

Heracles

Heracles is the most known person in Greek mythology. His name meant that he would acquire glory because of Hera. In every peoples, there is a model like Heracles which is powerful and fearless. However, in this case, this model is more complete. We are talking about a hero with human size, who fight against the unfairness and evil. Heracles is the liberator of humanity, the carrier of culture, perspectives of the peoples who create him.

Pleasure and Virtue

Prodicus is the man who narrate us the story of Pleasure and Virtue. Heracles was in a crossroad and he was thinking which road he was going to opt for his life. Then, appeared two women, the one had an impressive attire but the other a simple one. The first woman, whose name was Pleasure, told him that if he followed her, he would have an easy and pleasure life. The second one, whose name was Virtue, told him something strange. She told him that she wanted to follow her despite the fact that he was going to have a life full of troubles but and a glorious name. Heracles without second thought decides to use his power to help people, following the road of Virtue.

His Family

His great-grandfather was Perseus, the son of Zeus and Danae. Perseus had two children, Alcaeus and Elektryon, who have an important role in Heracles's history. Astimedusa, Alcaeus's wife, gave birth to Amphitryon and Anaxo who married her uncle Elektryon. Anaxo gave birth to Alcmene who married the brother of her mother, Amphitryon. However, we don't know who, in reality, the father of Heracles is. There are many versions. The first version claims that hero's father was Amphitryon and that one day Dias gloated over that he was his son. The second one says that Dias had an affair with Alcmene and this made Heracles demi-god. The last version, which is widely accepted, is that Dias took Amphitryon's form, while Amphitryon was missing in a campaign, in order to sleep with her.

Amphitryon's return

According to the last version, Dias took Amphitryon's form and he managed to sleep with Alcmene for three nights, after he had pleased the Sun not to rise for three days. When Alcmene saw him, she asked him to tell her some stories from the campaign to Tilevoas. Dias told her everything that happened there and after they had intercourse. The same night Amphitryon returned and he was expecting a different reception. After they made love, he understood that she was not very affectionate and he asked her the reason. She was surprised and "reminded" him the last night (which lasted three nights). Amphitryon wanted to learn what had happened and he went to the oracle Tiresias, who revealed him the truth. Meanwhile, Hera had learnt of Dias's adultery and she hated the child who is going to come in a few months. Dias was so proud of the strong child who would have with Alcmene and he gathered the rest of Gods to announce them about the child who was going to be birthed at dawn of that day and about the domination that he was going to have. Hera having planned her revenge made Dias to swear that the first child who is going to be birthed that day would be the predominant of the world. Dias was sure that Heracles would be the first born child and without expecting that Hera was setting him a trap, gave the strongest swearing. Hera, immediately, went to Nicippe to accelerate her birth, while she was only 7 months, and to delay Alcmene's who was ready to drop. She requested from Moirai and Ilithyia to delay Alcmene's birth. In this way, Nicippe managed to give birth to Eurystheus rendering Heracles his servant in the future.

Hera's milk and the snakes

There are two variations about the first contact between Heracles and Hera. The first says that after Heracles's birth, Hermes, correspondent from Zeus, went to Olympus and while Hera was sleeping he put the baby in her chest to drink some milk in order to becoming invincible. However, he bitten her nipple and make her awake. She was pulled and unwittingly let some milk to fall, forming the Galaxy. The second one claims that Alcmene had left Heracles in a mountain, apprehensive of Hera's jealousy. Nevertheless, Hera and Athens crossed randomly from there and found the young Heracles. Athens succeeded in persuading Hera to lactate the infant. While she was lactating it, it bitten her forcefully

for his young age. She felt pain and she remembered that it was Zeus's child and she threw it down. Athens raised it and went it to her mother, who was calmed down. However, Hera had not forgotten the hate about Heracles and she wanted to wipe him out. When Heracles and his brother Iphicles (who was Amphitryon's child) were eight years old, Hera sent two enormous snakes in their cot. The snakes reached at the cot ready to devour Heracles. The young child woke up and comfortably stifled the snakes, the time that his brother, terrified, broke down to tears. Alcmene, hearing the crying ran in the babies' room and faced the amazing spectacle. That moment Amphitryon arrived, ready to kill the snakes but he bogged seeing his just eight month's son to have already done it.

