Chapter 21
Perseus and the Legends of Argos

Argos, Mycenae, and Tiryns are close geographically and in the sagas confused. Argos itself was associated with Thebes and Corinth, and its myths reflect its contacts with the Levant and Egypt.

**HERA, POSEIDON, AND PHORONEUS**

Argos was the most important center on the Greek mainland for the worship of Hera. Its founder, PHORONEUS [for-roh'ne-us], decided in favor of Hera in her contest with Poseidon for divine patronage of Argos. In anger, Poseidon dried up the Argive rivers, including that of the river-god INACHUS [in'ak-us], or INACHOS, father of Phoroneus. Argive rivers since then have always been short of water.

**PERSEUS**

Abas had twin sons, Proetus (who became king of Tiryns) and ACRISIUS [a-kris'i-us], or AKRISIOS (who ruled Argos). An oracle foretold that the son of DANAË [da'na-ee], the only child of Acrisius, would kill her father. Acrisius shut Danaë up in an underground chamber, but Zeus lay with her, entering in the form of a shower of gold. Their child was PERSEUS [pers'e-us], whom Acrisius discovered after four years from the noise the child made by playing. He placed Danaë and Perseus into a chest, which he put into the sea. It floated to Seriphos, where it was found by DICTYS [dik'tis], or DIKTYS (brother of POLYDECTES [pol-i-dek'teez], or POLYDEKTES, king of Seriphos), who rescued Danaë and her son and gave them shelter in his home.

Meanwhile, Polydectes loved Danaë, who refused him. He ordered the men of Seriphos (including Perseus, now grown) each to give him a horse. When Perseus said, “I can as easily give you the Gorgon’s head,” Polydectes ordered him to perform this task, expecting to get rid of them.

**The Graeae and the Nymphs.** Hermes and Athena advised Perseus how to perform the task, telling him first to go to the three GRAEAE [gree'ee or greye'eye], or GRAIAI (daughters of Phorcys and Ceto, children of Pontus and Ge) and sisters of the Gorgons, who between them had but one eye and one tooth. Perseus got hold of the eye and tooth, and gave them back only when the sisters told him the way to certain (unnamed) nymphs who possessed three magic objects. From the nymphs Perseus obtained the Cap of Invisibility, a pair of winged sandals, and a bag (kibisis [ki'bi-sis]). Hermes gave him a scimitar.

**The Gorgons and the Beheading of Medusa.** Thus equipped, he flew to the GORGONS [gor'gonz], who lived on the edge of the world (usually located in North Africa or in the far north, in the land of the Hyperboreans). Two of the Gorgons (STHENO [sten'o] and EURYALE [you-reye'a-lee]) were immortal; the third, MEDUSA {me-dou'sa}, or MEDOUSA, was mortal. Those who looked on their faces were turned to stone. Guided by Athena, Perseus, looking at the Gorgon’s reflection in his shield, beheaded Medusa and put her head in the kibisis. Medusa had been loved by Poseidon, and from her body sprang their children, CHRYSAOR [kreye-say'or] (“golden sword”), and the winged horse, PEGASUS [peg'a-sus], or PEGASOS. Chrysaor became father of Geryon (see MLS, Chapter 22), and Pegasus played an important role in the saga of Bellerophon (see MLS, Chapter 26). When the hoof of Pegasus struck Mt. Helicon (in Boeotia) the fountain HIPPOCRENE [hip-po-kree'nee], or HIPPOKRENE, “Horse's Fountain,” gushed forth; it was sacred to the Muses and associated with poetic inspiration. Athena invented the flute for Medusa, imitating the lament of the two surviving Gorgons, Stheno and Euryale.

**Atlas.** Perseus, wearing the Cap of Invisibility, escaped from the Gorgons and began his flight back to Seriphos. Medusa’s blood dripped through the kibisis as he flew over Libya, and from it sprang the poisonous snakes that were said to infest Libya. The titan Atlas, who supported the heavens (see MLS, Chapter 4), refused hospitality to Perseus, who turned him into stone, now the Atlas range of mountains. When Perseus came down to the seashore to bathe his hands in the sea, the seaweed upon which he placed the kibisis hardened into coral.
**Andromeda.** Flying past the coast of the Levant (or, some say, Ethiopia, that is, the part of Africa lying to the south of Egypt), Perseus saw a young woman chained to a rock, threatened by a sea monster. She was ANDROMEDA [an-drom'e-da], daughter of King CEPHEUS [see'e-us], or KEPHEUS, and Queen CASSIEPEA [kas-si-e-pee'a], or KASSIEPEIA. Cassiepea had boasted that she was more beautiful than the Nereids, and Poseidon punished her pride by flooding the kingdom of Cepheus and sending the sea monster to ravage it. The oracle of Zeus, Ammon, told Cepheus that he could appease the monster only by chaining his daughter to the rock. Perseus killed the monster with the scimitar of Hermes and was rewarded with Andromeda as his wife.

**Phineus.** Since Andromeda was already betrothed to PHINEUS [feyen'e-us], her uncle, Perseus had to assert his claim by fighting Phineus and his followers, all of whom he turned to stone with the Gorgon’s head. The fight between Perseus and Phineus was described by Ovid as a full-scale battle in the dining hall (like that of Odysseus) in *Metamorphoses* 5.1–209, narrated at great length and with much ingenuity.

**The Return.** Perseus and Andromeda flew back to Seriphos, leaving a son, Perses, to inherit the kingdom of Cepheus. At Seriphos Perseus found Danaë and Dictys being threatened by Polydectes, whom he turned to stone. Leaving Dictys as king, he returned to Argos with Andromeda and Danaë (whom he had released), and gave the winged sandals, the kibisis, and the Cap of Invisibility to Hermes (who returned them to the nymphs), along with the scimitar. To Athena he gave the Gorgon’s head, which she placed in the middle of her aegis or shield.

**The Killing of Acrisius.** Acrisius fled from Argos to Larissa (a city in Thessaly) to avoid Perseus. Perseus followed him there and took part in funeral games being celebrated for Abas, father of Acrisius. In the discus-throw, his discus accidentally killed Acrisius, and so the prophecy of the oracle was fulfilled. Perseus, as the killer of his grandfather, could not return to Argos and went to Tiryns, where he became king, exchanging his kingdom with the king of Tiryns, Megapenthes. He founded Mycenae, and from him and Andromeda descended the kings of Mycenae in the generations before the family of Atreus. From them also descended Heracles and Eurystheus (see MLS, Chapter 22).

