

# POSEIDON and HADES: UNCONSCIOUS and UNDERWORLD

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## Gods of the Deep

*We can no longer deny that the dark stirrings of the unconscious are active powers and that psychic forces exist which cannot be fitted into rational order. The layman can hardly conceive how much his inclinations, moods and decisions are influences by the dark forces of his psyche, and how dangerous or helpful they may be in shaping his destiny.<sup>1</sup>*

- Carl Jung

Poseidon and Hades are brothers, sons of Cronus and Rhea, devoured by their fearful father and then released to battle and overthrow him. Hades is the lord of the underworld while his brother Poseidon rules the vast domain of the sea. Both spheres are symbolic of the worlds below consciousness and therefore both gods are *daimons* of the unconscious representing powerful hidden archetypal forces. Both brothers rule a vast expanse of the world but most of the inhabitants of their world are shadow images of the humans dwelling aboveground. Hades population is filled with shades and ghosts while Poseidon's realm is populated with monsters and shape-shifting prophets. As brothers and custodians of these places they are united in their rulership of the unconscious realms.

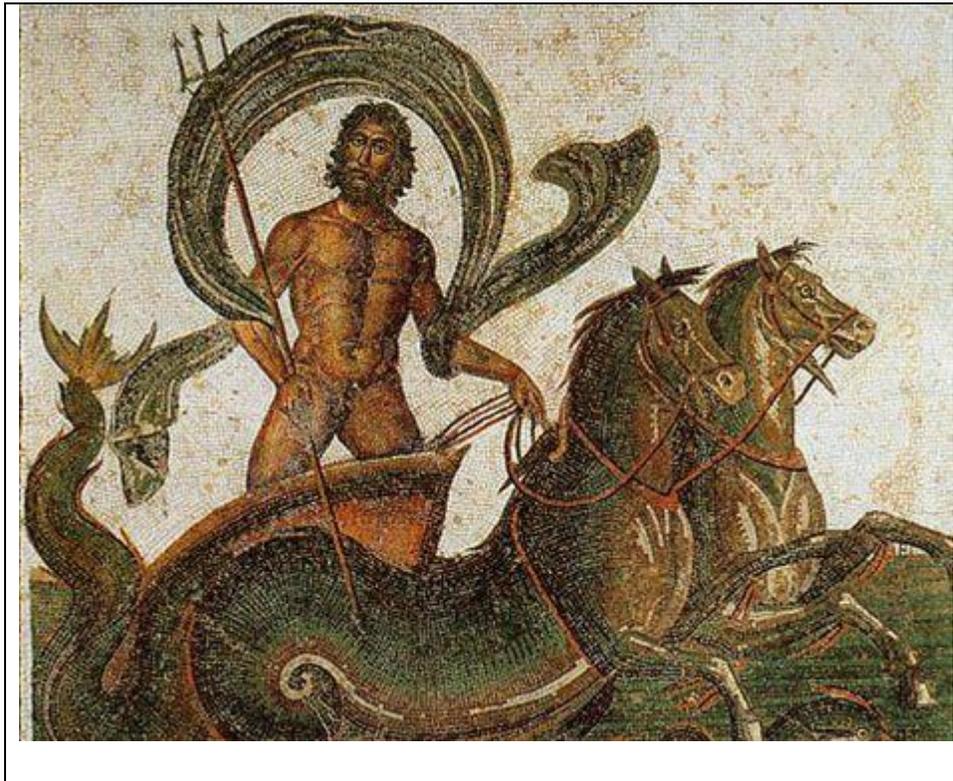
Once the Titans had been defeated it is the three brothers who divide the resources and inheritance amongst themselves. They drew lots as to who would inherit the various spheres. It is not chance, but the hand of fate that oversees the choice of their dominions. Poseidon, speaking through the voice of the poet Homer in the *Iliad* tells us how this was accomplished:

Since we are three brothers born by Rheia to Kronos,  
Zeus, and I, and the third is Hades, lord of the dead men.  
All was divided among us three ways, each given his domain.  
I when the lots were shaken drew the grey sea to live in  
forever; Hades drew the lot of the mists and the darkness,  
and Zeus was allotted the wide sky, in the cloud and the bright air.  
But earth and high Olympos are common to all three.<sup>2</sup>

The three brothers are each allotted a section of the world dividing the realms of the Earth amongst themselves. Hades is allotted the realm of darkness, the domain of shades, that which lies under the earth in the realm of the unknown. He is the brother that will be the regent of the underworld, the Lord of death and rebirth. He is the silent and invisible brother who removes himself from the affairs of the family yet senses the life of the family at its deepest levels. As the guardian of the shades, Pluto is given the care taking role for the underworld of the family: the secrets, the shame, the buried passions, the grief and loss, the negative feelings. He is the custodian of what has been buried alive in the family, the complexes and patterns not adequately interred. Unlike his brothers he wants only one mate and with his brother Zeus's blessing he abducts Persephone into his underworld residence.

Zeus is the new sky god whose realm is the spirit and as the younger brother who has become the elder takes the role of the supreme deity. Zeus is the personification of the law and becomes the supreme ruler of Olympus eclipsing the authority of his brothers. He is the overt carrier of the familial tradition and upholds the order of the family leaving his two brothers to be the carriers of the

chaos within the family system. Zeus is the family planner and sees into the future while his brothers hold onto the past and its ancestral legacy. They were also named for the slowest moving planets, Neptune and Pluto, the two planets that record the ethos of each generation.



## POSEIDON

*I  
when the lots  
were  
shaken drew the  
grey sea  
to live in forever*

- Homer

Poseidon rides across the sea in a chariot drawn by two Hippocampus (fish-tailed horses). Roman mosaic C 3rd CE

Poseidon's domain is to be the sea, this vast and ever changing domain, where he rules from beneath. His watery kingdom includes an eclectic population - the beautiful and kind Nereids, the Oceanids, monstrous and fierce creatures, and shape-shifting prophets. His realm is unfathomable. He too is the earth shaker and author of destruction. Poseidon is the brother who rules the domain of the feeling life in the family, bringing the stormy and monstrous feelings out into the open. He was known as an angry and irritable god and one who would unleash tempests and storms. Odysseus faced the wrath of Poseidon after he killed his son Polyphemeus. Navigators and fishermen would pray to Poseidon for calm seas trying to earn his goodwill so they would not be at his mercy.

-Sacred fish was the title the Greeks gave to the constellation named for Delphinus an ambassador of the sea god Poseidon who persuaded Amphitrite to marry him. Amphitrite had fled to the mountains to avoid the advances of Poseidon, who enlisted the help of Delphinus to try and persuade the goddess otherwise. Like Amphitrite, Delphinus was accustomed to the nature of the sea, and argued Poseidon's case for marriage so well that Amphitrite relented and agreed to marry him. Poseidon was so grateful he immortalized this persuasive authority by placing Delphinus in the heavens as the constellation of the dolphin.

