

# **THE ABDUCTION OF EUROPE**

## **THE MYTH**

### **The abduction**

The name of Europa is mentioned in many contexts, most of which deal with the divine union between a young girl and Zeus. The most popular myth about Europa says that she was the daughter of Agenor, a Phoenician king, and later became a wife of Zeus, the King of Gods.

According to the legend, Europa was the epitome of feminine beauty on Earth. Zeus once saw her on the seashore of Phoenicia playing with her friends. He was so captivated by her beauty that he fell in love with her and developed a strong desire to possess her. Immediately, he took the form of a white bull and approached her. The bull looked wonderful with its snow-white body and gem-like horns. Europa looked at the extraordinary animal curiously and dared to touch and later hang him because he appeared so calm to her. Later, she was somehow motivated to climb on his back.

As soon as she did so, Zeus ran to the sea and carried her all the way from Phoenicia to the island of Crete. There he regained his human form and mated with her under an evergreen tree. This was the abduction of Europa, who later gave birth to three sons of Zeus, Minos, Rhadamanthys and Sarpedon. These men were known for their fairness and became the three judges of the Underworld, when they died. In fact, Minos founded the town of Knossos and gave his name to an entire civilization, the *Minoan civilization*.

Zeus loved Europa so much that he showered her with three priceless gifts. The first one was a bronze man, Talos, who served as a guard to her. He was the bronze giant that the Argonauts met and killed in their attempt to shore on Crete. The second was a dog, Laelaps, which could hunt anything she wanted. The last one was a javelin that had the power to hit the target, whatever it was. Europa was later married to one of the kings of Crete, Asterius, who adopted her sons and made her the first queen of Crete.

### **Searching for Europa**

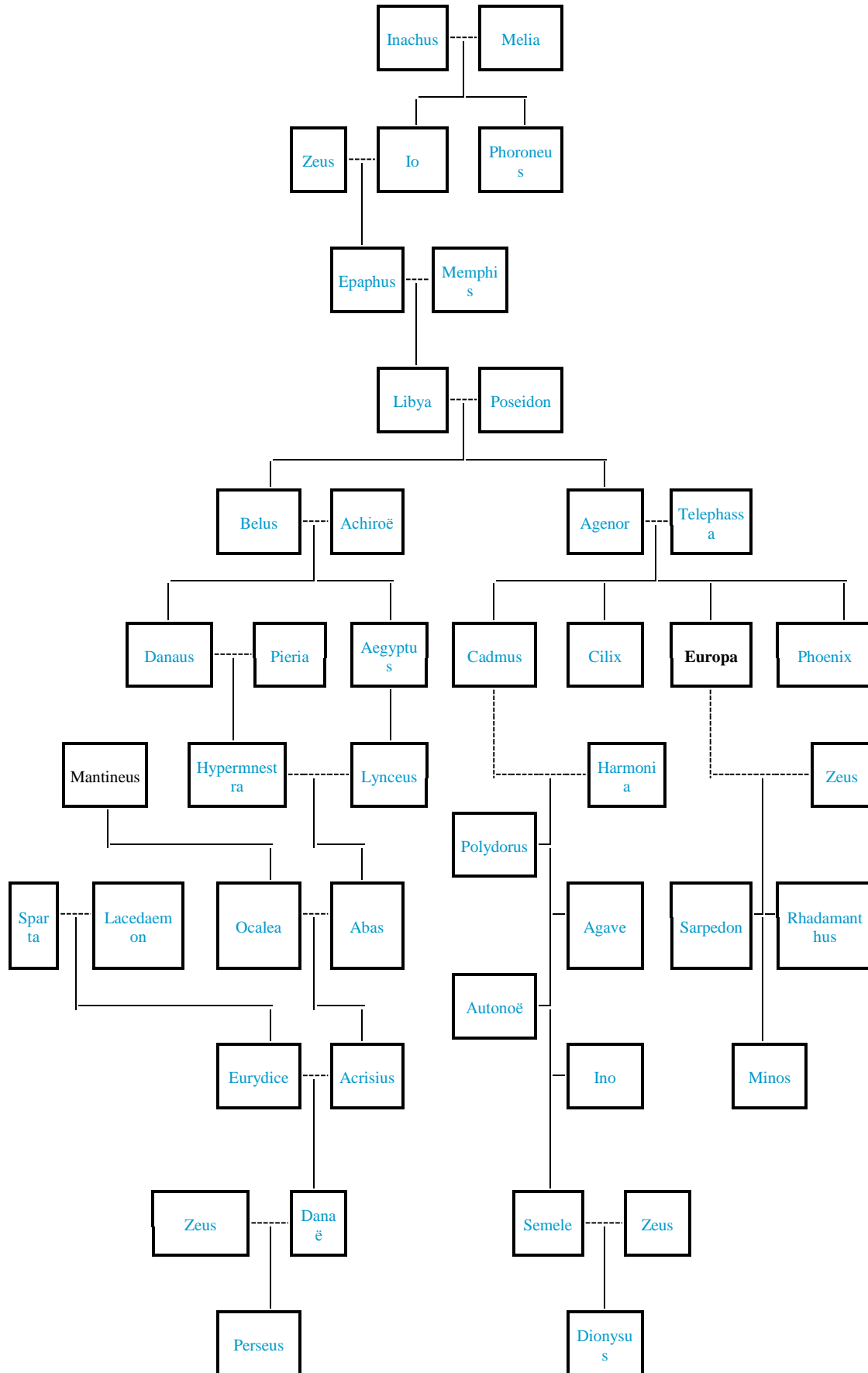
In the meanwhile, her father, Agenor, had ordered her brothers to cross the whole world and not to return if they hadn't found his precious daughter. Europa had four brothers. Cilix, his eldest brother, was searching for a long time but with no success. He ended up in a region in Asia Minor, which he named Cilicia after him and became a king there. Thasus eventually landed on the island of Thassos, also gave it his name and reigned there. Phoenix went to Africa.

