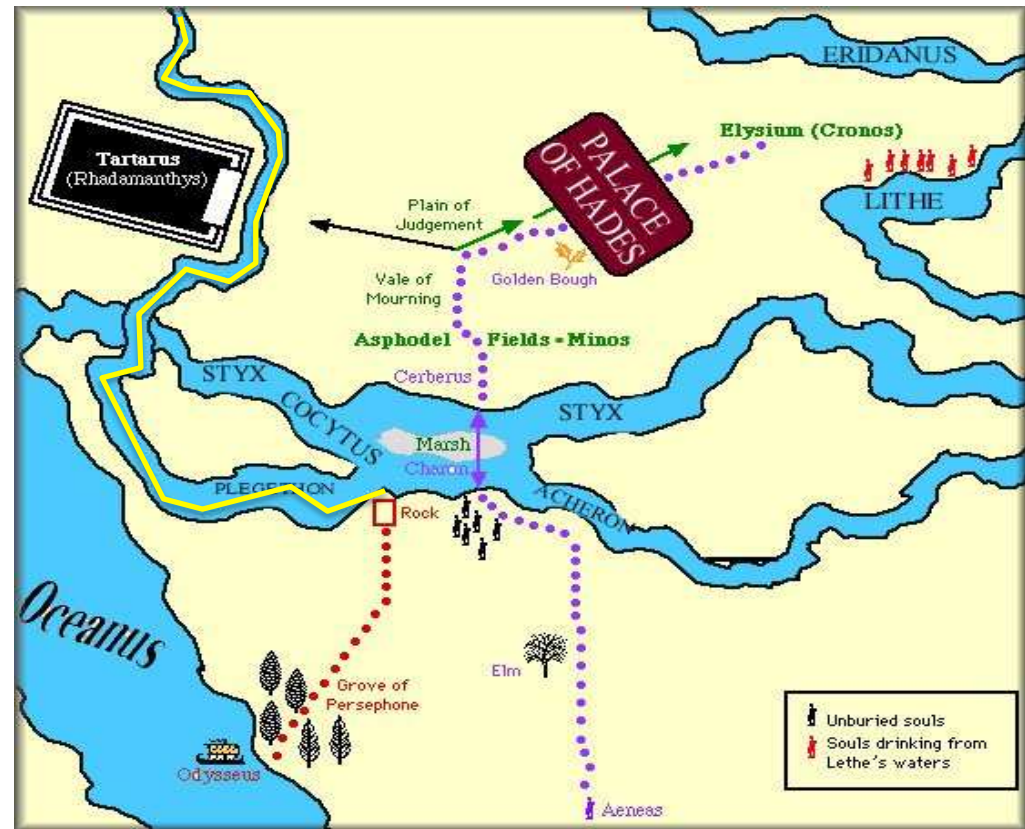
- The river of woe
- Sometimes considered to be the principal river of the Underworld



- Forms one of the borders of the Underworld
- One of the rivers by which Charon carries souls