While this may be a later explanation of how Poseidon became attached to the sea goddess, his origins are somewhat obscure and not always linked with the sea. Most probably he was an archaic earth god, who was also associated with sending up springs of water or the finding of water, perhaps an earlier version of a -diviner god. Through his alliance with the Nereid Amphitrite, he may have become aligned with the sea and usurped her domain becoming regent over the vast oceanic realms of water. His name is linked with the earth, meaning. -Man of the earth or -husband of the earth,

sometimes linked to being husband of the goddess Da, or the Earth goddess, Demeter. One of his constant symbols is the trident, perhaps connected to the triple goddess and his representation as a consort of the goddess. He is known as the "earth-shaker", the sender of earthquakes and tidal waves. Poseidon now becomes associated with the earth as flooding of the earth, the tidal waves and earthquakes and symbolises stormy disturbances on a feeling and emotional level. He is the tempest and the turbulence of the storm but he also calms the storm. His vengeance is demonstrated in many ways in myth. While he is not overtly known as a fertility god he has links with the fertility of the soil and is associated with some agricultural festivals.

## Shape-shifter

Poseidon is associated with shape-shifting. He can become various animals like bulls, rams, dolphins and sea monsters. Other inhabitants of the sea, including his offspring are also known for their ability to shape-shift. The population of the sea are often hybrids, like his son Triton ("he of the wide force") who is half human and half fish. Gods of the sea and water are also known for their insight and their oracular ability, as well as an ability to deceive and change quickly.

In order to receive an oracle from the sea prophet it was necessary to bind him in order to keep him from changing shapes. Proteus was an earlier sea deity who would foretell the future for those who could seize him. To avoid prophesying Proteus would change shape into a lion, a boar, a serpent or panther. He had to be bound while asleep so he could not escape from those who wanted his wisdom. Proteus also refers to an initial substance. He is often referred to as the Old Man of the Sea and an earlier prototype of Poseidon. The sea is full of dangerous monsters and a mythic motif suggests a hero must confront these dangerous sea monsters or dive into the seas of the unconscious to face the monsters of the deep. Perseus had to slay the dangerous sea monster that Poseidon had unleashed. The sea and its symbolic extension the unconscious is full of monstrous creatures that shape shift never allowing enough solid ground to support conscious life. Therefore in the face of the sea we regress and are overtaken by its force pulling us back into the oceanic realms of the unconscious.

An early myth connects him to rams and suggests he is the father of the ram of the Golden Fleece. He shape-shifted into a ram and took shelter amongst the flock where he mated with Theophane, hence Poseidon is often seen as a ram-god. Poseidon is also closely associated with horses. As Hippius, he is evoked as the protector of horsemen. In the form of a stallion he mated with Demeter who was lost in her search for her daughter. Myth suggests she bore a daughter whose name could not be spoken, an image of rage and ice, as well as Arion, a wild horse with a black mane. And his association with bulls is clear in through the Minoan myths.

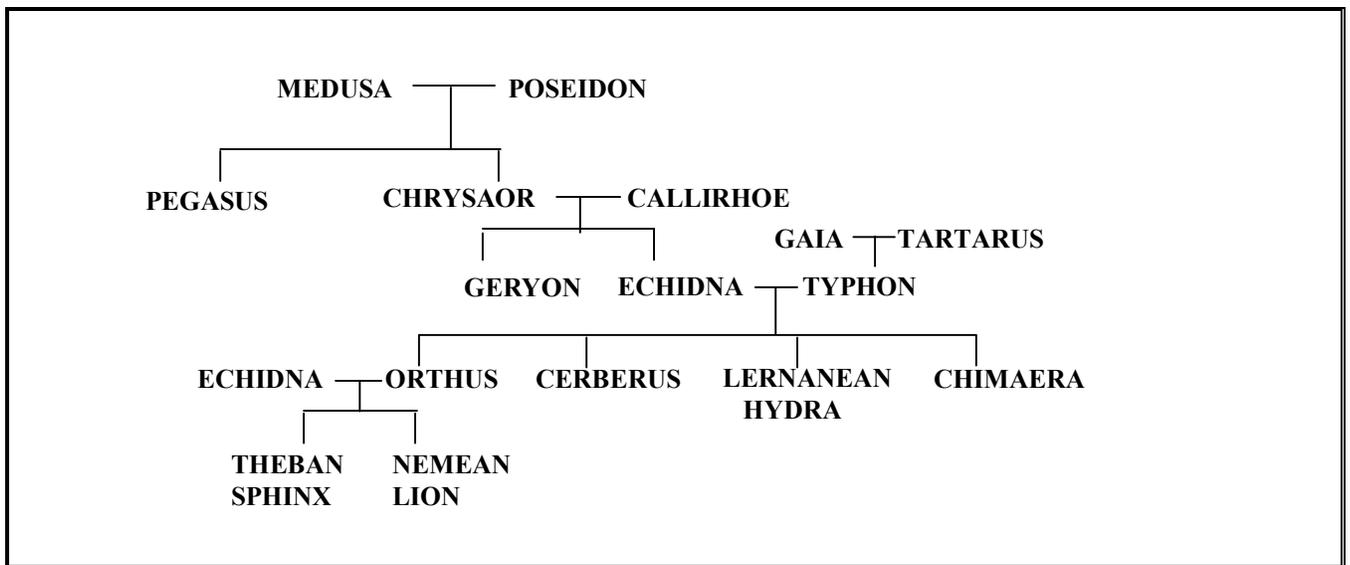
## Anti-Culture

Poseidon is a god of storms unsettling the atmosphere. He is a god of the margins, not the city, one of instinct not culture. This is mythically portrayed through his antagonism to his niece, Athena. An important myth recounts their contest for the guardianship of Athens. Athena, the reflective, rational goddess of the new order, and Poseidon, an irrational stormy god, are competing against one another for the honour to become the deity of Athens. After they both race to the top of the Acropolis they present the people of Athens with a gift each for the *polis*. It is now up to the citizens to vote for what they consider to be the best gift for the city. Athena gives the city of Athens the olive tree, planting the tree in the sacred soil of the Acropolis. Poseidon takes his trident, dashes it on the rock face and causes a spring of salt water to flow out of the rock. Of course the citizens of Athens vote for Athena

and in Poseidon's rage he floods the plains of Attica. When rageful, Poseidon is apt to create a flood, a metaphor for stormy and wild feelings.

Athena had already had a previous confrontation with her uncle. When Poseidon had made love with Medusa in her temple Athena was furious and transformed the young nymph into a Gorgon. Hence Athena reminds us that Poseidon is not a god of the city or culture but one who is marginal and oversees the depth of the feeling life. Known as the earth shaker and god of storms he was particularly known for the eruption of raging and stormy feelings.