Cadmus, the youngest and most beloved brother of Europa, asked the Oracle of Delphi what to do. The priests of the Oracle told him not to worry about his sister because she was safe. They also told him to go to Boeotia, a region to the north of Athens, and found a town there, which would become rich and powerful in the years to come. Indeed, Cadmus founded a town in Boeotia to which gave his name, Cadmia. Later on, this town changed its name and was called Thebes.

## The end

It is said that when Europa died, Zeus transformed her into a star complex and he himself took again the shape of the white bull to merge in the complex. The Taurus Constellation is believed to be the form of Zeus. Today the name Europa has been given to one of Jupiter's 16 moons and in fact this moon is very special, as it is believed to have water on its surface.

### Argive genealogy



## THE MYTH IN ANCIENT GREEK LITERATURE

### Homer: The Iliad

#### Book XIV. 312-322:

Zeus the Cloud-Driver answered: 'Hera, you shall go: later. But for now let us taste the joys of love; for never has such desire for goddess or mortal woman so gripped and overwhelmed my heart, not even when I was seized by love for **Ixion**'s wife, who gave birth to **Peirithous** the gods' rival in wisdom; or for **Acrisius**' daughter, slim-ankled **Danaë**, who bore **Perseus**, greatest of warriors; or for the far-famed daughter of **Phoenix**, who gave me **Minos** and godlike **Rhadamanthus**; or for **Semele** mother of **Dionysus**, who brings men joy; or for **Alcmene** at **Thebes**, whose son was lion-hearted **Heracles**; or for **Demeter** of the lovely tresses; or for glorious **Leto**; or even for you yourself, as this love and sweet desire for you grips me now.'

