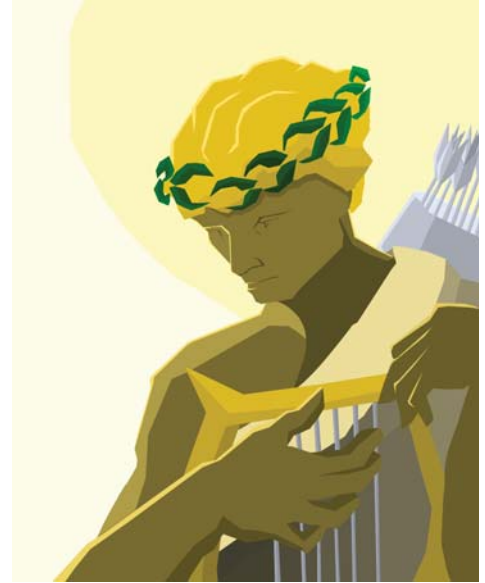


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# GREEK & ROMAN MYTHOLOGY



Sample Entry “Heracles”

preface

reader’s guide

**The Lincoln Library Press, Inc.**  
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#### Citation

Gall, Timothy, ed. “Heracles.” *The Lincoln Library of Greek & Roman Mythology*,  
vol. 3, Cleveland, OH: Lincoln Library Press, Inc., 2006, 74–85.

## The Lincoln Library of Greek & Roman Mythology

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Library of Congress Control Number: 2005935020

ISBN-13: 978-0-912168-21-0

ISBN-10: 0-912168-21-8 (set)



**The Lincoln Library Press,**  
dedicated to inspiring independent learning,  
is named for Abraham Lincoln,  
America's foremost autodidact.

### Publisher Cataloging Data

The Lincoln Library of Greek & Roman mythology / editors, Timothy and Susan Gall ; contributing editor, Rick M. Newton.

5 v.

Includes indexes.

Summary: This reference set includes alphabetically arranged entries on gods, goddesses, heroes, places, and other aspects of Greek and Roman mythology.

Contents: v. 1. Abyla to Atalanta--v. 2. Athena to Dirae--v. 3. Dis Pater to Janus--v. 4. Jason to Panoptes--v. 5. Parcae to Zeus.

ISBN 0-912168-21-8 (set)

1. Mythology, Classical--Encyclopedias, Juvenile  
[1. Mythology, Classical--Encyclopedias] I. Gall, Timothy L.  
II. Gall, Susan B. III. Newton, Rick M.

292.1/3/03-dc22  
2006 2005935020

Manufactured in Hong Kong

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1



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# P R E F A C E



*We are all Greeks. Our laws, our literature, our religion, our arts have their roots in Greece.*

**T**hus writes English poet Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792–1822) in his *Preface to Hellas*. Three things are amazing about this declaration. First, it was written not by a Greek but by an Englishman. If a Greek poet were to expound on the greatness of Greek culture, we might dismiss the boast as an expression of ethnocentric pride or even chauvinism. But the fact that an English poet can state “We are all Greeks” suggests that Shelley found something in the Greeks that transcends cultural boundaries and unites educated people.

Second, Shelley wrote in the early nineteenth century, some 2,500 years after the creation of Homer’s *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, and some 2,300 years after the Golden Age of Periclean Athens. Shelley apparently found something in the Greeks that transcends time. For him, the ancients were as vibrant and relevant in his own day as they were in antiquity.

Third, Shelley’s statement was written some 200 years before

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*A photograph of the Parthenon in Athens, Greece, as it appeared in the late 1800s.*

the era in which we now live. As we embark on the twenty-first century, we find that his assessment still holds true. In schools, colleges, and universities throughout England, the United States, Europe, Australia, and elsewhere, the “classical curriculum” rooted in Greek culture still provides the backbone of humanistic education and the liberal arts. This suggests that there is something in Greek culture that is of permanent and eternal relevance. Just as the ancients were alive for Shelley, so is his assessment still alive for us. Even today, we are “all Greeks”!

## Greece Has Taken Us Captive

But Shelley was not the first to recognize the lasting universal value of the Greeks, whose culture expressed itself in the language of mythology, gods, and heroes. As early as the second century B.C., when Rome conquered Greece and reduced her status to that of a province, the mighty conqueror confessed, “We have conquered Greece, but Greece has taken us captive through her culture.” Thus wrote Roman poet Horace in *Epistles* II.1 in the first century B.C.

When the Romans turned their attention to arts, literature, and religion, they found their inspira-

tion in the very Greeks they had overcome. The first work of Latin literature was written around 273 B.C. by Livius Andronicus: a Latin translation of Homer’s *Odyssey* for school children. This text not only translated Homer but, more importantly, adapted him for a young Roman audience. Thus began the classical tradition of calling the Greek “Hermes” by the Latin name of “Mercury,” and of naming the Greek “Muses” as “Camenae.” This tradition was honored by the epic poet Vergil, whose *Aeneid* traced the greatness of Rome to her origins in the tales first told by Homer. The Romans were proud to call themselves Romans, but they knew full well that their cultural origins lay in Greece. Expressed most simply, the Romans—like Shelley—saw themselves when they looked to Greece.

## A Rebirth of High Culture

Thus was born the “Greco-Roman Civilization” which, centuries after Rome’s fall, was rediscovered in the Italian and European Renaissance. As Europe awoke from the Dark Ages and found her “rebirth” in the high culture of the Greeks and Romans, she created the modern “Arts and Sciences” and gave them all classical names: poetry, drama, theater, tragedy, comedy, history, philosophy, theology, psychology,

## Preface (continued)

rhetoric, biology, chemistry, architecture, mathematics, geometry, geography, astronomy, technology, anatomy, medicine, physics, politics, government, and democracy are all words of Greek and Latin origin. In short, we find the “life of the mind” when we turn to the Greeks and Romans.

