

THE **CLAY-FOOTED** **SUPERHEROES**



LATIN FOR THE NEW MILLENNIUM

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THE CLAY-FOOTED SUPERHEROES



MYTHOLOGY *FOR THE*
TALES *NEW*
MILLENNIUM

By Rose Williams



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**The Clay-footed SuperHeroes
Mythology Tales for the New Millennium**

Rose Williams

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PREFACE

Greece gave the western world its first widely-known superheroes. From Heracles who brained his music master with a lyre to Theseus who in a forgetful moment left the princess who had saved his life on a deserted island, they fell a few furlongs short of the standard of perfection. Yet they were handsome and resourceful, they faced death without flinching, and they overcame almost insurmountable odds. It is not surprising that their stories have held the unflagging interest of a hundred generations and have played a key role in literature and art through those generations.

Terms that might be unfamiliar to the reader are emphasized in bold-face type upon their first appearance. The notes section at the back of the book provides an explanation for the terms.

The Clay-footed SuperHeroes was designed to serve as an ancillary and quick reference book for any group studying literature or the ancient world. It is a good resource for those using the Bolchazy-Carducci textbook *Latin for the New Millennium, Level 2* and coordinates as follows.

COORDINATION WITH CHAPTERS IN *LATIN FOR THE NEW MILLENNIUM*

I. Sons of Gods and Men

Heracles, Perseus, Theseus, Jason (LNM 2, Review 1)

II. Dysfunctional Dynasties

House of Atreus, House of Labdacus (LNM 2, Review 4)

III. Heroes, Gods, and Wooden Quadrupeds

The Trojan War (LNM 2, Review 2)

IV. Going Back to Greece

The Atreides and Odysseus (LNM 2, Review 3)

V. Starting Over

Aeneas and the Beginning of Rome (LNM 2, Review 5)

NB: There are multiple versions of these myths. Furthermore, commentators from Euhemerus in the fourth century BCE to Robert Graves in the twentieth century CE have interpreted them as reflections of actual events. The versions I have followed can be found in the Ancient Sources listed at the end of this book.

INTRODUCTION

Hero is a greatly overused word. In today's society it applies to anyone who does something for someone else without expectation of reward, and this definition is basically acceptable. The word is also loosely used as a synonym for idol to indicate anyone who is well-known or admired for any reason, from singing rock music to looking nice in a bathing suit. This use of the word does a disservice to the richness of its history in western culture.

The classical Greco-Roman hero was a mortal who underwent one or more ordeals, often on a mission or quest performed under the eyes of hostile powers and likely to end in his death, which he hoped to meet in a way that would earn him *kleos*, or immortal glory. The story of Heracles underlines this point. His name has been translated "Glory of Hera"—the goddess who spent quite a bit of time trying to destroy him.

Humans, all of whom also live in the constant shadow of death, are drawn to personalities who can face this ultimate disaster without cowering, as that attitude gives a certain freedom to live fully. As Aeneas tells his men while the Greeks are burning Troy down around them, "The one safety is to stop hoping for safety" (*Aeneid* 2.354).

The average human, who sometimes feels that the whole universe, or at least a significant part of it, is capable of destroying him, can identify with several aspects of the classical hero: he was often beset by antagonistic powers from birth or even before birth, he had questionable aspects in his family background, which was of prime importance in the ancient world, he gave or risked his life for others, and he often "came to rest" in an unknown grave.

Once the hero had achieved *kleos*, after death he often became a cult figure who was given festivals and sometimes even temples, and expected in return for these honors to protect his worshippers in death as he had done in life, and to provide prosperity. Sometimes this prosperity came in the form of fertility of plants and animals; sometimes as inspiration for the worshippers in war, allowing them, like Aeneas, to achieve safety by ceasing to look for it.

I: SONS OF GODS AND MEN

PERSEUS

THE QUEST FOR THE GORGON'S HEAD

Most Greek heroes in childhood were beset by some power dead set on seeing that they never grew up. Perseus' situation began even earlier. His prospective grandfather, King Acrisius of the Greek city of Argos, did not want his daughter to have any children, and took great precautions to see that she never met any men.