His education

When Heracles was in an appropriate age for his education had the most well-known teachers in that period. He learned letters and guitar from Linos, bow from Eurytus or from Teutarus, who maybe gave him his bow. Eumolpus taught him music and he was taught fight from Arpalikos or Autolikos. Amphitryon was the person who taught him chariot race and horse riding. Kastoras taught him the weapons, the spear and the shield's use but and how to be the leader in a phalanx. Other teachers were: Radamanthos, Chiron and Thespius.

The Lion of Cithaeron

When Heracles was eighteen years old did his first achievement. In Thebes there was a lion which caused many damages and devoured the oxen not only Amphitryon's but also Thespius' (king of Thespieae). Heracles decided to stop and clear the area from this. He started to go to Thespieae, where he would chase the wild beast. The king of the country not only accepted him but also hosted him for 50 days. The hunt lasted for fifty days. Thespius had 50 daughters and wanted all of them to get a child with Heracles. So, every morning, he was chasing the lion and every night, he had a daughter in his room. Nevertheless, Heracles thought that every night he was sleeping with the same woman and so he slept with all of them except for one who resisted to him. He considered that this action was an abuse and sentenced her to be for the rest of her life

virgin and to serve as a priestess in a chancel which was established in Thespieae for him. Heracles despite the fact that he didn't have intercourse with all Thespius's daughters he acquired 50 children because the older one gave birth to twins.

Heracles's frenzy and the murder of his children

After a war that was realized in Thebes, where Heracles was staying, he lived there ruling for many years. From his wife, Megara, he acquired eight children or as others say five, giving their names: Antimachus, Clymenus, Glinos, Thirimaxos and Kreontidis. However, his peaceful and good life would not last for a long. Hera maintaining the hate for him, decided to destroy him with another way. She sent him madness with murderous and destructive tendencies and consumed, considered enemies his wife and his children and killed them with his bow and the kids of his brother, Iphicles, too. The older, Iolaos, was saved because of his father who had moved him away. Also, Heracles threaten to kill Amphitryon but when he was ready to do it, Athens fired him a stone on his chest making him sounds asleep, like he was dead. When he woke up he got well and he understood what he have done. He accepted by himself to leave in another city as to be "cleaned" from the murders which he had committed. In continue, he went to Delphic Sibyl to ask where he should go. The oracle told him that he ought to go back to Tiryns to atone for his actions and to calm down Hera's anger. It also said him that he was going to serve Eurystheus for twelve years and he would perform 12 labours for Eurystheus. When he have done all these he would acquire immortality and he would ride up to Olympus. There, in Delphic Sibyl, for the first time he took the name Heracles from Pythia as until that day his name was Alcides.

The twelve labours of Heracles

1. Nemean Lion

The first trial which was asked from Heracles, was to slay Nemean lion and to give to Eurystheus its pelt. It was said that the lion was immune, so Heracles's first try to kill the lion with his bow and arrow, failed. In continue, he try to kill it with a club but the lion

go in a cave with two escapes. Heracles thought that it would be good to close the one exit and he entered from the other making a terrible fight. He caught the lion from the neck and he tried to stifle it until he managed it. He put the pelt of the dead animal in his back and he went in Mycenae where Eurystheus was shocked and scared.

2. Lernaean Hydra

Lernaean Hydra was the second Heracles's labour. It had eight mortal heads and an immortal. When Heracles met the monster he realized that it was not easy to kill it. Except for the fact that Hydra had wrapped around his leg and a crab bit his leg, whenever Heracles cut a head at in this place germinated two. The hero should think smart so, after killing the crab he asked from his staunch assistant, Iolaos, to light a fire and every time that Heracles cut a head, Iolaos put fire so do not go out other. In this way Heracles achieved to cut the immortal head making the monster drop dead on the ground.

