Heracles

and the Foundings of Sparta and Rome

A Thesis by

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Abstract

This thesis finds that both the Spartans and the Romans consciously adopted Heracles as a model for their societies. This adoption is seen both through their historical actions and, especially, in their founding myths, which identify the city’s founders with Heracles. Although the argument relies on previous scholarly work interpreting the character of Heracles, several connections, especially those in the Sparta chapter, are original arguments for Heracles’ relevance in founding mythology. A close analysis of the Twelve Labors of Heracles is the foundation for my arguments. The analysis of Sparta relies on the works of Tyrtaeus, Herodotus, Thucydides, Xenophon, and Plutarch. The analysis of Rome relies on the works of Fabius Pictor, Virgil, Livy, and Plutarch. Secondary sources were also important, especially the writings of G. Karl Galinsky, whose work is influential throughout the thesis.
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Introduction

Heracles and the Foundings of Sparta and Rome

Greek and Roman polytheism was an influential cultural force in the ancient world, ingrained in every facet of ancient life. The ancient Greeks and Romans woke up with devotions to their household gods, labored under the protection and conscious placation of these deities, relaxed at the sacrificial feasts to the gods, and slept with security due to their libations. Greco-Roman society celebrated birth with prayers, educated their children with epics of Homer and the myths of heroes, relied on auspices for political and military decisions, and honored the dead with the rites of passing and proper burial. The Greeks and Romans were as defined by their religion as they were by their language. Naturally, the objects of Greco-Roman theology, the gods, heroes, and stories that were told of them, were seminal for the political structure of the ancient world that they permeated. If the political systems of the Greeks and Romans were permeated by religious legend, then the polis, its primary unit, its founding, and its founder were also partly produced by religious legends.

This thesis focuses on the influence that Heracles/Hercules, the Greek/Roman hero-god, exerted on the founding of ancient Mediterranean cities. Heracles performed a special function in Greco-Roman history and mythology: he was the proto-founder of Greece and Rome. Heracles, the most popular and ubiquitous hero in Greece, was the first founder of Sparta and Rome
because he civilized the lands in a general sense so that men could found the cities in a specific sense. Heracles, in his role as a hero and the destroyer of evil, slew monsters and provided order, creating an environment in which founders such as Lycurgus of Sparta and Aeneas and Romulus of Rome could successfully found cities. These founders, who were posterior to Heracles, were directly influenced by his character in several ways, which will be examined at length in the following chapters. By virtue of being a model for these founders and the virtues they practiced and imbued in their city, Heracles imaged the virtues of a founder in his capacity as the proto-founder.

Heracles, and the founders of poleis, possess several shared virtues: strength, justice, intuition, courage, piety, and self-sufficiency. Heracles’ physical strength and indomitable will were the foundation of his virtue, and determined his life and destiny. Heracles’ performance of these virtues is different from their performance by a founder, but they are similar and connected in nature. Heracles was a proto-founder, but never a founder in the conventional sense. He was never a ruler, but was an excellent model for the virtues founders need, and the vices they should avoid.

The universality, attractiveness, and necessity of Heracles’ mythology made him a model for both the Spartans and Romans. Heracles is the typification of heroic, Spartan, and Roman virtue, destiny, and values, as well as the archetypical example of deification through labor. The Spartans and Romans, who were heirs of the Homeric heroes, who were themselves heirs of Heracles, sought physical and spiritual connection with the beloved hero-god. Lycurgus and Aeneas/Romulus, themselves anthropomorphic typifications of the character of their founded poleis, identified with Heracles’ purpose, bringing justice and civilization, and sought his destiny, apotheosis, through their founding labors. This identification was explicitly delineated in
founding stories, which sought to compare the founder positively with Heracles. In addition to these mythological and historical links, the Spartans and Romans sought to give themselves blood ties to Heracles.