[www.poetryintranslation.com/.../Iliad14.ht](http://www.poetryintranslation.com/.../Iliad14.ht)

### Lucian of Samosata

#### Dialogues of the Sea-Gods | Dialogi Marini

(SOURCE: The Works of Lucian of Samosata. Translated by Fowler, H W and F G.  
Oxford: The Clarendon Press. 1905.)

XV

*West Wind. South Wind*

W. Such a splendid pageant I never saw on the waves, since the day I first blew. You were not there, Notus? S. Pageant, Zephyr? what pageant? and whose?

W. You missed a most ravishing spectacle; such another chance you are not likely to have.

S. I was busy with the Red Sea; and I gave the Indian coasts a little airing too. So I don't know what you are talking about.

W. Well, you know Agenor the Sidonian?

S. Europa's father? what of him?

W. Europa it is that I am going to tell you about.

S. You need not tell me that Zeus has been in love with her this long while; that is stale news.

W. We can pass the love, then, and get on to the sequel.

Europa had come down for a frolic on the beach with her playfellows. Zeus transformed himself into a bull, and joined the game. A fine sight he was — spotless white skin, crumpled horns, and gentle eyes. He gambolled on the shore with them, bellowing most musically, till Europa took heart of grace and mounted him. No sooner had she done it than, with her on his back, Zeus made off at a run for the sea, plunged in, and began swimming; she was dreadfully frightened, but kept her seat by clinging to one of his horns with her left hand, while the right held her skirt down against the puffs of wind.

S. A lovely sight indeed, Zephyr, in every sense — Zeus swimming with his darling on his back.

W. Ay, but what followed was lovelier far.

Every wave fell; the sea donned her robe of peace to speed them on their way; we winds made holiday and joined the train, all eyes; fluttering Loves skimmed the waves, just dipping now and again a heedless toe — in their hands lighted torches, on their lips the nuptial song; up floated Nereids — few but were prodigal of naked charms — and clapped their hands, and kept pace on dolphin steeds; the Triton company, with every sea-creature that frights not the eye, tripped it around the maid; for Posidon on his car, with Amphitrite by him, led them in festal mood, ushering his brother through the waves. But, crowning all, a Triton pair bore Aphrodite, reclined on a shell, heaping the bride with all flowers that blow.

So went it from Phoenice even to Crete. But, when he set foot on the isle, behold, the bull was no more; 'twas Zeus that took Europa's hand and led her to the Dictæan Cave — blushing and downward-eyed; for she knew now the end of her bringing.

But we plunged this way and that, and roused the still seas anew.

S. Ah me, what sights of bliss! and I was looking at griffins, and elephants, and blackamoors!

## **The History of Herodotus**

*(The History of Herodotus, parallel English/Greek, tr. G. C. Macaulay, [1890])*

### **BOOK 1**

1. Those of the Persians who have knowledge of history declare that the Phoenicians first began the quarrel. These, they say, came from that which is called the Erythraian Sea to this of ours; and having settled in the land where they continue even now to dwell, set themselves forthwith to make long voyages by sea. And conveying merchandise of Egypt and of Assyria they arrived at other places and also at Argos; now Argos was at that time in all points the first of the States within that land which is now called Hellas;--the Phoenicians arrived then at this land of Argos, and began to dispose of their ship's cargo: and on the fifth or sixth day after they had arrived, when their goods had been almost all sold, there came down to the sea a great company of women, and among them the daughter of the king; and her name, as the Hellenes also agree, was Io the daughter of Inachos. These standing near to the stern of the ship were buying of the wares such as pleased them most, when of a sudden the Phoenicians, passing the word from one to another, made a rush upon them; and the greater part of the women escaped by flight, but Io and certain others were carried off. So they put them on board their ship, and forthwith departed, sailing away to Egypt.