**THE FAMILY OF INACHUS**

**Inachus, Io, and Epaphus.** Inachus, father of Phoroneus (see above), was son of Oceanus and Tethys and is sometimes said to be the founder of Argos. He gave his name also to the river Inachus. His daughter was IO [eye'oh] (see MLS, Chapter 4), who was loved by Zeus and changed into a cow, resuming her human form when she came in her wanderings to Egypt, where she gave birth to Epaphus. Hera persuaded the Curetes to kidnap EPAPHUS [ep'a-fus], or EPAPHOS, and Io, after searching through many lands, found him in Syria. After her return to Egypt she was worshiped as the goddess Isis (see MLS, Chapter 16).

**Epaphus and His Descendants.** Epaphus was identified by the Egyptians with the sacred bull, Apis. In the mythology of Argos, a son of Phoroneus was also called Apis, from whom came the ancient name for the Peloponnesse, Apia. The daughter of Epaphus was Libya (from whom the geographical Libya is named), whose twin sons were Agenor and Belus. Agenor, who became the ruler of Phoenicia, was father of Cadmus and Europa (see MLS, Chapter 17), while Belus ruled in Egypt.

**Aegyptus and Danaüs and the Danaïds.** The sons of Belus were AEGYPTUS [ee-jip'tus], or AIGYPTOS, and DANAÜS [dan'a-us], or DANAOS, who quarreled. Danaüs left Egypt and came to Argos, where he became king: his subjects were called Danaï, which is one of the names that Homer uses for the Greeks. The fifty sons of Aegyptus demanded the fifty daughters of Danaüs (DANAÏDS [dan'aidz]) in marriage; on their wedding night, forty-nine Danaïds stabbed their husbands with daggers given them for the purpose by Danaüs, and for this were punished in the Underworld by having to fill perforated water jars. The fiftieth, HYPERMNESTRA [hi-perm-nes'tra]...
spared her husband LYNCEUS [lins'e-us], and from them descended Abas, the great-grandfather of Perseus.

**Amymone and Poseidon.** The Danaid AMYMONE [a-meye'moh-nee] was loved by Poseidon, who with his trident caused water to gush from a rock: this is the spring, Amymone. Their son was Nauplius, founder of Nauplia and father of Palamedes. Nauplius, to avenge his son’s death at the hands of Odysseus, caused many ships of the Greek fleet to be wrecked on the rocks of Euboea during the return voyage from Troy (see MLS, Chapter 20). Other Argive heroes were Melampus (see MLS, Chapter 25) and the five Argives among the Seven against Thebes—Adrastus, Amphiarauìs, Capaneus, Hippomedon, and Tydeus (see MLS, Chapter 17). The son of Tydeus was Diomedes, a leading Greek hero in the Trojan War (see MLS, Chapter 19).

**Chapter 22**

**Chapter 22: Heracles**

HERACLES [her'a-klees], or HERAKLES (HERCULES), the most popular of Greek heroes, is associated especially with the area around Argos and with Thebes, where he was born.

**AMPHITRYON AND ALCMENA**

ELECTRYON [e-lek'tri-on] ELEKTRYON, son of Perseus and king of Mycenae, fought with Pterelaüs, king of the Teleboans. Electryon planned to attack the Teleboans, who had retreated to their land in western Greece, taking the cattle of Pterelaüs. Electryon also planned to leave his nephew, AMPHITRYON [am-fi'tri-on], as king in his place, and he betrothed his daughter, ALCMENA [alk-mee'na], or ALKMENE, to him.

Amphitryon accidentally killed Electryon and left Mycenae to go into exile at Thebes, taking Alcmena with him. She would not lie with him until he had attacked the Teleboans and avenged her brothers, whom they had killed in the earlier war. Amphitryon returned victorious to find that Alcmena had already lain with Zeus in the same night. She bore twins, Heracles, son of Zeus, and IPHICLES [if'i-kleez], or IPHIKLES, son of Amphitryon.

**THE BIRTH AND YOUTH OF HERACLES**

Hera, angry with Zeus, sent Eileithyia to delay the birth of Alcmena’s twins and hasten the birth of EURYSTHEUS [you-ris'the-us], child of Sthenelus, grandson of Zeus and king of Mycenae. The prophecy of Zeus, that the child of his blood to be born that day would rule over those that lived around him, was fulfilled by Eurystheus, for whom Heracles performed his labors.

After the birth of Heracles, which took place when a servant of Alcmena tricked Eileithyia into relaxing her guard, Hera sent a pair of snakes to kill the twins. Heracles strangled them, and Tiresias, summoned by Amphitryon, foretold how Heracles would go on to perform great labors for humankind and finally join the gods on Olympus. Heracles was taught chariot driving, wrestling, archery, and music by various heroes. He killed LINUS [leye'nus], or LINOS, his music teacher, by striking him with his lyre.

For this murder he was exiled to Mt. Cithaeron on the borders of Boeotia, where he saved the town of Thebes from the ravages of a lion and freed the Thebans from paying tribute to the people of Orchomenus. Creon, king of Thebes, gave him his daughter, MEGARA [meg'a-ra], as wife.

**THE MADNESS OF HERACLES**

After Megara had borne several children to Heracles, he killed her and the children in a fit of madness caused by Hera. He inquired at Delphi how he might expiate his crime; the Pythia first called him Heracles (“Glory of Hera”) rather than by his usual name, ALCIDES [al-seye'deez], or ALKIDES, “Grandson of Alcaeus,” and told him to serve Eurystheus, king of Tiryns, for twelve years, performing the labors that he would impose.

**THE TWELVE LABORS (ATHLOI)**
The Greek word for the "labors" is athloi, i.e., contests for a prize, which for Heracles was immortality. The first six of the labors were undertaken in the Peloponnese, and the other six elsewhere. Associated with them are incidental or subsequent exploits, known as parerga, "incidental deeds" (parergon in the singular).

1. The Nemean Lion. Heracles killed a lion at NEMEA [nem'e-a] by means of a club, skinning it by using the animal's own claws. Henceforth he carried the club and wore the lionskin, his two most prominent attributes in art.

