

Classical Mythology

LLCU/CMLT 316.010/080



Class 12

The Realm of Hades

Dionysus and His Retinue

Readings for Thursday:

Classical Mythology 304-335

Brief comments about Examination 2 next class

The Realm of **Hades**: From Life to Death



Death



[http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/9/9e/Gela_Painter_-_Black-Figure_%22Pinax%22_\(Plaque\)_-_Walters_48225.jpg](http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/9/9e/Gela_Painter_-_Black-Figure_%22Pinax%22_(Plaque)_-_Walters_48225.jpg)

The Afterlife

Homer's *Odyssey* (8th century BCE)



The Afterlife

Necromancy: sacrificing black rams



The Afterlife

Katabasis: descent into underworld



Odysseus' Reanimation of the Dead

- .The phantoms he sees in the underworld appear confused/senseless
- .Dead require blood (sacrifice) to be reanimated
- .Confusion in the text: how does Odysseus access these ghosts? (necromancy – summoning the spirits - vs. *katabasis* – descent into the underworld)

Odysseus' Reanimation of the Dead

.Important figures:

.Elpenor: Crewman on Odysseus' ship; fell off a roof in Circe's palace; forgotten and denied entrance into Hades

.Tiresias (prophet)

.Achilles: despised afterlife

.Agamemnon: murdered by wife Clytemnestra

.Ajax: committed suicide because of Odysseus

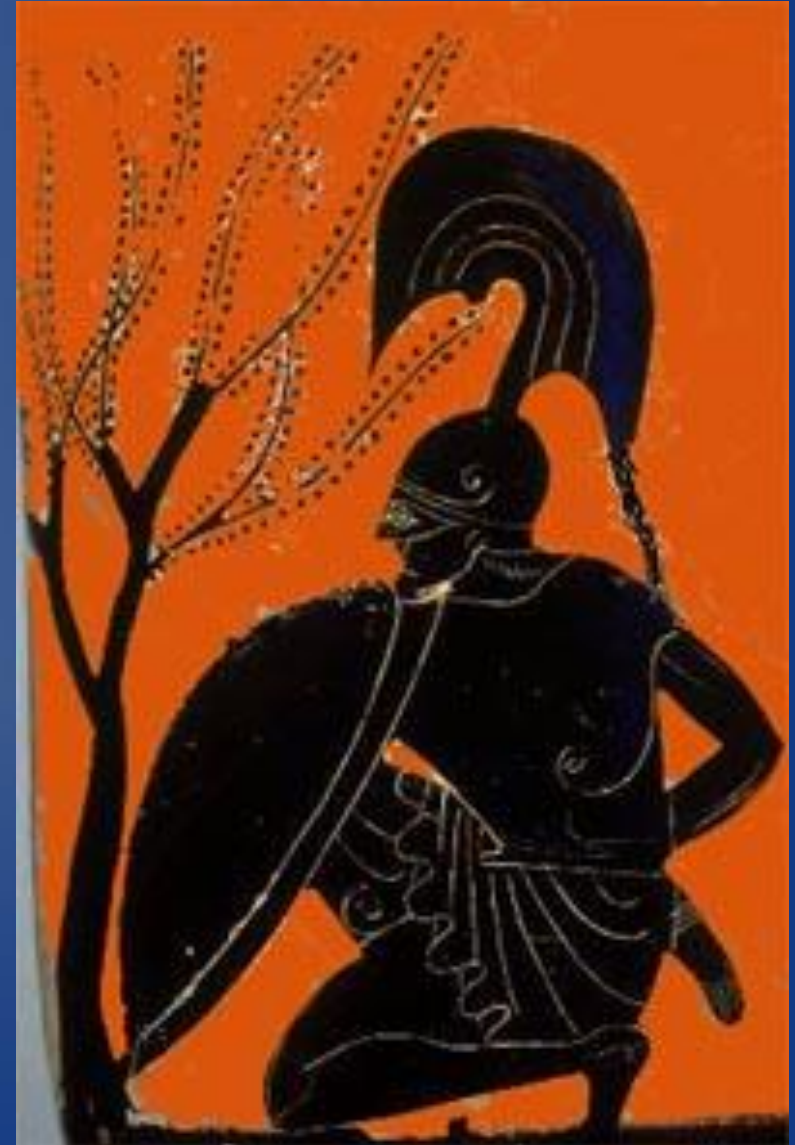
Odysseus' Reanimation of the Dead

• **Achilles** to Odysseus:

