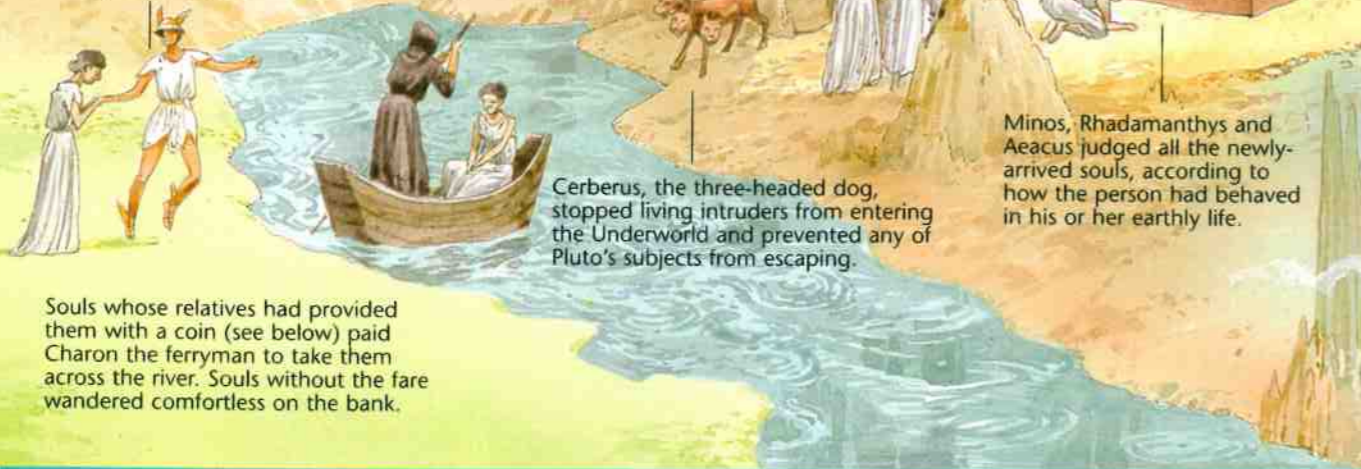


Death and the Underworld

The Greeks believed that when people died, their souls went to the Underworld. This was an underground kingdom, sometimes known as Hades, which was ruled by the god Pluto. Many caves and fissures on Earth were thought to be entrances to the Underworld. The god Hermes guided souls through these entrances to a river known as the Styx, which marked the boundary between the world of the living and the Underworld. This picture gives some idea of what the Greeks thought would happen to them in the Underworld.

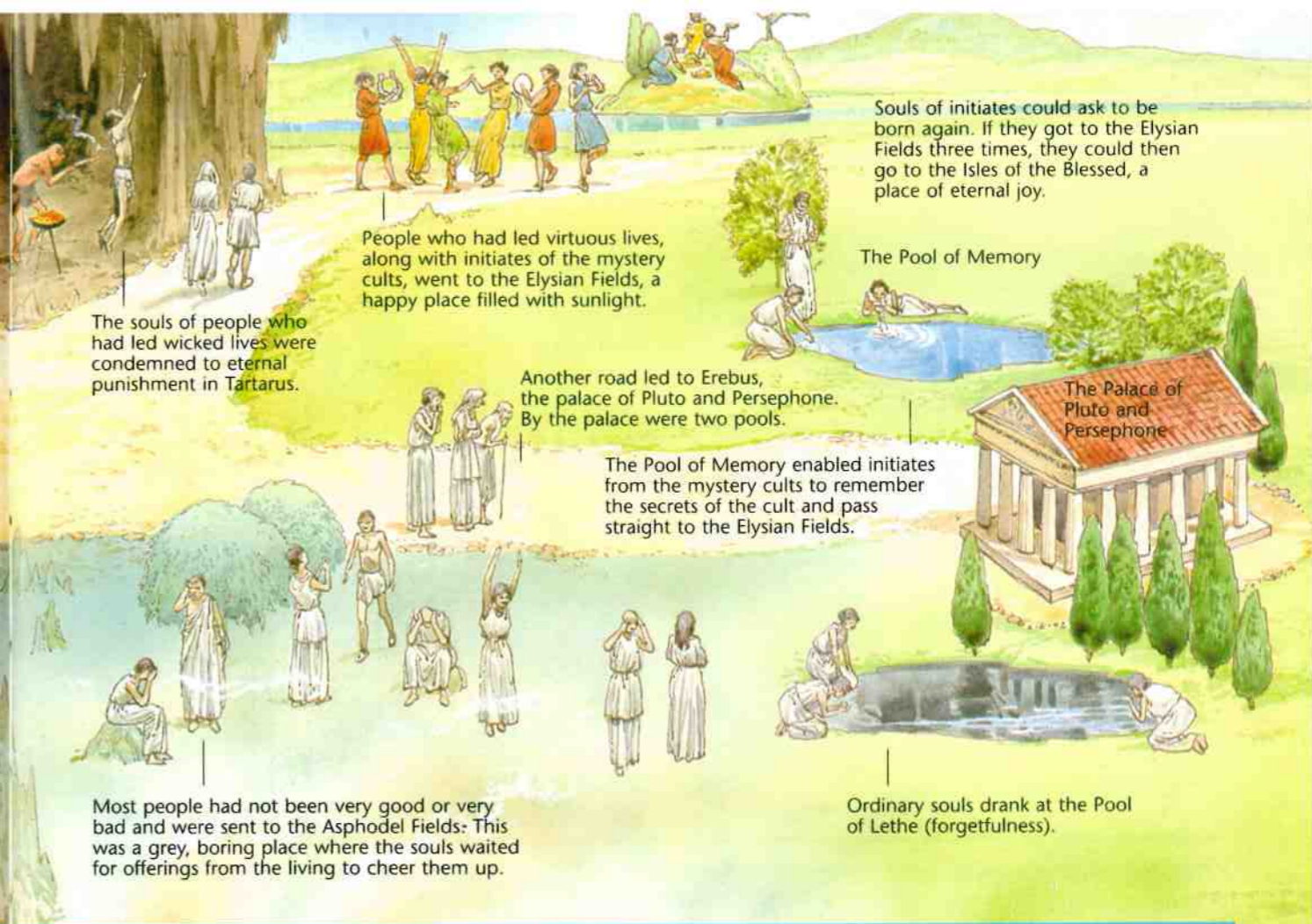
Souls were guided to the banks of the Styx by Hermes.