3. Ceryneian Hind

The third labour of the hero was different from the two precedents. The king Eurystheus demanded to bring him the deer of Ceryneian alive which was protected from the goddess Artemis. It was almost impossible to approach and to catch it because it was a tireless deer and an extremely fast with his cupric legs and his gold horns. Heracles was chasing it for twelve months without achieving to capture it. Once the deer reached in the country of Hyperboreans, it stopped. Heracles believed that it was the right moment to catch it. However, he failed. The Ceryneian hind continued to run and the moment it was ready to enter in the Artemis's temple to find cover, Heracles took out his darts and injured deer's leg. In that way, he managed to capture the hind and take it with him on the way of return to Mycenae. However, appeared furious the goddess and said that by hurting her deer, he had insulted her. Heracles answered her that Eurystheus had asked him to do it with the parliament of the rest gods and Artemis forgave him. When he reached at the palace, he demanded from Eurystheus to come out and take it alone. At the time he tried to catch it, Heracles let it free to return to Artemis.

4. Erymanthian Boar

The next labour that Heracles did was to catch the wild boar alive. Heracles had chased it in the snow when he managed to catch it at the gorge of Foloï. Then he put it at his back and he carried back to Mycenae

5. The stables of Augeas

The fifth labour of the hero was to clean the stables of Augeas. The stables were uncleaned for many years and it was impossible to be cleaned in just one day. Heracles demolished a wall from the stables and he achieved to turn the course of Peneus and Alpheus and the water of the rivers went into the stables luring the manure in one day.

6. Stymphalian birds.

Stymphalian birds were the sixth labour of the hero. They were man-eating birds sitting in Lake Stymphalia. Heracles with Hephaestus and Athens helped him to kill them. Hephaestus had made something which made noise and Athens gave it to the hero. Heracles climbed in a mountain and he sound with what Hephaestus had made, making birds to scare from the noise and to come out from their nest. So, he killed all of them with his arrows.

7. Cretan Bull

It had requested from Heracles to go to Eurystheus alive the Cretan Bull. That Taurus caused many damages and when Heracles asked Minoa getting him, he accept it with the precondition first to tame him. Heracles did it with the help of a net. Put on his back the Bull and went it to Eurystheus.

8. The Mares of Diomedes

The Mares of Diomedes were man-eating mares with chains in their legs and cupric jaws. Eurystheus as the eighth labour asked from Heracles to bring them to him. The hero took with him some companions and they went to Thrace. Despite the resistance from the guards he achieved to catch the horses and entrusted them to Abdiro, who was devoured by the horses. Heracles after killing the

king of them, Diomedes, and gave him to the horses, he managed to domesticate them and went to Eurystheus.

9. Hippolytes' Belt

About the way in which Heracles managed to accomplish this trial, there are two versions. The first version wants Hippolyte dead after a fight with many victims, one of them was and the same. So, Heracles took her belt. The second one claims that Hippolyte was captured and in order to be set free, she gave as an exchange her belt.

10. The Cattle of Geryon

The next achievement which Heracles should do was to go to Eurystheus the Cattle of Geryon. In his try to take the oxen he was faced with the dog Orthrus, which protected them. Heracles killed it with his club like he did with shepherd Eurytrion, who followed Orthrus. Heracles tried to take them but appeared Geryon who was killed by Heracles and finally he managed to take the Cattle.

11. Golden Apple

The trees which had the golden apples were situated in the country of Atlas. Atlas' daughters stole the apples and for this reason Hera put Hesperides and Ladon to guard them. There are three versions for this labour. The first version claims that Heracles persuaded Atlas to give him the apples and fooled him as not to keep the Earth and the Sky forever. The second version says that Heracles went to the garden, killed Ladon and took the apples. Finally, the last one says that Hesperides with their will gave the apples to Heracles, making the dragon to sleep.