• “I would rather be the poorest man on Earth than prince of the Underworld”

• I.e. Live life to the fullest here on Earth; there is little for us beyond

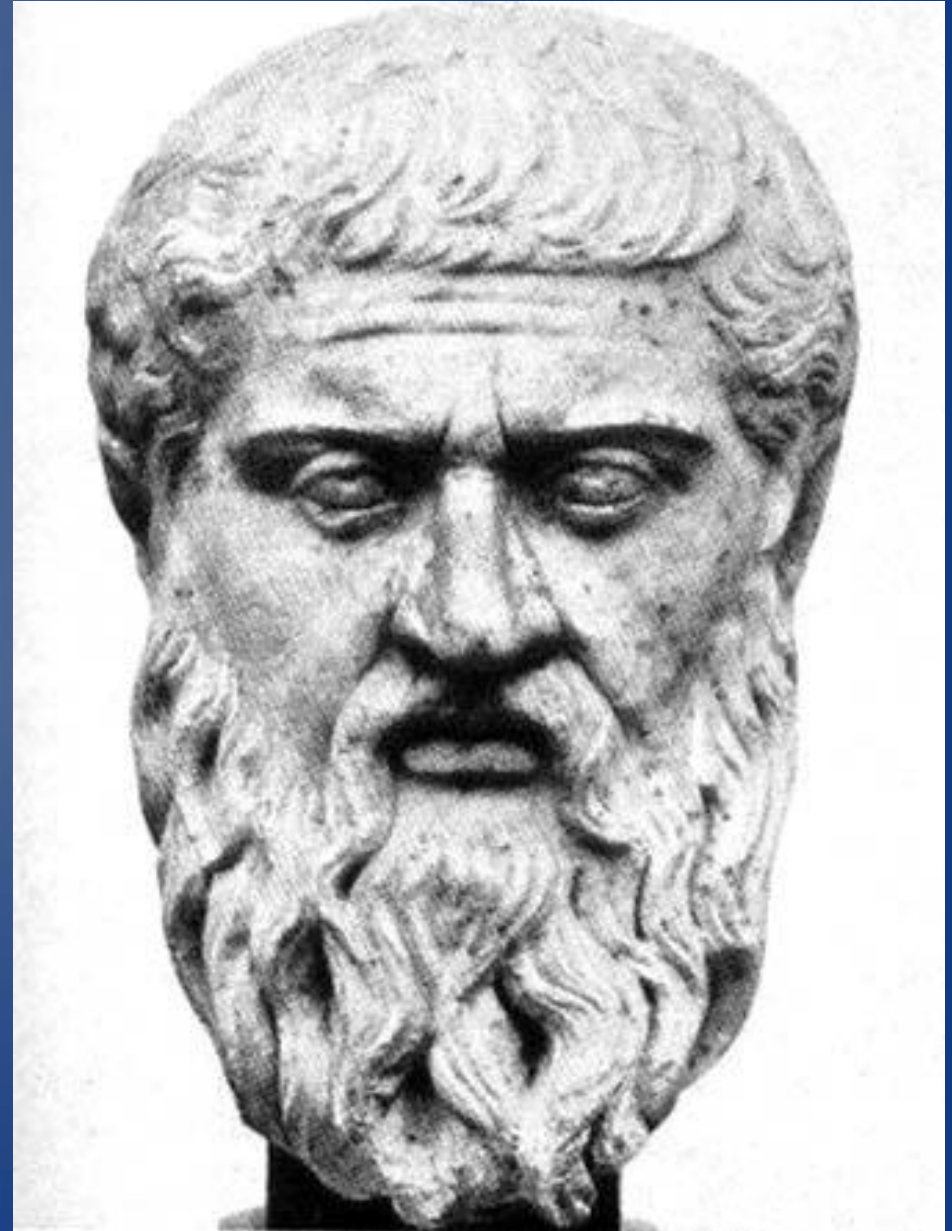
• (Except for those in the Elysium Fields, a rare happy place in the Underworld)