2. In this manner the Persians report that Io came to Egypt, not agreeing therein with the Hellenes, and this they say was the first beginning of wrongs. **Then after this, they say, certain Hellenes (but the name of the people they are not able to report) put in to the city of Tyre in Phoenicia and carried off the king's daughter Europa;--these would doubtless be Cretans;--**and so they were quits for the former injury. After this however the Hellenes, they say, were the authors of the second wrong; for they sailed in to Aia of Colchis and to the river Phasis with a ship of war, and from thence, after they had done the other business for which they came, they carried off the king's daughter Medea: and the king of Colchis sent a herald to the land of Hellas and demanded satisfaction for the rape and to have his daughter back; but they answered that, as the Barbarians had given them no satisfaction for the rape of Io the Argive, so neither would they give satisfaction to the Barbarians for this.

3. In the next generation after this, they say, Alexander the son of Priam, having heard of these things, desired to get a wife for himself by violence from Hellas, being fully assured that he would not be compelled to give any satisfaction for this wrong, inasmuch as the Hellenes gave none for theirs. So he carried off Helen, and the Hellenes resolved to send messengers first and to demand her back with satisfaction for the rape; and when they put forth this demand, the others alleged to them the rape of Medea, saying that the Hellenes were now desiring satisfaction to be given to them by others, though they had given none themselves nor had surrendered the person when demand was made.

4. Up to this point, they say, nothing more happened than the carrying away of women on both sides; but after this the Hellenes were very greatly to blame; for they set the first

example of war, making an expedition into Asia before the Barbarians made any into Europe. Now they say that in their judgment, though it is an act of wrong to carry away women by force, it is a folly to set one's heart on taking vengeance for their rape, and the wise course is to pay no regard when they have been carried away; for it is evident that they would never be carried away if they were not themselves willing to go. And the Persians say that they, namely the people of Asia, when their women were carried away by force, had made it a matter of no account, but the Hellenes on account of a woman of Lacedaemon gathered together a great armament, and then came to Asia and destroyed the dominion of Priam; and that from this time forward they had always considered the Hellenic race to be their enemy: for Asia and the Barbarian races which dwell there the Persians claim as belonging to them; but Europe and the Hellenic race they consider to be parted off from them.

**5. The Persians for their part say that things happened thus; and they conclude that the beginning of their quarrel with the Hellenes was on account of the taking of Ilion (...)**

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173. The Lykians however have sprung originally from Crete (for in old time the whole of Crete was possessed by Barbarians): **and when the sons of Europa, Sarpedon and Minos, came to be at variance in Crete about the kingdom, Minos having got the better in the strife of parties drove out both Sarpedon himself and those of his party:** and they having been expelled came to the land of Milyas in Asia, for the land which now the Lykians inhabit was anciently called Milyas, and the Milyans were then called Solymoi. Now while Sarpedon reigned over them, they were called by the name which they had when they came thither, and by which the Lykians are even now called by the neighbouring tribes, namely Termilai; but when from Athens Lycos the son of Pandion came to the land of the Termilai and to Sarpedon, he too having been driven out by his brother namely Aigeus, then by the name taken from Lycos they were called after a time Lykians. The customs which these have are partly Cretan and partly Carian; but one custom they have which is peculiar to them, and in which they agree with no other people, that is they call themselves by their mothers and not by their fathers; and if one asks his neighbour who he is, he will state his parentage on the mother's side and enumerate his mother's female ascendants: and if a woman who is a citizen marry a slave, the children are accounted to be of gentle birth; but if a man who is a citizen, though he were the first man among them, have a slave for wife or concubine, the children are without civil rights.