2. The Lernaean Hydra. A nine-headed serpent or HYDRA [heye'dra] lived in the marshes of LERNA [ler'na]. Each time Heracles clubbed a head, two more grew in its place, while Hera sent a crab to make things even more difficult. Helped by his nephew, IOLAÜS [i-o-lay'us] or IOLAOS, Heracles killed both monsters and dipped his arrows in the Hydra's poison. The crab became the constellation Cancer.

3. The Cerynean Hind. A hind with golden horns, sacred to Artemis, lived on Mt. CERYNEA [se-ri-nee'a] or KERYNEIA. After pursuing the beast for a year, Heracles caught it, carried it back alive to Eurystheus, and then released it. Pindar says that Heracles went to the land of the Hyperboreans to find the animal.

4. The Erymanthian Boar. Heracles brought back to Eurystheus the monstrous boar that lived on Mt. ERYMANTHOS [er-i-man'thus], or ERYMANTHOS.

5. The Augean Stables. Heracles cleaned the stables of AUGEAS [aw-jee'as or aw'jee-as], son of Helius and king of Elis, who kept vast herds of cattle. Helped by Athena, he diverted the rivers Alpheus and Peneus so that they flowed through the stables.

6. The Stymphalian Birds. Heracles shot the birds that lived beside lake STYMPHALUS [stim'fal-us], or STYMPHALOS, in Arcadia.

7. The Cretan Bull. Heracles caught the bull that the Cretan king, MINOS [meye'nos], had failed to sacrifice to Poseidon. After bringing it back from Crete alive, he released it, and it came to Marathon, where Theseus caught it (see MLS, Chapter 23).

8. The Mares of Diomedes. The Thracian king DIOMEDES [deye-o-mee'deez], son of Ares, owned a herd of mares that ate human flesh. Heracles brought the horses back to Eurystheus, who released them and dedicated them to Hera.


10. The Cattle of Geryon. Heracles brought back the cattle of GERYON [jer'i-on or ger'i-on] from Erythia, a land far away in the west. He sailed there in a cup given him by Helius and killed Geryon (who had three bodies) and his herdsmen, EURYTION [you-rit'i-on], and his hound (Orthrus) and drove the cattle back to Greece.

11. The Apples of the Hesperides. Heracles needed the help of Athena and Atlas to get the apples of the HESPERIDES [hes-per'i-deez], ("daughters of night"), which they guarded in a garden far to the west; around the apple tree was coiled the serpent LADON [lay'don]. The many-formed sea-god Nereus had to be held by Heracles before he would divulge the location of the garden. While Euripides says that Heracles killed Ladon and took the apples himself, usually he is said to have held up the heavens, with the aid of Athena, while the titan Atlas fetched the apples. After shifting the heavens back to the shoulders of Atlas, he brought the apples back to Eurystheus. Later Athena took them back to the garden of the Hesperides.

12. Cerberus. The final labor was to go to the Underworld and bring back the three-headed hound of Hades, CERBERUS [ser'ber-us], or KERBEROS. Heracles himself said (in the Odyssey) that this was the hardest labor. He brought Cerberus to Eurystheus and then returned him to Hades.

PARERGA (INCIDENTAL DEEDS)

The Centaurs. As a parergon to the fourth labor, Heracles was attacked by the centaurs while he was drinking wine with the centaur PHOLUS [foh'lus], or PHOLOS. He defeated them, but the immortal centaur, CHIRON [keye'ron], was wounded by one of the poisoned arrows and ended his suffering only by exchanging his immortality with Prometheus (see MLS, Chapter 4). Pholus died when he dropped one of the poisoned arrows on his hoof.

The Olympic Games. After cleaning the Augean stables, Heracles, cheated of his promised reward (one tenth of the cattle) by Augeas, returned with an army and killed Augeas. After this victory he is said to have instituted the Olympic Games in the territory of Elis (they were actually founded several centuries after the supposed time of Heracles).
Admetus and Alcestis. On his way to Thrace for his eighth labor, Heracles was entertained by ADMETUS [ad-mee'tus], or ADMETOS, king of Pherae, who was mourning the death of his wife, ALCESTIS [al-ses'tis], or ALKESTIS. Heracles wrestled with Death (Thanatos) and recovered Alcestis for her husband (see MLS, Chapter 11).

b>Hesione. Coming back from his ninth labor, Heracles rescued HESIONE [hee-seye'o-nee] from the sea monster at Troy (see MLS, Chapter 19). When the king, LAOMEDON [lay-o'me-don], cheated him of his reward, he returned with an army, sacked Troy, and replaced Laomedon with PRIAM [preye'am], who had been called Podarces.

Pillars of Heracles. As a monument of his journey to Geryon’s island, Heracles set up the Pillars of Heracles at the strait where the Mediterranean Sea meets the Atlantic ocean.

Cacus. On his overland journey, Heracles was attacked by the Ligurians (in southern France) and was helped by Zeus to drive them off. At Pallanteum (on the site of Rome, see MLS, Chapter 26) he was entertained by King Evander and killed the fire-breathing monster CACUS [ka'kus], or KAKOS, “evil one.”

Eryx. Crossing the strait to Sicily, he wrestled with ERYX [er'iiks], king of the western tip of the island, and killed him.

Alcyoneus. Last, at the Isthmus of Corinth he killed the giant ALCYONEUS [al-sye-eye-on'e-us] or ALKYONEUS

Echidna and Scythes. According to Herodotus, Geryon lived in the far north, where Heracles lay with ECHIDNA [e-kid'na] (“snake-woman”) who bore him SCYTHES [seye'theez], or SKYTHES, and two other sons. As a young man, Scythes, alone of the three, could string a bow left behind by Heracles, and he became king and ancestor of the Scythians.

Busiris. Journeying to the garden of the Hesperides, Heracles killed the murderous king of Egypt, BUSIRIS [bou-seye'ris].

Antaeus. In Libya he wrestled with ANTAEUS [an-tee'us], or ANTAIOS, son of Ge and Poseidon, who could not be beaten so long as he kept contact with the earth, his mother. Heracles held him aloft until he was able to crush him to death.

Prometheus. On this journey also it was said that he came to the Caucasus and there released PROMETHEUS [proh-mee'the-us]. See Centaurs above, and MLS, Chapter 4.

