

## Hades, Charon, Cerberus and the Underworld

### The Underworld

- The Underworld was composed of three parts/areas: the Asphodel Fields [or Meadows], the Elysian Fields and Tartarus.
- The Asphodel Fields [Meadows] was the place most dead people would go to. Here, the dead would become Shades, shadowy versions of the personalities they were when still alive.
- The Elysian Fields was the part of the Underworld reserved for those who were heroes while on earth. The place was described as a restful, peaceful and blissful place for souls.
- Tartarus was the place in Hades reserved for evil people, a place filled with punishments and suffering.
- Five rivers bordered the Underworld. These rivers were visible in the realm and in the world of the living as well. These were the Styx, Lethe, Acheron, Phlegethon and Cocytus.
- Charon, the Underworld's ferryman, rowed a boat to carry the dead to the Underworld through the river Styx, the river of hatred.
- The river Lethe was the river of forgetfulness and named after the goddess of oblivion and forgetfulness, Lethe. Cocytus was the river of wailing. Finally, the river Phlegethon was the river of fire that led the way to the depths of Tartarus.
- A sixth river, the Oceanus, encircled the world and marked the east edge of the underworld.

### Hades, God of the Underworld

**Hades** was the brother of two very powerful gods, Zeus and Poseidon. Long ago, they divided up the world. Hades became the ruler of the Underworld, Poseidon ruled the sea, and Zeus became the king of the gods and ruled over the land.

Hades' goal was to increase the number of spirits in his underground kingdom. He ruled over funerals and ensured that the dead were buried properly and respectfully. However, once their spirit entered the Underworld, he made sure that they couldn't leave.

Everyone hated Hades. He was often pictured as strict and mysterious. He was a fair ruler, though, and only got angry when the souls of the dead tried to escape.

Hades wore a helmet which could make him invisible.

### Charon, the ferryman.

A ferryman is someone who rows a boat to take passengers somewhere. Charon ferried souls to the Underworld. He wore a hat and cloak and stands in his boat holding a pole which he used to push the boat along. He had a crooked nose, a beard, and was very ugly.

To get to the Underworld, souls had to pay Charon to take them. This is why the Ancient Greeks buried their dead with money and treasure.

### Cerberus

Hades had a guard dog named Cerberus. Cerberus had three heads. The dog patrolled the entrance to the Underworld, making sure that the dead didn't exit, and the living didn't enter.

Cerberus would welcome the spirits of the dead but would eat anyone trying to pass into or out of the Underworld without permission.