While Poseidon was the father of the great hero Theseus and of city fathers like Boetus and Rhodus, myth records his monstrous legacy. He is the father of Polyphemus, the Cyclops who Odysseys kills, as well as the father of Charybdis with Gaia. However it is the lineage of monsters which spring from his union with Medusa which are the most interesting. From this ancestral line many of the monsters the heroes will later battle are conceived. Heracles battles both the Lernean Hydra as well as the Nemean Lion in his first two labours. When raiding the cattle of Geryon Heracles kills the two-headed dog Orthus while on his last labour he must confront its brother the triple-headed Cerberus without any weapons. Bellerophon fights the monstrous Chimera; Oedipus answers the riddle of the Theban Sphinx. As part of Poseidon's legacy the hero must fight the monstrous and misshapen, the representatives of the dark stirrings of the unconscious. Along with his brother Hades, Poseidon inhabits the darker spheres below consciousness.



*Poseidon's Monstrous Legacy*

## HADES

*It is in the light of  
psyche that we  
must read all  
underworld  
descriptions.  
Being in the  
underworld means  
psychic being,  
being  
psychological,  
where soul comes  
first.*<sup>3</sup>

- James Hillman



Hades abducting Persephone from a Greek Fresco in Macedonian tomb in Vergina, Greece, C4th BCE.

We have already met Hades as the abductor of Persephone and later her husband and equal. Hades was not only a personification of the underworld God commonly known as Pluto<sup>4</sup>, but also referred to a place; his extensive underworld kingdom. Mythological tradition and epic clearly differentiated the underworld and the god Hades was the regent of this place.

This mythological netherworld serves as a symbol for understanding the textures and shades of subterranean psychic life. In contemporary psychological terms this dark underworld territory is akin to the unconscious. Examining the customs, laws and landscape of the underworld amplifies our comprehension of the feeling life of the psyche. Hades, as a place, is a metaphor for what lies below the limen of consciousness and helps map out the internal psychic landscape.<sup>5</sup>

The terrain of Hades has been banished farther and farther away from consciousness since antiquity. In earlier agricultural societies, the gods of earth and underworld were closer allies. The gods of the earth were fertility gods sharing the cyclical nature of life with the chthonic gods of death. By the 8th Century BCE, Hades is truly a land of despair as Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* attests. This is confirmed by Achilles's shade in conversation with Odysseus in the *Odyssey*:

..never try to console me for dying.  
I would rather follow the plow as thrall to another  
man, one with no land allotted him and not much to live on,  
than be a king over all the perished dead.<sup>6</sup>

A life of a slave is now more appealing to the great hero Achilles rather than regency over the entire underworld. To be regent over the vast land of the dead is no prize for the Homeric hero! Heroes now learn to conquer death.

Before Homer, the gods of the deep and dark were honoured within the community for they were recognised as an essential part of the cycle of life. Erwin Rohde writes that underworld gods were once part of the local landscape and society:

And yet it is an undoubted fact that these divinities [referring to chthonic deities] are amongst the oldest possessions of Greek religious faith. Indeed bound as they are to the soil of the country, they are the true local deities, the real gods of home and country. They are also not unknown to Homer; but epic poetry has transferred them, divested of all local limitation, to a distant subterranean region, inaccessible to modern men, beyond the limits of Okeanos. There Aides [Hades] and the terrible Persephoneia [Persephone] rule as guardians of the dead.<sup>7</sup>

The underworld gods, ðthe real gods of home and countryö, are now separated from the visible landscape of contemporary life.

By Homeric times the rise of rationalism was under way. Gods and goddesses who did not conform to the cultural trend towards the *polis*<sup>8</sup> were cast into shadow roles. Gods who represented the light and triumph of the spirit were elevated while those who were chthonian and dark became denigrated and demonic. The underworld had become a gloomy land of shades; a depository for the soul cast off from its earthly life. Movement towards *polis* and city, away from agriculture and the land, contributed to man's loss of the instinctual knowing of seasonal changes and the cyclical nature of birth, death and rebirth. The movement away from the pragmatic earth and its underworld towards the fires of inspiration and heaven left Hades, the god farthest from heaven, isolated in his dark domicile. He had no place on the Olympian pantheon to remind us of his presence. No cults or temples remained to remind us of his power.

The House of Hades was driven either to the far western extremity of the known world, an *otherworld*, or far below the known, the *under-world*. In classical times, both locales referred to the land of the dead. Hades, no longer part of the local landscape, was located farther and farther away, beyond Oceanus, the river the Greeks knew as the extreme boundary of the world. This remote western place, the Hesperia, is where the Sun descends and where the solar hero must journey<sup>9</sup>. Death is now a task, a labour that must be overcome. This banishment put the underworld beyond the reach of man, endowing it with terrible and dark qualities.

Hades is also repressed deeper underground. Hades's realm of shades and death is no longer equated with the rich soil and the fertile earth. The god who once nurtured a rich and fulfilling life is now custodian over the banished aspects of soul. These dark qualities of soul become metamorphosed into untouchable and taboo parts of the psyche. Hades now governs feelings that are banished; any aspects of life that are deathly, rather than life giving, are assigned to his precinct. In this process, psyche becomes compartmentalised. A polarity is created between the underworld, Hades, and the world above the earth, Olympus. The underworld now is the place below consciousness, the other world situated at the extremity of the ðrealö world.

Having no specific temples or altars, Hades was summoned by his worshippers through striking the earth with their hands. Before Homeric times, Hades was underhand, in the ground. As he became banished farther away from consciousness, he also becomes literally more underhanded. As regent over this once dark, yet gestating place, he is now associated with the dark, as dreadful, secretive and taboo. Psychologically the god Hades symbolises these darker aspects of psychic life, once accessible or underhand. As his place is repressed so are the psychic aspects of this region: negative and dark

feeling, loss, rage, jealousy, grief, and death. These aspects of soul are now seen as underhanded. They are no longer part of the local landscape but replaced by the heroic light of the world above the earth. Hades becomes a realm of death inhabited by shades and shadows. Life that is of value now exists in the atmosphere above the earth. A Hades denying culture denies death, darkness and negative feeling, which surface as a loss of meaning, a sense of dislocation and a feeling of being inauthentic.

By the time Homer, in the 8<sup>th</sup> Century BCE, describes Hades in the *Iliad*, he has become the most abhorrent as this description says:

Lord Death indeed is deaf to appeal, implacable; of all the gods  
Therefore he is the most abhorrent to mortal men<sup>10</sup>.