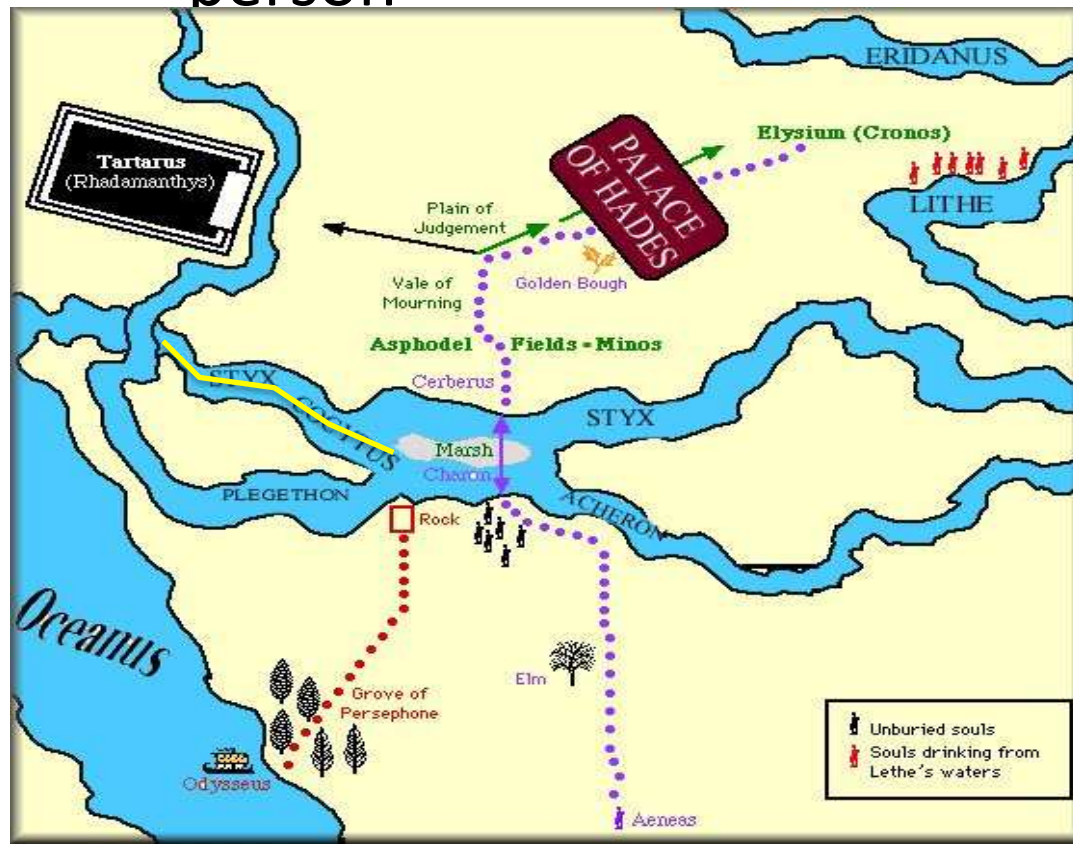
Plethegon

- The fire-flaming, coiling river of rage that forms the border of the Underworld
- Said to boil souls, especially those with violent past lives



Coccytus

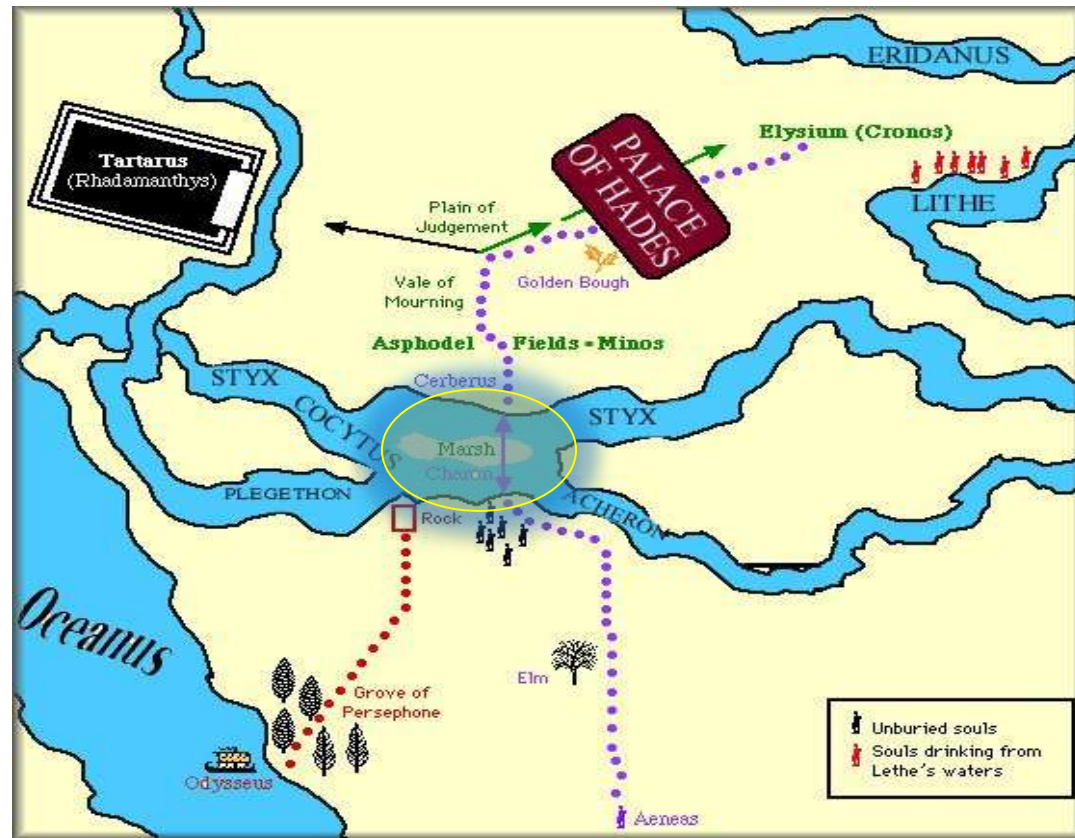
- The river of wailing or lamentation
- This river can cause misery to even the happiest person



- Here wait the souls of those whose bodies did not have a proper burial
- These souls moan and wail, mourning their plight

The Marsh

- The point of convergence for the four major rivers of the Underworld
- Another main ferrying point for Charon
- This region is sometimes collectively called *Styx*



