



Historically Speaking

Volume 3, Number #10 October 2024

Hades



What's happening?

I didn't manage to get a September HS newsletter out, and issue is late in the month. My wife and I have been working hard on getting ready for the two craft fairs we have signed up for. Oct. 19 and 20 is the University High School Craft Fair, and Dec. 7 and 8 is the Ridgeline High School Craft Fair. She has 14 quilts ready as well as some other sewing items, and I have woodworking items and my books.

I still should have taken the time to prepare the Sept. newsletter, but alas, I didn't. I hope to get this one out right away, and then get back on schedule to send each at the beginning of the month.

I recently read **The Games God Play** by Abigail Owen. It is an interesting book that has the Olympian (and other) gods interacting with mortals in the present day. She has the gods appearing very current most of the time in dress and accommodations. Each of the Olympians choose a mortal to be their 'champion' in a contest called the 'Crucible'. The god whose mortal wins the contest becomes the ruling deity until the next Crucible in one hundred years. The central character is Lyra, a young woman who is part of an organization of professional thieves. Hermes is therefore a special deity for the mortals engaged in that occupation. She is chosen by Hades to be his champion, and I will not do any more spoiling than that.



This book prompted me to address the god called Hades in this newsletter.

In Greek mythology, Hades, the god of the Greek underworld, was the first-born son of the Titans Cronus and Rhea, who ruled all existence. He had three older sisters, Hestia, Demeter, and Hera, as well as two younger brothers, Poseidon and Zeus. As each child was born, Cronus would swallow them to avoid a prophecy that one of his children would cause him to lose power. Zeus was the youngest child and through the trickery of their mother, Rhea, he was the only one that had escaped being swallowed. Upon reaching adulthood, Zeus managed to force his father to disgorge his siblings. After their release, the six younger gods, along with allies they managed to gather, challenged the elder gods for power in the Titanomachy, a divine war. The war lasted for ten years and ended with the victory of the younger gods. Following their victory, according to a single famous passage in the Iliad, Hades and his two brothers, Poseidon and Zeus, drew lots to decide which realm each would rule. Zeus received the sky, Poseidon received the seas, and Hades received the underworld, the unseen realm to which the souls of the dead go upon leaving the world as well as any and all

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things beneath the earth. As a chthonian god, Hades was not considered an Olympian as he did not reside in Olympus, but rather lived and ruled in the underworld.

Hades abducted the daughter of Demeter, Persephone to make her his wife and Queen of the Dead as explained in the *Historically Speaking* newsletter of April 2024. This myth is the most important one involving Hades and is also connected the Eleusinian Mysteries.

Despite modern connotations of death as evil, Hades was actually more altruistically inclined in mythology and this is appropriately reflected in **The Games Gods Play**. Hades was portrayed in mythology as passive and never portrayed negatively; his role was often maintaining relative balance. That said, he was also depicted as cold and stern, and he held all of his subjects equally accountable to his laws. Any other individual aspects of his personality are not given, as Greeks refrained from giving him much thought to avoid attracting his attention.

Hades ruled the dead, assisted by others over whom he had complete authority. The House of Hades was described as full of "guests," though he rarely left the underworld. He strictly forbade his subjects to leave his domain and would become quite enraged when anyone tried to leave, or if someone tried to steal the souls from his realm. His wrath was equally terrible for anyone who tried to cheat death or otherwise crossed him, as Sisyphus and Pirithous found out to their sorrow. While usually indifferent to his subjects, Hades was very focused on the punishment of these two people; particularly Pirithous, as he entered the underworld in an attempt to steal Persephone for himself, and consequently was forced onto the "Chair of Forgetfulness" where he stayed for eternity.

Another myth is about the Greek god Asclepius who was originally a demigod, son of Apollo and Coronis, a Thessalian princess. During his lifetime, he became a famous and talented physician, who eventually was able to bring the dead back to life. Feeling cheated, Hades persuaded Zeus to kill him with a thunderbolt. After his death, Asclepius was brought to Olympus where he became a god.

Hades was only depicted outside of the underworld once in myth, and even that is believed to have been an

instance where he had just left the gates of the underworld, which was when Heracles shot him with an arrow as Hades was attempting to defend the city of Pylos. After he was shot, however, he traveled to Olympus to heal. Besides Heracles, the only other living people who ventured to the underworld were also heroes: Odysseus, Aeneas (accompanied by the Sibyl), Orpheus, to whom Hades showed uncharacteristic mercy at Persephone's urging, as she was moved by Orpheus' music, Theseus with Pirithous, and, in a late romance, Psyche. None of them were pleased with what they witnessed in the realm of the dead.

Much more on the underworld is found in the Historically Speaking issues of March and April 2024 (<https://ouranianpublishing.com/historically-speaking-2024-1>)



Persephone and Hades: tondo of an Attic red-figured [kylix](#), ca. 440–430 BC

Red figure volute krater with scene of the underworld, follower of the Baltimore Painter, Hermitage



Pinax with Persephone and Hades Enthroned, 500-450 BC, Greek, Locri Epizephirii, Mannella district, Sanctuary of Persephone, terracotta – Cleveland Museum of Art