Cerberus, the three-headed dog, stopped living intruders from entering the Underworld and prevented any of Pluto's subjects from escaping.

Minos, Rhadamanthys and Aeacus judged all the newly-arrived souls, according to how the person had behaved in his or her earthly life.

Souls whose relatives had provided them with a coin (see below) paid Charon the ferryman to take them across the river. Souls without the fare wandered comfortless on the bank.



People who had led virtuous lives, along with initiates of the mystery cults, went to the Elysian Fields, a happy place filled with sunlight.

The souls of people who had led wicked lives were condemned to eternal punishment in Tartarus.

Another road led to Erebus, the palace of Pluto and Persephone. By the palace were two pools.

The Pool of Memory enabled initiates from the mystery cults to remember the secrets of the cult and pass straight to the Elysian Fields.

Souls of initiates could ask to be born again. If they got to the Elysian Fields three times, they could then go to the Isles of the Blessed, a place of eternal joy.

The Pool of Memory

The Palace of Pluto and Persephone

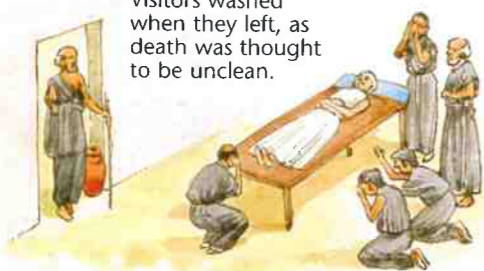
Ordinary souls drank at the Pool of Lethe (forgetfulness).

Most people had not been very good or very bad and were sent to the Asphodel Fields: This was a grey, boring place where the souls waited for offerings from the living to cheer them up.

Funerals

Greek funerals were designed to ensure that the soul arrived safely in the Underworld. Many Greeks believed that, without the proper rituals, the soul would wander on the banks of the Styx and would not be able to enter the Underworld.

Visitors washed when they left, as death was thought to be unclean.



When someone died, their relatives and friends wore black and women cut their hair short as signs of mourning. The dead body lay in state at home for a day, so that people could come to pay their respects. The body was carefully dressed and arranged. A coin was placed in its mouth to enable the soul to pay the fare to cross the Styx.

Even after the funeral, the continued well-being of the dead depended to some extent on the care of the living. Families made offerings to their ancestors on the anniversaries of their births and deaths, and at special festivals for the dead.



Wealthy families hired musicians and professional mourners to join the procession.

Early on the morning of the funeral a procession formed at the dead person's house. The body was either placed on a cart or on a bier carried by the relatives and friends. The body was then taken to the cemetery. The procession was a noisy affair, as it was the custom to express grief publicly with tears, sobbing and wailing.

Tombs

Cemeteries were usually situated outside the city walls. Each family had its own burial plot, where members of the family were either buried or cremated. Early tombs were marked with a plain marble slab, topped with a sculptured decoration. A rich person would be buried in a stone coffin known as a *sarcophagus*.



Plain marble slabs like these were set up to mark early tombs.

A *sarcophagus* often had elaborately carved reliefs on the sides.



It was the custom to bury personal belongings, such as jewels and clothes, with the dead person. Food, drink and bronze or pottery vessels were also buried for the soul to use in the afterlife. By the 5th century BC, people who could afford it built elaborate tombs which looked like small temples. These were often decorated with portraits of the dead person carved on stone slabs, known *stelae*.



Stele

Lekythoi

The women of the family continued to bring offerings to the tomb after the funeral. Perfume was often offered to the dead. It was carried in vases known as *lekythoi*.