### An Essential Component in Modern Life and Culture

Even today, as we explore outer space, investigate science, advance in technology, and pursue the arts, we “translate” our discoveries into Greek and Roman mythical terms that enable us to recognize and understand them. From the rings of Saturn to the Polyphemus moth, from the *Titanic* to the NASA Daedalus Project, from narcissism to the Oedipus complex, from our Achilles’ heel to our Achilles’ tendon, and even down to the trade names of Ajax cleanser and breakfast cereals (sacred to Ceres, goddess of grain), the myths of the Greeks and Romans have become an integral and permanent part of our modern life and culture.

The founding fathers of the United States were themselves educated in the classical tradition

and, for this reason, designed the cultural and political life of the New World according to the Greco-Roman model. The American work-ethic and pioneer spirit can be traced back to the Romans, who saw themselves as pious, hard-working farmers as well as tough soldiers who boldly crossed the mountains of the Alps and the Mediterranean Sea to spread their sphere of influence. But the culture they spread was also a Hellenized culture rooted in the arts and spirit of the Greeks. One need only take a cursory glance at the public buildings in every American city—with their Greek marble columns and Roman domes—to recognize the “neoclassical” models of our civic architecture.

The classical influence extends even to the inner portions of these structures. The hallways of the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C., are a veritable treasure-trove of colorful frescoes depicting myths and legends from the Greco-Roman past, reminding us that the very notions of public “library” and “museum” are inventions of the ancients that still enrich our lives.

### An Essential Component in Education

*The Lincoln Library of Greek & Roman Mythology* is offered to young readers in the belief that the cultural legacy of the Greco-Roman classics, as told in their fascinating myths, remains—even in the twenty-first century—an essential component in education.

The myths in this five-volume set are told in an easily readable and engaging story-like style that promises to captivate youthful enthusiasm and curiosity. At the same time, however, the texts do not “speak down” to the young. On the contrary, students are encouraged to stretch their minds and imaginations as they reflect on these stories and learn about their continuing legacy in art, science, and history.

Richly illustrated and cross-referenced, *The Lincoln Library of Greek & Roman Mythology* is designed to entice the reader to continue exploring the connections and ramifications of these marvelously intertwined tales of gods and heroes.

Rick M. Newton, Ph.D.  
Professor of Classics  
Kent State University



# READER'S GUIDE



**T**he *Lincoln Library of Greek & Roman Mythology* is designed for use by students in grades four through twelve. Organized in five volumes and arranged A to Z, *The Lincoln Library of Greek & Roman Mythology* presents entries on 500 gods, goddesses, heroes, places, and other aspects of Greek and Roman mythology.

## Greek and Roman Gods

*The Lincoln Library of Greek & Roman Mythology* presents separate entries on the Greek and Roman gods and heroes. The first myths were created by the ancient Greeks. The Greek gods and heroes, with their attributes and myths, are presented in *The Lincoln Library of Greek & Roman Mythology* in complete entries. The Romans later adopted many of the Greek deities, but renamed them and, in some cases, recast their stories to emphasize Roman values and ideas. *The Lincoln Library of Greek & Roman Mythology* presents the Roman versions of the myths in full entries as well. Thus, both Heracles, the Greek hero, and Hercules, his Roman counterpart, have their own entries. The stories may be similar, but our editors have taken care to include only Greek character names in the

Greek versions and only Roman character names in the Roman versions. The entries for some of the gods, where the myths and attributes were identical for the Greek and Roman characters, have some redundancy. The editors were committed to eliminating as much confusion for the student researcher as possible.

## Features

Each entry begins with the title. If the subject is Greek, the spelling of the name in Greek follows the heading. The pronunciation guide encourages readers to say long Greek and Roman names out loud, and supports classroom presentations. The character is identified as Greek or Roman, and the attributes by which he or she is known are listed.

A brief abstract opens the longer entries, summarizing the key aspects of the character's life and/or role in mythology.

The entry text follows. Longer entries include features to draw the reader into the text, such as subheads and True/False anticipation guides. Designed with the advice of Dr. Mary Spor, an expert on reading in the content areas, these True/False statements encourage the reader to delve into the text to distinguish the true from the false.

More than 400 illustrations accompany the entries. Images filling the pages of each volume include Greco-Roman sculpture, vase-paintings, and statues; great works of Renaissance and modern art; graphics of the constellations and photographs from the exploration of outer space; comic-style panels; and photographs of plants, insects, and animals whose names were inspired by mythology. The illustrations were selected to satisfy a wide range of interests.

Artwork was specially commissioned to illustrate the entries of this first edition. Comic-book style panels were specially drawn to illustrate five myths. In addition, selected entries have black-and-white line drawings, suitable for reproduction as report covers, also specially created for this first edition of *The Lincoln Library of Greek & Roman Mythology*.

Following the text of the entry, the character's family members are identified to enable further research or to lend perspective. Multidisciplinary references were added to expand the reader's understanding of mythology and its influence on the fields of art, music, literature, science, space exploration, and word history.

Readers will find mythical allusions in William Shakespeare, Dante, English and American lit-

## Reader's Guide (continued)

erature, and even modern cinema. Word histories are provided to help students recognize Mercury in the English word “merchant” and Hestia in the word “restaurant.”

*The Lincoln Library of Greek & Roman Mythology* aims to expand the thinking of young readers. Entries are supplemented with excerpts from the key classical authors of antiquity in readable translation. Contributing editor Rick M. Newton prepared new translations of many excerpts specifically for readers of *The Lincoln Library of Greek & Roman Mythology*. For readers who want to “go to the source,” citations are provided to works by Homer, Hesiod, Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, Pindar, Apollonius Rhodius, Livy, Vergil, Horace, and Ovid.

In addition, group projects are supported by six plays edited for classroom presentation, depicting six different myths. To facilitate full class participation and to simulate theater of ancient Greece, the plays include roles for a chorus.

Organized and indexed as a ready-to-use reference work for those researching specific names and places, *The Lincoln Library of Greek & Roman Mythology* also supports browsing or inde-

pendent reading. Generous cross-references are provided with most entries, designed to build research skills and entice the reader to further study.