REGIONS OF THE UNDERWORLD

Erebus

- Erebus was a gloomy region of the Underworld divided into regions
 - One region (unnamed) was reserved for children and infants, who died in a neutral state
 - One region (unnamed) was reserved for those who died without reason (murder, etc.)
 - One region (unnamed) was reserved for those who died by their own hand (suicide)
 - Another region, called the Vale of Mourning, was reserved for those who died of a broken heart
 - The last region (unnamed) was reserved for average warriors who died in battle

Asphodel Fields

- This region was reserved for ordinary souls who committed no wrongs yet contributed nothing significant while living
- The fields were covered in asphodel flowers, which connected them to death. Proserpina is sometimes depicted wearing a crown of asphodel



Plain of Judgement

- In this region, the three judges determined where a soul needed to go
 - A soul who lived a good life would go to a more positive area of the underworld
 - A soul who lived a wretched life went to a negative area

Palace of Pluto

- The golden Palace of Pluto was located in the Plain of Judgment
- Here Pluto sat on his throne, accompanied by the three Judges
- Occasionally, Pluto punished souls within his palace
 - For example, Hades punished the heroes *Peirithous* and *Theseus* for attempting to steal Proserpina by having them stuck to a chair (or rock) for all eternity
 - Theseus managed to escape, leaving some of his rear end behind (giving the “explanation” for why Athenians have tiny butts). Peirithous remained stuck.

Elysium

- Admission to Elysium (also called the *Elysian Fields*) was reserved for demi-gods and heroes
 - Later, entry was granted to those mortals favored by the gods, and those who lived righteously
- Life was pleasant in Elysium, with no cares or labors for the souls for all eternity
- King Rhadamanthys was one possible ruler of the Elysian Fields and Saturnus (Cronos) was another possible ruler

Isles of the Blessed

- In the realm of Elysium, those permitted to be in the Elysian Fields had the ability to seek reincarnation
- The isles of the blessed were reserved for those who sought reincarnation three times and managed to be judged worthy of Elysium after each one
- Once the reincarnation cycle was complete, the souls lived here in eternal bliss

Tartarus

- Tartarus is the dungeon of torment and suffering
- Originally, Tartarus was the place to house those who were dangers to the gods of Olympus
 - For this reason, Tartarus is the home of the Titans and other fearsome monsters
- Later, Tartarus became the place where a punishment was given to fit a crime

Fields of Punishment

- This place was the area where the souls of those who have done terrible things in their lifetime or have offended the gods
- Tartarus and the Fields of Punishment overlap in some understandings of the Underworld

INHABITANTS OF TARTARUS

Danaids

- The Danaids were the fifty daughters of Danaus who were set to marry the fifty sons of Aegyptus
 - Their father urged them that rather than marry these men, they should kill them on their wedding night
 - All but one daughter obeyed
- The 49 women were sentenced to carry jars of water to fill a bath to wash away their sins.
 - However, the bath had a leak and therefore would never be full and they must try (unsuccessfully) to fill the bath for all eternity

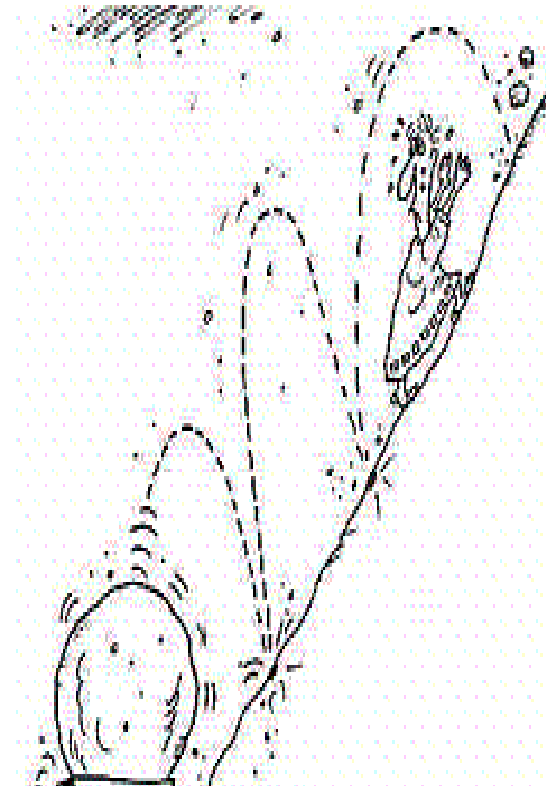


Tantalus

- Tantalus chose to feed the gods with food he had made himself- his own son! He also stole ambrosia from the gods and spilled their secrets
- His punishment was to stand in a pool of water beneath a tree of fruit.
 - If he reached for the fruit, it retreated from his grasps. If he bent for some water, it receded before he could drink any.