Theseus, Pirithoüs, and Meleager. In Hades Heracles saw THESEUS [thee'us-us] and PIRITHOÛS [peye-rith'oh-us], or PIRITHOOS, chained fast to stone seats and released Theseus. He saw the ghost of MELEAGER [me-le-ay'jer] (see MLS, Chapter 22), whose sister, DEIANIRA [dee-ya-neye'ra], or DEâNEIRA, he offered to marry.

OTHER DEEDS OF HERACLES

The Robbers Cycnus and Syleus. Helped by Athena and Iolaüs, Heracles killed the Thessalian robber CYCNUS [sik'nus] or KYKNOS, son of Ares, and near the Strait of Euboea he killed another robber, SYLEUS [sil'e-us].

The Cercopes. A pair of mischievous dwarfs, the CERCOPES [ser-koh'peez], or KERKOPES, tried to steal the weapons of Heracles, who caught them and slung them upside down from a pole across his shoulders. They laughed so much at the sight of his buttocks, burned black by the sun, that he let them go. Later they were turned by Zeus into apes (or stones).

The Argonautic Expedition and Hylas. Heracles was one of the Argonauts who sailed with Jason (see MLS, Chapter 24), but at Cios he left the ship to search for his companion HYLAS [heye'las], who had been abducted by the water-nymphs. The Argo sailed on without him, and he instituted a cult of Hylas at Cios.
Expedition against Pylos. Besides the expeditions against Augeas and Laomedon, Heracles led an army against NELEUS [neel'e-us], king of Pylos, whom he killed along with eleven of his twelve sons. He left as king the survivor, NESTOR [nes'tor], who was a prominent Greek hero in the Trojan War (see MLS, Chapter 19). In the battle at Pylos, Heracles is said to have wounded the gods Hades and Hera, and Apollo and Poseidon are said to have driven him back from the city. He attacked Hippocoon, king of Sparta, who had helped Neleus.

Auge and Telephus. During his journey back to Tiryns, Heracles lay with AUGE [aw'jee] at Tegea. Their son, TELEPHUS [tel'e-fus], or TELEPHOS, was put in a chest by Auge’s father and floated over the Aegean to Asia Minor. There Telephus became king and ancestor of the Mysians (see MLS, Chapter 19).

DEIANIRA AND IOLE

In Hades during his last labor, Heracles had promised Meleager that he would marry his sister, DEIANIRA [dee-ya-neye'ra], or DEIANEIRA (sometimes spelled in English Dejanira). To win her he wrestled with the river-god ACHELOUS [ak-e-loh'us], or ACHELOUS, who also wished to marry her. As a river-god, Acheloüs could turn himself into different creatures. He had bull’s horns on his head, one of which was broken off in the fight and became (or was exchanged with) the miraculous cornucopia (in Latin, cornu copiae, “horn of plenty”), said also to have been the horn of Amalthea, the goat who suckled the infant Zeus on Crete (see MLS, Chapter 3).

Nessus. On the way back to Tiryns with Deianira, Heracles came to the river Evenus, which was in spate. The centaur NESSUS [nes'sus], or NESSOS, carried Deianira over and, before Heracles could cross, attempted to violate her. Heracles shot him with his bow, and as Nessus lay dying, he told Deianira to collect some of his blood and keep it, for, he said, it would prevent Heracles from loving any other woman more than Deianira. She collected the blood and kept it out of the sunlight. She did not know that the arrow that killed Nessus had been dipped in the poison of the Hydra.

Iole. Deianira bore Heracles a son, HYLLUS [heyel'lus], or HYLLOS, and a daughter, MACARIA [ma-kar'i-a] or MAKARIA. Later the hero fell in love with IOLE [eye'o-lee], daughter of EURYTUS [your'i-tus], or EYRYTOS, king of Oechalia (a city on the island of Euboea), who had taught Heracles archery. Eurytus would not give Iole to Heracles, even though he won an archery contest to decide who should have her as wife or concubine. Later the brother of Iole, IPHITUS [if'i-tus], or IPHITOS, came to Tiryns, and there Heracles threw him from the acropolis and killed him.

Heracles and Apollo. Heracles asked the Delphic oracle how he might be cured of his fits of murderous madness. When the Pythia refused to answer him, he began to carry off the tripod, so as to set up his own oracle. Apollo prevented him, and their fight was ended by Zeus. Finally the Pythia told him that he must serve as a slave for one year.

Omphale. Heracles was sold to OMPHALE [om'fa-lee], queen of Lydia, and served as her slave, even dressing as a woman and spinning wool for her.

Heracles and Deianira in Trachis. Because of the murder of Iphitus, Heracles no longer could live at Tiryns, and he and Deianira were received by Ceyx, king of TRACHIS [tray'kis]. On the way back to Trachis from Lydia, Heracles attacked Oechalia: he sacked the city, killed Eurytus, and took Iole prisoner, sending her back to Deianira with his herald, LICHAS [leye'kas].

THE DEATH OF HERACLES

Deianira learned from Lichas that Heracles loved Iole. Remembering the advice of Nessus, she smeared a shirt with the centaur’s blood and sent Lichas to give it to Heracles to wear at the sacrifice to Zeus, which Heracles was performing in thanksgiving for his victory. The flames of the sacrificial fire warmed the blood and the shirt clung to the flesh of Heracles, burning him with intolerable pain. In agony he hurled Lichas into the sea and had himself carried back to Mt. Oeta in Trachis. When Deianira heard what had happened, she killed herself. Hyllus went with his father to Mt. Oeta, where Heracles ordered him to marry Iole. Then Heracles was placed on a huge funeral pyre.
The Apotheosis of Heracles. Heracles gave his bow to POEAS [pee'as], or POIAS, father of PHILOCTETES [fi-lok-tee'teez] or PHILOKTETES (see MLS, Chapter 19), as a reward for lighting the pyre. The mortal part of Heracles perished in the flames, while his immortal part ascended to Olympus in a chariot sent by Zeus. There Heracles became one of the immortal gods; he was reconciled with Hera and was given Hebe as his wife.