This thesis thus purposes to delineate the influence Heracles exerted on the foundings of Sparta and Rome. First, we will analyze Heracles himself through his labors, in order to understand his myth and how it relates to founding. Second, we will discuss the Spartan founding by Lycurgus; the Spartans sought to connect themselves to Heracles through historical links as well as emulation of his virtues. Finally, we will look at Rome’s founders: Aeneas, whose role closely resembles that of a Roman Heracles, and Romulus, whose myth owes much to Heracles’ legendary birth and death.
Chapter One

Heracles

Heracles, the son of Zeus and Alcmene who became a god through his labors, was a beloved figure in Greek and Roman mythology. Present in the Greek myth from its earliest periods, and lasting unto its dying breaths, Heracles was the ultimate hero and a model for founders in Sparta’s and Rome’s early civilizing periods. Heracles’ myth, centered on his famous Twelve Labors, was as flexible as the mind of the person adapting it, giving his myth and cult enduring relevance in Greek, as well as Roman, history. In order to understand the influence that Heracles exerted on Sparta and Rome’s founders and constitutions, an understanding of Heracles’ virtues and character is necessary. This understanding is reached through a study of Heracles’ Twelve Labors, his contribution to mythology and the reason for his importance.

Originating in folk tale as a strong boy, Heracles had evolved into a hero with overwhelming strength by the Homeric period, a trait he would keep for the entirety of his long and prestigious career. Amidst his many changing roles, from glutton to justice-bringer, from murderer to civilizer, from blasphemer to savior, Heracles always retained his enormous strength of will and body. This strength was both a blessing and curse for Heracles, and was the basis for his other characteristics. Heracles’ indomitable will and his tendency to act towards extremes are results of his strength, and he was a symbol of great perseverance and salvation, and horrible sin.
The conflicts created by his strength led to the legendary Labors of Heracles, which began when Heracles massacred his family, and were completed when he had performed several miraculous and benevolent deeds (as well as many side-quests, both good and evil). Heracles’ Labors took place all over Greece and chronicled his interactions with many iconic Greek landscapes and cities, either through the Labor itself, or the travel required to reach the Labor.

Heracles’ role in mythology is that of a unifier: the Greek *ethnos*¹ itself was united in his labors and his character reflects the traditional Greek and Roman values. Works of art portraying Heracles (statues, walls, pots, etc.) have been found all over Greece,² and his literary presence in both the oral and written tradition is consistent through all ages and places. Heracles’ ubiquitous presence is due to his position as the ideal founder. Since Heracles possessed all the traits of a founder, yet founded no city specifically as his own and in his name, he could be claimed by all of Greece as its own sort of founder.

**Heracles’ Virtues**

Heracles’ life and actions reveal six major virtues that form the basis of his character. The virtues are those typically possessed by founders: justice, strength, intuition, excellence, courage, and piety. Justice allows the founder to bind the city together into a cohesive unit, uniting factions despite their natural inclination to rebel against one another. Heracles was widely known as the hero who brought justice, usually by civilizing the wild land or destroying an evil monster. In later interpretations, Heracles also exhibited a more internal justice, depicted as his ability to choose good, often selfless applications of his strength that benefitted all, rather than applications that benefited only himself. We should remember that Heracles’ strength was the rock and foundation of all his other virtues and vices, and an unchanging point of reference to all the

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¹ A Greek word meaning those of the same race or nationality (in a general sense) who share the same culture.
² This is partially due to the fact that, as a god, Heracles was venerated in cities as much as the Twelve Olympian gods; further, his humanity made him attractive to claim as a patron god.
aspects of his myth: no matter what virtues he practices in his myths, Heracles was always the hero who was so strong that no task was beyond him. This sort of constancy is in itself a literary meta-strength, emphasized by the authors of the myths as well as respected by believers, a trait very rarely achieved by ubiquitous characters.

Heracles’ intuition is most prominent in his clever and unorthodox solutions to many of his Labors. The hero is necessarily an intelligent man, especially in the ancient world, because the trials he endured were legendary in nature and torturous in solution: the hero had to keep his wits about him in order to survive confrontations with unnatural beasts. The founder of a city is by definition the best man of the city he founds, as he is the first citizen and the one who was intelligent enough to bind together peoples in the first place (forming a city is obviously beneficial to the Greeks due to the various advantages it supplied people with economically, religiously, socially, etc.). To possess not only the intuition required for the physical act of creating the city but also the ability to adeptly traverse its political structure is a rare gift. The founder must be able to temper the passions of his city with good judgment. This intelligence separates the founder (or subsequent re-founders, who imprint the city with their image) from the citizen. The successful founder is cunning and understands the obstacles to his success, as Heracles does.