His face is now so terrible and frightening that we learn to speak of him euphemistically to forget Pluto's fearful face of death, grief, loss, betrayal, depression and despair or the feelings of jealousy, envy, and rage associated with this archetype. By idealising the transformative qualities of Hades/Pluto we are kept imprisoned by his dark face. In our culture we remain ignorant of his dark feeling life trying to avoid or overcome it rather than honour it. His cult is now foreign and alien, no longer part of the mysteries taught to us. When Hades is denied we speak of death and the underworld in euphemism: expressions like "passed over" or "the other side" replaces death. James Hillman suggests that there is a god of plenty beneath the euphemisms, which help lessen the dread of the underworld god:

Pluto, especially, is important to recognise in our euphemistic references to the unconscious as the giver of wholeness, a storehouse of abundant riches, a place not of fixation in torment, but a place if propitiated rightly, that offers fertile plenty. Euphemism is a way of covering anxiety.<sup>11</sup>

Because of his frightening nature, Hades had many names. These help amplify the nature of this god and astrologically help us reconsider Pluto and his astrological legacy, especially by transit. Idealised versions of the god, suggested by some of his epithets, alleviate some of the anxiety of the unknown associated with Hades. However his epithets also serve to remind us of the natural cycles of life and death and the enriching process born out of an encounter with this god of place.

## Epithet: Names Associated with Hades

*The gods of the underworld are generally referred to by affectionate or cajoling nicknames that laid stress on the lofty or beneficent character of their rule and threw a veil over the darkest side of their nature with conciliatory euphemism.*

*Thus Hades had many flattering titles and special names<sup>12</sup>*

- Edwin Rohde

There were few names associated with Hades. Often he was given no name since this constellated dread in those who heard his name spoken. However, as is the custom with terrifying spirits, a complimentary epithet was used to dissipate some of the terrifying feelings. The most common of these names was "Pluto" which refers to wealth or riches, but he was also known by other names, which amplify the nature and experience of this deity.

- **Pluton or Pluto** from *Plutus*: 'wealth' or the 'rich man'

This title of the 'rich man' or the 'wealthy one' was suggestive of the riches that lay beneath the earth. This epithet links the underworld gods to the agricultural gods that were banished as polis-culture replaced agri-culture.<sup>13</sup> Pluto symbolises the immense resources hidden in the interior of the earth or metaphorically, in the underworld of the psyche. Pluto's sphere is the rich terrain of the underworld and what lies hidden beneath the visible world. These riches could also refer to the abundant amount of shades and ghosts that populate Hades' territory. The instinctual wisdom of the ancients knew of these riches of the underworld (unconscious).

Edwin Rohde connects Hades to Pluto especially when evoking the dread of Hades:

'Hades, too, was for his Peloponnesian worshippers a god of fertility of the earth just as much as a god of the dead. And in the same way he was a lord of the Souls as well, in those places where in fear of the name of Hades he was called, in honour of his beneficent powers, Plouton, Plouteus or Zeus Plouteus.'<sup>14</sup>

Similarly James Hillman refers to the frightening name of Hades: 'In antiquity, Pluto (riches) was said as a euphemistic name to cover the frightening depths of Hades.'<sup>15</sup> This name is a useful metaphor and reminder of our rich interior world. Subjectivity is Pluto's realm and when honoured the richness of the interior world can be tapped through dreams, images and symbols. Dreams appear in the stillness of sleep when the extroverted world becomes invisible and consciousness yields to unconsciousness. Pluto symbolises the resources available as we turn to the underworld of self. Introversion helps tap this wealth. Hades' world of shades and shadow is a resourceful place, which is the transformative aspect of the astrological Pluto. Facing what has been invisible to us allows a view of the wealth that lies buried or hidden to our conscious self. To resurrect this hidden value, and place it back into conscious life, becomes part of the opus of a transit of Pluto.

*Ploutus* was not only a personification of wealth but also a son of Demeter and Iasion conceived in one of Demeter's fertile and plowed fields. Zeus blinded this divine child of Demeter so that he could distribute his wealth without 'eyesight' in symbolic terms without 'consciousness'. Aristophanes produced a play in 388 BCE, *The Plutus*, which concerned various ways which Plutus was able to restore his eyesight. Ultimately Hades, as Plutonic wealth, concerns the resourcefulness and wealth not seen by the naked eye of consciousness, but distributed throughout the unconscious which is blind to us. Pluto's domain is power and wealth and a plutocrat is one who becomes powerful through their amassed wealth. In symbolic terms we become wealthy through our honouring of the god Pluto and his dark domain.

Pluto was also the name of one of the 3,000 Oceanids who is the mother of Tantalus.<sup>16</sup> His father is Zeus and as we shall see Tantalus eventually resides in Tartarus, the darkest region of the underworld.

- **Ais or Aides** 'the invisible', 'invisibility giving' or 'the unseen'

Hades was given a helmet of invisibility by the Cyclops which when worn rendered him invisible. This cap was given to him during the Great War between his brother Zeus and their father, Chronus. It enabled Hades to be invisible to Chronus, permitting him to rob his father's weapons without being detected. He shared this helmet with Hermes, his nephew, whose invisibility allowed the younger god to cross the boundaries between the two worlds.

Hades surfacing is invisible, so above the earth he is not recognised. In psychological terms this refers to an absence of persona; there is no thing in front of this god. Hades does not hide behind images but confronts us with what lies below the mask of conscious personality and identity. A mask hides the depth that flows beneath the visible and conscious world. Hades appears from the shadows with no warning, therefore there is no conscious mechanism to respond to what he unearths. The helmet covers the head's thoughts, ideas and intentions, rendering the function of consciousness helpless. Hades as Ais also reminds us of his rulership over the invisible world of shades and disembodied souls; in this place we are without the guise of the world above.

Hades's nature is synonymous with Fate and the mysteries of life and death. Fate, like Hades, is unknown to us; part of the invisible terrain of our self that erupts out of the underworld to confront us, dragging us into the unknown. Jung pointed out that 'the man who submits to his fate calls it the will of God; the man who puts up a hopeless and exhausting fight is more apt to see the devil in it.'<sup>17</sup> In denying Hades as our fate we turn him into the devil.

*Aidoneus*, which is derived from the same root, was a poetic term meaning Hades. In Greek legend, he was also a king. A mythic alternative suggests that it is Aidoneus's wife that Theseus and Pirithous conspire to abduct, not Persephone, as in the story most commonly known.<sup>18</sup> Here it is the outer queen, not the underworld queen, whom the heroes try to abduct and conquer.

- **Eubuleus** 'good counsel' or 'benevolent counsellor'

Another epithet for Hades, Eubuleus,<sup>19</sup> was sometimes applied to a divine child of Zeus and Persephone. In Argive tradition, he was the son of the priest, Trochilus, and the brother of Triptolemus, who was instructed by Demeter to spread the knowledge of agriculture. The epithet also means good counsel, which is a reference to the wise counsel of Hades. This wise internal counsel is the images and feelings that rise from deep inside, even though they are often labelled 'irrational'. The goddess, Metis, was also associated with wise counsel and 'belly wisdom'.