This anti-descendant attitude of Acrisius seems a bit strange, but it was the result of his asking the **Delphic Oracle** of Apollo the god of truth whether he would have any male heirs. Apollo could never lie, but his oracle often made up for this possible handicap by skirting around the suppliant's question and flooring him with a bit of truth guaranteed to give him high blood pressure, if not outright apoplexy. Acrisius was informed that he would be killed by his daughter's child. With that stubborn, and totally useless, shortsightedness so typical of characters in ancient myth, Acrisius tried to forestall the oracle by imprisoning his daughter Danae in an underground bronze house with only a small opening for light and air. Here he was sure no man could reach her. No man did. But that did not solve Acrisius' problem.

Zeus, grandson of Heaven and Earth and youngest child of **Cronus** and Rhea, had become Lord of the Sky and General Superintendent of the Universe upon dethroning his father. From his lofty position he had an excellent view of the Earth and a special appreciation for its loveliest inhabitants, an appreciation which made Hera, his wife and queen, furious. She was not only Queen of the Gods, but also the protectress of marriage, which in her case proved to need a great deal of protecting.

Acrisius' precautions helped not at all; there was absolutely no future in trying to conceal lovely girls from Zeus. Eluding both Acrisius' precautions and Hera's watchful eye, Zeus showed the ingenuity he always used when engaged in mischief and visited Danae in a shower of golden rain. Soon she gave birth to a baby boy whom she named Perseus.

Upon discovering that, in spite of his best efforts, he had become a grandfather, Acrisius faced a dilemma which would come upon many other ancient characters. The **Erinyes**, or Furies, visited those who killed relatives. Since these immortal female avengers had snakes for hair and eyes that wept tears of blood, people were reluctant to encourage them to make an appearance. Therefore he put Danae and her son Perseus in a wooden chest and floated them out to sea, smugly reflecting that he had done no violence and that what happened to them next was no concern of his. Zeus, who always, if he happened to remember, kept an eye on his offspring, asked his brother Poseidon the sea god to calm the waves.

The chest washed ashore on the island of Seriphos, and the seafarers were taken in by Dictys, the brother of King Polydectes. After some years Polydectes fell in love with Danae, who was still beautiful though Perseus was now a young man. Perseus was very protective of his mother, and Polydectes decided to get rid of him. The king announced his approaching marriage, and invited all to the wedding, knowing that they would bring gifts and that Perseus, who had no source of income, would have nothing to bring. When the humiliated young man faced the king and his court, with the rashness and anger so typical of the young, he announced that he would bring as a gift anything that Polydectes might want. Polydectes, with the nastiest smile imaginable, said he wanted the head of Medusa. Perseus immediately swore that he would not return without it. Polydectes took great interest in the part about not coming back, as this was the outcome he expected. Medusa was one of the three Gorgons, monstrous females with snakes on their heads instead of hair and with bodies covered with impenetrable golden scales. To make matters worse, two of them were immortal, and they all looked alike. Not that this fact had up to this point made a great deal of difference, as everyone who looked at them turned to stone.

Perseus wandered around for quite a while trying to find the Gorgons' island, which was not on the map, before Hermes the messenger god and Athena goddess of wisdom came to his aid. No one knows why they did this; perhaps Zeus had taken a somewhat tardy interest in his son and encouraged the intervention of these half-siblings on Perseus' behalf. Hermes appeared, complete with winged sandals and winged hat, and gave Perseus some valuable though circuitous information. He said that Perseus, to put it mildly, needed some special equipment to deal with

the Gorgons. He went on to say that this equipment was in the possession of the nymphs of the North, and that Perseus must go to the Graiae to find out how to get to these nymphs. These three Gray Women lived in the land of twilight, and possessed only one eye among them, which they took turns using. They were extremely stingy with information, so Perseus was instructed to hide until one nymph started to hand the eye to the next; then he had to leap out, grab it, and refuse to give it back until they told him how to find the nymphs of the North. Evidently this was a test for Perseus, as Hermes, messenger of Zeus, knew very well where the nymphs were. He promised to guide Perseus to the Graiae, and also to lend him a sword which could not be bent or broken by the Gorgon's scales. Athena turned up at this point and gave Perseus her shield to carry, so that he could look into the polished metal and see the reflection of the Gorgon and cut off her head without looking at her.