Two tables precede the Subject Index in Volume 5. The first is a table of mythological associations that links heroes, gods, and goddesses with the concepts, words, and phrases with which they are associated. The second provides a listing of English words and phrases that have their origins in Greek and Roman mythology.

### Editor's Notes

A note about punctuation of possessives: The standard reference in book publishing, *The Chicago Manual of Style*, calls for the use of 's when creating possessives of proper nouns, even of those ending in s. Exceptions include names ending in -ees (such as Achilles). *The Lincoln Library of Greek & Roman Mythology* makes a further exception, bowing to general practice: when punctuating possessives for one-syllable names ending in s, such as Zeus and Mars, we have used the apostrophe alone.

Finally, myths cannot be fact-checked. Many versions of each myth have been recorded and

recounted over the centuries. The editors strove to provide coherent retellings of common versions of the myths. Comparing the renditions presented in *The Lincoln Library of Greek & Roman Mythology* to those found in other sources will spark debate and deepen understanding of the evolving nature of myth and its relationship to human imagination.

There are people and places without whose help and support *The Lincoln Library of Greek & Roman Mythology* would not have been possible. Each deserves our deepest gratitude: Rollie Welch, Young Adult Librarian, Youth Services Department, Cleveland Public Library; Arthur and Alice Gall; Patrick Bevan; Jim Corrigan and Claudia Coulton; Doug and Mary Seidner; David and Paula Stebbins; the Janes's First Light on Nantucket; The Alesci's team of Gina, Jeff, Lisa, and Dell; the A.J. Rocco's team of Brendan, Zack, Nicole, Charlie, Becca, and Addie; David Bevan, Marty Niemi, and the Indian Hill Observatory of the Chagrin Valley Astronomical Society; and especially William Seibert for giving us the opportunity to pursue this project.





## Gods and Heroes

Equivalent mythological characters

GREEK NAME	ROMAN NAME
Alexandra	Cassandra
Aphrodite	Venus
Apollo	Apollo
Ares	Mars
Artemis	Diana
Asclepius	Aesculapius
Athena	Minerva
Castor and Pollux	Gemini
Cronus	Saturn
Demeter	Ceres
Dionysus	Bacchus
Eos	Aurora
Eros	Cupid
Gaea	Tellus
Hades	Pluto
Helios	Sol
Hephaestus	Vulcan
Hera	Juno
Heracles	Hercules
Hermes	Mercury
Hestia	Vesta
Odysseus	Ulysses
Persephone	Proserpina
Poseidon	Neptune
Rhea	Cybele
Selene	Luna
Tyche	Fortuna
Zeus	Jupiter

See volume one, page vii, for the **Reader's Guide** to this encyclopedia. See volume five for a **Table of Associations**, linking characters to the attributes with which they are associated; a **Table of Word Origins**, listing English words and their Greek and Latin origins; and a **Subject Index**.

## The Greek Alphabet

UPPERCASE	LOWERCASE	NAME	ENGLISH EQUIVALENT	SOUNDS LIKE
A	α	alpha	a	father
B	β	beta	b	bag
Γ	γ	gamma	g	gain
Δ	δ	delta	d	dog
E	ε	epsilon	e	end
Z	ζ	zeta	z	zebra
H	η	eta	ê	hey
Θ	θ	theta	th	thick
I	ι	iota	i	it
K	κ	kappa	k	king
Λ	λ	lamda	l	lamp
M	μ	mu	m	man
N	ν	nu	n	net
Ξ	ξ	xi	ks	box
O	ο	omikron	o	off
Π	π	pi	p	pin
P	ρ	rho	r	ring
Σ	σ, ς	sigma	s	say
T	τ	tau	t	top
Υ	υ	upsilon	u	put
Φ	φ	phi	f	fun
X	χ	chi	ch	Bach
Ψ	ψ	psi	ps	psalm
Ω	ω	omega	ô	grow

## The Ancient World



*Here is a fresco (a watercolor painting painted directly onto a wall) from Herculaneum of the hero Heracles. He is famous for completing twelve very difficult labors.*

---

# Heracles

PRONUNCIATION: HAIR-uh-kleez

EQUIVALENT CHARACTER: The Romans called him Hercules. He was also known as Alcides, taken from the name of his grandfather, Alceus.

GENDER: Male

CULTURE: Greek

ATTRIBUTES: Strength; Heroism; Suffering for the good of others

Heracles was known for his superhuman strength. He was considered the greatest of all the Greek heroes. He is famous for performing the 12 labors, all of which required great strength and a quick-thinking mind. His father was Zeus, king of the gods. Zeus welcomed Heracles to live with the gods on Mount Olympus when Heracles died.

Heracles was the greatest of all Greek heroes. He was the son of Zeus, the king of the gods, and Alcmena, a mortal woman. Heracles was the great-grandson of the Greek hero, Perseus. Heracles led a difficult life as a mortal because he was constantly tormented by Hera, the queen

of the Olympian gods. Hera was Zeus' wife, but Zeus had many children with mortal women. Hera was jealous when Zeus fell in love with Alcmena. When Alcmena became pregnant with Zeus' child, Hera decided to take her revenge on the child. It is ironic that the name Heracles means "glory of Hera." The labors that Heracles endured proved the power of the vengeful Hera.

Hera showed her anger with Zeus even before Heracles' birth. On the day Heracles was to be born, Zeus proclaimed that he was going to be the father of the next ruler in the line of Perseus. This gave Hera an idea. First, she asked Zeus to swear that the baby born that day would inherit the

entire kingdom of Perseus. Zeus felt confident that Heracles would be born that day, so he agreed. Then Hera, with the help of her daughter Eileithyia, the goddess of childbirth, delayed Heracles' birth. Next, Hera and Eileithyia prompted the premature birth of Eurystheus, a cousin of Heracles. Since Eurystheus was born first, he inherited the kingdom meant for Heracles. Eurystheus became the king of Mycenae.