Another version

Plato's **Myth of Er**

- A story in his *Republic*
- **Er** a soldier who died in battle
- When recovered 10 days later, his body did not show signs of decomposition
- Awoke 2 days later on his funeral pyre
- Relates the story of what he saw



Plato's Myth of Er

Plato's Myth of Er

Path up to heavens and down to Underworld

Those that live a good life temporarily go up; those living a bad life go down

In underworld, repay crimes in this world 10 times over for 1000 years

All drink from the river Lethe (Forgetfulness) – some more, some less



Myth of Er

- .Example of myth 'creation' (or synthesis)
- .Messenger from the dead (Er)
- .Death and Rebirth (*metempsychosis*) – Pythagorean Cult
- .Reward and Punishment – Orphic Cult
- .Selection of lots for reincarnation - democracy

Realm of Hades as a Literary Trope

- .Readers/audience expected to hear about certain individuals, e.g.:
- .Charon (ferryman)
- .Minos (judge of souls)
- .Cerberus (3-headed dog)
- .Furies (Erinyes) vengeful beings – blood guilt

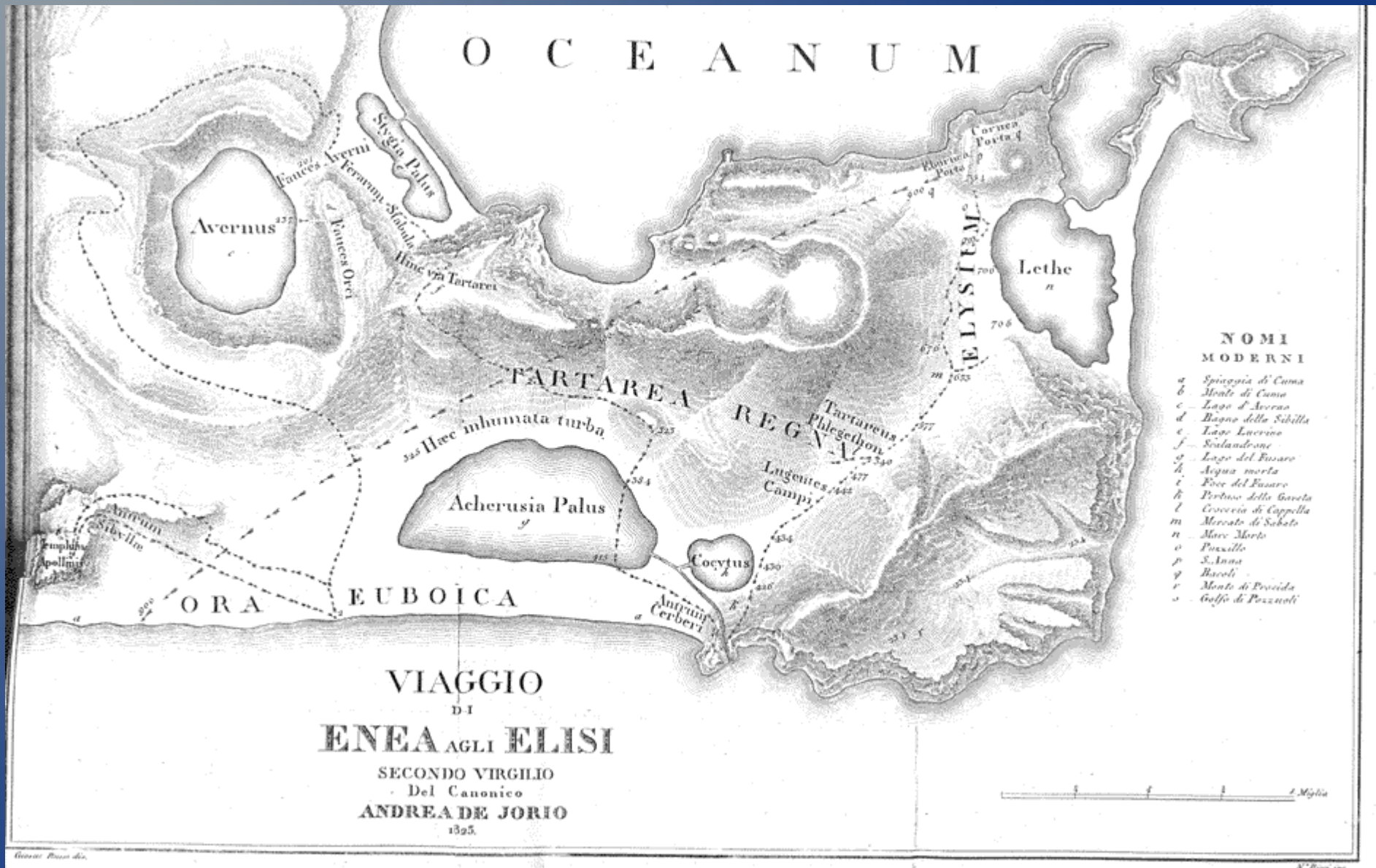
- .Sisyphus
- .Tantalus
- .Ixion
- .Tityus

