

2006 Medusa Mythology Exam Study Guide

N.B. The Medusa Mythology Exam will take place during the first FLEX of Monday, April 3rd. Students should report to the library.

Thanks to Quynh Tran, who compiled and arranged these notes!

NAME

Heracles (Greek)-derived from “Hera’s glory” in Greek

Hercules (Roman)

Alcidēs – a patronymic taken from his grandfather Alcaeus (Amphitryon’s father), meaning “Descendent of Alcaeus”

Alcaeus – sometimes Heracles is called just by his grandfather’s name directly

BIRTH

Heracles was born from Zeus and Alcmene. Alcmene is a wife of Amphitryon, the day before Amphitryon returned home from war, fighting to avenge the death of her (Alcmene’s) brother, Zeus transformed or came as a figure of Amhitryon. He slept with her. In Olympic, Zeus boasts about (hints) his descendent becoming king of Tiryns and Mycenae. Hera figured that he had slept with another woman and became jealous. She sent Eileithyia (her daughter, goddess of childbirth) to stop Alcmene’s delivery (about a week), and at same time accelerate the birth of Eurystheus (both-Heracles and Eurystheus were direct descendents of Zeus, the father Perseus who was their ancestor). Eurystheus did fulfill Zeus’ oracle that his lineage would become the ruler of Tiryns and Mycenae. Back to Alcmene, Galanthis, a servant saw that Alcmene couldn’t give birth and shouted out “the baby’s born!” Eileithyia was distracted & the spell was broken, giving Alcmene long enough to give birth to Heracles and his twin brother, Iphicles. Galanthis was turned into a weasel as punishment.

Side story

Heracles was exposed and Athena saved him. She then put him on Hera’s chest while she is asleep to suck on her milk. When Hera awoke, she found Heracles on her chest, she pushed him aside, and the breast milk spilled, turning into the Milky Way.

DISCOVERY

Day later, Amphitryon returned from war, he told her all the tales from war but Alcmene seemed to already knew about it. (recall Zeus’ visit) Amphitryon became confused and didn’t understand how she already knew. He suspected that it could possibly be a god. It was either Amphityon or Hera who wanted to find out which of the twins was from Zeus and which was from Amphitryon. Either way, somebody placed 2 giant serpents in the crib with the baby twins. Bravely, Heracles grabbed the serpents and killed them, while Iphicles reacted like a normal baby and cried. Amphitryon realized that Heracles is Zeus’ son.

EDUCATION

Heracles lived in Thebes when he was a child. In school, he was taught war/warrior skills, to drive a chariot-taught by Amphytryon, fencing-Castor, wrestling-Autolycus, archery-Eurytus, and music-Linus. Heracles excelled at all subjects except music. One day

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when Heracles played badly, as usual, Linus became impatient and hit Heracles. Heracles got angry and killed his teacher by hitting him on the head with the instrument.

ADVENTURES

In Heracles' first adventure, he went to the next town Thespia, where there was a lion ravaging the town, named the "Thespian lion" or "Cithaeronian Lion" (the town was near Mt. Cithaeron). Heracles met up with the king Thespius who had lots of wine, 50 daughters, and a comfy bedroom. In one night, Thespius sent 50 of his daughters or 1 each night to sleep with Heracles because he knew that he was from line of Zeus.

Side story

One time, early in his adventures, Heracles met two beautiful goddesses: Vice or Virtue. Each offered him different things: Vice-fulfilled desire, no need to work; Virtue-hard life but do right thing. As a result, Heracles chose Virtue-as one can see that his life is not easy.

FAMILY AND MARRIAGE

Heracles married Megara and had 2 kids. One day, Hera, who always had a grudge against Heracles, drove him mad causing him to kill his own kids. Some say he killed his wife also. Afterwards, when he came to his senses, Heracles saw what he had done and sought purification. He went back to Thespius but he couldn't help. Instead, Thespius told him to go to Delphi-the most important oracular institution in Ancient Greece, which only opens once a year, where it was believed that Apollo actually spoke prophecies through the body of the priestess (the Pythia), and another priest, a translator, would deliver the prophecy to the person seeking advice from the oracle. Strangely, instead of giving a vague prophecy, as often happened, Heracles was instructed to go perform 10 (yes, 10) labors for Eurytheus-his weak (borne early), cowardly cousin who had gotten the kingdoms of Tiryns and Mycenae instead of Heracles. Eurytheus told that the hero that the following tasks must be completed by Heracles himself without help.

12 LABORS

1. Nemean Lion (from Nemea)

The Nemean Lion had impervious skin that a sword & arrow couldn't penetrate. It was killing and hurting people so Heracles came to kill it. After trying to kill it with the sword and didn't work, Heracles squeezed the lion to death and skinned it with its own claws. In pictures and statutes, you can see Heracles wearing the lion skin as a cloak.