## Baby Heracles and the Giant Snakes

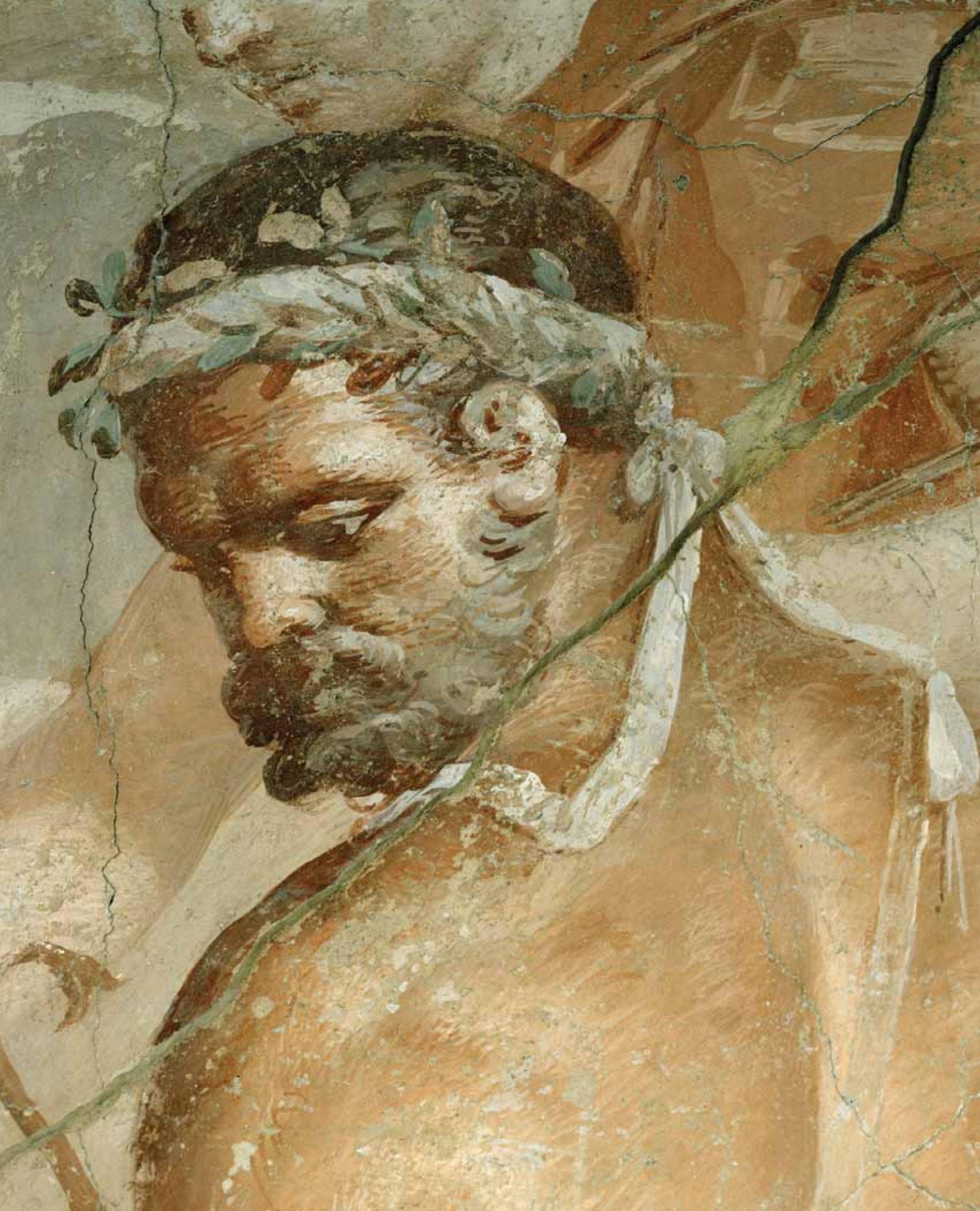
Hera had deprived Heracles of the kingdom of Mycenae, but she still was not satisfied. She wanted to punish Heracles further. One night



## TRUE OR FALSE?

1. Heracles was the son of Zeus.
2. Heracles grew up in the city of Thebes.
3. A metope is a pimple on the end of your nose.
4. Heracles killed the Hydra with flaming arrows.
5. Heracles cleaned King Augeas's stables in 30 days.
6. Heracles freed Prometheus from his chains.
7. Heracles became immortal and lived among the gods.
8. Heracles completed ten labors for his cousin Eurystheus.







*Heracles was a hero who accomplished many difficult tasks. One of these tasks was to defeat the many-headed Hydra.*

### His Fame Grows

Heracles grew up in the Greek city of Thebes. Being of noble birth, Heracles was expected to learn astronomy, poetry, and music. But Heracles wanted only to hunt and fight. One day Linus, his music instructor, grew impatient with Heracles and scolded him for singing poorly. Heracles became so angry that he hit Linus over the head with his lyre (a type of harp), killing the old man instantly. Amphitryon—king of Thebes, husband of Alcmene, and Heracles' adoptive father—decided that it was too dangerous to have Heracles living in the royal palace. He sent Heracles outside the city to become a shepherd. Heracles became famous for killing many of the wild beasts that preyed upon the king's sheep. By the time he was 18, Heracles had killed the vicious lion of Cithairon.

### The 12 Labors of Heracles

As a reward for his valiant exploits, Heracles was offered the hand of Megara, daughter of the ruler of Thebes. Together they had three sons. But Hera again became jealous of Heracles' fame, and

she sent two gigantic snakes into his cradle. Heracles showed no fear, even as a baby.

Taking one snake in each hand, he squeezed and squeezed. The snakes writhed in the tiny baby's fists, but Heracles did not ease his grip until the snakes hung limply, dead. Gods and mortals

alike were amazed by the infant's strength and bravery. As he grew up, Heracles became stronger and stronger with each day. He spent his childhood in training. He learned wrestling from Autolycus, archery from Eurystus, armored fighting from Castor, and music from Linus.

she decided to bring him great misfortune.

