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ANCIENT GREEK BELIEFS ABOUT THE AFTERLIFE ARE EXPLORED IN MAJOR EXHIBITION AT THE GETTY VILLA

**Exhibition is Centered on the Recent Conservation of a Monumental Funerary Vessel on
Loan from the National Archaeological Museum in Naples**

Underworld: Imagining the Afterlife

**At the Getty Villa
October 31, 2018–March 18, 2019**

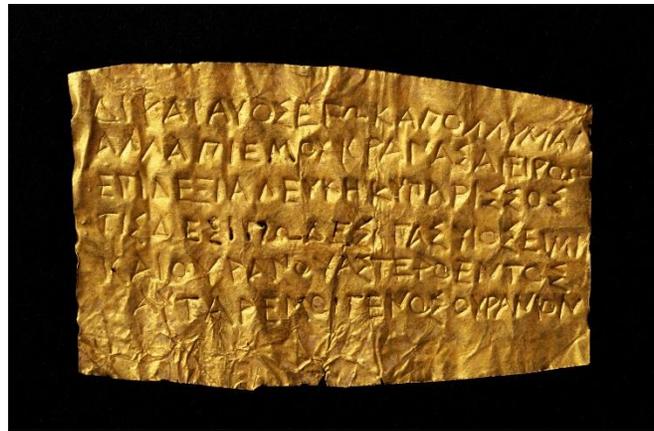
LOS ANGELES - What did ancient Greeks believe would happen to them after they died? For most, the Underworld was bleak and somber, characterized by the absence of life's pleasures, leading many individuals to seek ways to secure a more blessed afterlife. Organized around a monumental funerary vessel (*krater*) from Altamura, on loan from the National Archaeological Museum in Naples and recently conserved by the J. Paul Getty Museum's Antiquities Conservation department, *Underworld: Imagining the Afterlife* explores depictions of the Underworld in the art of ancient Greece and southern Italy. The exhibition will be on view at the Getty Villa from October 31, 2018 through March 18, 2019.



Funerary Vessel with an Underworld Scene (pre-conservation), Southern Italian, made in Apulia, 360-340 BC. Terracotta, 149.5 x 92.4 cm. National Archaeological Museum of Naples.

"Some of the richest evidence for ancient beliefs about the afterlife comes from southern Italy in the fourth century BC, and the magnificent Altamura *krater* exemplifies the monumental, elaborately decorated vases that were produced at that time," said Getty Museum Director Timothy Potts. "This important exhibition is the culmination of a two-year

conservation project with the Museo Archeologico Nazionale in Naples (MANN) to conserve and display this *krater*. Our continued partnership with MANN has resulted in several successful collaborative projects including three of their splendid bronze treasures, the *Ephebe* (Youth) in 2009, the *Apollo Saettante* in 2011, and the over-life-size sculpture of *Tiberius* in 2013."



Tablet with instructions for the Deceased in the Underworld, Greek, 350-300 BC. Gold, 2.2 x 3.7 cm. The J. Paul Getty Museum, Gift of Lenore Barozzi

A centerpiece of the exhibition, the *krater* was made around the middle of the fourth century B.C, and was found in fragments in 1847 in Altamura in the region of Apulia, southeast Italy. The ancient inhabitants of that region buried their dead with assemblages of pottery and other goods, and large vessels were produced for graves of the local elite. Though not Greek themselves, Apulians engaged closely with the culture of Greece, and many of their funerary vases are decorated with scenes from Greek myth and drama. The *krater* from Altamura depicts the Underworld populated with more than 20 mythological figures including Hades and Persephone, the god and goddess of the Underworld, the musician Orpheus, the hero Herakles, the messenger god Hermes, and Sisyphus, who was eternally punished by having to roll a giant boulder up a hill.

The display of the *krater* in this exhibition follows two years of conservation treatment at the Getty Villa. After its discovery in 1847, the *krater* was substantially overpainted when it was reassembled in the workshop of the Neapolitan restorer Raffaele Gargiulo (1785–after 1870) in the early 1850s. By 2016, many of the old repairs needed treatment. In collaboration with colleagues in Naples, Getty conservators have worked to ensure the vase's structural soundness and future stability. In the process, they were able to identify which areas had been re-created in the nineteenth century, and the results are presented in the exhibition.

The Underworld—otherwise known as “the House of Hades” or simply “Hades”—is a rare subject in Greek art. Athenian vase-painters of the sixth century BC typically focused on individual sinners such as Sisyphus, and it is only in South Italian vase-painting from around 350 BC that a tradition of richly populated Underworld scenes developed. About forty Apulian funerary vessels in mostly European collections, including the *krater* from Altamura, bear detailed representations of the afterlife and the mythological figures associated with it.

"Around thirty-five other ancient works have been chosen to highlight the famous inhabitants of Hades and to explore the ways in which individuals sought to achieve a happier afterlife," said David Saunders, curator of the exhibition and associate curator of Antiquities at the J. Paul Getty Museum. "Monumental funerary vessels, such as the *krater* from Altamura, are painted with elaborate depictions of Hades's realm, and rare gold plaques that were buried with the dead bear directions for where to go in the Underworld. These works, alongside funerary offerings, grave monuments, and representations of everlasting banquets, convey some of the ways in which the hereafter was imagined in the fifth and fourth centuries BC."

Most ancient Greeks anticipated that the soul left the body after death and continued to exist in some form, but an expectation that good would be rewarded and evil punished in the afterlife was not central to their beliefs. Perpetual torment awaited only the most exceptional sinners, while just a select few—heroes related to the Olympian gods—enjoyed an eternal paradise. Yet as this exhibition explores, individuals did seek ways to improve their lot.

Initiation in the Eleusinian Mysteries, an annual festival in Greece based on the story of Persephone, ensured participants a good harvest and also a blessed afterlife. Outside of mainstream religious practice, devotion to the mythical singer Orpheus and the god Dionysos also offered paths to a better existence after death. The rites were shrouded in secrecy and remain little understood today, but one of the most intriguing sources of information are the so-called Orphic tablets. Named by modern scholars after the mythical poet Orpheus, whose descent and return from the Underworld made him one of the few who could impart knowledge of the afterlife, the Orphic tablets are Greek inscriptions written on thin sheets of gold. They were deposited in graves, and usually bear a short text proclaiming the deceased's distinguished status and providing guidance for his or her journey into the Underworld. Three examples are on view in the exhibition, including one in the Getty's collection.

The Greek philosopher Plato (about 428-347 BC) observed wryly that individuals "dismiss the stories told about what goes on in Hades" until they face death themselves. This exhibition examines some of the competing ideas and beliefs about the afterlife, and different strategies for ensuring everlasting happiness.

Underworld: Imagining the Afterlife is curated by David Saunders, associate curator of antiquities at the J. Paul Getty Museum. The exhibition is organized in collaboration with the National Archaeological Museum in Naples – Laboratory of Conservation and Restoration. The conservation and display of the *krater* from Altamura were made possible by support from the J. Paul Getty Museum's Villa Council.

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The J. Paul Getty Museum collects Greek and Roman antiquities, European paintings, drawings, manuscripts, sculpture and decorative arts to 1900, as well as photographs from around the world to the present day. The Museum's mission is to display and interpret its collections, and present important loan exhibitions and publications for the enjoyment and education of visitors locally and internationally. This is supported by an active program of research, conservation, and public programs that seek to deepen our knowledge of and connection to works of art.

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