12. Cerberus

Cerberus was the twelfth and last labour of Heracles. Eurystheus asked from Heracles to go to underworld and to bring him the Cerberus, which had three heads and a dragon tail. When Heracles went down to Hades, asked to let him take the Cerberus. Pluton permitted it but firstly Heracles should tame it without chariots. The hero looked for a long time the Cerberus and when he found it, grabbed it from the neck. The fight continued for a long time

until Cerberus fell down. Heracles put it on his shoulders and went to Mycenae.

The three circles

The adventures and the achievements of Heracles gathered in three big circles based on their content but also in the conditions in which they were accomplished. Firstly are the Labours, after the Parerga and finally the Actions. The labours, which have already mentioned, are what Heracles did with Eurystheus's order. From them six take place to Peloponnese, 1 to Thrace, 1 to Crete, 1 to Black Sea, 1 to the Island Eritia, 1 at the end of the world and 1 to underworld. The Parerga are the achievements and the adventures which happened in period between the labours or while a labour was executed. The Actions are all these which he managed to do in campaigns and in invasive wars.

The Parerga

Heracles either while was going to perform a labour or while he was returning from it, faced many obstacles and difficulties or collisions with criminals or with supernatural entities which he ought to win. All these episodes belong to a separate circle, Parerga. These events are imaginary with intense superhuman and fairytale element. The Parerga were these which are more directly related to the Labours than the Actions. The Parerga are:

- Pholus
- Eurytion
- Alcestis
- Kyknos
- Antaeus
- Busiris
- Prometheus
- Emathion
- Lycaon
- Alcyone
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The Actions

The Actions were independent occasions and result of initiative of Heracles. It was mainly campaigns where Heracles was the leader of a troop. The Actions' characteristic is the human element. He always fights with an army that shows the human measures. The creator does it because that period there are many new perceptions for the form of the war and the hero's element. So, they cannot imagine an only man to face an army by himself. The Actions are distinguished in campaigns in Levant and in Asia Minor, in these to Peloponnese and one in north-west Greece. The Actions are:

- Campaign in Troy
 - The Mares of Laomedon
 - Hesione
 - The war in Troy
 - Priamos
- The adventure in Kw
 - Meropes-Eurupulos
- The war with Augeas. Actoriones
- In Pylos
- In Sparta. Ippokoontides
- In Lapiths and in Dryopes. Alliance with Egmio

Heracles's death and his apotheosis

Heracles after an achievement in Oichalia, built an altar to respect Zeus Kineos and he prepared everything for a luxurious sacrifice. So, he asked from Lichas to bring him a garment, like the used to wear in such occasions. Simultaneously, Dianeira who had married Heracles in the past, learnt that he loved another woman who called Iole and she was jealous. When she heard about the garment which Lichas was going to give to Heracles, she remembered a filter which Centauros Nessus had donate to her telling lies. So, she put the filter on the garment without knowing what was going to happen with this action. She thought that by this way she would regain his love but in reality it was a poison. When Heracles wore it, the tunic started to stick on his skin and he felt pain. Then, while he was shocked by the pain, he killed Lichas considering that he was responsible while in continue he was telling curses for Dianeira

and her family after he had learning the true. Heracles trying to put away the tunic, he pulled pieces of his skin while he was screaming. In the end, Hyllus, the son of Dianeira, and some others transferred him to Trachis. When she learned what she had done, she took a knife and put an end in her life. Heracles transported to Mount Oeta where they did a load of woods and he asked from his child to put a fire and relieve him but he could not. So, Heracles asked from a passer-by to help him, the name of him was Philoctetes. After putting the fire he gave him his bow and then started lightings and thunders and then Heracles disappeared. He had gone to Olympus where the Gods were hospitable, even Hera, who adopted him. Heracles married Ivi, the daughter of Zeus and Hera. Since then, people started to respect him as a God.

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