Realm of Hades as a Literary Trope

And the rivers:

- .Acheron – river of pain
- .Cocytus – river of wailing
- .Lethe – river of forgetfulness
- .Phlegethon – river of fire
- .**Styx** – river of hate (best known)

Map of Virgil's Hades Andrea de Jorio (1825)



Dionysus and his Retinue:

A god of life and death

Dionysus:

.Son of Zeus and Semele
(Thebes)

.god of vegetation (esp.
wine)

.associated with ecstatic
.behaviour



Dionysus:

- .Sometimes middle aged
- .Icons:
- .Thyrsus (pine cone staff)
- .Cup / vines (wine)
- .Leopard/tiger



Dionysus:

- .Often depicted young
- .Long hair
- .Sometimes has a 'non-Greek' look - exotic



Dionysus: Thyrsus



<http://iris.haverford.edu/athens/files/2009/08/thyrsus-291x300.jpg>

Dionysus: A god of life and death

Walter Otto:

‘His duality has manifested itself to us in the antitheses of ecstasy and horror, infinite vitality and savage destruction. At the height of ecstasy all of these paradoxes suddenly unmask themselves and reveal their names to be Life and Death.’

Dionysus: Birth (Zeus and Semele)



<https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/e/e3/Rubens-Death-of-Semele.jpg/1280px-Rubens-Death-of-Semele.jpg>

Dionysus: Birth (Zeus and Semele)



Dionysus: Birth (Zeus and Semele)

- Semele a princess of Thebes
- Zeus visits her at night in mortal form (but says that he's Zeus)
- Hera jealous: comes down as an old lady to plant doubts in Semele's mind about who she's having sex with
- Semele makes Zeus promise to do her a favour: reveal his true form to her (swearing on Styx)



Dionysus: 2nd birth

- Semele turned to ash
- Zeus snatches Dionysus as a fetus and sews him into his thigh
- Dionysus therefore becomes “twice born”
- Sent away to be raised by nymphs



