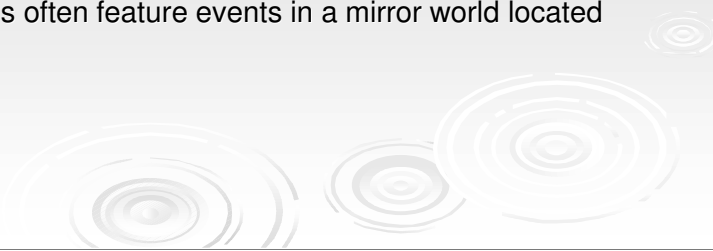


Ancient Roots: Mythology and Us

- Week Seven: Body and Soul
- Bob Bohall
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- Copies of slides: Check the OLLI Website Doc Store or if that is not helpful send me a note on what you would like and I will be glad to send you copies of slides

Body and Soul

- The **mythological imagination** everywhere tends to see the visible world of daily life as containing, or in some way associated with, an **invisible essence** which could be called “**soul**” or “**spirit**.”
- It can be envisaged as the **sun, the earth**, the moon and spectacular features of the **landscape** such as mountains, lakes or even large trees.
- Sometimes the invisible spirit counterpart of the everyday world would be thought of as a **place apart**.
- Melanesian myths often feature events in a mirror world located **underground**.



Body and Soul 2

- **Celtic** tradition tells of an **Otherworld**, a place of magic, mystery and danger, which can be entered through caves or lakes and is sometimes located in the west.
- **Irish and Welsh** depictions vary, but it tends to be land where there is no sickness, old age or death, where happiness lasted forever, and a hundred years is as one day; sort of an Eden.
- The human soul is often thought of as a normally invisible duplicate of the visible body, and is sometimes called a “**shadow**.”
- Germanic folklore makes frequent mention of this eerie “**double**” or *doppelganger*, which has the disconcerting habit of suddenly manifesting itself, often far away from its material counterpart (generally considered evil or a bad omen).

The Soul's Journey

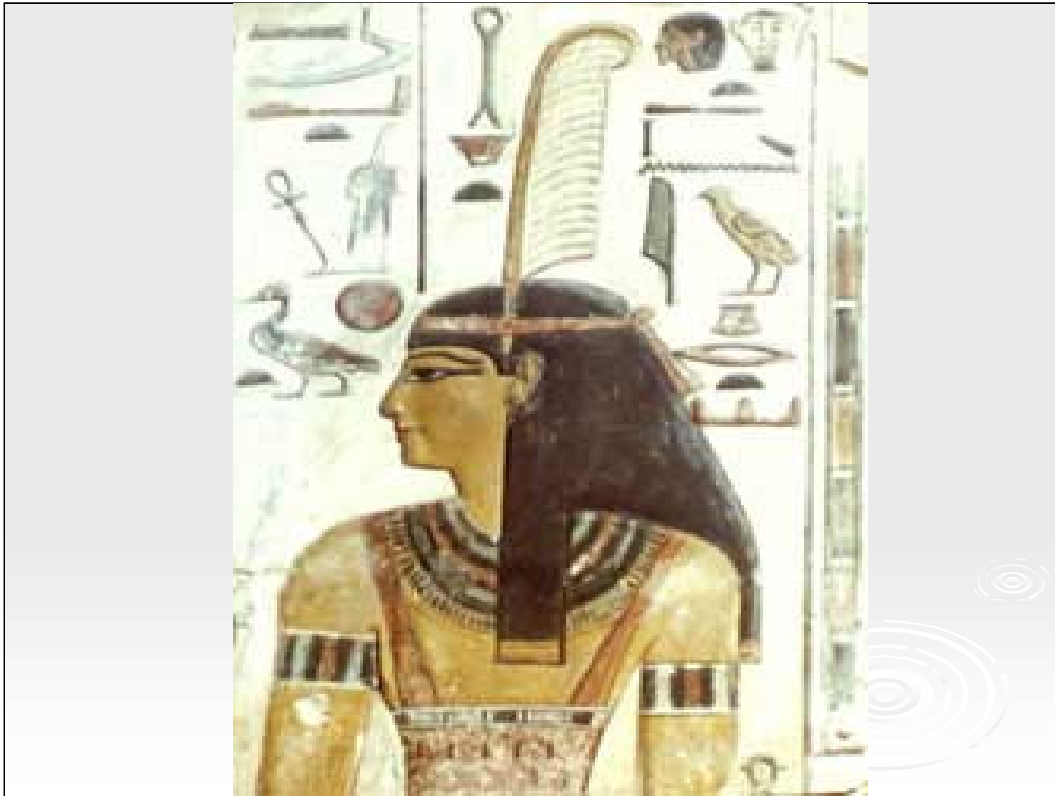
- Many traditions picture the **journey of the human soul** after death as a descent into the underworld, the realm of the dead.
- In many parts of Africa it is believed the souls of the departed spend a **certain amount of time in this underworld** before deciding to be born again in the upper world of human life.
- Other traditions tell of a fearful **ordeal of judgment** that awaits the newly departed soul.
- In Japanese myth those found guilty of grievous sin are consigned to one of sixteen regions of an infernal domain called Jigoku with eight cold and eight hot hells.
- The soul's **journey is often provisioned** by the living. For example, the Greek and Roman dead were given not only money to be ferried across the Styx, but also confectionary for Cerberus, the terrifying three-headed dog which guarded the entrance to Hades.



An ancient Etruscan vase from Caere (ca 525 BC) depicting Hercules presenting Cerberus (three headed hound that guards the gates of Hades) to Eurystheus. After Heracles died Eurystheus tried to kill all his children who had fled to Athens. Eurystheus was soundly defeated, and he and his sons were killed.

The Soul's Journey 2

- The myths of ancient Egypt paint a vivid picture of the **soul being examined** by 42 judges in the throne room of Osiris, lord of the underworld.
- **Those who fail** to prove that they have lived virtuous lives are **devoured by a monster**.
- Whereas, the fortunate souls who **pass the test** when their hearts or consciences are **weighed against the feather** of the goddess Maat, deity of justice and truth, join the gods in their eternal battle against the serpent of chaos, Apep.



Egypt Old Kingdom (ca 2780-2250 BCE) Concept of truth, balance, order, law, morality, and justice. Maat was also personified as goddess regulating the stars, seasons, and the actions of both mortals and the deities, who set the order of the universe from chaos at the moment of creation



Egyptian Book of the Dead written on papyrus showing the weighing of the heart in the Duat (underworld) using the feather of Maat (goddess and the personification of truth and justice) as the measure in balance. Ostrich feather represents truth.

The Soul's Journey 3

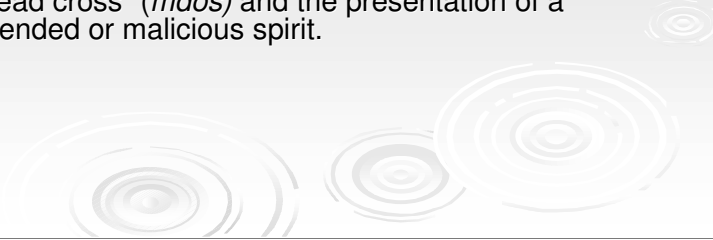
- Greek tradition places the underworld **beyond the great river called Ocean** which surrounds the world, or deep inside the earth.
- But as we have also seen, to reach the **domain called Hades** (which was also the name of its divine ruler, a brother of Zeus), the newly departed souls have to be ferried across the infernal river Styx by Charon, the boatman.
- Once there, as in Egypt, the Greek souls were judged and then **punished or rewarded** accordingly.



Hades, labeled as “Plouton”, “The Rich One”, bears a cornucopia on an Attic red-figure amphora, ca 470 BC. The term *hades* is parallel to Hebrew *skoal* (grave of the dirt pit) and refers to the abode of the dead. The Christian concept *hell* is more akin to the Greek concept of *Tartarus*, a gloomy part of *hades* used as a dungeon of torment and suffering.

Shamans and Death

- Centuries before Buddhism came to Tibet, a shamanistic culture held sway over both Tibet and Mongolia.
- Only a **shaman in trance** had the ability to travel the three realms (special places on **earth, heavens and subterranean labyrinths**) and understand the intricate workings of the universe.
- He could divine the causes of illness and misfortune, or **retrieve lost souls abducted by spirits**.
- It was he who recommended the **appropriate sacrifice**, typically the weaving of a “thread cross” (*mdos*) and the presentation of a ransom to the offended or malicious spirit.