*seeing that Heracles is so strong, Eurytheus became afraid and hid in a giant, bronze jar. From then on, he locks Heracles outside of the city and has Copreus, his herald, as his messenger. Copreus, then, instructs Heracles' of his next task and verifies his prizes (his kills & captures through the labors)

2. Lernaean Hydra (Lerna)

The Hydra in Lerna is a serpent or dragon with many heads (9). Heracles came and tried to cut its head off but every time he cut off one head, two new ones grew out in its place. Also, while Heracles was trying to kill the Hydra, a giant crab, Cancer, was clawing at Heracles' feet. After many tries, he defeated the Hydra with the help of Iolaus, his friend, who used a burning torch to cauterize the wound and close it up as Heracles chopped each head off. Finally, all the heads were cut off except the main one, which was immortal. Since Heracles

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couldn't kill it, he put it under the rock. The hydra's blood was poisonous, so Heracles dipped his arrows into its blood and used it to kill his enemies/ monsters. Iolaus ended up becoming Heracles' charioteer. This one was not counted as one of Heracles' labors because he could not have accomplished it without the help of Iolaus.

3. Cerynithian/Cerynaean Stag/ Hind

The next task was to hunt the golden-horned Cerynaean Stag and bring it back alive. It was a challenge, seeing how Heracles is capable of killing things easily, testing whether he can catch it w/out killing it.

Heracles spent 1 year trying to capture it, chasing it throughout the land. He finally caught it and brought it back to Eurytheus. However, he had to release it again because it was sacred to Artemis.

4. Erymanthian Boar

Heracles had to bring this giant boar alive back to Eurytheus.

Side Story

-On the way to the hunt, Heracles encountered the centaurs (half man/horse). The centaurs were hanging out and offered Heracles to drink wine with them (since they were hosts to him). Pholus (a good centaur) brought the wine out. When they were drunk, the centaurs became aggressive and fought with Heracles. After killing most of them, Heracles dropped one of his poisonous arrows on the hooves of Pholus and killed him. In another accident, Heracles wounded Chiron (good/wise centaur, and tutor to many Greek heroes). Since Chiron was immortal and was suffering from the wound of the poison arrow, he eventually gave up his immortality to Prometheus.

-Heracles also joined the crew of the Argo, but ended up quitting early on b/c of his friend Hylas (young boy, his squire). When Hylas was ordered to get water, a nymph Pegae fell in love with him and dragged him into the water. Heracles searched everywhere for him but couldn't find him. He got sad and refused to leave with the Argonauts. This became a tradition: people who lived there, every year went and searched for Hylas, calling out his name as a ritual.

5. Augean Stables

The stables belonged to Augeus, king of Elis. The stables had not been cleaned for many years, the poo piled all the way up to Heracles' middle. The task was to clean these stables in 1 day. Heracles diverted the Alpheus and Peneus rivers to flood the stables and thus washed out the poo. Heracles then made a deal saying that he wanted a 10th of the king's horses in payment. Eurytheus refused and didn't count this as a labor b/c Heracles tried to do it for hire.

6. Stympthalian Birds

These birds are man-eating or they shoot feathered-darts from their wings. Heracles killed them by banging special symbols created by Hephaestus and given to him by Athena, causing them to fly up. Heracles then killed many of them with his poisoned arrows and drove the rest away.

7. Cretan Bull (Crete)

The Bull was the father of the Minotaur. Minos, king of Crete was husband of Pasiphae. But he was punished by the gods, who made Pasiphae fall in love with the bull. It didn't look so good so Daedalus made her a wooden cow suit, which is how she consummated her love with the Bull. Heracles captured the Cretan bull and released it after he brought it back to Eurytheus (still in the bronze jar). Later in Marathon, Theseus killed it.

8. Man-eating Mares of Diomedes

Side story

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On his way to Thrace, where Diomedes and his Mares were, Heracles stopped at Pherae where Admetus was king. Admetus had once earned the favor of Apollo, who found out from the Fates that Admetus was going to die soon. But, Apollo had worked out a deal that someone would be allowed to die for him. Admetus panicked and asked everyone, young and old, but no one would give up their life for him, not even his parents, who maybe only had a few more years to live. Finally, his wife, Alcestis chose to die for him.

When Heracles came to Admetus' house, which was in mourning for Alcestis' very recent death, Heracles didn't know and partied on. The next day, he found out and was embarrassed for his oafish behavior. Being the hero he was, however, he wrestled Death, Thanatos/Orcus, as he was carrying Alcestis' spirit away and brought her back to Admetus. -To satisfy the appetite of Diomedes' man-eating mares, Heracles threw Diomedes to them and they ate him alive. Heracles then drove the mares back to Tiryns and eventually released them. The mares were eventually eaten by other wild animals near Mt. Olympus.