ALCMENA AND EURYSTHEUS

Alcmena and the children of Heracles were persecuted by Eurystheus despite the protection of King Ceyx. They fled from Trachis to Athens and were received by King Demophon, son of Theseus. The Athenians killed Eurystheus with his five sons in battle. Alcmena revenged herself by mutilating the king’s severed head. Euripides said that the Athenian victory was assured by the voluntary sacrifice of Macaria (daughter of Heracles) to Persephone, and that the nephew of Heracles, Ioläus, was miraculously rejuvenated and captured Eurystheus, who was later executed. Pindar says that Ioläus himself killed Eurystheus, whose body was buried in the tomb of Amphitryon at Thebes. Alcmena died at Thebes and went to the Elysian Fields, where she became the consort of Rhadamanthys. In another version she married Rhadamanthys in Thebes (after the death of Amphitryon). After her death Hermes substituted a large stone for her body in the coffin, and her grandchildren set up a shrine to her with a cult.

THE HERACLIDAE

Hyllus married Iole and led an expedition in an attempt to return to the Peloponnese. He was killed by Echemus, king of Tegea. After one hundred years his descendant Temenus invaded the Peloponnese and defeated its defenders, who were led by Tisamenus, son of Orestes. Thus the HERACLIDAE [her-a-ki-le-ee dee], or HERAKLIDAI, “descendants of Heracles” returned to the Peloponnese, where the three principal areas were divided among them: Procles and Eurysthenes ruled Sparta; Temenus ruled Argos, and Creshphontes held Messene. These were the principal Dorian kingdoms in the Peloponnese, and Sparta, which subdued Messene, and Argos flourished for centuries.

Chapter 23
Theseus and the Legends of Attica

The legends of Attica fall into three groups:

- Foundation myths and legends of the early kings of Athens.
- The saga of Theseus.
- Legends involving Minos, king of Crete.

FOUNDATION MYTHS AND LEGENDS OF THE EARLY KINGS OF ATHENS

Cecrops. The Athenians said that they were autochthonous (sprung from the earth). The first king was CECROPS [see-kropz], or KEKROPS, who was autochthonous and half-serpentine. Attica was called “Cecropia” after him. The contest between Poseidon and Athena for control of Attica took place in Cecrops’ time (see MLS, Chapter 8). For Cecrops’ daughters, see Erichthonius.

Erichthonius. The second king, ERICHTHONIUS [er-ik-thohn’i-us], or ERICHTHONIOS, was also autochthonous and half-serpentine, sprung from the semen of Hephæstus that fell to the ground when Hephæstus tried to violate Athena. Erichthonius was put in a basket and given to the daughters of Cecrops, who ignored the taboo against looking inside the basket. Driven mad, they killed themselves, and Erichthonius was brought up by Athena. He founded the festival of the Panathenaea and set up the wooden statue of Athena on the Acropolis (see MLS, Chapter 8). In another version, the daughters of Cecrops (Aglauros, Herse, and Pandrosos) did not kill themselves. Herse became mother of Cephalus by Hermes. Aglauros, because of her earlier
disobedience and because she asked Hermes for gold as a reward for her help in bringing him to Herse, was punished by Athena with insatiable envy. Hermes turned her into a rock.

Erechtheus. The third king was ERECHTHEUS [e-rek'the-us]. He was later worshiped at Athens and was closely associated with Poseidon. The ERECHTHEUM [e-rek-thee'um], or ERECHTHEION, was a temple on the Acropolis dedicated to him and to Athena Polias (i.e., Athena as guardian of the city). It contained the wooden statue of Athena set up by Erichthonius, and the olive tree and salt "sea" produced in the contest of Poseidon and Athena. It also housed the tomb of Erechtheus. Erechtheus defended Athens against Eumolpus, son of Poseidon and king of Eleusis. To secure the victory he sacrificed his daughter (sometimes called Chthonia). Erechtheus killed Eumolpus and was himself killed by a blow from Poseidon's trident.

Creusa and Ion. In his drama Ion [eye'on], Euripides made CREUSA [kree-ou'sa], or KREOUSIA, a daughter of Erechtheus who survives after all her sisters have been sacrificed to Earth to win the victory. By Apollo she became the mother of Ion, who was rescued from exposure by Hermes and brought up at Delphi. Later he was recognized by Creusa and returned to Athens. He became the ancestor of the Ionic tribes of Athens and the Greek colonies in Ionia.

Cephalus and Procris. CEPHALUS [se'fa-lus], or KEPHALOS, the son of Hermes and Herse (Cecrops' daughter), married PROCRI [pro'kris], or PROKRIS, a daughter of Erechtheus. Cephalus was a hunter loved by Eos, goddess of the dawn. In disguise he seduced his wife and she fled, becoming a follower of Artemis. When she returned to Cephalus, Artemis gave her a hound, Laelaps, which always caught its prey, and a javelin that never missed its mark. (The hound chased a fox that could not be caught and finally both were turned into stone.) Later Procris secretly watched Cephalus as he rested in the forest from hunting. When he called on the breeze (Latin aura) to cool him, she thought he was calling on the Dawn (aurora in Latin) and moved. Cephalus threw the javelin into the bushes where he had seen the movement and killed his wife.

Orithyia and Boreas and their Children. Another daughter of Erechtheus was ORITHYIA [or-i-theye'ya], or OREITHYIA. By BOREAS [bohr'e-as], the North Wind, she was the mother of ZETES [zee'teez] and CALAIS [kay'la-is], or KALAIS (who were winged), and of Cleopatra and Chione. Cleopatra married Phineus, king of Thrace (see MLS, Chapter 24) and Chione, by Poseidon, was the mother of Eumolpus, the king of Eleusis against whom Erechtheus fought (see above).

Pandion. The fourth king was PANDION [pan-deye'on]. Pandion was driven out of Athens by Metion. His four sons recovered the throne, and eventually Aegeus ruled as the fifth king of Athens, while his brother, Nisus, ruled at Megara.

Philomela and Procrne. Pandion was the father of PHILOMELA [fil-ooh-mee'la] and PROCNE [prok'nee], or PROKNE. Procrne went to Thrace as wife of TEREUS [teer'e-us], and her son was ITYS [eye'tis]. When Philomela visited her sister, Tereus raped and mutilated her and shut her up in a hut in the forest. Procrne discovered the truth and revenged herself on Tereus by killing Ity and serving him to his father to eat. She was turned into a swallow, Philomela into a nightingale, and Tereus into a hoopoe. (For the Greeks, Procrne became the nightingale and Philomela the swallow.)