Hera caused Heracles to go mad. In his crazed state, Heracles, thinking that his sons were his enemies, threw them into a blazing fire. When he realized what he had done, Heracles exiled himself from Thebes and traveled to the oracle at Delphi to ask for help. The priestess of Apollo delivered a prophecy. She told Heracles that he must serve his cousin, Eurystheus, for 12 years. He would be required to perform ten grueling labors. If he completed each successfully, he would be granted immortality.

### Labor 1: Kill the Nemean Lion

Eurystheus was intimidated by his cousin, Heracles. Eurystheus devised ten labors to assign to Heracles that would keep him away from the royal palace for as long as possible. Heracles' first labor was to kill the Nemean lion and bring its hide back to Eurystheus.

Heracles was both strong and quick-witted, but killing the Nemean lion presented a huge challenge. First Heracles tried to shoot arrows at the lion. Then he beat the lion with his club. Heracles quickly discovered the beast could not be harmed by regular weapons. With a rush of strength and courage, Heracles grabbed the lion



*This sculpted image of Heracles, called a metope, is from the Athenian Treasury at Delphi.*

with his bare hands and strangled it. Heracles then skinned the Nemean lion with its own claws, because its skin was too tough for other tools. Heracles then threw the lion's skin over his head and shoulders and returned to Eurystheus. In ancient art, Heracles is almost always shown wearing the skin of the Nemean lion.

### Labor 2: Slay the Lernaean Hydra

For his second labor, Heracles was sent to slay the Lernaean Hydra, a horrible monster residing in Lerna, a town in southern Greece. The Hydra resembled a snake with nine heads. It was believed to be so poisonous that even its breath was enough to kill a man.

Heracles first shot flaming arrows at the Hydra, but found they did little to harm it. He then attacked the Hydra with his club. However, for each head that Heracles knocked off, two more heads would grow in its place. Heracles called for Iolaus, his charioteer, to bring him firebrands,

which he used to singe the Hydra's necks so the heads could not grow again. When he finally succeeded in killing the Hydra, Heracles dipped the tips of his arrows in its blood, making them so poisonous they could kill a man by merely grazing him.

### Labor 3: Capture a Sacred Deer of Artemis

For his third labor, Heracles was sent to capture one of the sacred deer of Artemis, the Greek goddess of the hunt. These deer had golden antlers and brass hooves, and they were extremely swift runners. Heracles did not want to wound the deer because he feared angering Artemis and incurring her wrath. Instead Heracles ran after the deer. Heracles chased the deer for a full year before the deer finally grew tired. The deer slowed down enough that Heracles was finally able to trap it.

### Labor 4: Capture the Erymanthian Boar

For his fourth labor, Eurystheus sent Heracles to capture the Erymanthian boar and bring it back to Mycenae alive. (A boar is a type of large male pig.) On his way to Mount Erymanthus where the boar lived, Heracles stopped overnight. He stayed with Pholus, a Centaur (half man, half horse),

## Heracles (continued)

and was entertained as his guest. Pholus and Heracles sat together, eating roasted meat. Later, against the Centaur's wishes, Heracles opened a jar of wine that had been a gift from Dionysus for all the Centaurs to enjoy. When the Centaurs saw that Pholus was going to share their wine with Heracles, they became angry and a fight broke out. Heracles accidentally shot Chiron, the wisest of the Centaurs and the tutor of Achilles, with one of his poisoned arrows. The wound was painful, but Chiron was immortal and could not die.

Pholus had also died in the fighting and confusion. Heracles gave him a proper funeral and then returned to his task to capture the Erymanthian boar. Heracles chased the boar until it grew weary, then picked it up and thrust it into a snowbank. The boar was unable to move, and Heracles easily captured it in a net and returned it to Eurystheus.

### Labor 5: Clean the Stables of King Augeas

With the first four labors completed, Eurystheus thought that Heracles wasn't being challenged enough. For his fifth labor, Heracles was sent to clean the stables of King Augeas of Elis. This was the most difficult labor so far. Augeas owned thousands of sheep and cattle, and

his stables had not been cleaned for more than 30 years. Nevertheless, Heracles approached Augeas and offered to clean the stables in a single day in exchange for a tenth of Augeas's herd. Augeas agreed. Heracles redirected the course of two nearby rivers so that they ran through the stables. The stables were washed clean within a few hours. After Heracles had completed the task, Augeas found out that he had been ordered to do so by Eurystheus, and he refused to give Heracles his reward. Heracles



*In this metope, Athena, the goddess of wisdom, is giving Heracles advice about how to clean the Augean Stables. It adorned the Temple of Zeus at Olympia and is now housed at the Archaeological Museum in Olympia, Greece.*

was ordered to leave Elis, and he returned to Mycenae.

### Labor 6: Chase Away the Deadly Birds of Stymphalos

The sixth labor of Heracles was to chase away the deadly birds that were tormenting the citizens of Stymphalos. These birds were raised by Ares, the god of war. The Stymphalian birds had sharp brass feathers that they used as weapons. Once they attacked, the birds then ate the flesh of their victims. Heracles frightened the birds by using a pair of bronze castanets given to him by Athena, the Greek goddess of war and wisdom. The birds flew away from Stymphalos in fear, never to return.

### Labor 7: Capture the Fire-Breathing Cretan Bull

For his seventh labor, Heracles was sent to the island of Crete. A monstrous, fire-breathing bull had been ravaging the countryside there. Eurystheus wanted Heracles to capture it and bring it back to him alive. Heracles easily captured the bull. He carried it back to Mycenae. Eurystheus received it and then decided to let it roam free. The bull wandered Greece and eventually came to Marathon, a city near Athens, where it tormented the people living there.

*“Although I was the son of Zeus, I endured boundless agony. For I was a slave to a man who was far beneath me...”*

—Homer’s *Odyssey*



*Heracles is capturing the Cretan bull to complete his seventh labor.*

### Labor 8: Capture the Mares of Diomedes

Eurystheus was frustrated that Heracles was completing his labors with such ease, and he decided to give him even more difficult tasks. Heracles’ eighth labor was to capture the mares (female horses) of Diomedes, a king in Thrace. Diomedes fed his mares human flesh. The mares were hungry for the taste of human blood and attacked anyone who ventured into Diomedes’ kingdom. When Heracles arrived in Thrace, he threw Diomedes to his own mares. The mares then became so obedient that they allowed Heracles to lead them to Mycenae without threatening him once.