9. Girdle of Hippolyta (Amazons)

His task was to win the girdle of Hippolyta, queen of the Amazons (a society of warrior women who didn't marry men) b/c the daughter of Eurytheus wanted it. Heracles took a bunch of heroes to Themiscyra, the Amazon capital, and talked Hippolyta into giving it to him. Hera then posed as one of the Amazons, claiming that Heracles was going to kidnap Hippolyta. The Amazons attacked Heracles and his men. Heracles, thinking Hippolyta had ambushed him, killed the queen and took the girdle. On way home, the band of men w/ Heracles went and sacked the city of Troy.

Side story

Troy had a king name Laomedon, who didn't pay the gods Apollo and Poseidon for building his city's walls. The gods then sent a sea monster to ravage the city. On the advice of an oracle, Laomedon offered his daughter Hesione as a sacrifice to the monster. Heracles volunteered to kill the sea monster for payment of special horses, including Hesione. He got swallowed into the monster and killed it from the inside out. Laomedon then went back on his word. Heracles then got angry and swore revenge, which he got on his way back from the Amazons. During the attack on Troy, one of Heracles' friends, Telamon broke through walls first, taking this honor away from Heracles. Heracles got mad at Telemon and that meant a likely death, but being quick-thinking, Telemon, who saw Heracles approaching angrily, dropped to the ground and begin constructing a small altar claiming that it as an altar to honor Heracles' great victory. Heracles felt better and forgot his anger against Telamon. Heracles killed the king but didn't kill Hesione, whom he married off to Telamon. He also allowed her to choose one of her siblings to live (he killed all the rest). She chose Podarces who later changed his name to Priam ("ransom"), who of course became King Priam of Troy during the famous Trojan War of Homer's *Iliad*.

10. Cattle of Geryon

Geryon was a 3-bodied man who guarded the cattle of Helos (the Sun) with his dog Orthrus (a 2-headed brother of Cerberus, the 3-headed dog). On the way to Erytheia where Geryon was king, Heracles set up the Pillars of Heracles at the Straits of Gibraltar. He put one Pillar on Spain and one on Africa to show how far he had traveled. With the sun beating down on him, Heracles got angry and threatened the sun w/ his bow and arrows. Helios liked Heracles' courage and gave him a golden chariot allowing him to travel on it the rest of the

way. Heracles drove the cattle back to Eurystheus after fighting w/ Geryon and killing him.

Side story

On way home Heracles passed through Italy where Cacus, a fire-breathing monster and son of Vulcan, stole the cattle and drove them backward to confuse Heracles. After a while, Heracles found his cattle by hearing their mooing. Heracles killed Cacus for doing that. Later on the way back to Tiryns, a snake woman named Echidna, also took his cattle. She promised him she would give it back to him if in return he would sleep with her. Of course, Heracles said yes. He left her a bow and told her to give it whichever child of theirs grew up strong enough to draw it.

11. Golden Apple of Hesperides

These apples were made of gold, it was grown and taken care of by the Hesperides, daughters of Atlas, and guarded by Ladon, a dragon. Heracles found Atlas bearing the sky and asked for those apples. Atlas agreed to get the apples if Heracles would hold the sky temporarily. Heracles agreed. Atlas retrieved the apples but then decided not to carry out his end of the deal since now he was free from bearing the weight. Heracles then tricked Atlas to hold the sky for him really quick while he gets himself ready with a cushion for his shoulders. Atlas agreed and took back the sky - Heracles tricked him and went away with the apples.

Side stories

-On way back, Heracles fought with Antaeus who was son of Ge/Gaia (Earth). As long as he is touching the earth, he is invincible. After awhile, Heracles figured that he couldn't kill him this way, so he squeezed Antaeus to death while lifting him up above the ground.

-Heracles also met Prometheus, the Titan who had stolen fire and given it to mankind. For that act, Zeus had punished Prometheus by having him chained to a rock on Mt. Caucasus where everyday an eagle would come and eat his liver. Every night, his liver would grow back and he had to face the same pain all over again the next day. Heracles saved Prometheus by shooting arrows at the eagle and freeing him. Zeus forgave Prometheus since it was his beloved son who freed him. Heracles had Prometheus wear a small chain of Mr. Caucasus' rocks as a reminder of his punishment.