After a long and shadowy journey Hermes and Perseus arrived at the twilight land. Perseus was somewhat taken aback at the sight of the Graiae, as they looked like swans except for having human heads and arms with hands beneath their wings. Still, he snatched the eye as instructed, and was told that the nymphs he sought lived with the Hyperboreans, a blessed race who lived at the back of the North Wind feasting and celebrating. Hermes led him there, and the nymphs stopped dancing long enough to give him three gifts: winged sandals, a bag which was always the right size for whatever was put in it, and a cap which made the wearer invisible. Perseus, now fully armed, was guided by Hermes to the island of the Gorgons.

By great good fortune (or the contrivance of some god) the Gorgons were all sleeping when Perseus arrived. Hermes and Athena were beside Perseus, pointing out which Gorgon was the mortal Medusa. Looking in the shield and guided by Athena, Perseus cut off Medusa's head and dropped it in the bag. Then man and gods departed quickly, as the other two Gorgons awakened with a start.

Hermes and Athena went about their divine business, and Perseus started the long flight home. As he flew over Ethiopia, he saw a strange sight—a maiden chained to a rock. He discovered later, when he had the leisure to ask, that she was Andromeda, the daughter of King Cepheus and an extremely foolish queen named Cassiopeia, who had boasted that she was more beautiful than the daughters of Nereus the sea god.



Perseus triumphantly displays the head of the much-feared Medusa.

Whether or not this was true was completely beside the point. Such *hubris* always drew the wrath of the gods, who sent a sea serpent to devour Cepheus' people and announced they would withdraw it only if his daughter Andromeda were offered to the serpent. Perseus, still showing that impetuosity typical of youth in general and mythological figures in particular, fell in love with her on the spot, waited beside her until the serpent came, and relieved said beast of his head. He then flew back to the palace and asked Andromeda's parents for her hand in marriage, which they gladly gave him.

When he arrived with his bride on Seriphos he found that all was far from well. Dictys and Danae were hiding from Polydectes, who was still furious with Danae for refusing to go ahead with the marriage. Perseus left Andromeda with them and went straight to the palace where Polydectes and his henchmen were feasting. He strode in noisily and, when everyone looked up, whipped Medusa's head out of the bag and considerably increased the island's supply of statues.

Having made Dictys King of Seriphos, Perseus took Danae and Andromeda and went back to Argos to see if they could make peace with Acrisius, but the king had gone on a journey, and no one knew where. Then Perseus went to Larissa, where he had heard of a great athletic contest. He entered the javelin throw, and as anyone who has read many Greek myths could have foretold, it swerved into the crowd and killed an elderly spectator, who just happened to be King Acrisius.

After he learned what he had done, Perseus, not wanting his grandfather's throne under these circumstances, exchanged cities with his cousin Megapenthes, who became king of Argos while Perseus became king of Tiryns, and according to the ancient Greeks, founded Mycenae. Later Tiryns went to war with Argos, and Perseus was killed. He left many sons, and after various contretemps among them Sthenelus succeeded his father as king of Tiryns, Electryon received Mycenae, and Perses ruled Ethiopia and became ancestor of the emperors of Persia.

Perseus was gone, but, in the manner of classical heroes, far from forgotten. Pausanias mentions the shrine to Perseus that stood on the left-hand side of the road from Mycenae to Argos, and also a sacred fountain at Mycenae called *Persea*.

HERACLES

THE QUEST FOR ABSOLUTION

Perseus had left entirely too many offspring. Electryon King of Mycenae was accidentally killed by Amphitryon, son of another **Perseid**. Amphitryon was exiled for this, and fled with his cousin Alcmena to his maternal uncle Creon, King of Thebes, who cleansed him of his blood guilt. Amphitryon married the beautiful Alcmena, but he was not alone in admiring her. Zeus, still observing precautions, came to Alcmena in the guise of her husband, and she bore two sons: the mortal Iphicles to

Amphitryon and Heracles to Zeus. This evidently worked splendidly until Zeus, in a moment of hare-brained euphoria, boasted that a son soon to be born to him would be High King of the mighty house of Perseus. This little bit of thoughtlessness provided Heracles one feature necessary to a hero—the antagonism of a great power. Hera (who never seemed to miss these little tidbits) set out to destroy him.

Hera had hindered Alcmena's delivery so that another queen would bear her son first, making that child heir to the high kingship. She then turned her divine attention to shortening Heracles' life. She sent two giant serpents into the cradle of Heracles and Iphicles. Hearing the screams of Iphicles, Alcmena ran into the nursery to find Heracles laughing and holding a strangled snake in each hand. In no way discouraged, Hera set out to torment Heracles with the same thorough nastiness she would show in dealing with the Trojans after the Trojan War.