### Labor 9: Retrieve the Golden Belt of Ares

Eurystheus next sent Heracles far to the east, to the land of the Amazons. The Amazons were a race of warlike women who fought and hunted while their husbands tended the household. Heracles’ ninth labor was to retrieve the golden belt of the war god Ares, which was in the possession of the Amazon queen, Hippolyta. When Heracles arrived in the land of the Amazons, Hippolyta was so amazed by his muscles that she offered the belt—and her hand in marriage—without a fight. But Hera, who had continued to pay close attention to Heracles, would not allow Heracles to complete his labor so easily. Disguising her-



*In this metope from a temple at Selinunte, Heracles retrieves the belt of Ares from Hippolyta, the queen of the Amazons.*

self as an Amazon woman, Hera spread a rumor that Heracles was there to kidnap Hippolyta. The Amazons attacked Heracles, but he managed to fight them off and run away. Fortunately, he had managed to keep a grip on the golden belt.

### Labor 10: Herd the Red Cattle of Geryon

The tenth labor of Heracles was to herd the red cattle of Geryon back to Mycenae. Geryon was a monster with three bodies and three pairs of legs joined at the waist. On his way to the island of Erytheia, where Geryon lived, Heracles became overheated by the rays of the Sun. He aimed an arrow at Helios, the Sun god, and threatened to shoot. Helios was impressed by Heracles’ bravery and offered him his golden cup to travel in. When Heracles landed on Erytheia, he began to round up Geryon’s cattle. Before long, Eurytion, Geryon’s cowherd, and Orthos, his two-headed guard dog, came after Heracles. Heracles swung his mighty club and killed them both with a single stroke. Next Geryon himself attacked Heracles. This time, Heracles carefully aimed a poisoned arrow at the giant and shot him through all three of his bodies. Geryon fell down dead. Heracles then herded the cattle into the magical golden

## Heracles (continued)

cup and sailed back to the mainland of Greece. As soon as he landed there, Hera sent a swarm of gadflies to torment the cattle. To escape the stinging and biting gadflies, the cattle ran all over Europe. Heracles managed to round them up again and deliver them to Eurystheus.

Heracles happily returned to Mycenae, thinking that his labors were completed. But Eurystheus claimed that he had only successfully completed eight labors: His charioteer had helped him kill the Hydra, and it was the two rivers, not Heracles himself, that had cleaned the stables of King Augeas. Heracles agreed to perform two more labors because he enjoyed the fame they had brought him.

### Labor 11: Retrieve the Golden Apples of the Hesperides

For his eleventh labor, Heracles was sent to retrieve the Golden Apples of the Hesperides, nymphs who lived in a garden to the west beyond the sunset. The tree that bore the Golden Apples was sacred to Hera. When she married Zeus, Hera had received the tree as a marriage gift from Gaea, the Earth Mother. Hera placed the tree near Mount Atlas and appointed the Hesperides and the dragon Ladon to watch over the tree. Heracles



*In this metope from the Athenian Treasury at Delphi, Heracles fights Cycnus, the son of Ares.*

did not know where the tree was located, so he traveled the globe in search of it.

On his way to the garden of the Hesperides, Heracles was challenged to a fight by Cycnus, a son of the war god Ares. Heracles defeated Cycnus. Then Ares tried to attack Heracles but Zeus threw a thunderbolt between them and stopped the fight.

Heracles next visited Nereus, an old but clever god with the tail of a fish, who had ruled the sea before Poseidon. Nereus, who was the father of the water nymphs known as Nereids, lived at the bottom of the sea and could change his shape at will. Heracles thought that Nereus would know where the Golden Apple tree grew. But he also knew that Nereus would not be willing to tell him without a

fight. Heracles seized Nereus while he was asleep. Nereus violently thrashed about and transformed himself into many different shapes, but eventually he grew tired and was forced to reveal the location of the Hesperides.

Heracles continued on his way and was confronted by Antaeus, a Giant and son of the Earth Mother, Gaea. Antaeus challenged all who passed by to wrestle with him. Heracles agreed to the challenge. Heracles and Antaeus grappled, and Heracles appeared to be winning—but whenever Heracles threw Antaeus to the ground, he sprang up again, fully revived. Heracles realized that Antaeus could not be hurt as long as he touched the earth. As the son



*In this metope from the Temple of Zeus at Olympia, Athena, the goddess of wisdom, is helping Heracles hold the sky.*



## The Pillars of Heracles

of Gaea, Antaeus received fresh strength every time he was thrown to the earth. Heracles seized Antaeus, lifted him above his head, and squeezed the life out of him without allowing him to touch the ground again.

Next Heracles passed Mount Caucasus as he continued on his journey. There he found the Titan Prometheus chained to a rock. Heracles knew that Prometheus was being punished by Zeus for stealing the sacred fire from Mount Olympus and giving it to mortal men.

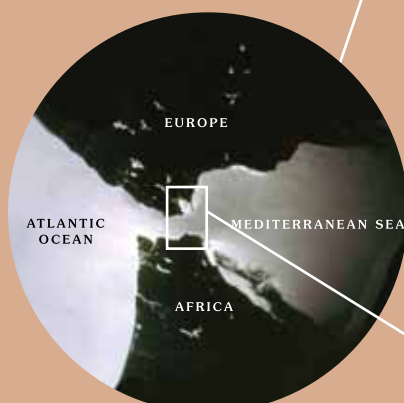
Prometheus was bound to a rock, and each night an eagle came down to him and pecked out his liver. During the day, the liver grew back again, so the eagle kept coming back in hopes of totally consuming Prometheus's liver. Heracles shot the eagle that Zeus had sent and freed Prometheus from his bonds. Prometheus was grateful. He decided to help Heracles by telling him that only a god could pick the Golden Apples of the Hesperides.