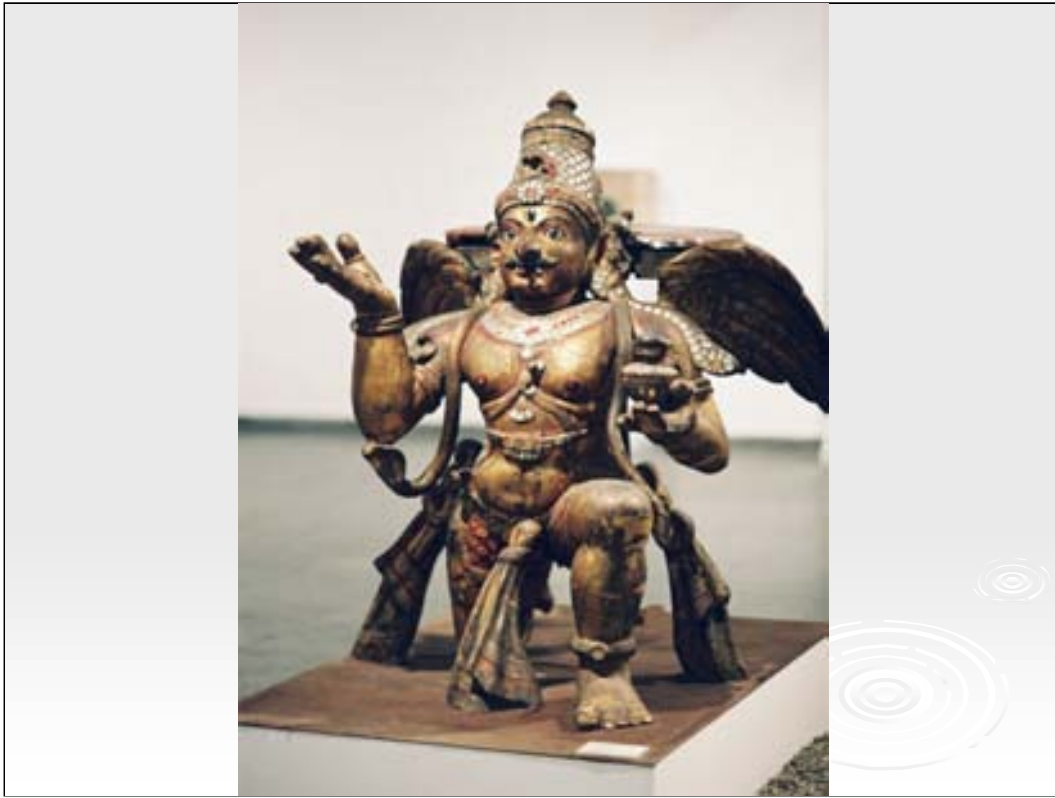




Tibetan Dragon, not a thread cross

Shamans and Death 2

- Under the influence of Buddhism, the chaotic forces of nature, variously feared and honored by the shamanic traditions, were made to fit harmoniously into the Indian cosmological model.
- **Old shamanic rites were adopted by the Buddhist clergy and heavily overlaid with Buddhist liturgy and symbolism.**
- Monks adorned their temples with such archaic paraphernalia as the shaman's **divination arrow**, his magic mirror and precious pieces of fine rock crystal.
- From the trimmings on the old shaman's tunic were derived theatrical costumes for the Buddhist **dances** of the eagle, stag, snow lion and skeleton.
- The **shaman eagle**, by which he once ascended to his **nest in the world tree**, became identified with the Indian **Garuda**.
- Buddhist priests often assumed the role of **oracular mouthpiece** for converted shamanic deities.
- They **appropriated the shaman's** bow and arrow or drum, and the broad, fur-trimmed hat and gown of the "black hat sorcerer" (*zhva nag*) festooned with shamanic symbols of the cosmic tree (world mountain), sun and moon, snake-like ribbons and the divination mirror, with trimmings of bone, fur and feathers.



Garuda, the [Vahana](#) of Lord [Vishnu](#), lesser Hindu deity, golden body, strong man, white face, red wings, eagle's beak and crown on head. Vishnu's mount. Symbol of impetuous violent force, of speed, and of martial prowess. In Buddhist mythology enormous predatory birds with intelligence and social organization



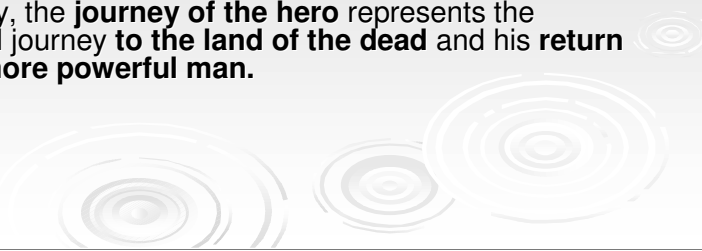
Padmasambhara stature in Hemis Monastary, Lakakh, India Brought Buddhism to Tibet in 8th Century, used tantric powers to subdue evil deities, utilized principle of not eliminating negative forces but redirecting them to fuel the journey toward spiritual awakening.



Yama Dharmapala, the Lord of Death is revered in Tibet as a guardian of spiritual practice and was likely revered before the conversion of Tibet from Bon to Buddhism. Field Museum, Chicago. Considered to have been the first mortal who died and espied the way to the celestial abodes, and in the virtue of precedence he became ruler of the departed.

The Other World

- The **Other World** may lie beyond an impenetrable forest on the other side of a fiery river, or beyond or below the sea, or above or below the earth.
- To gain access to the “**thrice tenth kingdom**” (as it is termed in a East Slavonic folktale), it may be necessary to scale a precipitous mountain or descend into a cave or hole in the ground.
- In his trance, the **soul of the shaman** was believed to fly to the world above or descend to **accompany the soul of a dead person**.
- In other mythology, the **journey of the hero** represents the shaman's magical journey **to the land of the dead** and his **return as a wiser and more powerful man**.

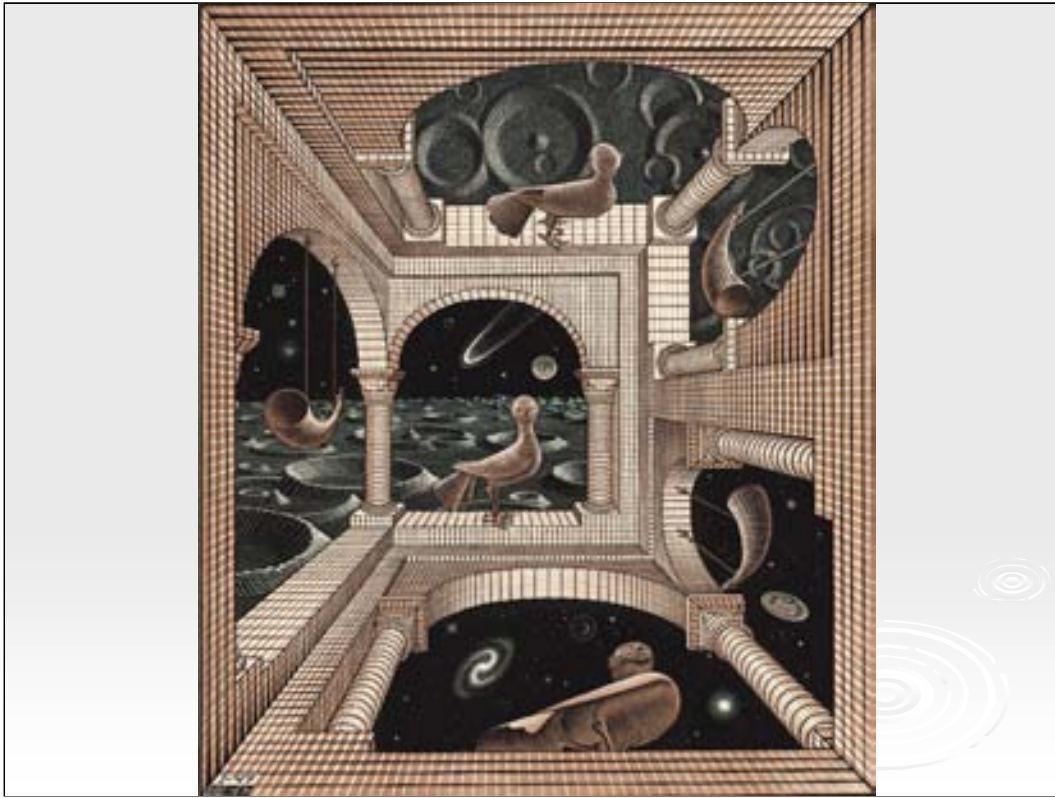


The Other World 2

- Another theory sees the source of journeys to an Other World in initiation rites, in which the initiate was believed to **die before being reborn** into a new stage of existence.
- Certainly the hero must face terrifying danger before emerging from the Other World.
- Furthermore, the belief in **death as a journey** involving a climb seems to have been preserved in parts of Russia in the custom of **saving one's nail clippings** so they would turn into talons after death.



