



# Historically Speaking

Volume 3, Number 4 April 2024

## Demeter (Ceres)

The Greeks called her Demeter, and she is the goddess of the harvest and presides over grains and the fertility of the earth. She was also goddess of sacred law and the cycle of life and death. She is a very important deity in the Greek pantheon, embodying the life-giving aspects of nature and overseeing the cycles of life, death, and rebirth. Her myths and worship reflect the ancient Greeks' deep connection with the land and their understanding of the delicate balance of the natural world.

As a daughter of Kronos and Rhea, Demeter's siblings include Hestia, Hera, Hades, Poseidon, and Zeus. These were all important Olympian Gods with rich mythology and cultural importance. Each representing a fundamental aspect of the ancient Greek belief system. Demeter's role being primarily associated with agriculture and fertility.

Demeter is often depicted with symbols and items that reflect her dominion over agriculture and the harvest. While she was also the goddess of sacred law, it is with the more earthly and attractive areas of her rule that she is usually depicted. These include the cornucopia, ears of corn, a sheaf of wheat, a torch, and occasionally, a crown of flowers. She is often depicted with at least one of these items in hand or close by in painting and sculpture.



The sacred animals associated with Demeter include quite an eclectic mix. Pigs and serpents are the most commonly associated with this goddess. Geckos are also mentioned in the myths around Demeter, notably because she would show favor to those that killed the little lizards. Turtledoves, cranes, and screech owls are also mentioned, but with little supporting mythology, other than their representing various aspects of agriculture, fertility, and the natural world that she governs.

Sources for this newsletter include: Theoi.com, Dictionary of Greek and Roman Biography and Mythology, greekgodsandgoddesses.net



### What's happening?

I have a new hip. It is the left one. Next is a new right knee. I mention this because all of this medical stuff is getting in the way of the writing and woodworking.

I am making progress on AMON, spending much time on the research for that book, which is set in ancient Egypt around 700 BCE.

Reaction on **...to teach** has been gratifying, including several very positive reviews.



...to teach.



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## The Abduction of Persephone

One of the most poignant and significant myths involving Demeter is the abduction of her daughter, Persephone (Romans called her Proserpine,) by Hades, the god of the Underworld. This event is central to understanding Demeter's role and influence. Persephone, while gathering flowers in a field, was seized by Hades and taken to his realm. Demeter roamed the earth, endlessly searching for her, preoccupied with loss and grief. Her sorrow was so great that it led to the neglect of the land. Angry over the abduction, Demeter subjected the world to famine. The seasons halted with the onset of winter, and living things stopped growing and died.

Zeus sent the gods to Demeter one by one to try and bring her out of her despondency. Eventually, he sent his Hermes to the underworld to bring Persephone back and prevent the extinction of all life on Earth. Demeter and Persephone were ultimately reunited at Zeus's decree.

Hades agreed to Persephone's release but gave her a pomegranate as she left. When she ate the pomegranate seeds, she was bound to return to him for one month for each pomegranate seed she ate. Since the myth explains the season of winter, which is longer in the northern region of Greece and shorter in the south, the seeds consumed in the myth as told in those regions identified an appropriate number of seeds to account for the length of the winter season in those regions.

Demeter was granted the other months of the year with Persephone; her daughter would remain with Hades for those winter months.

The symbolism in the myth of Persephone's abduction is clear. Demeter is the soil of the earth. Persephone is the grain. Persephone's descent into the underworld occurs when the grain is harvested. Winter is when Demeter neglects the plant growth in her sorrow over her missing daughter. The sowing of the seed in the spring is the daughter returning to the mother. The grain is with the mother through the growing season until the next harvest.

The myth is also representative of the cycle of birth, death, and resurrection.

Demeter's influence extended into the realm of sacred law and rites, particularly through the Eleusinian Mysteries – a series of large and secretive concerts held every five years. These mysteries represented the abduction of Persephone by Hades in three phases. The “descent” (loss), the “search” and the “ascent”. The main theme is the “ascent” of Persephone and the reunion with her mother. These secretive and mystical rites, held in her honor, promised initiates guidance for a blessed afterlife.



left - the abduction of Persephone by Hades

right - the goddess Demeter