Sisyphus



- King Sisyphus violated the Greco-Roman rules of hospitality by killing guests and travelers visiting his castle. He also seduced his niece and told another god of Zeus' conquests.
- His original punishment was to be chained up inside of Tartarus. However, after tricking his jailer into chaining himself, Sisyphus needed a new punishment
- Zeus declared that Sisyphus would have to roll a boulder over a hill, only to have that boulder roll back downhill once it reached the top

Ixion



- King Ixion really hated his father in law, and one day pushed him onto a burning bed of coal and wood
- Ixion was punished for his sins but Zeus pitied him and invited him to dine at Olympus.
 - However, Ixion seduced Hera and mated with a pseudo-Hera, creating Centaurus. Zeus, angered, ordered Ixion to Tartarus, sending him flying via thunderbolt on an ever-spinning flaming wheel
- In Tartarus, Ixion's punishment was to spin eternally on this burning wheel

MYTH OF PROSERPINA

Proserpina

- As we know, Proserpina did not marry Pluto because she wanted to
- Jupiter had, unbeknownst to Ceres, promised Proserpina to Pluto
- After her abduction, her mother Ceres searched for days, stopping the growth of crops in her grief

Proserpina

- Angered that they allowed her to be abducted, Ceres turned the handmaidens of Proserpina into the Sirens
- Ceres searched high and low, seeking help from mortals and immortals alike
- She grew to shun the gods and instead took up comfort and aid in the homes of mortals

Proserpina

- In her search, she came across a gracious king in Eleusis (in Greece) who treated her most hospitably
 - As a thank-you for this treatment, Ceres offered to nurse his son, Prince Demophoon, in an attempt to make him immortal.
 - However, her attempts were interrupted by Demophoon's mother and as a result, the baby died (in some versions) or was enfeebled (in others).

Proserpina

- Jupiter became worried that if something did not change, the mortals would become extinct, and therefore gathered a council of the gods to discuss their next action, which was to bribe her with presents and favors
- Stubborn Ceres insisted that these ideas were not good enough and refused to continue her agricultural responsibilities.

Proserpina

- Jupiter sent Mercury to sway Pluto into giving her back. Pluto reluctantly agreed
- However, before she could go, Pluto forced Proserpina to eat six pomegranate seeds, one for each month of the year he wanted her to stay with him

Proserpina

- Because she had been tricked into eating the food of the dead, she was supposed to remain eternally in the Underworld
 - Jupiter persuaded Pluto and Ceres to come to an agreement; part of the year Proserpina would stay with her mother and part of the year she would stay with Pluto.
 - Also, Ceres needed to return to Mount Olympus
- The earth blossoms upon Proserpina's return to her mother (causing spring) and is barren upon her departure (causing winter)
- Proserpina rules as Queen of the Underworld, alongside Hades

THE MYTH OF ORPHEUS AND EURYDICE

Orpheus and Eurydice

- Orpheus was a legendary musician whose songs were said to charm anyone he came across
- Eurydice was a young, beautiful woman who grew enchanted with Orpheus, who loved her very much

O and E

- On the wedding day of Orpheus and Eurydice, tragedy struck by means of a snake bite. Eurydice died instantly

O and E

- Orpheus was so sad that he composed a song so beautiful that all of the nymphs and deities wept and urged him to travel to the Underworld to soften the hearts of Pluto and Persephone, hoping that they may allow him to retrieve her.

O and E

- As we know, Orpheus made his descent, and sang his sorrowful song to the inhabitants of the Underworld
 - Tantalus didn't seek food or drink
 - Sisyphus sat on his rock
 - The Danaids stopped filling their bath
 - Ixion stopped spinning
 - Pluto and Proserpina were swayed

O and E

- Pluto gave Orpheus one condition:
 - He may retrieve Eurydice as long as he does not look at her until they both depart the Underworld

O and E

- Orpheus and Eurydice set out to return to the upper world, him in front and her following

O and E

- Unfortunately, as soon as he reached the upper world, Orpheus was struck with fear that she had fallen behind
- He looked back too soon, seeing Eurydice before truly leaving the Underworld, thus she was lost for a second time
- He reached for her but was unsuccessful in pulling her back

O & E

- After her second death, Orpheus shunned women and men and despised their company
- He wandered the countryside alone, sharing his songs with beasts

O and E

- While traveling, some Thracian Bacchantes came upon him and ripped him limb-by-limb and threw his parts into the river, where his head and lyre continued their weary song

O & E

- His lyre ascended to Mount Olympus, where it was placed among the stars (constellation Lyra)
- His soul descended to the Underworld in Elysium, where he delighted others with songs reunited with his dear Eurydice