Otherworld



Otherworld modern

Vision Quests and Guardian Spirits

- **Direct contact** with the world of gods and spirits is of great importance to most traditional Native American cultures.
- It is achieved principally through the “**vision quest**,” a process of solitary fasting and prayer in a remote place.
- Those whose **visionary experience** occurs may go on to become **shamans, healer-priests**, who are the chief intermediaries between human beings and the sacred world.
- While many may acquire power, only the most powerful will become full shamans, others without the full range of shamanistic attributes are usually termed “**medicine men**.”





Yupik shaman exorcising evil spirits from a sick boy, Nushajak, Alaska 1890's

Vision Quests and Guardian Spirits 2

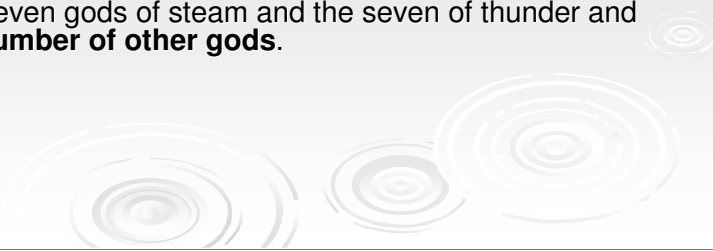
- The relationship between a **shaman and the spirit world** amounts almost to a personal religion, while the account of the first meeting with the spirits becomes the **shaman's personal myth**.
- The power of this myth is important for establishing the shaman's credentials with the tribe, on behalf of which his or her skills are used to locate game, find lost objects and, above all, treat the sick.
- Shamans can enter a **trance** at will and journey to the **sacred world**, the **land of the dead**.
- Visible representations of the spirits are found in the shaman's "**medicine bundle**," a collection of artifacts of spiritual significance used in curing rituals.
- Symbols of the spirits are also depicted on clothing and on ritual and spiritual objects.



Ojibwa medicine man preparing a herbal remedy

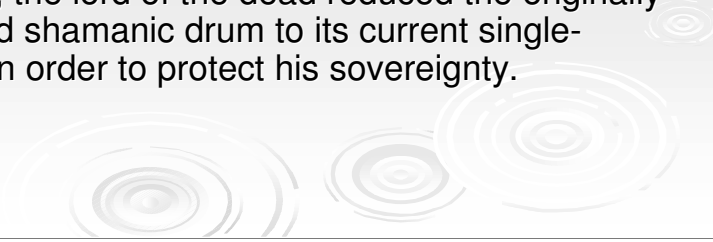
Encounters with the Spirit World

- **Mongolian shamans** have to this day woven into their costumes knowledge of light and darkness, of the **deities above and below** and of spirits both benevolent and malign.
- While resting in the world tree, fledgling shamans learn **the way of sacrifice** to ensure harmony and order within the web of life.
- They return to men with a knowledge of the five gods of wind, the five gods of lightning, the four gods of the corners, the five of the horizon, the five of entrance and the eight of borders.
- They know the seven gods of steam and the seven of thunder and the **countless number of other gods**.



Encounters with the Spirit World 2

- For Mongolian shamans, knowledge of the gods gives them great power.
- Early shamans were apparently so powerful that they **could call back the souls of those long deceased**, so that the **lord of the dead** feared that his realm would be emptied around him.
- In a fit of rage, the lord of the dead reduced the originally double-headed shamanic drum to its current single-headed style in order to protect his sovereignty.





Mongolian shaman with mythological powers to bring back the souls of those long deceased



Mongolian Shaman

Spirits, Sacrifice and Sacred Journeys

- Willis notes that from the earliest times, the ancient South American civilizations shared common features in their religious outlook and mythic beliefs.
- Sacred **journeys to mountains and temple-pyramid shrines** were evidently important in prehistoric times, and indeed continue to be so today.
- The most famous ancient pilgrimage site was the shrine of Pachacamac on Peru's central coast.
- Here a **priesthood** administered the worship of an earth and creator deity, made **human and animal sacrifices** and received oracular predictions in return.
- Pachacamac was considered to be the supreme god by the coastal peoples. When the Incas conquered the area, they acknowledged his importance by permitting his shrine alongside a temple to their sun god, Inti.

Inca Death

- Like many ancient Andean people before them, the Incas viewed death in two ways.
- One was **biological death**, when the body ceased functionally and was cremated, buried, or mummified.
- The other was **social death**, when certain privileged individuals remained active in the minds, souls, and daily lives of the living until they were forgotten or replaced by other prominent figures.
- Some **ancestors were never forgotten**, however. They were considered heroic figures who gave the Inca their identity.
- Their **corpses were mummified, revered, and saved as sacred objects**.
- Ancestor veneration frightened the Spanish crown and clergy, who destroyed the burial chambers, or *huacas*, of these corpses in an attempt to undermine the ancestral foundation of the Incan empire.



The Pachacamac Shrine 40 km southeast of Lima in the Valley of the Lurin river. Several pyramids have been uncovered, at least 17 identified, Dates back to 800-1450 but early artifacts back to 200

Spirit Worlds – South American Tropical Rain Forest Societies

- In the world-view of tropical forest societies, everything that happens has a spirit-world cause or consequence. **All-powerful spirits** are dangerously ambivalent, and the shaman has a key role as intermediary with the supernatural world.
- By virtue of his ability to persuade or cajole dangerous spirits on equal terms, the **shaman acts as sorcerer, curer, diviner, dispenser of justice and upholder of the moral code**. He often contacts his spirit activities in **nocturnal séance**.
- **Hallucinatory visions**, such as those produced by *ayahuasca* or *viho* snuff, are the shaman's window to the spirit world, permitting him to see and understand the nature of things, explain events and suggest courses of action.
- In some societies, the **shaman's powers remain effective after his death**, continuing to protect his community from malevolent spirits or from shamans from other villages.



South American Shaman, details unknown

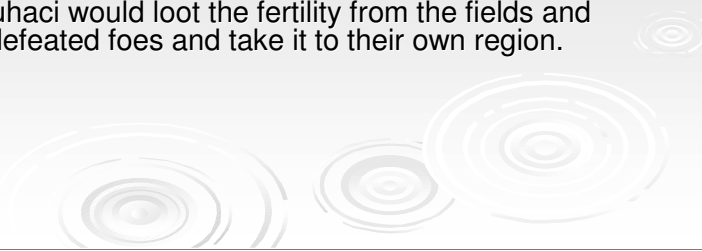
Spirit Souls of the Departed The Zduhac

- The idea that the **soul is separable from the body** and **can emerge during sleep** as well as death, is found among all Slavs.
- Called Zduhac by the Serbs, souls gather on mountain tops and do battle with each other.
- Victory in these battles bring prosperity to the sleeping owner, but if his soul perishes he will never awaken.

Spirit Souls of the Departed

The Zduhac 2

- The zduhac was also a man with the inborn supernatural ability to chase away or destroy demons that brought bad weather.
- While asleep his **soul would leave his body** and **confront the demons**, and thus **protect his estate**, village or region **from adverse weather** by moving it along to some other area.
- The zduhaci (plural) of an area usually fought against the attacking zduaci of some other area who were bringing a **storm and hail clouds above their fields**.
- The victorious zduhaci would loot the fertility from the fields and livestock of their defeated foes and take it to their own region.