After he flew into a boyish rage and brained his music master with a lute, Heracles was relegated by thoughtful mentors to the outdoors, where he killed the Thespian lion which had been devastating the woods of Cithaeron. Ever after he wore a lion skin, either this one or perhaps the skin of the Nemean lion, who was soon to be another of his victims.

He was given the princess Megara in marriage as a reward for defeating the Minyans and ridding the Thebans of a pesky **tribute** paid to that people. This loving couple had three sons, and the sight of Heracles enjoying all that bliss was more than Hera could bear. She drove him mad, and he killed his wife and children. Then, with her typical thoroughness, Hera restored his sanity so that he could understand what he had done. As the trembling Thebans filled him in on the details, he vowed to kill himself. Before he could rush forth to do so, his friend and kinsman Theseus of Athens clasped his bloodstained hands to share in his guilt and begged him to come to Athens, be strong, and leave death come when it would. Heracles went, but he could not share the philosophical reasoning of the Athenians, who insisted that he could not be guilty of a murder he had not known he was committing. Heracles was a man of great strength and feeling, but philosophical reasoning was quite beyond him. His guilt drove him to the Delphic Oracle, which told him, with a clarity unusual for it, that he must be purified, and sent him to his cousin Eurystheus King of Mycenae for instructions as to what he must do.

Eurystheus, who wanted no competition from a fellow Perseid who was much braver and stronger than he himself was, devised a really fiendish set of tasks known as the Labors of Heracles. In this charming exercise he was helped, of course, by Hera, who had yet to finish punishing Heracles, not only for existing in the first place, but also for being Zeus' favorite son.

Each of the labors was chosen with the amiable intention of cutting short Heracles' career, and great was the dismay of Eurystheus and Hera when the hero accomplished each one.

The first labor was to kill the Nemean lion, whose hide could be pierced by no weapon. Heracles solved this difficulty by choking it to death. When he appeared in Mycenae with the huge carcass on his shoulder, Eurystheus turned a ghastly pale color and ordered him henceforth to deliver his trophies outside the city.

Second Heracles killed the nine-headed Hydra, which grew two more heads when he chopped off one. He solved this problem by searing the necks as he chopped off the heads, a tactic which worked well until he came to the last head, which was immortal. This he cut off and buried under a rock and the Hydra died at last. (How an immortal head grew on a mortal body was one of those little conundrums with which Greek mythology never troubled itself.)

There is some disagreement about the exact order of the next labors, but they were these: he had to capture alive both a stag with golden horns and hooves and the great Erymantian boar. To Eurystheus' dismay he brought these back alive to show this taskmaster.

After that he cleaned the stables of Augeas, who had not attended to the matter for years, by diverting a river through them; killed the Stymphalian birds who were plaguing a city; and went on two more animal hunts, one for the savage bull belonging to King Minos of Crete and one for the man-eating horses of Diomedes, both of whom he brought back alive.

The ninth labor involved a change of pace—he was to bring back the girdle of Hippolyta, the queen of the Amazons, those fierce women warriors who inhabited a fortified island. She kindly gave him the girdle, but Hera, who did not like the way the labors were turning out, exhorted the Amazons to fight him and he killed the queen and fought off the Amazons.

For the tenth labor Heracles had to bring back the cattle of Geryon, a three-bodied monster who lived on a western island. Heracles paused on the way to set up the pillars of Heracles at the western end of the Mediterranean, on each side of what is now called the Strait of Gibraltar, then killed Geryon and brought back the cattle.

As this was not working out the way Eurystheus and Hera had planned, the tasks grew even harder, though that is hard to imagine. Number Eleven was to bring back the Golden Apples of the Hesperides. Nobody but Atlas, the Titan who had been holding the vault of heaven on his shoulders ever since he had been on the wrong side of the War of the Gods, could tell him where the Hesperides, who were his daughters, actually lived. Heracles set out to find Atlas, pausing on the way to free Prometheus, who had angered Zeus by giving fire to humankind and had consequently been chained to a rock for eons, while an eagle of Zeus ate his liver every day and the immortal liver grew back every night. Heracles slew the bird and freed Prometheus. When he arrived at his destination, Atlas said that, if Heracles would hold the sky for a while, he would go and get the golden apples. When Atlas returned, he told Heracles that he would take the apples to Mycenae while Heracles continued to hold the world. Heracles was no Athenian philosopher, but he could see that Atlas was less than enthusiastic about taking his burden back. Heracles was in no position to deal with him while supporting the sky, so he had to use whatever brainpower he could muster. He agreed to hold the world, but asked Atlas to hold the sky while he got a pad for his shoulders. As Atlas was no great intellectual himself, he reassumed the burden, and Heracles broke all speed records for the trip to Mycenae.