**BOOK 4**

45. As to Europe, however, it is clearly not known by any, either as regards the parts which are towards the rising sun or those towards the North, whether it be surrounded by sea: but in length it is known to stretch along by both the other divisions. And I am not able to understand for what reason it is that to the Earth, which is one, three different names are given derived from women, and why there were set as boundaries to

divide it the river Nile of Egypt and the Phasis in Colchis (or as some say the Maiotian river Tanais and the Kimmerian ferry); nor can I learn who those persons were who made the boundaries, or for what reason they gave the names. Libya indeed is said by most of the Hellenes to have its name from Libya a woman of that country, and Asia from the wife of Prometheus: but this last name is claimed by the Lydians, who say that Asia has been called after Asias the son of Cotys the son of Manes, and not from Asia the wife of Prometheus; and from him too they say the Asian tribe in Sardis has its name. **As to Europe however, it is neither known by any man whether it is surrounded by sea, nor does it appear whence it got this name or who he was who gave it, unless we shall say that the land received its name from Europa the Tyrian;** and if so, it would appear that before this it was nameless like the rest. She however evidently belongs to Asia and did not come to this land which is now called by the Hellenes Europe, but only from Phoenicia to Crete, and from Crete to Lykia. Let this suffice now which has been said about these matters; for we will adopt those which are commonly accepted of the accounts.

## **Diodorus Siculus: The Library of History** (published in Vol. III of the Loeb Classical Library edition, 1939)

60 1 It remains for us now to speak of the Minotaur which was slain by Theseus, in order that we may complete our account of the deeds of Theseus. But we must revert to earlier times and set forth the facts which are interwoven with this performance, in order that the whole narrative may be clear.

2 Tectamus, the son of Dorus, the son of Hellen, the son of Deucalion, sailed to Crete with Aeolians and Pelasgians and became king of the island, and marrying the daughter of Cretheus he begat Asterius. **And during the time when he was king in Crete Zeus, as they say, carried off Europê from Phoenicia, and carrying her across to Crete upon the back of a bull, he lay with her there and begat three sons, Minos, Rhadamanthys, and Sarpedon.** 3 After this Asterius, the king of Crete, took Europê to wife; and since he was without children by her he adopted the sons of Zeus and left them at his death to succeed to the kingdom. As for these children, Rhadamanthys gave the Cretans their laws, and Minos, succeeding to the throne and marrying Itonê, the daughter of Lyctius, begat Lycastus, who in turn succeeded to the supreme power and marrying Idê, the daughter of Corybas, begat the second Minos, who, as some writers record, was the son of Zeus. This Minos was the first Greek to create a powerful naval force and to become master of the sea. 4 And marrying Pasiphaê, the daughter of Helios and Cretê, he begat Deucalion and Catreus and Androgeos and Ariadnê and had other, natural, children more in number than these. As for the sons of Minos, Androgeos came to Athens at the time of the Panathenaic festival, while Aegeus was king, and defeating all the contestants in the games he became a close friend of the sons of Pallas. 5 Thereupon Aegeus, viewing with suspicion the friendship which Androgeos had formed, since he feared that Minos might lend his aid to the sons of Pallas and take from him the supreme power, plotted against the life of Androgeos. Consequently, when the latter was on his way to Thebes in order to attend a festival there, Aegeus caused him to be treacherously slain by certain natives of the region in the neighbourhood of Oenoê in Attica.



## **THE MYTH IN LATIN LITERATURE**

### **Ovid's "Metamorphoses"**

( translated by Anthony S. Kline)

#### **Bk II:833-875 (Jupiter's abduction of Europa)**

When Mercury had inflicted this punishment on the girl for her impious words and thoughts, he left Pallas's land behind and flew to the heavens on outstretched wings. There his father calls him aside, and without revealing love as the reason, says 'Son, faithful worker of my commands, go, quickly in your usual way, fly down to where, in an eastern land, they observe your mother's star, among the Pleiades, (the inhabitants give it the name of Sidon). There drive the herd of royal cattle, that you will see some distance off, grazing the mountain grass, towards the sea shore!' He spoke, and immediately, as he commanded, the cattle, driven from the mountain, headed for the shore, where the great king's daughter, Europa, used to play together with the Tyrian virgins. Royalty and love do not sit well together, nor stay long in the same house. So the father and ruler of the gods, who is armed with the three-forked lightning in his right hand, whose nod shakes the world, setting aside his royal sceptre, took on the shape of a bull, lowed among the other cattle, and, beautiful to look at, wandered in the tender grass.