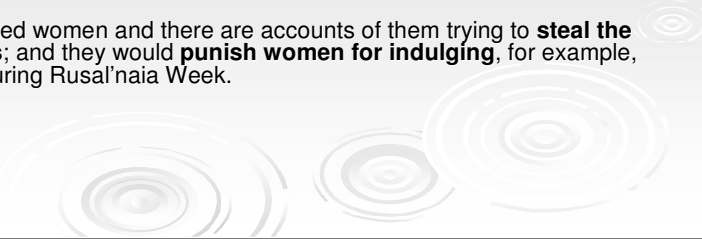




Cumulonimbus clouds are involved in thunderstorms, and can produce heavy rain and hail. It was believed that the movement of these clouds was directed by demons, who led them over fields to destroy crops

Rusalka

- In Russia **souls** can take on the **form** of the *kikimora*, a small female being with flowing hair who, like the *domovoi* (farmstead spirits), dwells in houses, but whose role as a **oracle of disaster** makes her a less welcome presence.
- After **death the windows and doors** of a peasant hut were left open to enable the **soul** in the form of a bird **to flutter in and out** unseen.
- Much better known is the **rusalka**. In Southern Russia and the Ukraine, the *rusalka* were commonly believed to be the **souls of infants or drowned maidens**.
- They loved singing and men who drowned were believed to have been lured by the song of the *rusalka*: taking the form of attractive maidens dressed in leaves, they were believed to emerge from the water into the fields and forest to fall on victims from behind and **tickle them to death**.
- In particular they disliked women and there are accounts of them trying to **steal the souls of unwary girls**; and they would **punish women for indulging**, for example, in **domestic duties** during Rusal'naia Week.





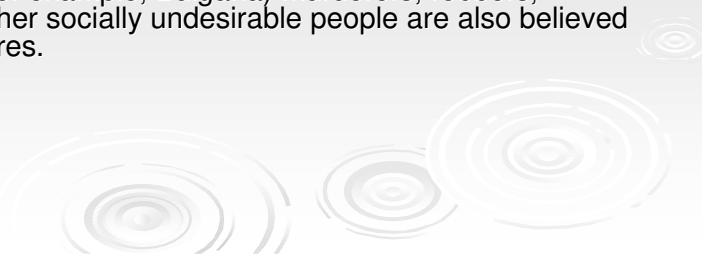
Rusalka by Ivan Bilibin 1934

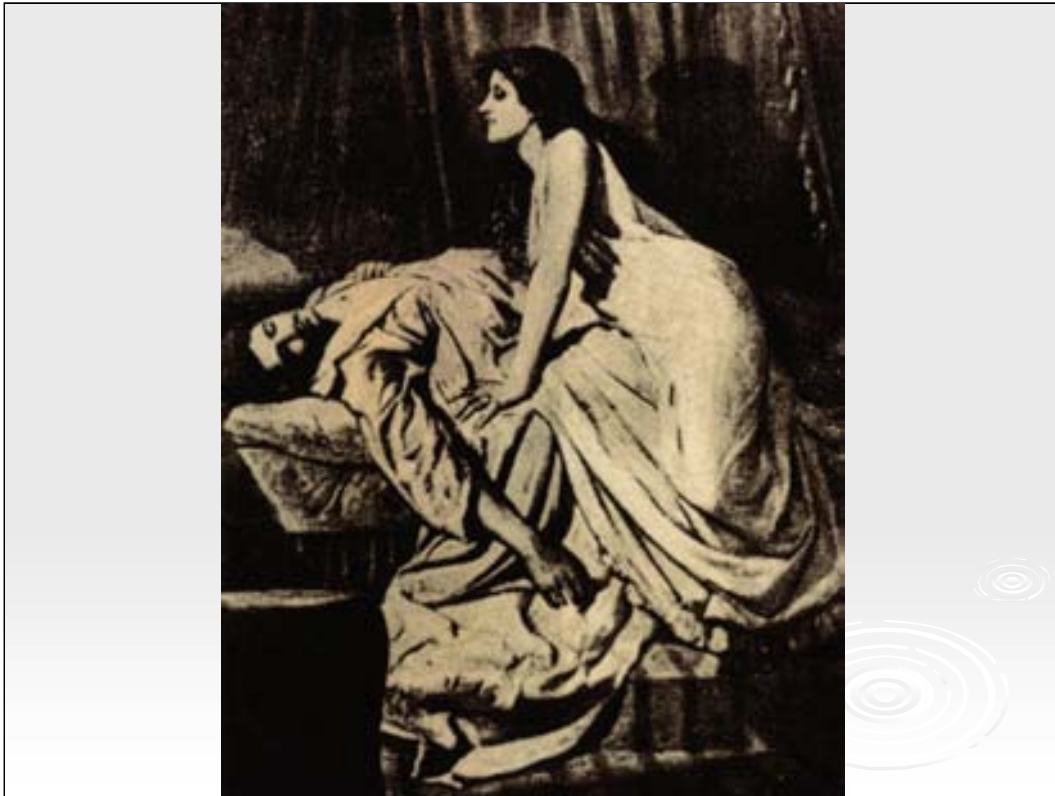


Rusalka by Ivan Kramskoi, The Mermaids 1871

Vampires

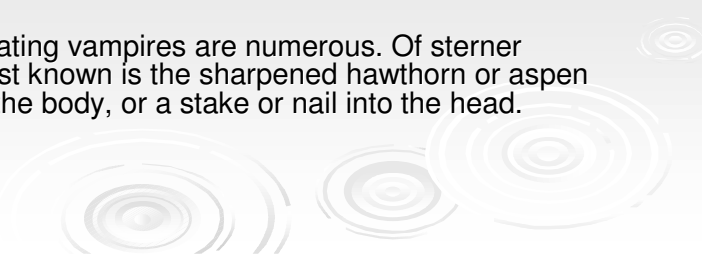
- Of all the mythical creatures familiar to the Slavs and their neighbors, none is better known than the vampire.
- **Vampires** are essentially manifestations of the revenant (one who **returns after death** or after a long absence) unclean dead.
- Certain categories of people become vampires after death, including **werewolves as well as sorcerers**, witches, sinners and the godless (which in Russia included heretics).
- In some places (for example, Bulgaria) murderers, robbers, prostitutes and other socially undesirable people are also believed to turn into vampires.





The Vampire by Philip Burne-Jones 1897

Vampires 2

- Even non-miscreants who die normally may turn into vampires, particularly when **burial rites have not been read** over them, or when they have met an **untimely death** (for example, by suicide).
 - People **conceived or born on a holy day, the stillborn, or those born with a horny growth** at the bottom of their backbone or with teeth are marked as vampires.
 - At midnight they visit houses to suck the blood of or have sex with the sleepers, often their own relations, who then waste away and die.
 - Methods of combating vampires are numerous. Of sterner measures, the best known is the sharpened hawthorn or aspen stake driven into the body, or a stake or nail into the head.
- 



Le Vampire, lithograph by R. de Moraine in Feval (1851-1852)

Immortality

- **Eternal life** is the concept of living in a physical or spiritual form for an infinite length of time.
- What form an unending human life would take, or **whether the soul exists and possesses immortality**, has been a major focus of religion and mythology.
- As we have seen, the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, one of the first literary works dating back to the 22nd century BCE, is primarily a quest of a hero seeking to become **immortal**.



The Theft of the Golden Apples

Asgard, Land of the Norse Gods

- One day when Odin, Loki and Hoenir tried to roast an ox, the meat would not cook properly.
- A great eagle (actually the giant Thiazi) offered to help for a share of the meal. When the ox was finally roasted the bird carried off the greater part of the meat.
- Loki in fury struck at him with a pole, but the eagle flew off with the pole fixed to his body and Loki still attached to the other end.
- Loki was dragged along the ground, and Thiazi would not free him until he swore he would bring him the goddess Idun and the **golden apples of immortality**.



The Theft of the Golden Apples

Asgard, Land of the Norse Gods 2

- When Loki reached Asgard, he lured the goddess with the golden apples out into the forest.
- Then the giant Thiazi in his eagle form swooped down and bore her off to the land of the giants.
- **Deprived of the apples, the gods began to grow old and wrinkled**, and when they discovered Loki's part in the theft they threatened to kill him unless he brought Idun back.
- So he flew as a falcon to Thiazi's hall, changed Idun into a nut and flew off with her in his claws.
- The giant pursued but was singed by a fire built by the gods. He fell to the ground and the gods slew him.
- The **precious apples** remained in Asgard, continuing to **ensure eternal youth for the gods**.



Idun (1905) by Bernard Evans Ward, “ever young”, fertility, Prose Edda, 11 golden apples, Norse



There sat Idun with her beautiful hair falling over her shoulders (1914) by Fiona F. Hart

The Severing of the Cord

- The first Tibetan **king not to return to heaven** by a cord at the end of his reign was Gri-gum; his was the **first royal tomb of the land**.
- Enraged by the **prophecy** of his shamanic soothsayer that **he was to die by the sword**, and determined to prove otherwise, Gri-gum challenged his ministers to a duel. The challenge was accepted by Lo-ngam, keeper of the king's horses.
- For superstitious reasons, Gri-gum went into battle surrounded by a herd of **yaks with bags of soot upon their backs**.