Heracles finally traveled to the land of the Hesperides and saw the Titan Atlas nearby. Atlas had the task of holding the sky on his shoulders for all eternity. Heracles knew that he could not pick the Golden Apples himself, so he asked Atlas for help. Atlas

The Greeks called the great rocks that guard the entrance to the Mediterranean Sea the Pillars of Heracles. The rock on the African side was called Abyla and the rock on the European side was called Calpe. According to Greek myth, the two mountains were formed from a single mountain torn apart by Heracles.



This map shows the location of the entrance to the Mediterranean Sea. The narrow channel that separates the Atlantic Ocean from the Mediterranean Sea is called the Strait of Gibraltar.



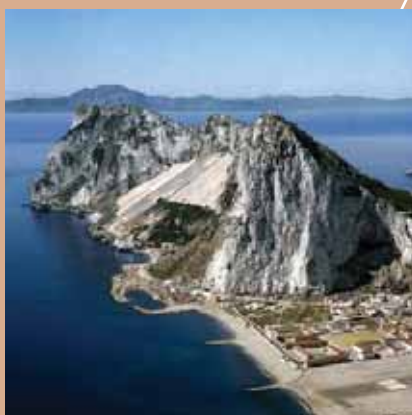
NASA Photo STS098-712-29

This photograph was taken by an astronaut from space. It shows how the Strait of Gibraltar looks from a spacecraft.



NASA/GSFC/METI/ERSDAC/JAROS and U.S./Japan ASTER science Team

This image was taken from a satellite orbiting the Earth. It shows the Strait of Gibraltar in more detail.



Gibraltar Tourist Board

The photograph to the left shows Calpe (the Rock of Gibraltar) as it looks from Earth. Across the water is Abyla. The mountain Abyla is now known as Jebel Musa. It lies on the northern shore of the African nation Morocco.

## Heracles: The Strongest Hero

**H**eracles was one of the first constellations that was ever recognized, but is one of the most difficult to see. Most of the stars are quite faint. The great hero Heracles is shown kneeling and holding a club in his right hand. In ancient times this constellation was known simply as “the Kneeler.”

Heracles is the fifth-largest of all the constellations. Heracles is visible in the Northern Hemisphere throughout the summer months, and reaches its highest point in June. The alpha star of Heracles is (1) Ras Algethi, and it is one of the largest known stars. Ras Algethi is a red giant star, and is approximately 600–700

times larger than our Sun. The brightest star in Heracles is (2) Kornephoros, which comes from the ancient Greek word for “club-bearer.” This giant yellow star makes up the right shoulder of Heracles. Kornephoros is close to 110 light-years from Earth, and is about 175 times brighter than the Sun.



Till Credner/allthesky.com

refused to pick the apples because he feared the dragon Ladon, so Heracles quickly shot Ladon with one of his poisoned arrows. Taking the sky upon his shoulders, Heracles watched as Atlas picked the three Golden Apples. But Atlas was so happy to be freed from his task of holding the sky that he told Heracles that he would return the apples to Eurystheus himself. Thinking quickly, Heracles asked Atlas if he could hold the sky for just a moment while he made his lion skin into a pad for his shoulders. Atlas thought this sounded reasonable; he put the apples on the ground and took the sky on his shoulders again. Having tricked Atlas, Heracles quickly grabbed the apples and left for Mycenae. Eurystheus was impressed with Heracles' craftiness and returned the Golden Apples to him. Heracles gave the apples to Athena so that she could return them to their proper place.

### Labor 12: Capture the Watchdog of the Underworld

For his twelfth labor, Eurystheus sent Heracles to capture Cerberus, the three-headed watchdog of the Underworld. Accompanied by Hermes, the messenger of the gods, and Athena, Heracles

descended into the Underworld. Heracles approached Hades, the god of the Underworld, and asked his permission to bring Cerberus to the surface. Hades agreed, on the condition that Heracles accomplish the deed without the use of weapons. Heracles held the beast tight around its three necks and managed to drag it all the way to Mycenae. When Eurystheus saw Cerberus, he was so frightened that he dove into a nearby urn and ordered Heracles to return the beast to the Underworld.

With his twelfth labor completed, Heracles was free to return to Thebes.

### A Hero to the End

Heracles continued to fight and perform heroic feats for the rest of his life: He rescued Alcestis, the wife of Admetus, from the Underworld, by wrestling with death itself; he sailed with Jason and the Argonauts in search of the Golden Fleece; he participated in the hunt for the Calydonian boar; he fought alongside the Greeks in the Trojan War; and he assisted the Olympian gods in their fight against the race of Giants. He also made war against numerous nations of men; he even marched against Elis because King Augeas had refused to pay his reward after cleaning his stables.

### Heracles and Deianeira

Heracles chose Deianeira, a young and beautiful princess, to be his new wife. But she had been promised to Achelous, a mighty river god. Heracles and Achelous wrestled for Deianeira's hand. During the fight, Achelous even assumed the form of a bull. When he charged, Heracles grasped him by one of his horns and tore it off. Heracles was declared the victor, and he lived happily and peacefully with Deianeira for three years.

But their peace and happiness ended one fateful day when Heracles and Deianeira came to the River Evenus. A Centaur named Nessus lived there, and he offered to ferry the two across the river for a fee. Heracles crossed the river himself, but entrusted Nessus to carry Deianeira across. Instead of bringing her safely to the other side, Nessus decided to run away with Deianeira. Acting quickly, Heracles took aim and shot Nessus in the heart with one of his poisoned arrows.

As Nessus lay dying, he called Deianeira to his side. He told her that she could save some of his blood and use it as a love potion if she ever suspected that Heracles was pursuing other women. Deianeira listened to Nessus and kept a small vial of his blood. What she didn't know was that his blood

## Heracles (continued)

was tainted with the poison of the Hydra. Years later, when Heracles was off at war, Deianeira received word that Heracles had fallen in love with a princess named Iole. Remembering what the Centaur had said, Deianeira decided to use his blood as a love potion. She painted some of the Centaur's blood on a tunic and gave it to Heracles.