THE SAGA OF THESEUS

AEGEUS [ee'je-us], or AIGEUS, son of Pandion and king of Athens, was father of Theseus by AETHRA [ee'thra], or AITHRA, daughter of Pittheus, king of Troezen, where Theseus spent his childhood. Aegeus left a sword and pair of sandals under a rock as tokens by which he could recognize his son. When he was strong enough to lift the rock, Theseus recovered the tokens and set out for Athens.

The Labors of Theseus. On his journey from Troezen to Athens, Theseus performed six labors.
1. He killed a son of Hephaestus, PERIPHETES [pe-ri-feet'eez], also called Corynetes ("club-man"), from the club that was his weapon.
2. He killed SINIS [seye'nis], also called Pityocampetes ("pine-bender"), by tying him to two bent trees, which he then released; this had been the way in which Sinis killed his victims.
3. He killed the monstrous Sow of Crommyon, named PHAEA.
4. He killed SCIRON [skeye'ron], or SKIRON, who kicked travelers on the narrow path on the sea-
cliffs into the sea, where a huge turtle devoured them. Theseus killed him in the same way.
5. He wrestled to the death with CERCYON [ser'si-on], or KERKYON at Eleusis.
6. He killed PROCRUSTES [prokrus'teez], or PROKRUSTES (“the stretcher”), who would kill travelers by making them lie on a bed. He would hammer out those who were too short, until they fitted the bed, and he would shorten with a saw those who were too long. Theseus killed him by his own methods.

Theseus and Aegeus. Theseus arrived at Athens and was almost poisoned by Aegeus on the advice of Medea (see MLS, Chapter 24). Aegeus recognized his son in time by the sword that Theseus bore, which Aegeus had left in Troezen, and made him his successor. Pallas (brother of Aegeus) and his sons disputed Theseus’ claim to the throne and many of them were killed by Theseus.

The Bull of Marathon. Theseus caught the bull of Marathon and sacrificed it at Athens to Apollo. On his way to Marathon he was entertained by HECALE [hek'a-lee], or HEKALE, and after her death, on his orders, she was honored at the annual festival of Zeus Hecalus.

Theseus Kills the Minotaur. Theseus’ most important myth is the killing of the MINOTAUR [mi'noh-tawr], the monstrous son of MINOS [mey'e-nohs] and PASIPHAË [pa-si'fa-e], which was shut up in the Labyrinth in the palace of Minos at CNOSSUS [knos'sus], or KNOSSOS. While visiting Athens, Androgeos, son of Minos, was killed by the Athenians, and Minos attacked Athens (and her ally Megara), in a war of revenge. As a result, the Athenians agreed to send fourteen girls and boys every seven years to be devoured by the Minotaur, and Theseus volunteered to go. On the voyage to Crete, Minos challenged Theseus to prove that he was the son of Poseidon by recovering a ring that he threw into the sea. Theseus jumped into the sea and came to the palace of Amphitrite, the wife of Poseidon, who gave him a robe and a wreath (and, presumably, the ring).

Theseus and Ariadne. At Knossos, Theseus, was helped by ARIADNE [a-ri-ad'nee]. Some say Ariadne gave Theseus the wreath to illuminate the Labyrinth, but others say she gave him a thread by which to find his way out of the Labyrinth. Thus Theseus slew the Minotaur and emerged from the Labyrinth. He sailed from Crete with Ariadne, whom he deserted on the island of NAXOS [nak'sos], also called Dia. She was rescued by Dionysus, who took her wreath and set it in the heavens as the constellation Corona, making Ariadne his wife (see MLS, Chapter 13).

Theseus, King of Athens. Theseus sailed from Naxos to Delos, where he danced the Crane dance (a traditional dance at Delos with labyrinthine movements). From Delos he sailed to Athens, forgetting to change his sails from black to white, the signal to Aegeus that he had been successful. When Aegeus saw the black sails he threw himself into the sea, which was thenceforth called the Aegean Sea, and Theseus became king of Athens.

Theseus and the Amazons. Theseus joined Heracles in his ninth labor (see MLS, Chapter 22) and fought the Amazons, bringing back with him the Amazon queen HIPPOLYTA [hip-pol'i-ta] (or, others say, ANTOPE [an-teye'oh-pee]), with whom he fathered Hippolytus (see MLS, Chapter 10). He defended Athens from an attack by the Amazons during which Hippolyta (or Antiope) died.

Other Adventures. Theseus took part in the Argonauts’ expedition (see MLS, Chapter 24) and the Calydonian boar hunt (see MLS, Chapter 25).

Theseus and Phaedra. At some time after his encounter with the Amazons and the birth of Hippolytus, Theseus married PHAEDRA [fee'dra], daughter of Minos and sister of Ariadne (see MLS, Chapter 10).
Theseus’ Friendship with Pirithoüs. PIRITHOÛS [pi-ri-thoh-us], or PIRITHOÖS, son of Ixion and king of the Thessalian Lapiths, was Theseus’ friend. Theseus attended the marriage feast of Pirithoüs and Hippodamia and fought against the drunken centaurs (see MLS, Chapter 5). They later decided each to take a wife worthy of their divine ancestry. Together they seized Helen for Theseus.

Theseus and Helen. While Theseus was away in the Underworld, he left Helen with his mother, Aethra, in the Attic village of Aphidnae. The Dioscuri, Helen’s brothers, rescued her and took Aethra back to Sparta as Helen’s slave. She went with Helen to Troy.

Theseus and Pirithoüs in the Underworld. After seizing Helen, the two friends then descended to the Underworld to seize Persephone for Pirithoüs. There Hades imprisoned them on magic chairs; Heracles set Theseus free during his twelfth labor, but Pirithoüs was left in the house of Hades for ever.

Theseus the Protector. Theseus protected Oedipus in his old age and was present at his “translation” at Colonus. He championed the mothers and widows of the Seven against Thebes (see MLS, Chapter 17), and he offered a refuge at Athens to Heracles after he had murdered his wife and children (see MLS, Chapter 22).

Theseus’ Death and Successors. Theseus was driven out of Athens by the usurper Menestheus and went to the island of Scyros, where King Lycomedes probably killed him. Demophon, son of Theseus, succeeded Menestheus as king and rescued his grandmother, Aethra, at the fall of Troy. He gave refuge to Alcmena, mother of Heracles, and helped the Heraclidae (see MLS, Chapter 22). The last king of Athens was Codrus, who gave up his life to bring victory to Athens.