The Severing of the Cord 2

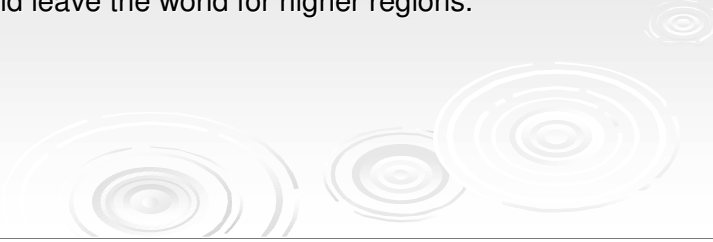
- Wearing a black turban fastened on his forehead with a shining mirror, Gri-gum had the corpses of a fox and a dog draped upon his shoulders.
- As soon as combat began, the sharp horns of the yaks burst the bags of soot and the air was filled with a dense cloud of black dust.
- Wildly waving his sword above his head, **Gri-gum severed the magic rope that connected him with heaven**, and inflicted no injury upon his opponent.
- Deserted by his protector gods who felt aggrieved at the stinking corpses on his shoulders, Gri-gum was slain by Lo-ngam who carefully aimed an arrow at the only thing visible in all that cloud of gloom – the shining mirror on the king's forehead.



Tibetan Yaks mammals highest regions of the world, cannot live below 10,000 feet, large lungs, blood as medicine tradition

Chang E and the Moon

- Yi was an expert archer who killed nine of ten suns, leaving one in the sky. The climate improved and he was a great hero.
- The **gods were angry and Yi and his wife Chang E were condemned to live on earth as mortals.**
- Yi went in **search of the elixir of eternal life** possessed by the Queen Mother of the West, a tyrant goddess who lived on Mount Kunlun (Taoist paradise).
- She gave him enough for two, but warned that if one person took it all he or she would leave the world for higher regions.



Chang E and the Moon 2

- Yi took the elixir back home to **Chang E**, who was missing **her** former trouble-free life in heaven.
- Having heard about the gods' warnings, she considered taking all of the elixir and returning to heaven.
- But she was worried that she would be condemned by the other deities for deserting her husband, so she consulted an astrologer.
- He suggested that she go to the moon, where she would be free of all the travails of mortal life and the accusations of the gods and goddesses.
- Moreover, he promised that when she arrived on the moon she would be wonderfully transformed.

Chang E and the Moon 3

- Chang E agreed with this plan.
- One day when Yi was out, **she stole the elixir** from where it was hidden in the rafters, **swallowed the whole bottle** and immediately floated to the moon.
- She tried to call out but could only croak because she had been turned into a toad.
- Her only companions on the moon were a hare, which continually pounded medicinal herbs with mortar, and an old man vainly trying to chop down a cassia tree.
- When Yi found his wife and the elixir missing, he knew at once what had happened.
- He realized that it **had been a mistake to attempt to escape from the mortal existence** which had been granted him.



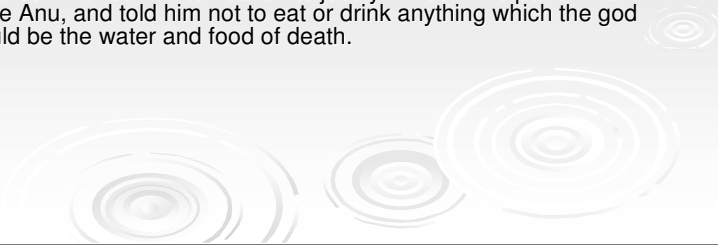


Chang E flies to the moon, from myths and legends of China, 1922 E.T. Werner



Adapa

- Willis reflects that Babylonian myths reflect an **unpredictable universe**, which poses critical questions for humanity: how can mankind deal with the unpredictable activities of the gods (the theme of the flood myths)?; **why does mankind not enjoy immortality, which the gods jealously reserve for themselves?**
- These two themes are subject to the tale of Adapa.
- One of the Seven Sages of prehistory, (powerful beings evoked in **magical rites**), Adapa was a priest of Ea in the city of Eridu.
- On one occasion, the south wind overturned his fishing boat. Adapa cursed the wind and prevented it from blowing, so that the moisture it brought was denied to the land.
- The supreme god Anu summoned him to heaven to justify himself. His patron Ea advised him to placate Anu, and told him not to eat or drink anything which the god offered him, as it would be the water and food of death.

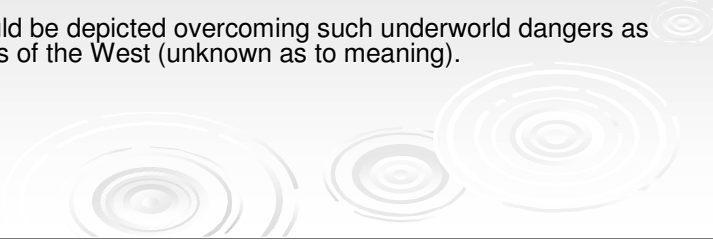


Adapa 2

- This, however was **deceptive counsel**, for Anu in fact presented Adapa with what was the **water and food of life**, which would **cause him to become immortal, like the gods**.
- When Adapa rejected the offer, Anu burst out laughing and sent him back to earth.
- The end of the story is missing, but it would seem that Anu **granted special privileges to Eridu and its priesthood**, but decreed disease and demons as the general lot of humankind; Adapa, however, would be able to combat these ills by his magical powers.
- The parallels with the Adam story are of interest. Biblical scholars have noted the first, or Priestly Account, was written in the 5th century BCE. The second, or Jehovistic Account, was written in the 8th century BCE.

Life After Death

- The Egyptian underworld was imagined as an elaborate landscape of rivers and islands, deserts and rivers of fire.
- To find a way through it, and to **placate or overcome the gods** and demons who inhabited it, the soul had to become a hero-magician.
- From the late 3rd millennium BCE, people of rank and wealth had **spells** inscribed on their **coffins**.
- Later these spells were developed into the body of texts now known as the **Book of the Dead**, and papyrus rolls containing illustrated selections from the book were buried with wealthy Egyptians from the 16th century BCE on.
- The deceased would be depicted overcoming such underworld dangers as the Four Crocodiles of the West (unknown as to meaning).

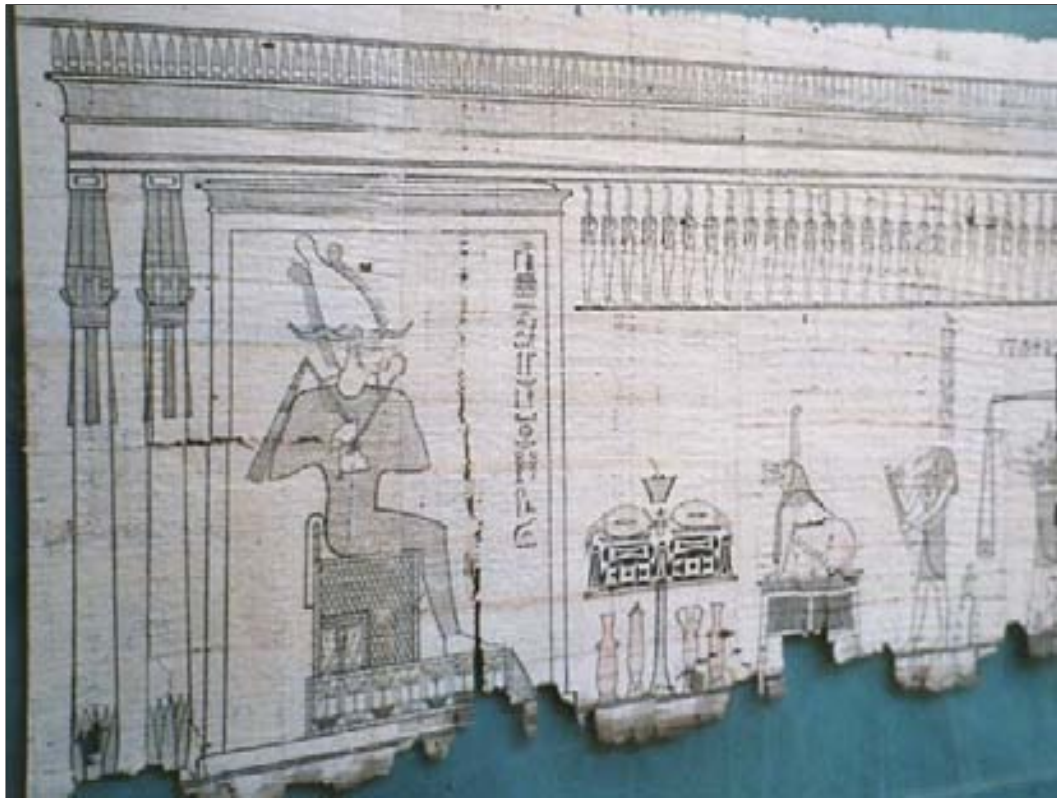




Papyrus perhaps the Egyptian Field of Reeds



White Desert Farafra



A section of the Egyptian Book of the Dead written on papyrus.