Metis, often referred to as the first consort of Zeus, was the mother of Athene. Metis was pregnant with Athene, when she was swallowed by Zeus, a continuation of the patriarchal devouring of what is potentially threatening. This is a potent image of the masculine god of spirit and heaven devouring feminine counsel and wisdom. Hades, as Eubuleus, shares this image of internal wise counsel. Like Metis, Hades too was devoured and spent time in the belly of his father. He knows what it is like to be devoured and interred by his father's fear, unlike Zeus who escapes this fate. Zeus has not experienced the dark region inside his father and is therefore prone to inflation and upward mobility. In the internal world lies the wise counsel devoured either by Cronus (the god fearful of his own progeny and creativity) or Zeus (the triumphant god who needs to transcend knowing rather than enter the intolerable voids of not knowing).

Eubuleus in Greek myth was also a personification of an oracular swineherd. While tending his animals he experienced the earth break open and saw a chariot, drawn by black horses, appear then disappear into the chasm, along with a girl clasped in the charioteer's arms. Into the chasm also fell one of his pigs; an animal later sacrificed at the festival of Demeter, the abducted girl's mother. Helios, the Sun god, saw the abduction and Hecate, a lunar goddess, heard Persephone scream but Eubuleus, as wise counsel, experienced loss while unintentionally witnessing the abduction of Persephone. Hades's realm is a realm of loss, especially from our attachments. When he appears on the surface of our life, he demands a sacrifice: to let go of what is no longer destined to be part of our life. This epithet reminds us of Hades's instinctual wisdom and counsel. It is the sense of 'gut knowing' being uncompromising and blatantly honest, qualities that Pluto evokes.

- **Zeus Chthonius** *Subterranean Zeus or Zeus of the underworld*

Chthon suggests a god of the earth as distinct from the sky gods of heaven. This epithet refers to Zeus of the lower world. This may refer to Hades as the darker aspect of Zeus; together their union creates more of a holistic god. When Zeus became the bright god of Olympus, his dark shadow was cast on Hades. Being brothers, their relationship is the polarity of dark and light; Zeus is triumphant and heavenly, while Hades is invisible and subterranean. This epithet reminds us of the sibling nature of Zeus and Hades, representing both the light and dark aspects of the same genealogy.

Hades had been devoured by his father, Cronus, whereas Zeus had not. They access a different way of knowing. Zeus continued this legacy by swallowing Metis; his way of knowing is to conquer and be triumphant in knowing. Hades is more familiar with not knowing, being engulfed in the darkness of uncertainty. Hades, as this aspect of Zeus, is the potency inherent in this underworld way of knowing.

The relationship of Zeus and Hades can be seen through their various encounters. As allies and brothers, they fought together in the war to overthrow the Titans and their father Cronus. Zeus condoned Hades' abduction of Persephone when his brother sought his permission to abduct his daughter. When Heracles injured Hades, he went to Zeus' precinct on Mount Olympus to be healed of the wound. As an epithet for Zeus, Zeus Chthonian had altars at Olympia and Corinth, two important centres in the ancient world. It is in this face we are reminded of the link between both the god of heaven and the god of the underworld.

- **Polydegmon** *'the receiver of many guests'*

With this epithet, Hades is referred to as the god who receives his guests into the underworld. This was certainly the case in the hero's descent, where myth details how he received Theseus, Heracles, and Orpheus. Guest friendship was an important custom in ancient Greece. The word guest shares the similar root with the word ghost, which also has the derivative root of host, hospitality and hospice. Hades, as Polydegmon, reminds us of welcoming the ghosts of our past and the shades of our underworld. When these ghosts are banished to a subterranean or unconscious realm, they become the ghosts that potentially come back to haunt us.

This is the aspect of Hades who is willing enough to receive the hero, yet demands that the hero abide by the customs of the underworld. The underworld has its own mores and intelligence, which must be honoured. Hades demands that we honour the customs of the world below when we are under its jurisdiction, which includes the honouring of our dark feeling life. If not, we risk being in limbo, becoming a shade of our former self, lost in the dark regions of the underworld.

- **Dis or Dis Pater** *Roman equivalent of the 'dark lord of the underworld'*

Like Pluto, the Romans believed Dis to be the richest of the gods. His name is derived from the root *-dītis* meaning rich. His altars were rare and the Romans were also fearful of this dark god of the underworld. Distancing from this dark god in the Roman and Latin ages continued. It is also interesting to note that the prefix *-dis* is often used as a term of discord or negativity. Could we evoke this god when we unconsciously use the prefix *-dis*? When speaking of the soul and family, Thomas Moore in *Care of the Soul* says:

When I see those three letters *-dys* in *-dysfunctional*, I think of *-Dis* the old Roman name for the mythological underworld. Soul enters life from below, through the

cracks, finding an opening into life at the points where smooth functioning breaks down.<sup>20</sup>

Moore reminds us that soul is embraced and nurtured in the underworld. In a modern culture, where we have forgotten how to address the underworld gods, we have unconsciously honoured him through our language.

## The Geography of Hades

Entrances to the underworld included caves, chasms with underground pools or springs, fissures, cracks in the surface of the earth where hot springs or poisonous vapours escaped, or even underneath a lake or body of water. These entrances were generally located in remote and wild areas. Some of the entry sites were sacred while others were secular or illegitimate entrances. At any of these entry points, the hero could begin his descent into the nether world, passing through the underworld gates guarded by the monstrous triple headed dog, Cerberus.<sup>21</sup>

Rivers, many of which were toxic and torrential, separated the lower world from the upper world. Souls, having left their mortal bodies at death, would have to cross the most poisonous and fearful of all the rivers, the Styx. The ferryman, Charon, facilitated the journey across the Styx. However before one could cross the river, a consecration of the body through burial in the earth had to take place. Without respecting the body through the ritual of burial, the soul was doomed to wander aimlessly along the banks of the Styx unable to acquire access to the other side. The ancients knew of the need for completion and finalisation in order to enter a new realm. This is still psychologically true today; what is not adequately interred roams aimlessly and is unable to die or be transformed.

Charon also demanded a toll to cross the river in his barge, hence the custom of putting gold coins in the mouth of the dead to pay the ferryman for transporting the dead across the Styx. The gold coins were ancient symbols of valuing this treacherous journey to the nether region.