THE LEGENDS OF MINOS

Minos was the son of Europa and Zeus (see MLS, Chapter 17), and much of his legend has been told above.

Minos and Scylla. In his war against Athens and Megara, because of the murder of his son Androgeos, Minos attacked Megara. SCYLLA [sil'la], or SKYLLA, daughter of Nisus, king of Megara, betrayed her father out of love for Minos, by cutting off a magic purple lock from the head of Nisus. Rejected by Minos, she clung to his ship as he sailed away and was turned into a sea bird, the ciris.

Daedalus, Pasiphaë, and the Minotaur. The Athenian craftsman and inventor DAEDALUS [dee'da-lus], or DAIDALOS, fled from Athens to Crete after he had hurled PERDIX [per'diks], the inventor of the saw, off the Acropolis. Perdix was turned into a partridge. Minos had kept for himself a bull, sent from the sea by Poseidon, instead of sacrificing it to the god as he had vowed. Poseidon caused PASIPHAË [pa-si-fa'ee] to fall in love with the bull, and Daedalus built a hollow wooden cow, into which Pasiphaë climbed to mate with the bull. From this union came the MINOTAUR [mi'noh-tawr], which was shut up in the Labyrinth, built by Daedalus.

Daedalus and Icarus. Daedalus escaped from Crete by flying with the aid of wings that he invented for himself and his son, ICARUS [ik'a-rus], or IKAROS. Icarus, flying too near the sun, fell into the sea, but Daedalus came to Sicily, where he was protected by King Cocalus. The story of Daedalus and Icarus is similar in its motifs to that of Apollo and Phaëthon (see MLS, Chapter 3).

The Death of Minos. Minos followed Daedalus to Sicily and there was killed by the daughters of Cocalus. As son of Zeus he became a judge in the Underworld.

The Children of Minos. Of the children of Minos, Ariadne and Phaedra have been mentioned. His son Catreus was associated with Rhodes, where he was worshiped as a hero. Another son, Deucalion, was the father of the Trojan war hero Idomeneus (see MLS, Chapters 19 and 20). A third son, GLAUKUS [glaw'kus], or GLAUKOS, was miraculously brought back to life (after falling into a vat of honey) by the seer Polyidus. The death of the fourth son, Androgeos, has already been mentioned.
Chapter 24
Jason, Medea, and the Argonauts

SAGA AND FOLKTALE

- The saga of the ARGONAUTS [ar'goh-nawtz] concerns the quest for the Golden Fleece by Jason and the crew of the ARGO [ar'goh], which included many of the leading Greek heroes from the age before the Trojan War. As a group they are sometimes called Minyae, and two cities that claimed to be Minyan were Miletus (in Ionia), which was especially active in founding colonies in the Euxine (Black Sea) area, the setting for the quest, Iolcus (in Thessaly).

THE GOLDEN FLEECE

ATHAMAS [ath'a-mas] of Thebes married NEPHELE [nef'e-lee] ("cloud"), who bore him PHRIXUS [frik'sus], or PHRIXOS, and HELLÉ [hell'eel] and then returned to the sky. Athamas then married INO [eye'noh], daughter of Cadmus (see MLS, Chapter 17), who out of jealousy of her stepchildren caused a famine and, after Delphi had been consulted, plotted to have Athamas sacrifice Phrixus to end the famine. At the moment of sacrifice, Nephele caught up Phrixus and Helle and set them on a ram with golden fleece, the gift of Hermes, which carried them eastward through the heavens. Helle fell off into the strait between Europe and Asia, thenceforth called Hellespont ("Helle’s sea"), while Phrixus continued to Colchis, at the eastern end of the Black Sea. Here he was received by King AEÆTES [ee-ee'teez], son of Helius and brother of Circe and Pasiphaë, who give him his daughter, Chalciope, as wife. Phrixus sacrificed the ram to Zeus Phyxios (Zeus, god of escape) and gave the Golden Fleece to Aeëtes. It was hung in a grove sacred to Ares and guarded by a serpent.

JASON AND PELIAS

Cretheus (brother of Athamas) was king of Iolcus. His son and successor, AESON [ee'son], or AISON, was deposed by his stepson, PELIAS [pel'i-as], son of Poseidon and Tyro. Aeson’s son, JASON [jay'son], was sent to the hills to be educated by the centaur CHIRON [keye'ron], and after twenty years returned to Iolcus to reclaim his family’s throne. On his journey back Jason carried an old woman across the river Anaurus, losing a shoe during the crossing. She was the goddess Hera, who thereafter favored Jason. Pelias was warned by the Delphic oracle to beware of a man with one shoe. As the price for giving up the throne, he ordered Jason to fetch him the Golden Fleece, an impossible task that he thought would get rid of Jason.

THE VOYAGE OF THE ARGONAUTS TO CHOLCIS

The Argo [ar'go] was the first ship, built by ARGUS [ar'gus], or ARGOS (son of Arestor), with the help of Athena. In its bow was a piece of wood that had the power of speech, taken from the sacred grove of Zeus at Dodona. Its crew (usually fifty in number) included the best Greek heroes: Jason, the leader, Augeas, Theseus, Meleager, Peleus, Telamon, Nauplius, Orpheus, and Heracles. Many were fathers of Trojan War heroes, while others had special skills: Idmon and Mopsus were seers; Castor and Polydeuces were, respectively, a horseman and a boxer; Lyneus had special powers of sight; Zetes and Callais (sons of Boreas) were winged; Argus was the shipwright, and Tiphys the helmsman.

Hypsipyle and the Lemnian Women. The Argonauts sailed to Lemnos, where the women, under Queen HYPSIPYLE [hip-sip'il-lee], had killed every male except THOAS [thoh'as], father of Hypsipyle. She put Thoas in a chest, in which he floated to the land of the Tauri (i.e., the Crimea, in southern Russia). The Argonauts stayed for a year and fathered many children. After their departure, Hypsipyle was driven by the other women from the island because of her deception in saving Thoas, and she came eventually to Nemea, where she had a role in the saga of the Seven against Thebes (see MLS, Chapter 17).
**Heracles and the Argonauts.** The Argonauts sailed to CYZICUS [siz'i-kus], or KYZIKOS, where Heracles killed the earth-born giants (Gegeneis) who lived nearby. In a night battle they mistakenly killed King Cyzicus (after whom the city was named). At their next landfall, Cios, Heracles left in search of his companion HYLAS [hey'e-las], and the Argo sailed on without him (see MLS, Chapter 22).