Labor Number Twelve, both Eurystheus and Hera knew, had to be the *piece de resistance*. Heracles was ordered to bring up from Hades the giant three-headed dog Cerberus, who guarded the entrance. Heracles knew better than to try to storm the realm of his uncle Hades, god of the dead. His first stop was at Eleusis for two reasons. First, he wanted to be purified for the death of some **centaurs** he had happened to finish off in an odd moment. Second, he wanted to become an initiate into the **Eleusinian Mysteries**, which precaution men engaged in hazardous tasks often took in order to gain the protection of the powerful Eleusinian gods. After this, he journeyed down to the Underworld, pausing to free Theseus, who had helped with a feckless plot to steal Persephone, Hades' queen,

and was consequently imprisoned in the Chair of Forgetfulness. Arriving at last, Heracles politely asked Hades' permission to borrow Cerberus. Hades agreed, provided that Heracles overcame his dog without the use of weapons. Heracles subdued the beast with his bare hands, took him to Mycenae, and placed him at the foot of the throne of Eurystheus, who could only gasp out, "Take him back." Heracles restored Hades' pet, and his labors were at an end.



A medieval rendering of Hades shows the three-headed Cerberus in the center of the Underworld assembly. Visiting the Underworld and returning safely constituted a very significant heroic achievement.

Heracles had many more adventures and killed many more people, some unintentionally. His last wife was Deianira, whom he loved devotedly. The two set forth on a journey from Calydon, and met the centaur Nessus, who helped them cross a river. The centaur tried to carry off Deianira, so of course Heracles killed him, with an arrow this time. This was an unfortunate choice, because it gave Nessus time before he died to instruct Deianira to gather a vial of his blood, which he said was a potent love charm which she could use if she ever thought she was losing the love of Heracles. Years later Heracles sent back a band of captive maidens, among whom was a beautiful young princess, Iole. Some busybody told Deianira that Heracles was madly in love with the girl, and she hastened to anoint a beautiful soft robe with the blood of Nessus and give it to her husband. Heracles put on the robe and instantly felt fire in all his limbs. Deianira killed herself when she saw what she had done, but Heracles was too strong to die this way. He had a great funeral pyre made. He gave his bow and arrow to his faithful follower Philoctetes and lay down upon the pyre, where he was immediately surrounded by flames and taken up to Mount Olympus to dwell with the gods. There he was reconciled to Hera and given one more wife, Hera's daughter Hebe, goddess of youth.

Many ancient temples and shrines memorialized Heracles, or Hercules, his Roman counterpart. The Greeks celebrated a festival called the Herakleia.

THESEUS

THE QUEST FOR DELIVERANCE

Aegeus King of Athens had had two wives but no heir, and he was worried. Being a good Greek, he went to consult the Delphic Oracle, which gave him an answer less appalling than the one Acrisius had received, but also much vaguer: "Don't loosen the wineskin until you have reached the height of Athens." While taking an overnight rest in the town of Troezen, he told his host King Pittheus, who was known for his wisdom, about the oracle's words. Pittheus, understanding only too well what the oracle meant, gave Aegeus a great deal of very potent wine and then introduced him to a lovely maiden, Aethra. In the morning Aegeus learned that Aethra was the daughter of Pittheus, and he put two and two together concerning the recent events. He showed Aethra a great rock under

which he placed a sword and a pair of sandals. He said that if their child was a boy, he should take these things from beneath the rock and come secretly to Athens. He feared that his nephews, who wanted the throne, would make short work of his heir.