The realm of Hades is reached either by a descent through an opening in the earth (a physical journey below the surface of the earth) or by extensive travel to the far western extremity of the known world. Poseidon, in talking about the threefold division of the world, says, "Hades drew the lot of the mist and the darkness"<sup>22</sup>. The "mists" locate the house of Hades as the other world, at the farthest regions beyond Oceanus, the place to which Odysseys travels. "Darkness" locates Hades beneath the earth, the under world to which many of the heroes descend. To reach each location a boundary must be crossed, a limen between the worlds. The destination is a place far away from, or far below, consciousness. Whether it is the river Oceanus or Styx that must be crossed, the boundary between the two worlds renders that which is potent in the upper world powerless in the underworld. The values and customs of this other world are unknown to the hero.<sup>23</sup>

Today we enter into this place of Hades often through a gapping hole caused by the pouring forth of volcanic and buried feelings, a catharsis. We may enter through the caves and empty places that are formed with our despair and depression. Grief and loss draw us into the underworld. Quite commonly at "mid-life" or other transitions in the life cycle we find ourselves standing at one of the entrances to Hades.<sup>24</sup> Extroverted energies are drawn inward to a more soulful level through these cracks that appear in the ego centred life. Emotive eruptions and desperate feelings may pour out the encrusted unconscious feelings, leaving a hole where we now must enter into the underworld to encounter soul. Restoration of soul begins to occur as the unconscious material begins to seep through the cracks of our outer world persona.

Classical literature often described heroic descents into the underworld. For the last of her four labours Psyche descends to retrieve Persephone's "beauty box". She receives many instructions from

her guide, the tower, on how to accomplish this. First Psyche must find the appropriate entrance to the underworld, the vent of Dis:

The famous Greek city of Lacedaemon is not far from here. Go there at once and ask to be directed to Taenarus, which is rather an out-of-the-way place to find. It's on a peninsula in the south. Once you get there you'll find one of the ventilation holes of the Underworld. Put your head through it and you'll see a road running downhill, but there'll be no traffic on it. Climb through at once and the road will lead you straight to Pluto's palace.<sup>25</sup>

Taenarus was a locality in Greece where ancient legend told of a back entrance to the Underworld. There was a cave-like temple where those who were not conducted by the psychopomp, Hermes, slipped into the Underworld. This was an illicit entry hoping to avoid Charon's fee. Here is where Theseus and Pirithous entered the Underworld and where Heracles surfaced with Cerberus.<sup>26</sup> Taenarus could serve as an image of an unconscious entrance to the underworld. Proper initiation has not taken place and the ego is still intent on overcoming the unconscious, rather than yielding to its customs and laws. It is through this gate that the defiant ego, focused on conquering the mystery that lies beyond its own experience, enters into the underworld realm. This is an illicit entry and without the proper instruction or guidance the journey is destined to fail.

In Book 6 of the *Aeneid*, the hero, Aeneas prepares to enter the Underworld. After completing the Sibyl's instructions, she warns him of the ease of descent into Hades but the difficulty of return:

it is easy to go down to the underworld. The door of black Dis stands open night and day. But to retrace your steps and escape to the upper air, that is the task, that is the labour.<sup>27</sup>

Once one had entered through the gates of the Underworld, it was nearly impossible to retrace the steps back. He enters the cave at Lake Avernus near Cumae, Italy<sup>28</sup> and after the necessary sacrifice descends through the cave, guided by the Sibyl of Cumae.

## Territories in Hades

The topography of Hades had three regions, which were described in classical literature. Tartarus was the deepest region in the underworld, where those who had committed great sins were eternally punished. Erebus was like a middle region where souls of the departed known as shades would roam. Often the realm of Hades, as a whole, is referred to as either Tartarus or Erebus. Finally Elysium or The Elysian Fields, the third region, was reserved for the heroic or chosen ones of the gods. The paradisiacal realm is also known as The Islands of the Blessed, not necessarily located in the underworld. These islands were located in the river Oceanus in a remote region of the upper world. Two of these regions were personified as parthenogenetic progeny of Chaos in Hesiod's *Theogony*. Both Tartarus and Erebus were born at the beginning of creation along with Eros, Gaia and Nyx.<sup>29</sup> Interesting to note that two personifications of the underworld, along with Night (Nyx) are present at the dawn of creation.

- **Tartarus**

In *Theogony*, Hesiod describes Tartarus:

misty Tartarus, as far beneath  
The earth, as earth is far beneath the heavens.  
An anvil made of bronze, falling from heaven,

Would fall nine nights and days, and on the tenth  
would reach the earth; and if the anvil fell  
from earth, would fall again nine nights and days  
and come to Tartarus upon the tenth.

A wall of bronze runs around Tartarus,  
And round this runs a necklace, triple thick,  
Of purest night, while up above, there grow  
The roots of earth and of the barren sea.  
There, in the misty dark, the Titan gods  
Are hidden, in a mouldering place, lowest  
And last of the giants Earth, by the will of Zeus  
Who drives the clouds, and they may never leave.<sup>30</sup>

This was the blackest sphere of Hades where eternal punishment was exacted against those who had committed crimes against the gods. The greatest crime seemed to be *hubris* or sins against the gods either through betrayal, deceit or arrogance. *Hubris*, inflation or self-identification as a god, was one of the greatest sins. Tartarus was the deepest region of the underworld, a polarity to Olympus/Heaven. It was populated by those who dared to try to enter the realms of the gods, compare themselves to a god or challenge the gods. This is the place where Zeus imprisons the Titans after the Great War.

In *Theogony*, Tartarus is actually personified at the creation. One of his offspring from an incestuous union with his sister, Gaia, was Typhon. This frightening monster, whose lower half was a snake, was Zeus's adversary during the Great War. Typhon is also the father to many monsters. He mates with Echidna, the monstrous grand daughter of Medusa, who has the torso of a woman with snakes for her tail. One of their offspring is Cerberus, Hades's dog that guards the gates of the underworld. Another dog-son, Orthrus, had an incestuous relationship with his mother, Echidna, who gave birth to the Sphinx (perhaps this genealogy points to a more complex riddle than the one that Oedipus had to solve for the Sphinx). No longer solely personified as a primal act of creation, Tartarus is now a place at the lowest level of the underworld where his monstrous and incestuous descendants are gathered. Here the ancestral sins are deposited becoming monstrous over generations.

The root of the word Tartarus is *tartar*, which refers to the crude deposits formed by mucus, the sediment of wine or the encrustation found on teeth. Jung, when speaking on alchemy, says:

Tartar settles on the bottom of the vessel, which in the language of the alchemists means ðin the underworld Tartarusö<sup>31</sup>.