Heracles put the tunic on and shouted out in pain—it felt like thousands of snakes were biting him at once. Heracles thought he was dying from the Hydra's poison, but he was too strong to be killed. The poison made his skin stick to the tunic, so that when Heracles tried to tear the tunic off, he tore off his skin as well.

In tremendous agony, Heracles made his way to Mount Oeta, constructed a wooden funeral pyre for himself, and ordered his men to set it on fire. None of his men could bring themselves to do it, so he asked his friend Philoctetes, who was passing by, to light the pyre. Philoctetes agreed, and Heracles thanked him by giving him his bow and arrows.

As soon as the pyre was lit, a cloud lifted Heracles up to Mount Olympus. For his bravery and heroic deeds he became immortal and lived amongst the gods. Even Hera resolved her differences with

Heracles, and gave her daughter Hebe, the goddess of youth, to be his immortal wife. Heracles is unique among Greek heroes for his adoption as a god on Mount Olympus. In Greek culture, he became a model of the long-suffering hero who endures great struggles that will benefit humanity. He was especially honored by the Stoic philosophers, who believe that human suffering can lead to a virtuous outcome.

### The Choice of Heracles

Although the labors endured by Heracles were imposed on him against his will, in fifth century B.C. Athens a philosopher named Prodicus of Ceos authored a new myth about this suffering hero. (Prodicus was a friend of the famous philosopher Socrates.)

Prodicus composed an allegory in which the hero Heracles finds himself at a crossroads. One road leads downhill to a life of Pleasure; along the wayside are tempting women and musical entertainments, but the road leads to a dark end. The other hill is steep and rocky, leading to a life of Virtue. Heracles stops at the intersection and ponders which road to take. At the far end of the path to Virtue, he sees a victory crown and a temple of Virtue and Honor. Heracles reflects about what kind of life he

wants, and he nobly selects the life of Virtue although the path leading upward is steep and difficult.

In this myth, Heracles chooses hardship as a way of life that will help the world and redound to his eternal glory. Paintings of the Choice of Heracles were popular in Renaissance Europe, and Heracles was admired as a sort of martyr who looked into eternity and suffered because he believed it was more noble than an easy life of meaningless pleasure. This story is told in Book 2 of Xenophon's *Memorabilia* and is mentioned in Plato's *Symposium*.

**FAMILY:** Father was Zeus; mother was Alcmene; wives were Megara, Deianeira, and Hebe.

**IN ART:** Heracles is often portrayed in art as athletic and overly muscular. Every one of Heracles' labors was the subject of art in ancient Greece. Heracles is most often depicted wearing a lion skin over his head. This is most likely meant to represent the pelt of the Nemean lion. Some Greek authors (such as Apollodorus) believed the skin came from the lion of Cithairon, which Heracles killed as a young man. Others, such as Theocritus, believed the skin was from the Nemean lion—the skin of which was so tough that Heracles had to use its own claws to skin it.

The temple of Zeus at Olympia had sculpted images (metopes) along the top of the east and west porches. They depicted scenes from all twelve of Heracles' labors. In addition, numerous pieces of pottery depict Heracles involved in his many labors.

**IN LITERATURE:** Heracles was mentioned by just about every ancient Greek author whose work has survived to the present day. In Homer's *Odyssey*, Odysseus encounters the ghost of Heracles when he visits the Underworld. In this passage, Heracles tells Odysseus how he became the slave of Eurystheus and completed his twelfth labor—dragging the three-headed Cerberus up from the Underworld:

Although I was the son of Zeus,  
I endured boundless agony. For I  
was a slave to a man who was far  
beneath me, and he forced me to  
undergo difficult labors. He even  
sent me at one time here, to the  
Underworld, to bring back that  
dog, since he thought that there  
was no more difficult struggle than  
this. But I seized that dog and  
brought it out of Hades, since I was  
aided by Hermes and grey-eyed  
Athena.

*Homer, Odyssey, book 11, lines 620–626; translation by Rick M. Newton*

Many modern day authors refer to Heracles by his Roman name, Hercules.

See also Hercules.



*Because Heracles killed his friend Iphitus, he punished himself by serving Queen Omphale for three years. In this picture he is sitting humbly by the queen and spinning. His lion skin is on her throne. The mural can be found in the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C.*

**IN SPACE:** The constellation Heracles was one of the first ever recognized, but is one of the most difficult to see. The great hero Heracles is shown kneeling and holding a club in his right hand.

**WORD HISTORY:** The word “Herculean” describes something or someone that is unusually large and powerful. It can also describe a task that is extremely difficult.

**MODERN USAGE:** The Greek city Heraklion is named after Heracles. It is the largest city on the Greek island of Crete.

**GO TO THE SOURCE:** Heracles was a common subject for the ancient Greek authors. The 12 labors of Heracles are recounted in the *Library* by Apollodorus, book 2 chapter 5. One of the *Homeric Hymns* is entitled *Homeric Hymn*

*to Lion-Hearted Herakles.* (There are 34 *Homeric Hymns* that most experts believe were written several centuries after Homer lived.) Hesiod mentions Heracles in the *Theogony*, and in the *Shield of Heracles*, Hesiod tells of the marriage between Alcmene and Amphitryon and the subsequent birth of Heracles as the son of Zeus. It then relates the story of how Heracles and Cycnus, the son of Ares, did battle. The famous historian Herodotus wrote of the birth of Heracles in his *History* and contended that Heracles was not Greek, but Egyptian. Herodotus also writes at length about the cult religion of Heracles in ancient Greece.

All of the tragic playwrights wrote of Heracles, especially Euripides. Euripides wrote of how Heracles and his descendents were mistreated in his plays, *Heracles* and *Heracleidae*. Euripides also writes of Heracles and his involvement with Admetus and Alcestis in the tragic play *Alcestis*. Heracles even appears in the comic plays of Aristophanes, including the *Birds* and the *Frogs*.