Pittheus and Aethra reared the child, a boy whom they named Theseus, concealing his heritage and spreading the rumor that he was the son of Poseidon, the god of the sea. When he was old enough, Aethra showed Theseus the rock and told him the story, and day by day he gained strength and tested himself against it. At last he was strong enough to lift it and obtain the sword and sandals underneath. Then she and her father offered him a ship to go to Athens. Theseus, already aware of the exploits of his kinsman Heracles, chose to be brave and go overland. Though the sea had its dangers, the land route was infested with hostile kings and robbers. He made the hazardous land route considerably less hazardous by killing the robbers which infested it, and all Greece rang with the praise of the unknown young man.

Medea the witch in the meantime had fled to Athens and the protection of King Aegeus when she had made Corinth too hot to hold her by arranging the death of a princess with a robe like the one given to Heracles. Knowing through her sorcery who Theseus was, she told Aegeus that such a popular young man would take the kingdom from him.



The palace at Knossos with its multiple storeys, winding corridors, hundreds of rooms, and natural light shafts readily gave rise to the myth of King Minos' labyrinth.

She persuaded Aegeus to invite the young man to a banquet and poison him there. While she was holding the poisoned wine for Aegeus, Theseus drew a sword Aegeus knew only too well, and Aegeus snatched the cup from Medea and threw it away. Medea fled to Asia, and Aegeus welcomed his son and proclaimed him heir to the throne.

Soon after these stirring events the great sorrow of Athens reared its ugly head. Some years before, the powerful king of Crete, Minos, had sent his only son Androgeos on a state visit to Athens, and King Aegeus had been dumb enough to let the young man go on a hunt to kill a dangerous bull. The bull had killed the boy, and a furious King Minos had stormed Athens and said that he would raze it to the ground unless the Athenians sent him a tribute of seven maidens and seven youths every nine years. His revenge was to put these young people into the Labyrinth, the great maze which Daedalus the inventor had built for him to contain the Minotaur. This winsome creature was half man and half bull, the offspring of Queen Pasiphae and a marvelous bull which Poseidon had given to King Minos and which Minos should have had the good sense to sacrifice to Poseidon instead of keeping for himself. Poseidon had caused the queen to fall in love with the bull, and the Minotaur was the result of this lamentable affair. For some inscrutable reason it ate the people it found in the Labyrinth, and this was to be the fate of the young Athenians. Theseus offered to be one of the sacrificial victims, telling his father that he would kill the beast and, on returning to Athens, would change the black sail that the ship of doom always carried to a white one.

King Minos, on receiving the young sacrifices, made an arrogant mistake. He paraded the victims through the streets on their way to the Labyrinth, and his daughter Ariadne fell in love with Theseus as he passed. She immediately cajoled Daedalus into telling her how to escape from his Labyrinth, and smuggled this information, plus the necessary equipment, to Theseus. The process was amazingly simple: he merely carried a ball of string and unrolled it as he went through the maze, keeping the other young Athenians behind him and instructing them to keep watch for the Minotaur in case it might suddenly appear from one of the endless passages. By luck he found the Minotaur asleep and killed it, some say with a sword, some say with his bare hands. (This sounds a bit incredible, but sacrificial bulls were often struck at the base of the brain with a

mallet to kill them; perhaps Theseus, strengthened by his exploits, was able to strike such a blow with his fists.) Gathering up his ball of string, he hastily rewound it, and, taking the other Athenian youths and Ariadne, fled in his ship which some thoughtless soul had left handy.

On the voyage home Theseus did two things that the ancient authors labor greatly to explain. He put in at the island of Naxos, and left Ariadne behind there. Then he sailed home to Athens without changing the black sails to white as he had promised his father he would do.



A forlorn Ariadne awakens after napping on Naxos only to find herself abandoned by Theseus whom she loved dearly.

All accounts agree that Theseus sailed away from Naxos and left Ariadne there. Now this does not seem very heroic, and the ancient writings give widely varying explanations. Apollodorus says that the god Dionysus had fallen in love with Ariadne, and carried her off. He then says that Theseus was heartbroken, and forgot to change the sails. Another version says that Ariadne was set ashore because she was ill, and the ship was carried out to sea. The Roman poet Catullus, who had his own reasons for doubting the faithfulness of lovers, said that she fell asleep and in a moment of absentmindedness Theseus sailed away without her. He

goes on to say that she cursed him so that the same thoughtlessness led to his forgetting to change the sails. However that may have been, Aegeus, seeing the ship returning with black sails, leapt into the sea which would ever after be known as the Aegean.