This is the place that collects the sediment and the un-distilled feelings. The expression ðcatch a Tartarø is defined in the dictionary as ðto catch or have dealings with something that or someone who proves unexpectedly troublesome or powerfulö. Here is the place far below consciousness, walled and barren, that has captured some of our darkest feelings. Perhaps in all of us, it represents that archetypal place of torment and powerlessness. It is a place we fall into in the midst of our grief and torment, a place of total resignation to the will of the gods. In Greek myth many besides the Titans were condemned to Tartarus for their sins. Some of the characters were:

*Tantalus* was a son of Zeus, who as the king of Phrygia betrayed the gods three times. He was intimate with the gods and invited to dine at their great banquets. He abused their trust by stealing ambrosia and nectar from these banquets and giving the food of the gods to his mortal friends. His second sin was in testing the omnipotence of the gods, believing he could trick them into eating his own son. He chopped up, then boiled his son, Pelops, and served his roasted body to the gods. A

third sin was perjury, breaking an oath to Zeus. Tantalus lied about the whereabouts of the golden dog, crafted by Hephaestus that guarded Zeus in his infancy.

His punishment in Tartarus was to be placed under an enormous stone, at the point of falling. Under this perilous rock he experienced eternal thirst but could never satisfy his craving as the water around him receded every time he tried to drink. He also experienced great hunger and the branch laden with fruit dangling above him was unreachable. The word *tantalisø* reminds us of his torment at never being able to eat the food or drink the water that was within reach. Tartarus is the tormented place where we have all that we desire within our reach, yet are unable to enjoy it. We have deceived ourselves; the sins we committed on the way to fulfilling our desires stand in the way of enjoying the fruits of our work: antiquity's version of Karma!

*Ixion* was tied to the wheel lashed by serpents as punishment for his lust for Hera. Zeus had taken pity on Ixion and purified him of a terrible murder, however he showed his ingratitude when he fell madly in love with the god's sister-wife, Hera, and tried to seduce her. Zeus shaped a cloud, *Nephele*, into the form of Hera tricking Ixion into embracing only an image of Hera, which was borne by the cloud. From this union of *Nephele* and *Ixion*, *Centaurus* was born. *Centaurus* then mated with the mares of Mount Pelion and the race of the Centaurs came into being, a hybrid race known for their wildness and brutality.

*Ixion* is tied to an eternally revolving wheel in Tartarus where he is continually lashed. In the Tarot, the Wheel of Fortune is the encounter with fate and preparing to meet our internal chaos. Like *Ixion*, we may be tied to the wheel of fortune and fate when we are haunted by our own sins against the gods. James Hillman also echoes this when he says:

to be put on the wheel in punishment (as *Ixion*) is to be put into an archetypal place, tied to the turns of Fortune<sup>32</sup>

*Tityus* was a giant, the son of Zeus and *Elara*. Hera inflamed *Tityus* to attack her enemy *Leto*, mother of Zeus's divine twins, *Apollo* and *Artemis*. As *Tityus* attacked *Leto*, her divine children rescued her, killing the giant. Since he had attacked an immortal and the mother of Zeus's children, he was condemned to Tartarus where he was pegged to the ground. Continuously a vulture attacked him, pecking at his heart and liver. *Prometheus* too met the same fate at the hands of Zeus having his liver daily eaten by a griffin. Like *Prometheus* and *Tityus*, our life force may be pecked out of us when we are imprisoned in our own Tartarus of meaninglessness.

*Sisyphus* had to roll a huge rock up a hill, only to have it roll down again. He was the most cunning of all. In one tradition he is the father of *Odysseus*, having seduced his mother *Anticlea* on her wedding eve. He incurred Zeus's wrath by revealing the god as the kidnapper of *Asopus's* daughter. For this telling of tales, Zeus ordered *Hades* to take him to the deepest region of the underworld. Once in the underworld he tricked *Persephone* into releasing him, requesting the privilege to be properly buried and then to return. Of course this promise was broken and *Hermes* had to retrieve him and escort him back to Tartarus. *Sisyphus* reminds us of being imprisoned in Tartarus through our own lies, deceit and trickery.

*The Danaidae* were the fifty daughters of *Danaus*, descendants of Zeus and *Io*. *Danaus's* twin brother, *Aegyptus*, and mortal enemy had fifty sons whom he wanted to marry off to their cousins, *The Danaidae*. *Danaus* fled with his fifty daughters to *Argos* to avoid the marriages. However they were pursued by *Aegyptus* and his sons, and eventually *Danaus* consented to the marriage. On the wedding night *Danaus* gave each of his daughters a dagger to kill their husbands, all following his orders, except one, *Hypermnestra*. Even though *Hermes*, Zeus and *Athena* purified them of the murders, they were still condemned by the judges of the underworld to Tartarus. Their task was to fill their buckets with water from the well, however their buckets continually leaked water through the holes. They

were condemned to an eternity of fetching water with buckets that leaked like sieves; an endless, repetitive and unfulfilled task. Tartarus is depression and despair, the endless, futile repetition of a life without hope or meaning.

Tartarus is reminiscent of the place in all of us that is futile, repetitive, stuck and irresolvable. This is the aspect of Hades that has been most repressed and denied. It is a place of despair, depression, compulsion and rage; aspects of the psyche that are denied the light, yet need to be honoured and recognised. We need to be reminded of the heroic strength built through life that allows us to have both an access into and out of Tartarus. We need to create our own rituals of entry into and exit from this place.

- **Erebus**

Erebus is the unknown darkness, however it was also known as the section of the underworld where the souls of the dead passed through to reach their resting-place. Erebus was the region in Hades where the disembodied souls resembled shadow or dream pictures and were impalpable to human touch. They were somnambulist and unconscious, except for Tiresias, the seer, who preserved his consciousness and prophetic abilities, thanks to Persephone.

This is the land of the shades where the inhabitants are -shades of their former self. In this place the inhabitants lived off the blood of others. When a hero passed through this region, he often sacrificed an animal so the shades could feed off of its blood. Erebus is an image of a psychological state where what has died is either in transition or has not been able to be consciously released. We have not yet accepted the death of what we were attached to and wander aimlessly through the land of the shades taking the life force from those who randomly pass through the vicinity. Erebus is the state we visit in times of grief and loss, a place where we identify with the dead. During a transit of Pluto the individual often feels in limbo, between two worlds, wandering aimlessly through Erebus.

Homer named the meadows of the dead the Asphodel Fields where the shades of the heroes wandered. The asphodel was a common weed associated with the dead growing prolifically in barren places.

- **Elysian Fields/Elysium or the Isles of the Blest**

Homer describes Menelaus' resting place in the Elysian Fields as a place where:

there is made the easiest life for mortals,  
for there is no snow, nor much winter there, nor is there ever  
rain, but always the stream of Ocean sends up breezes  
of the West Wind blowing briskly for the refreshment of mortals. <sup>33</sup>

Elysium, the idyllic fields or the magical Isles of the Blest were reserved for those who had pleased the gods in their lives. Heroes, and those who had been initiated into the mysteries through the Eleusinian rites, were also destined for this land. It was the Camelot of antiquity. This part of the underworld was idyllic and its inhabitants lived an afterlife blessed by the gods. In contrast to Tartarus or Erebus, it represents the outcome of a more conscious relationship with Hades and death.