The Japanese Underworld

- The subterranean **world of the dead** is known also as the **Land of Darkness** (Yomi-tsu-kuni).
- The description on Yomi given in the Kojiki (Record of Ancient Matters and the oldest extant chronicle in Japan, dating from the early 8th century BCE) may reflect the late prehistoric Japanese practice of **burying the dead in stone-lined chambers deep** within large tumulzi.
- The expedient of **rolling a large boulder across the entrance to Yomi** perhaps reflects the **final sealing of such a tomb**. The boulder may also be a **metaphor for the insurmountable barrier between life and death**.



Late Jomon clay head, Shidanai Iwate Prefecture 1500-1000 BCE



Noge-Otsuka Kofun timulus Tokyo, Early 5th Century

Grecian Underworld

- The underworld is frequently encountered in Greek myth.
- Sisyphus, a king of Corinth, who **tried to cheat death**, was condemned by the gods forever to push a rock to the top of a mountain; every time he almost reached the top, it rolled back down again.
- An endless and unavailing labor.
- The **maddening nature of the punishment** was reserved for Sisyphus due to his hubristic belief that his cleverness surpassed that of Zeus and for his greediness and deceit.
- Tantalus was a king of Asia Minor, who in one account stole ambrosia and nectar from the gods; his internal punishment was to suffer **eternal thirst and hunger**, with food and drink always just beyond his reach – hence the word “tantalize.”



Persephone supervising Sisyphus in the Underworld, Attica black-figure amphora (vase, ca 530 BC, Staatliche Anikensammlungen museum).



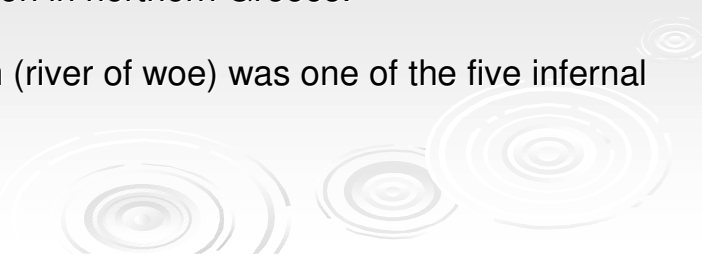
Tantalus initially known having been welcome to Zeus' table, misbehaved, stole ambrosia, nectar, and revealed secrets of the gods. Also other doings cannibalism, human sacrifice and infanticide.

Grecian Underworld 2

- The mythological **Grecian underworld** was where the **souls of dead mortals were judged and, if necessary, punished in the dark infernal regions of Erebos.**
- **Erebos (the personification of darkness and shadow)** filled in all the corners and crannies of the world or Tartaros (a deep, gloomy place, a pit, or an abyss used as a **dungeon of torment and suffering**) that resides beneath the underworld.
- However, Erebos also encompassed the **lands of the divine dead**, the **Elysian Fields** (the final resting place of the souls of the heroic and the virtuous) or Islands of the Blessed.

Grecian Underworld 3

- One tradition followed by the legendary epic poet Homer, placed **Hades, god of the underworld**, in the sunless region beyond the great river Ocean which surrounded the earth.
- But, as the Greeks discovered more of the world, a new tradition located it in the center of the earth, connected to the land of living by unfathomed caves and by rivers which flowed partly underground, such as the Acheron in northern Greece.
- The Acheron (river of woe) was one of the five infernal rivers.



Grecian Underworld 4

- The other infernal rivers were the Styx (**river of hate**), which surrounded the underworld, Lethe (**river of forgetfulness**), Cocytus (**river of wailing**) and Phelgethon or Puriphelgethon (**river of fire**). Charon, the boatman of the underworld, ferryman of Hades, ferried the souls of the dead across the Styx and also the Acheron (the dividing line between the world of the living and the dead).
- A coin to pay Charon for passage, usually an obolus or danake, was sometimes placed in or on the **mouth of the dead person**.
- Some authors say that those that **could not pay the fee** or those whose bodies were **left unburied**, had to wander the shores for one hundred years.
- Roman poet Virgil on Charon:

There Charon stands, who rules the dreary coast-
A sordid god: down from his hairy chin
A length of beard descends, uncombed, unclean
His eyes, like hollow furnaces on fire;
A girdle, foul with grease, binds his obscene attire.



Acheron river of northwest Greece near the village of Glyki. River of pain, one of five Greek underworld. In the Homeric poems was described as a river of Hades.

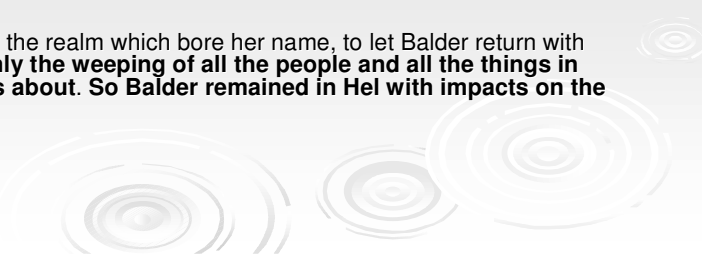


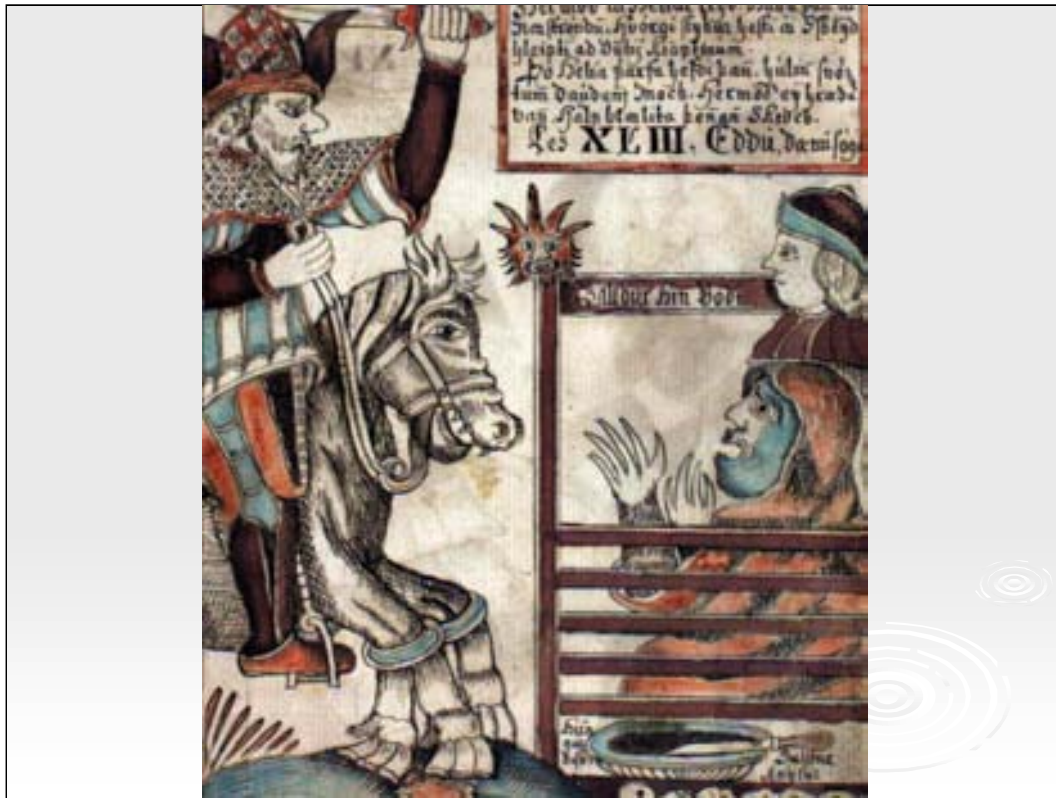
A 19th-century interpretation of Charon's crossing by Alexander Litovchenko

Visits to the Underworld

- In Viking belief, Odin, the All-Father, was ruler of Asgard, home of the gods.
- His son Balder, by Odin's wife Frigg, was killed by a mistletoe dart engineered by trickster god Loki. When the dart pierced Balder, he fell down dead.
- Odin and the other deities were plunged into mourning. The gods took up Balder's body and laid it on a **funeral pyre built on his own ship**, alongside the body of his wife Nanna, who had died of grief, and his horse.