Theseus became an excellent king, credited with the unification of the territory of Attica under his Athenian rule and protecting the downtrodden, from the bloodstained Heracles to the disgraced king Oedipus to the losers in the war of the Seven against Thebes when they wanted the right to bury their dead.

He was still an adventurer, though, in spite of these kingly qualities, taking part in the Calydonian Boar Hunt and carrying off an Amazon, Antiope or Hippolyta. She bore him a son, Hippolytus, but the Amazons came to rescue her, invading Athens itself but finally being defeated before they could destroy it.

Pirithous, King of the Lapithae, was as harebrained as he was brave. Having heard of the valor of Theseus, he decided to test it by carrying off some of the cattle of Theseus. When Theseus came full-speed after him, Pirithous was overcome with admiration, meeting Theseus with outstretched hand and offering to submit to any penalty for his rash action. Theseus asked only for the friendship of this charming rogue, and they were fast friends ever after. This was lucky for Pirithous, for when he married Hippodamia, a group of Centaurs, those half-man, half-horse creatures came to the feast, where they proceeded to get drunk and tried to carry off the women. Theseus defended the bride and led the Lapithae in driving the Centaurs out of their country.

The rescued bride was not long-lived, however, and Pirithous with his usual foolhardiness decided that he wanted Persephone, Queen of Hades, for his next. Theseus loyally accompanied him to the Underworld, where they both wound up the in Chairs of Forgetfulness.

Heracles rescued Theseus, but Hades would not allow the rescue of Pirithous, who was the chief culprit, and evidently he is still there. Meanwhile Theseus' current wife Phaedra, the sister of the problematic Ariadne, had fallen in love with her stepson Hippolytus. Some say this was because he had worshipped only Artemis the hunting goddess and scorned Aphrodite, the goddess of love, who had her own way of avenging such slights. Hippolytus turned in disgust from Phaedra, who killed herself and left a letter for Theseus saying that she had done this because Hippolytus had attacked her. Theseus called upon Poseidon to curse his son, and banished Hippolytus. As Hippolytus drove his chariot along the seacoast, a sea monster frightened his horses and he fell mortally wounded from the chariot. As he was carried dying to Theseus, Artemis (who could have bestirred herself a bit earlier to help her devotee) told Theseus the truth.

Perhaps Theseus may have been too long away; perhaps the death of Hippolytus had sickened the people. One way or another, Theseus had lost his firm hold on the Athenian people. He retired in disgust to the

court of King Lycomedes of Scyros, where the king for obscure reasons cast him into the sea. Sometime later Kimon returned his ashes to Athens, and the Thesia, or festival of Theseus, was instituted. His remains were interred and his grave became a sanctuary for people in peril, in keeping with the best traditions of his life. Fragments of Philochorus indicate that there were at least four shrines or temples to Theseus at Athens.

JASON

THE QUEST FOR BIRTHRIGHT

Jason, who came from Thessaly in Northern Greece, was in ancient eyes not exactly an equal of the Perseids, who not only had at least tenuous claims to divine ancestry but also were associated with Attica and its environs. However, his lineage was hardly to be despised. He was descended from Hellen, the patriarch of all Greeks or Hellenes. His father was King Aeson of Iolcos and his mother Alcimede was descended from the Boeotian King Minyas. Unfortunately his grandmother, Aeson's mother Tyro, had had a liaison with Poseidon which produced twins, one of whom was his frightful uncle Pelias. As gods were notoriously protective of their offspring, this could have proved fatal for Aeson's branch of the family when Pelias developed royal ambitions. However, Pelias and his twin sought revenge on Sidero, whom Aeson's father King Cretheus had married in a careless moment and who had mistreated their mother Tyro. They pursued her into the temple of Hera, where suppliants were supposed to receive sanctuary, and killed her on the altar there, thus earning the hatred of Hera. The goddess deeply resented this insult and would thereafter give aid in any plans made against Pelias.

Jason was an infant when Pelias made his move, overthrowing Aeson and killing Aeson's descendants. Alcimede secretly sent her son Jason off to the wise centaur Chiron for education. Meanwhile Pelias ruled uneasily, and often consulted the oracles, one of which cryptically told him to beware of a man wearing only one shoe.