<http://www.theoi.com/image/K12.27Dionysos.jpg>

Dionysus: Wanderings

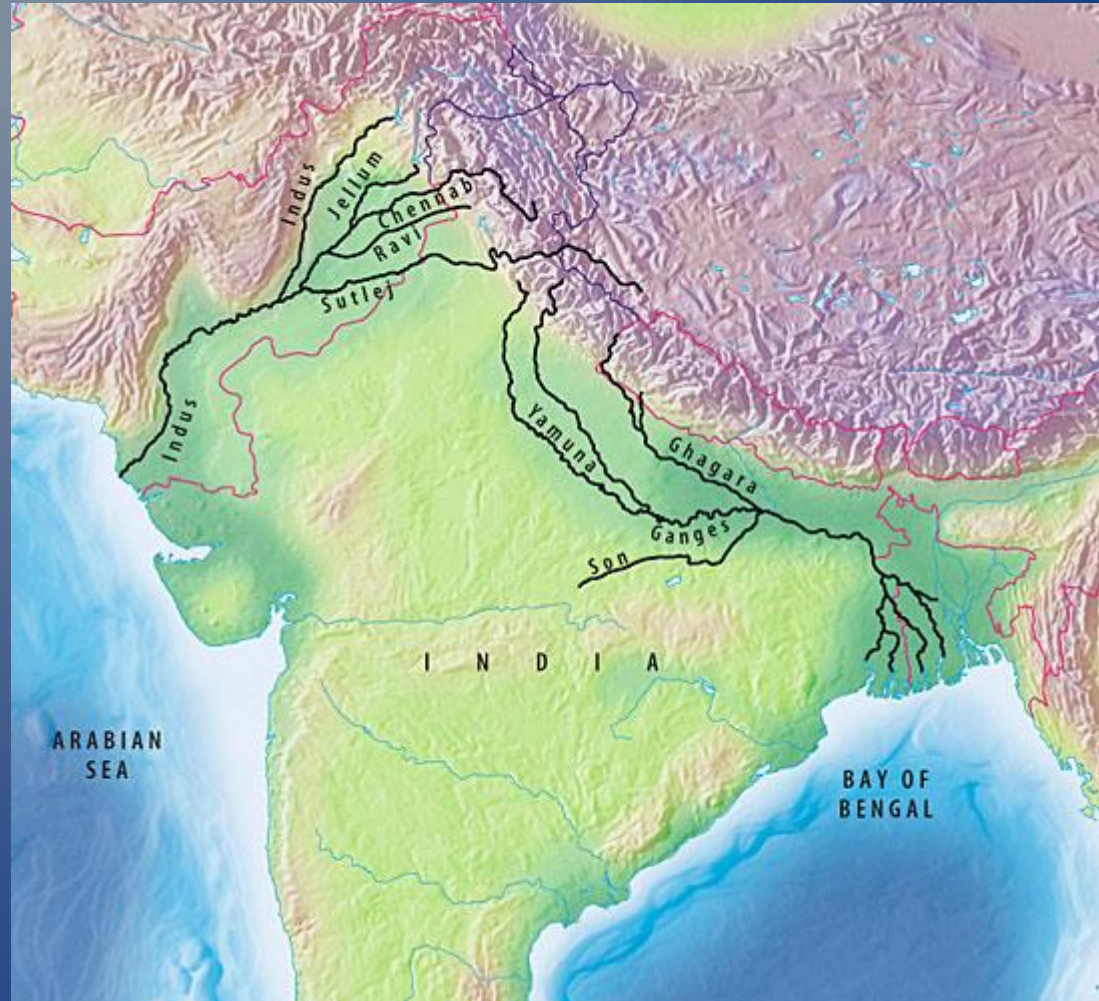
An old Etymology of his name:

.Dionysus = *Dio (god) of Nysa (city/mountain in India) – account from Alexander the Great's travels*

.Nysa also associated with Mt. Kithairon (Boiotia, north of Athens) – the older tradition

Dionysus: Wanderings

Indus River



http://www.whoiedu/cms/images/oceanus/2006/5/map1-en_24290.jpg

Dionysus: The Foreign god (?)



http://2.bp.blogspot.com/-fVnv4HHlaLU/UQ8Ym6p0m_I/AAAAAAAAAB0U/6Yj_pvWvAlQ/s400/dionysus-panther04.jpg