

Hades *Klutopōlos* and the Abduction of Persephone
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Although Greek deities are frequently depicted driving horse-drawn chariots, Hades is unusual in the fact that his possession of horses is reflected in a Homeric epithet, *klutopōlos*, “of renowned foals.” This is especially surprising since horses do not otherwise feature prominently in the mythology of Hades or of the underworld. In this paper, then, I examine the significance of this epithet through an exploration of the significance of young horses, *pōloi*, in Greek literature. Ultimately, I suggest that this epithet has less to do with Hades’ possession of young horses than it has to do with his abduction of Persephone. I discuss three points.

First, I review the evidence for the erotic connotations of horses in Greek literature, examined at length by Griffith (2006), and suggest that there is special erotic significance in the depiction of markedly young horses which draws on the symbology of horse-breaking so as to render the identification of young horses with marriageable young women especially likely. I then draw evidence from Homer, Xenophon, and Plutarch to suggest that the word *pōlos*, in particular, may have been associated with young women near the age of marriage.

Then I suggest that Anakreon’s famous poem about the “Thracian filly,” *pōle Thrēikiē* (417 PMG), not only bears testimony to this association but also recalls the abduction of Persephone as depicted in the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* so closely, both in content and diction, that the word *pōle* may function to invoke this mythical parallel. Not only do several key words from the lyric appear in the first episode of the hymn, the episode that describes the abduction, but the depiction of an older man intending to sexually subdue a young woman playing in a meadow while she is either unaware of or unconcerned with the man’s attention constitutes a deployment of the same identifiable mythological scene. The presentation of such a scene in connection with the word *pōlos*, I believe, makes it very likely that the Homeric epithet, *klutopōlos* reflects the identity of Hades’ wife rather than the identity of his horses.

Finally, and briefly, I suggest some ways of understanding this depiction of Persephone in light of the role that horses play in other Indo-European abduction narratives. In this way I attempt to demonstrate that this understanding of *klutopōlos* provides a starting point from which to understand not only Hades and Persephone, but also the horse-headed Demeter, described in Pausanias (8.42.4), which reflects the tradition that Persephone’s mother had once assumed the form of a horse in an attempt to evade the sexual advances of Poseidon.