## The Rivers in Hades

The rivers that flow through the underworld are symbolic of the feeling life present in Hades. Five rivers of the underworld are generally differentiated. These rivers carry the flow of the feelings

through our psychic underworld. Often the rivers are toxic, like feelings that are repressed and not able to flow freely. Or the rivers are torrential, like the powerful force of feelings accumulated over time, then released. These rivers are hidden below the surface of the visible world and carry the feelings that have not yet been able to become conscious. They are the waterways of the underworld that separate the two worlds from each other.

The *Styx* is the hateful river that encircles Hades and is its outermost boundary. It is an image of the toxic and polluted feelings that mark the boundary to the underworld. This was the boundary river that the souls who were properly entombed crossed in order to find their resting-place in the underworld. The Styx was also sacred to the gods, who swore their oaths on the river. Breaking an oath that was sworn on the Styx would ostracise them from the council of the Gods. An oath made on the Styx bound one to their pledge, and if broken the punishment was exile. The river Styx contains the underworld, like an alchemical alembic. Either the psyche is bound up by the poisons and toxins of the feeling life, which must be heroically traversed, or is contained by our oath to remain authentic to our self. In this way the Styx also contains and honours our privacy.

*Acheron* was the woeful river. The souls of the dead bathed in the river then crossed it. It was a river of the lower world and in symbolic terms contained underworld feelings like grief, despair or depression that flow under consciousness.

The *Cocytus* was known as the wailing river. Usually a wail refers to an inarticulate high-pitched cry, lamenting a loss. As part of the feeling life this river holds the sounds and speech of the pain experienced through loss, separation, change and death.

*Phlegethon*, also known as Pyriphlegethon, was the river of burning which flowed into the river Acheron. Bathing ourselves in this waterway burns off the dross and sediment of the repressed feeling life.

The river *Lethe* was the river of forgetting. Souls crossed this river when entering and leaving the underworld. Having crossed the river, the experiences of the world before were lost to the conscious memory. Lethe is the boundary that we cross when we leave the underworld to rejoin the living. In order to join the living the pain of our loss and grief is forgotten. To forget is a powerful demarcation between the two worlds. It is the boundary between two distinct worlds and the process of assigning the appropriate feeling to each world. Wordsworth remarked, "our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting", the experience of crossing Lethe.

The underworld has its own hierarchy. Hades and Persephone are the regents of the great world below. They are joined by the phantoms of sleep and dreams as the underworld is filled with dream and soul images. As well, there are judges in the underworld who preside with Hades over the judgment of souls. The wise seer, Tiresias, who had lived for seven generations of the Theban dynasty retained his prophetic consciousness in the underworld and becomes the surrogate of Hades, the symbol of the internal knower.

## ENDNOTES

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<sup>1</sup> C.G. Jung, *Collected Works*, Volume 10.

<sup>2</sup> *The Iliad of Homer*, translated by Richmond Lattimore, University of Chicago Press, London, 1961 Book 15:187-9

<sup>3</sup> James Hillman, *The Dream and the Underworld*, Harper and Row (New York, NY: 1979). 47.

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- <sup>4</sup> Homer refers to Hades in the *Iliad* as “the Lord of the Undergloom” 5:395.
- <sup>5</sup> Psyche in Greek was synonymous with “soul”
- <sup>6</sup> Homer, *The Odyssey*. Book 11: 488-491.
- <sup>7</sup> Erwin Rohde, *Psyche, The Cult of Souls and Belief in Immortality among the Greeks*, Kegan Paul (New York, NY: 1925), 158.
- <sup>8</sup> The polis refers to the organisation of the city, the laws and customs and the people that make up the city-state. *Synoikismos* refers to households and settlements coming together within an area to form a city, which gave rise to the polis.
- <sup>9</sup> This western extremity of the horoscope is the descendant. Here the Sun sets on the western horizon opposite the ascendant. The descendant is also often endowed with dark and shadowy qualities cast onto others.
- <sup>10</sup> Homer, *The Iliad*, Book 9: 62.
- <sup>11</sup> James Hillman, *The Dream and the Underworld*, p. 120
- <sup>12</sup> Edwin Rohde, *Psyche*, p.159
- <sup>13</sup> suggestive of the shift from the cultivation of the soil (agriculture) to the cultivation of the city (polis)
- <sup>14</sup> Edwin Rhode, *Psyche*, 100
- <sup>15</sup> James Hillman, *The Dream and the Underworld*
- <sup>16</sup> She is also one of the playmates Persephone describes when telling her mother of her abduction by Hades in *The Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, translated by Charles Boer (Spring, Dallas TX: 1970).
- <sup>17</sup> C. G. Jung, *Psychology and Alchemy*, CW 12, translated by R.F.C. Hull (Routledge and Kegan Paul, London: 1953)
- <sup>18</sup> For a discussion of this attempted abduction, see the section on Theseus and Pirithous under *Descents*.
- <sup>19</sup> also Euboulous or Eubouleus
- <sup>20</sup> Thomas Moore, *Care of the Soul*, Harper Collins (New York, NY: 1994), 26
- <sup>21</sup> Cerberus is also referred to as the “Hound of Hades” often depicted with 1000 heads. He is the monstrous product of Typhon and Echidna- see the section on *Tartarus*.
- <sup>22</sup> Homer, *The Iliad*, 15:191- see *Drawing Lots*
- <sup>23</sup> For example, both Heracles and Aeneas in the underworld draw their weapons to defend themselves against a monstrous image. But these weapons no longer have the same power against the residents of the underworld, as they learn from their guides.
- <sup>24</sup> In astrological symbolism, this is the generic transit of Pluto squaring Pluto, which occurs as early as age 35.
- <sup>25</sup> Apuleius, *The Golden Ass*, translated by Robert Graves, Penguin (London, 1972), 129.

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<sup>26</sup> Pausanias reports that in Troizen, near Corinth, there was a temple with altars to the underworld gods. It was here that Heracles surfaced as well as Dionysus with his mother Semele.

<sup>27</sup> Virgil, *Aeneid*, translated by David West, Penguin (London, 1991). 6: 126-9

<sup>28</sup> This was one of the most famous entrances to the Underworld. Lake Avernus was often referred to as birdless as any bird trying to fly across would perish falling into the lake. The underworld is often depicted without birds.

<sup>29</sup> Hesiod, *Theogony*, 116-24.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid*, 719-33

<sup>31</sup> CG Jung. CW 9, Part I, *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious* (London: 1959) 537.

<sup>32</sup> James Hillman, *The Dream and the Underworld*, 161

<sup>33</sup> Homer, *The Odyssey*, 4: 565-8.