Grown to manhood, Jason came to the city of Iolcos during a great festival in honor of Poseidon. On the journey he met an old woman, who asked his help in crossing the river Anauros; while helping her he lost, of course, one of his sandals. Readers acquainted with Greek mythology

will not be surprised to learn that the old woman was Hera in disguise, and that Pelias turned a ghastly white when he heard of the fine young man who had entered his city wearing only one shoe.

Pelias, confronted by Jason on the question of his right to the kingdom, admitted that Jason was the rightful king, but reminded him that his great-uncle Athamus had had twin children, Phrixus and Helle, who had been scheduled for sacrifice due to the machinations of their stepmother and saved by a flying golden ram which Zeus (or in some stories Poseidon) sent to whisk them away. The princess Helle had fallen into the water later called the Hellespont, but Phrixus had been kindly received by King Aetes. He had sacrificed to the gods the golden ram, which became the constellation Aries. He then had given its golden fleece to King Aetes, who had hung it in a tree guarded by a dragon that slept neither by night nor day. Now, Pelias said, the Golden Fleece must be brought home so that the spirit of Phrixus could return to the land of his ancestors. “Do this,” said Pelias, “and I swear by Zeus that I will give you the throne of our kingdom.” The young man eagerly took the quest, and Pelias settled back with the smug feeling that he had seen the last of his troublesome nephew.

Jason prayed to Hera and to Pallas Athena for aid, promising sacrifices such as the divinities loved. Athena hurried to consult Argos of Thespiæ, who some said was a son of Phrixus come from Colchis. Whether or not this was true, he was certainly a shipbuilder, and that was what Jason needed. Hera meanwhile was proclaiming throughout her cities Jason’s quest and its promise of glory for heroes.

Everybody who was anybody answered the call. Argus built a mighty ship from the talking wood which Athena provided. This strong and chatty ship, which sometimes gave Jason very good advice, was christened the *Argo*, and thus the sailors were known as Argonauts. Among these great adventurers were Argus; Bellerephon who had ridden the winged horse Pegasus; Castor and Polydeuces, known as the Dioscuri or sons of Zeus; Heracles, who was derailed by the loss of Hylas before Colchis was reached; Zetes and Calais, who as twin sons of the North Wind Boreas could fly; Orpheus the great musician; Peleus the father of Achilles; and many others. Some ancients say Theseus went along; others say he was on the Chair of Forgetfulness down in Hades and therefore missed the ship.

On their sea journey the Argonauts experienced many adventures, including a stay on Lemnos, the Island of Women, and a visit with the prophet Phineas, who repaid them for ridding him of **Harpies** by telling them the secret of Symplegades, or the Clashing Rocks, which stood on each side of a narrow passage and slammed together to the destruction of anything passing between them. He told them to release a dove and time the resulting crash. The dove escaped, losing only a few tail feathers, and the Argonauts rowed for dear life in the time it took the rocks to reposition themselves for another onslaught. The ship, like the dove, lost only a bit of tail ornament, the *Argo* triumphantly sailed on, and the Symplegades were so embarrassed that they never moved again.

Aeetes received them kindly in Colchis, promising to give them the fleece if Jason would do him a small favor, i.e., yoke two fire-breathing bulls, plow a field with them, sow dragon's teeth, and then kill the crop of warriors which would promptly spring up. While Jason was achieving these simple tasks, the king's daughter Medea, who luckily was a witch, fell in love with Jason. When her father tried to go back on his word, she put the dragon who guarded the fleece to sleep, and she and Jason, complete with Golden Fleece, fled to the *Argo* and the heroes set sail. When her father tried to follow them, she cut her little brother Absyrtus, whom she had brought along as insurance, into pieces so that her father would have to pause to gather him up and then give him a proper burial. After an adventurous trip home involving the twin dangers Scylla and Charybdis, they arrived in Iolcos only to learn that Pelias had no intention of honoring his word. Medea tricked his daughters into killing him.

At this point the stories vary. Some say the Iolcians were so incensed over the manner of the death of Pelias that they drove Jason and Medea out; others say that he ruled. However that may have been, he decided, after ten years and two sons with Medea, to marry the daughter of the king of Corinth. Medea sent the bride-to-be a poisoned robe, which burst into flame when donned, killed her own two sons, and fled to Athens in a dragon-drawn chariot sent by her grandfather the sun god Helios. Jason, on a visit to the decaying *Argo*, was killed when a beam fell on him.