Visits to the Underworld 2

- After Balder's death Frigg begged that someone should **ride to Hel, the realm of the dead**, and seek to bring back her son.
 - It was Hermod the Bold, Balder's brother, who volunteered.
 - He rode away on Odin's horse Sleipnir, journeying for nine days and nine nights until he came to the golden bridge over the Echoing River.
 - He was directed down the road to Hel's gate, which Sleipner cleared with an easy leap.
 - Hermod entered a hall where Balder was sitting and stayed there three nights.
 - He begged Hel, the ruler of the realm which bore her name, to let Balder return with him, but she replied that **only the weeping of all the people and all the things in the world could bring this about. So Balder remained in Hel with impacts on the gods.**
- 



An 18th century Prose Edda manuscript illustration featuring Hermoar upon sleipnir (left), Balder upper right and Hel lower right



Odin upon the eight legged Sleipner from the Tjongvide image stone

Freyr and the Vanir

Funeral and Burial Myths

- The main Scandinavian god of fertility and plenty was Freyr. He was one of the Vanir, a group of deities, male and female, mainly associated with the depths of the **earth and water**, as opposed to Aesir, the gods of the sky.
- The Yngling kings of Uppsala in Sweden appear to have identified with Freyr after their deaths, and were thought to have brought prosperity to the land.
- Gifts of **gold and silver** were placed on Freyr's **burial mound**, and the image of the god was taken around Sweden in a wagon to bless the farms.
- One Vanir symbol was the **golden boar**, which traveled across the sky and underneath the earth like the sun.
- Another Vanir symbol was the ship, and Freyr had a special one of his own, in which he could travel whenever he wished; it could accommodate all the gods but would fold up into a pouch when not in use. **Ship-funeral** was practiced by royal families, as well as lesser folk, from the 7th century.



“Freyer” (1901) by Johannes Gehrts



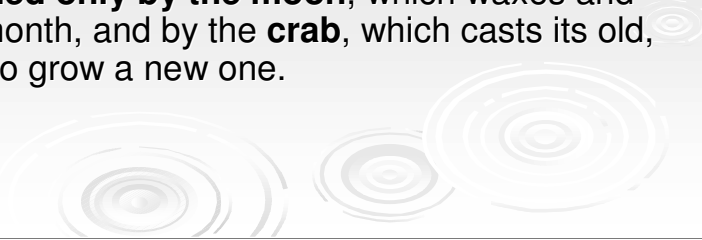
A wild boar in Northern Europe. In the *Prose Edda*, "Van-child" is listed as a name for boars. Both Freyja and Freyr are attested as accompanied by boars.

A wild boar in Northern Europe. In the *Prose Edda*, "Van-child" is listed as a name for boars. Both Freyja and Freyr are attested as accompanied by boars.

Funeral Rites

Death and Mourning

- Australian Aboriginal myth treats **death** as the consequence of **human misdeeds**.
- It **was not inevitable**; the heroic ancestral beings in the creation period had the opportunity to live forever.
- However, through **spite, foolishness or greed**, the gift of immortality slipped beyond the grasp of humankind and was **retained only by the moon**, which waxes and wanes every month, and by the **crab**, which casts its old, battered shell to grow a new one.





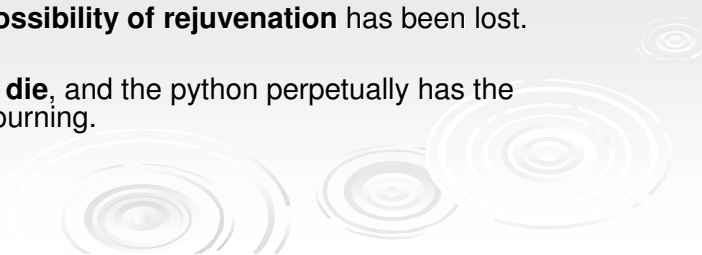
Didgeridoo Aboriginal ceremonial music

Wandjina

- According to the Worora of the Western Kimberlys, Australia, a certain Widjingara was the first person to die, killed in a battle against some *wandjina* beings.
- They had wanted to steal a woman who had been promised in marriage to someone else and Widjingara had fought to ensure that the traditional marriage rules were upheld.
- His body was wrapped in a bark coffin and his wife, the Black-Headed Python, began to mourn.
- She shaved off her hair and rubbed ashes on her head and body, thereby founding the traditional Aboriginal way of showing mourning.



Wandjina 2

- When Widjingara returned from the grave, his body renewed, the Black-Headed Python was angry: “Why have you come back?” she asked.
 - “Look at me, I’ve already shaved my head and made it black with ashes!”
 - Widjingara, angry in his turn at this poor welcome from his wife, indignantly returned to the grave: he later transformed into the native cat.
 - Since then, the **possibility of rejuvenation** has been lost.
 - **Everyone has to die**, and the python perpetually has the appearance of mourning.
- 



In [Aboriginal mythology](#), the **Wondjina** (or **Wandjina**) were [cloud](#) and [rain](#) spirits who, during the [Dream time](#), created or influenced the landscape and its inhabitants. When they found the place they would die, they painted their images on [cave](#) walls and entered a nearby waterhole.



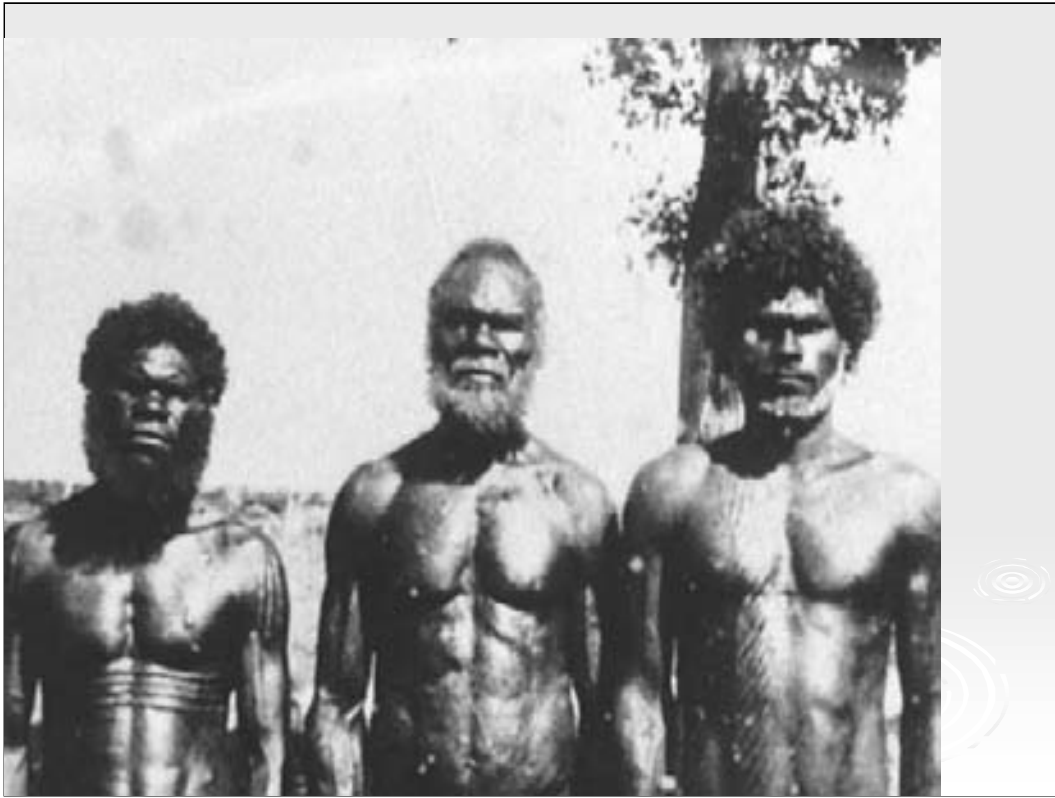
Black-Headed Python

Tiwi Funeral Myth

- Another myth about the origin of death is found among the Tiwi of the Melville and Bathurst Islands, just off the coast of the Northern Territory, Australia.
- According to their myth, the island was populated by the offspring of an old blind woman. Her son Purukupali later married and fathered a son.
- Purukupali shared his camp with Tjapara, the Moon Man, an unmarried man bent on seducing Purukupali's wife.
- One very hot day she went with Tjapara into the forest, leaving her young son asleep in the shade of a tree. While she was away, the sun moved across the sky, exposing the infant to its rays and killing him.
- Purukupali was very angry, and declared that from now on **everyone should die**.
- Tjapara pleaded with him, saying that if he were allowed to **take the boy's body for three days** he would **restore him to life**.
- Purukupali refused and, after a struggle with Tjapara, snatched up the boy's body and walked into the sea, leaving a powerful whirlpool at the place where he sank below the surface.