**Polydeuces and Amycus.** Coming to the Bebryces (on the Euxine coast) POLYDEUCES [pol-i-dou'seez], or POLYDEUKES (POLLUX), boxed against their king, AMYCUS [am'i-kus], or AMYKOS, and killed him.

**Phineus and the Harpies.** At Salmydessus the Argonauts were received by the blind king, PHINEUS [feyen'e-us], who was tormented by the Harpies ("snatchers"), winged monsters who snatched away his food and fouled what was left. ZETES [zee'teez] and CALAÏS [kay'la-is], or KALAI, pursued them to the Strophades ("turn-around") Islands, where the Harpies swore never to harass Phineus again.

**The Clashing Rocks.** Next were the SYMPLEGADES [sim-pleg'a-deez], "clashing rocks," between which nothing had ever passed. Forewarned by Phineus, Jason sent a dove between the rocks: as they parted after trying to crush the dove, the Argonauts rowed furiously through the gap, and the rocks were fixed ever after.

Further along the Euxine coast, Idmon was killed by a boar, and Tiphys, the helmsman, died. His place was taken by Ancaeus. The Argo sailed past the land of the Amazons and the land of the Chalybes ("iron-workers") to the island of Ares.

**The Stymphalian Birds.** The Argonauts frightened away the STYMPHALIAN [stim-fay'li-an] birds, which had settled on the island of Ares after being driven out of Greece by Heracles in his sixth labor. Here they took on board the four sons of Phrixus (who had been shipwrecked) and sailed on to the river Phasis, on whose banks was Colchis.

**JASON AT COLCHIS**

Aeëtes set Jason a series of impossible tasks before he would let him take the Golden Fleece. He was to yoke a pair of brazen-footed, fire-breathing bulls (the gift of Hephaestus to Aeëtes) and plough a field. In the furrows he was to sow dragon’s teeth and kill the armed men who would spring up from the teeth. Helped by Medea, daughter of Aeëtes, Jason performed these tasks and took the fleece.

**Medea.** A priestess of Hecate, MEDEA [me-dee'a], or MEDEIA, was as skilled in magic as her aunt, Circe. Hera and Aphrodite made her fall in love with Jason, to whom she gave a magic ointment to protect him from fire and iron, and drugs to tranquilize the serpent that guarded the fleece. Euripides makes Medea kill the dragon, so that she may claim that she, not Jason, is the dragon-slayer; on a vase by Douris (ca. 470 B.C.) Jason is swallowed by the dragon and disgorged, while Athena looks on.

**THE RETURN OF THE ARGONAUTS**

The Argonauts set sail with the fleece and the princess, pursued by the Colchians. Their leader, APSYRTUS [ap-sir'tus], or APSYRTOS, brother of Medea, was killed on land by Jason: some say that Medea killed him on the Argo and threw him piecemeal into the sea to delay the pursuers.

**The Return Route.** Pindar has the Argonauts sail by the River of Ocean (i.e., at the edge of the world) to the “Red Sea,” then to Lemnos and so home.

In the Argonautica of Apollonius, the Argonauts sail from the Euxine up the Danube, across to the Adriatic and up the Eridanus (a mythical river sometimes identified with the Po), and across to the Rhone, down which they sailed to the Mediterranean.

**The Phaeacians.** In this version the Argonauts confronted many of the dangers later faced by Odysseus (see MLS, Chapter 20) and came to the land of the PHAEACIANS [fee-ay'shi-anz], or PHAIAKIANS. Here Medea appealed to Queen Arete for protection from the Colchians, and the
king. Alcinoüs, promised not to give them up if Jason and Medea were already married. There they
celebrated the marriage, and the Colchians gave up the pursuit.
The Argonauts sailed to Libya and were stranded on the Syrtes (shoals off the Libyan coast). They
carried the Argo on their shoulders for twelve days to Lake Tritonis (Mopsus died in the desert)
and from there made their way back to the sea.

Talus. Continuing their voyage, they killed the bronze giant, TALUS [tal'us], or TALOS, who
guarded the island of Crete, by opening a vein above one of his ankles, through which his life-
supporting ichor (the divine equivalent of blood) leaked out.

Jason and Pelias. Finally they sailed back to Iolcus. Jason handed over the fleece to Pelias and
dedicated the Argo to Poseidon at the Isthmus of Corinth. But Pelias refused to give up his throne
to Aeson, Jason's father, as he had promised.

Medea and the Daughters of Pelias. Medea tricked the daughters of Pelias into trying to
rejuvenate him by cutting him up and boiling him in a cauldron. They succeeded only in killing
him. For this murder Medea and Jason were driven out of Iolcus and went to Corinth.

JASON AND MEDEA IN CORINTH

Aeëtes had originally been king of Ephyra (an early name of Corinth), which he left to go to
Colchis. In the original version of the saga, the Corinthians sent for his daughter, Medea, to be
their queen, and through her Jason became king of Corinth. She was favored by Hera, in whose
sanctuary her children (by Jason) died and were honored with a cult.
In another version, the king of Corinth was CREON [kree'on], or KREON. He was killed by Medea,
who left her children in the sanctuary of Hera, where they were murdered by Creon's family after
Medea had fled to Athens.

Euripides’ Medea. In Euripides' tragedy, Medea, Jason divorces Medea so that he can marry
Creon's daughter, GLAUCŒ [glaw'see], or GLAUKÈ (also called CREUSA [kree-ou'sa], or KREOUSA),
and Creon orders Medea to leave Corinth. Medea sends her children with gifts for Glaucæ—a robe
and a crown smeared with magic ointment that burn Glaucæ and Creon to death. Medea then kills
the children as a final revenge on Jason. She escapes to Athens (where King AEGEUS [ee'ye-us], or
AIGEUS, had promised to receive her) in a chariot drawn by winged dragons and sent by her
grandfather, Helius. Jason lives on in Corinth, where he dies, struck by a piece of wood that falls
from the Argo.

Medea in Athens. At Athens Medea failed to trick Aegeus into poisoning his son, Theseus (who
had been one of the Argonauts), and she fled to Persia. There Medus, her son by Aegeus, founded
the kingdom of Media. Medea herself returned to Colchis.