In colour he was white as the snow that rough feet have not trampled and the rain-filled south wind has not melted. The muscles rounded out his neck, the dewlaps hung down in front, the horns were twisted, but one might argue they were made by hand, purer and brighter than pearl. His forehead was not fearful, his eyes were not formidable, and his expression was peaceful. Agenor's daughter marvelled at how beautiful he was and how unthreatening. But though he seemed so gentle she was afraid at first to touch him. Soon she drew close and held flowers out to his glistening mouth. The lover was joyful and while he waited for his hoped-for pleasure he kissed her hands. He could scarcely separate then from now. At one moment he frolics and runs riot in the grass, at another he lies down, white as snow on the yellow sands. When her fear has gradually lessened he offers his chest now for virgin hands to pat and now his horns to twine with fresh wreaths of flowers. The royal virgin even dares to sit on the bull's back, not realising whom she presses on, while the god, first from dry land and then from the shoreline, gradually slips his deceitful hooves into the waves. Then he goes further out and carries his prize over the mid-surface of the sea. She is terrified and looks back at the abandoned shore she has been stolen from and her right hand grips a horn, the other his back, her clothes fluttering, winding, behind her in the breeze.

#### **Bk III:1-49 (Cadmus searches for his sister Europa)**

And now the god, dispensing with the deceptive image of the bull, confessed who he was, and made for the fields of Crete. Meanwhile Europa's father, in ignorance of this, orders his son Cadmus to search for the stolen girl, and adds that exile is his punishment if he fails to find her, showing himself, by the same action, both pious and impious. Roaming the world (for who can discover whatever Jupiter has taken?) Agenor's son, the fugitive, shuns his native land and his parent's anger and as a suppliant consults Apollo's oracle and asks in what land he might settle. Phoebus replies 'A heifer will find you in the fields, that has never submitted to the yoke and is unaccustomed to the

curved plough. Go where she leads, and where she finds rest on the grass build the walls of **Thebes**, your city, and call the land **Boeotia**.’

Cadmus had scarcely left the **Castalian** cave when he saw an unguarded heifer, moving slowly, and showing no mark of the yoke on her neck. He follows close behind and chooses his steps by the traces of her course, and silently thanks Phoebus, his guide to the way. Now he had passed the fords of **Cephisus** and the fields of **Panope**: the heifer stopped, and lifting her beautiful head with its noble horns to the sky stirred the air with her lowings. Then looking back, to see her companion following, she sank her hindquarters on the ground and lowered her body onto the tender grass. Cadmus gave thanks, pressing his lips to the foreign soil and welcoming the unknown hills and fields.

Intending to offer a sacrifice to Jupiter, he ordered his attendants to go in search of water from a running stream for a libation. There was an ancient wood there, free from desecration, and, in the centre of it, a chasm thick with bushes and willow branches, framed in effect by stones making a low arch, and rich with copious springs. There was a snake sacred to **Mars** concealed in this cave, with a prominent golden crest. Fire flickered in its eyes, its whole body was swollen with venom, its three-forked tongue flickered, and its teeth were set in a triple row.

After the people of **Tyre**, setting out, a fatal step, reached the grove, and let their pitchers down into the water, it gave out a reverberation. The dark green snake thrust his head out of the deep cavern, hissing awesomely. The pitchers fell from their hands, the blood left their bodies, and, terrified, a sudden tremor took possession of their limbs. The snake winds his scaly coils in restless writhings, and, shooting upwards, curves into a huge arc. With half its length raised into thin air, it peers down over the whole wood, its body as great, seen in its entirety, as that **Dragon** that separates the twin constellations of the **Bear**. Without pause he takes the Phoenicians, whether they prepare to fight, run, or are held by fear itself. Some he slays with his bite, some he kills in his deep embraces, others with the corrupting putrefaction of his venomous breath.