12. Ceberus

Heracles has to capture Ceberus from the Underworld. Going to and returning from the Underworld is considered the ultimate task of heroes because this required him to essentially conquer death, which is beyond the capability of a normal man. Heracles searched for years to find the entrance to Underworld. When he did, he talked to Hades to allow him to wrestle Cerberus (some stories say he fought and wounded Hades). When Heracles went down there, he found the heroes Theseus and Peirithous.

Side story

Theseus had wanted to marry Helen, and Peirithous wanted to marry Persephone, both daughters of Zeus. They decided to kidnap them and make them their wives. They first captured Helen for Theseus. When they went to capture Persephone, Hades suspected this, and invited them to underworld. He offered them (magical) chairs to sit in before they kidnap his wife Persephone. Instantly, both were lost in a coma. When Heracles saw them, he took Theseus out of the chairs. When he tried to rescue Peirithous, the whole place started to shake, so he couldn't rescue him.

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Heracles overcame Ceberus and dragged him back to Eurytheus; afterwards, Heracles brought him back to Hades.

LATER LIFE

Omphale and Slavery

Eurytus' was offering his daughter Iole as a prize for anyone who could beat him in archery. Heracles, who learned archery under Eurytus, defeated him but the king refused to honor his word, perhaps fearful that Heracles might kill Iole as he had earlier killed his own children and Megara. Heracles left and (some say) stole the king's horses. The king's son, Iphitus, refused to believe that Heracles was guilty; Iphitus went to help Heracles find the missing horses. In any event, Heracles killed Iphitus by flinging him from the roof of his house, either on purpose or because Hera had driven him mad again. Since Heracles killed Iphitus unjustly, he was again in need of purification. He eventually discovered from the Pythia at Delphi that he must be sold into slavery. So, Heracles became the slave of Omphale, queen of Lydia, to pay penance for his crime. For three years he was cross-dressed as a woman, spun wool and played music to please his queen.

Gigantomachia

After his enslavement, Heracles went on a number of adventures, mostly going back and avenging wrongs done to him by other kings. One adventure, was different, however. The Giants and Olympian gods were having a war, called the "Gigantomachia." An oracle said that the gods would never beat the Giants unless they had the help of a mortal man. Of course the gods enlisted the aid of Heracles. Heracles then helped them in the fight, and they won.

One story says that at some point, Zeus punished Hera for all the things she did to Heracles—he tied to anvils to her ankles and hung her by the wrists from Olympus.

Nessus and Deianeira

Heracles decided to marry Deianeira. After they married, they went on a trip. On the way, they needed to pass a river, which the centaur Nessus guarded. Nessus offered to take her over the river and Heracles agreed. While in the middle of the river, Nessus tried to rape her but Heracles shot him down with his arrows. Before Nessus died, however, he told her that if ever she felt that Heracles was losing interest she should use his blood as a love potion. Believing his words, she saved the blood.

Death and Immortality

Eventually, after his enslavement, Heracles went back to avenge himself on Eurytus, who had not given him Iole as promised. Heracles marched on Oechalia and defeated Eurytus, killing him and his sons. He took Iole as his concubine.

When Deianeira (wife) heard this news that Heracles had taken Iole, she became jealous and remembered the words of Nessus. She soaked a tunic with the centaur's blood which was poisoned by Heracles' poison and had this tunic sent to Heracles. When Heracles put it on he immediately experienced intolerable pain. He tried ripping it away but it was adhered to his skin and tore out his own flesh. Heracles bleeding and dying, made his way up to Mt. Oeta and made his own funeral pyre. He climbed atop the pyre laid there waiting for someone to light the pyre on fire. No one was willing to kill the hero.

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Finally, Philoctetes, who was passing by, agreed to do it (other versions say it was Poeas, Philoctetes' father). Heracles gave Philoctetes his bow and arrows. While his body was being burned, lightning struck the pyre and his mortal form was gone. Heracles had become a god and lived in Olympus as one of the gods. There, he married Hebe, daughter of Hera (goddess of youth).

In the Trojan War, there was a prophecy that the Greeks could only win if they have the bow and arrows of Heracles. Philoctetes used the bow and arrows to kill Paris; the Greeks eventually won the war.

In the *Aeneid* (a Latin epic by Vergil about Aeneas' escape from Troy and journey to found a new city in Italy, the city which would eventually lead to Rome), Aeneas' young friend Pallas faces Turnus, who is the chief of the Rutulians and Aeneas' main rival. Pallas prays to the god Hercules for aid in facing Turnus, but Jupiter restrains Hercules from aiding the warrior. Turnus slays Pallas and takes his sword-belt. Later, at the end of the epic, Aeneas vanquishes Turnus and is considering sparing his life when he sees Pallas' belt and kills him, thus ending the war between the Trojans and the Latins.

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From there, click on any other related sources, it also tells about the 12 labors.