Tiwi Funeral Myth 2

- Tjapara changed himself into the moon and rose from the sky, still bearing the scars inflicted by Purukupali as they had fought over the corpse.
- The rest of the original inhabitants came together to perform the first **mortuary ceremony**, preparing the large decorated poles now used at all Tiwi funerals.
- When a Tiwi person dies, **the body is buried immediately**, but the **funeral ritual is delayed for several months** until the grief of family members has subsided.
- At the funeral or *pulumani* ceremony, brightly **decorated poles** are erected to mark the spot of the grave, the number of poles varying with the age and status of the deceased.
- In an nonspecific way, the poles symbolize the **link between the worlds of the living and of the dead**.



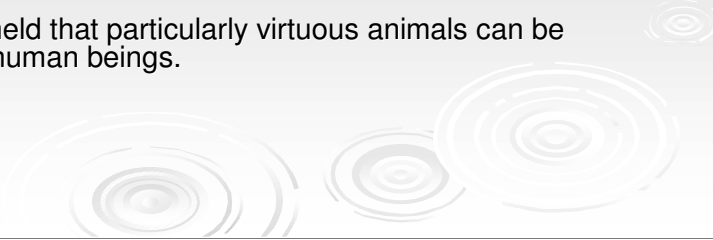
Bathurst Island men, indigenous Australians that inhabit the Tiwi Islands. Language and art very distinctive.



Tiwi ironwood pukimani poles. Carvers are paid according to the quality of their work.

Reincarnation

- In many mythical systems some form of **rejuvenation** followed the soul's sojourn into the realm of the dead.
- In Africa it is usually supposed that **souls are reborn into the kin group or clan** to which they had belonged in the previous life.
- In the Oriental civilizations influenced by Hindu and Buddhist philosophy, it is commonly believed that **reincarnation destiny** depends on the **person's conduct** in earlier lives: the good are rewarded with incarnation in **higher social castes** or groups, the wicked in **low-status groups**, or as animals.
- Conversely it is held that particularly virtuous animals can be reincarnated as human beings.

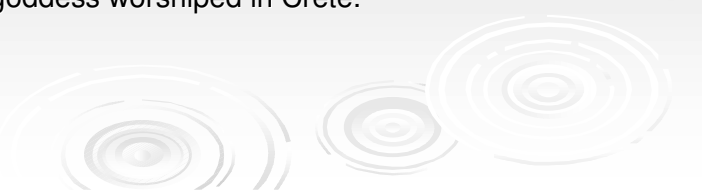




Reincarnation

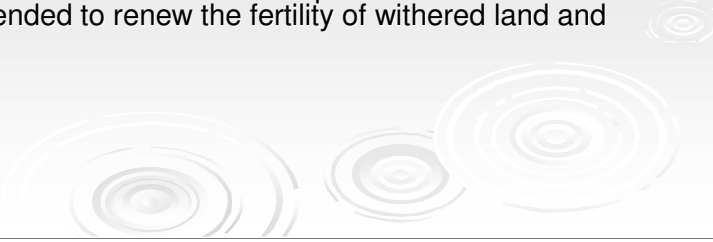
Life-Death-Rebirth Deity

- Wikipedia indicates a life-death-rebirth deity, also known as a **dying-rising or resurrection deity**, is a god who is born, suffers death or a death-like experience, passes through a phase in the underworld among the dead, and is subsequently reborn, either in a literal or symbolic sense.
- Male examples include Osiris (Egyptian), Tammuz (Dumuzi) (Babylonian and Sumerian), Jesus (historical Galilean), Zalmoxis (Thracian Dacian), Dionysus (Greek) and Odin (Norse).
- Female examples are Inanna (Sumerian), also known as Ishtar, whose cult dates to 4000 BCE and Persephone (Greek), the central figure in the Eleusinian Mysteries, whose cult may date to 1700 BCE as the unnamed goddess worshiped in Crete.



Life-Death-Rebirth Deity 2

- The term “life-death-rebirth deity” is associated with the works of James Frazer, Jane Ellen Harrison and their fellow Cambridge Ritualists.
- In their seminal works, *The Golden Bough* and *Prolegomena of the Study of Greek Religion*, Frazer and Harrison argued that all myths are echoes of rituals, and that all rituals have their primordial purpose in the manipulation of natural phenomena by means of sympathetic magic.
- Consequently, the rape and return of Persephone, the rending and repair of Osiris, and the travails and triumph of Baldr derive from primitive rites intended to renew the fertility of withered land and crops.

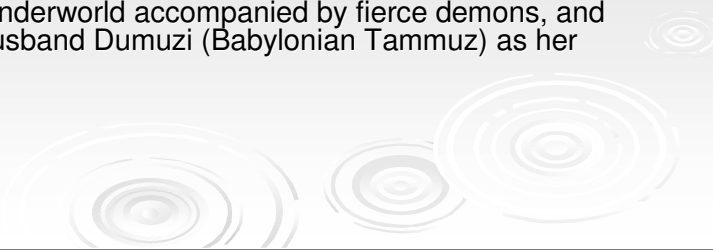


Life-Death-Rebirth Deity 3

- The Swiss psychoanalyst Carl Jung argued that processes such as **death and resurrection** were part of the **symbolism of the collective unconscious**, and could be utilized in the task of psychological integration.
- Jung's argument, in combination with that of the Cambridge Ritualists, has been developed by Karoly Kerenyi and Joseph Campbell.
- In addition to the deities already mentioned, Wikipedia provides links to Julunnggul and Wawalag (Australian Aboriginal); Phoneix (Arabian); Quetzalcoatl and Xipe Totec (Aztec); Melqart (Canaanite); Amun and Amun-Min (Egyptian); Atunis – also known as “Adonis” (Etruscan); Cronus, Dionysus, and Orpheus (Greek); Izanagi (Japanese); Heitsi Eibib (Khoikhoi African); Kaknu (Native American); Baldr, Gullveig (Norse); Attis (Phrygian); Mithras, Aeneas, and Bacchus (Ancient Rome); and Veles and Jarilo (Slavic).
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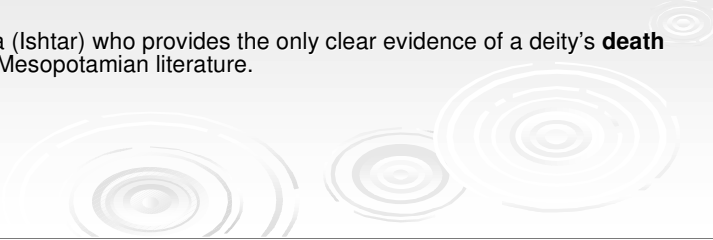
Ishtar/Inanna and Tammuz

- Inanna, or Ishtar in the Akkadian version, is the supreme goddess of sexual love and fertility, and also goddess of war, “the lady of battles.”
- The most important myth in which she is the central figure is that of her descent to the underworld. No reason is given for her descent to the nether world; possibly she wishes to extend her power there.
- According to the Inanna myth, she can return from the underworld only if she will send a substitute for herself.
- She leaves the underworld accompanied by fierce demons, and nominates her husband Dumuzi (Babylonian Tammuz) as her substitute.



Ishtar/Inanna and Tammuz 2

- The myth ends with a speech ordaining that Dumuzi will spend half a year in the underworld and his sister Geshtinanna, "Lady of the Grape Vine," the other half.
- Under one aspect, Tammuz was the embodiment of vegetation.
- The annual withering of vegetation during the hot season is symbolized by his death and captivity in the underworld.
- Willis indicates it has often been supposed that his resurrection was also ritually celebrated; there is no clear evidence for this, but the fact his sojourn in the underworld is said to last for only half a year makes it probable that his return to life was the focus for a rite of spring.
- However, it is Inanna (Ishtar) who provides the only clear evidence of a deity's **death and resurrection** in Mesopotamian literature.





One type of depiction of Ishtar/Inanna



Peragmon Museum Berlin Depiction of the eighth gate of Babylon 575 BC by order of King Nebuchadnezzar II on north side of the city. Tribute to Ishtar.