A founder must also be superior in some way to the people around him, in the sense that he is excellent independently and apart from the city. In other words, a founder’s virtue, vice, and power cannot be derived from a city, for the virtue necessary to create a city cannot be derived from the city that still needs to be created. Heracles is commonly depicted in tragedy and his Labors as a solitary man, the sole pillar of justice, good, and civilization in a world of madness and evil. Heracles is able to take on all the odds, even the gods themselves, and
succeed, alone. Heracles’ excellence is due to his role as the proto-founder and hero-god; the founder of a *polis* naturally could not confront the situations that Heracles did and escape on his own merit. Every founder becomes invested in his city in some way, and so becomes less self-sufficient as he rules it, whereas Heracles, having never founded a city and then remained in it, never relinquished his self-sufficiency.³ This distinction is evidence of the difference between the founder-ruler and proto-founder, although both species of man exhibit the virtue of self-sufficiency.

Courage, a virtue at which Heracles excelled through his many encounters with various monsters, demi-gods, gods, and scoundrels, is a virtue of paramount concern to the founder. As previously stated, Heracles had to earn his own glory and practice virtue without the aid of a city before he was able to create a city; in the time of the ancient Greeks and Romans this was usually done through a personal test of strength, by fighting monsters or through perilous travel and hardship. Fighting monsters, braving the world, and traveling to unknown places requires enormous reserves of courage, and it is a necessary element of the ancient founder’s quest to establish himself as a capable leader.

Finally, the founder of a city must be pious. Heracles, though a man of great passion, exhibited amazing piety throughout his life, enduring his step-mother Hera’s hatred all of his life before finally reconciling with her and taking his place among the gods. Heracles’ whole life was governed by piety: his determination to complete his labors was motivated by the obligations of piety in regards to his divine destiny, his father, the oracle of Delphi, and the necessity of repentance for murdering his family. Heracles sought to behave piously throughout his labors, a

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³ In fact, the only times Heracles was ever actually assisted in his tasks were when he was fighting the Hydra and his nephew burnt their heads, a Labor that didn’t count towards the original 10 Labors because he received help, and when he asked Philoctetes to set up his pyre when Heracles was poisoned and wished to die, so that his mortal skin could be burnt off.
difficult feat in some cases due to the impious orders of his taskmaster, Eurystheus. The founder, like Heracles, was bound by piety at all times, though this piety was aimed at obligation to his countrymen and family in addition to obligation to the gods. The founder of a Greek city founded because it was good for himself and others to do so, an action complying with the demands of piety. Both proto-founder and founder participated in the virtue of piety, and further, being pious actually benefitted these men as well, because it provided them with great glory, and in some cases, divinity.

**Heracles Before the Labors**

This characterization of Heracles as a founder is extractable from his earliest deeds. Heracles, as a youth, grew up fighting monsters and the corruption of the world around him. Heracles’ immense strength and divine destiny were apparent from the very beginning. Immediately after Heracles was born, Hera sent two snakes to kill Heracles and his brother Iphicles, but the child Heracles famously choked the snakes to death, establishing his excellence in the first moments of his life. Later, due to the trickery of Zeus, Hera herself suckled Heracles, and when she discovered whom she was nursing, she violently withdrew, releasing milk that Heracles threw into the sky, creating the Milky Way. Hera acted this way out of jealousy towards Heracles’ mother, Alcmene: if Heracles brought Alcmene glory, it would call attention to Zeus’ infidelity to Hera, and would diminish the glory of Hera’s own children. After this incident, Heracles was raised with his stepfather, a farmer and peasant.

Heracles’ birth, simultaneously noble and common, gave him incredible appeal. Many founders after him would have the sort of birth that evoked both the ordinary and extraordinary.\(^4\)

The circumstances of birth for a founder are important, as they foreshadow the man’s later

\(^4\) Cf. Theseus, who was born of a king but not raised nobly. Romulus and Remus, who were born of Ares, suckled by a she-wolf, and then raised by a farmer. Also, Cyrus the Great or Moses.
actions. Heracles, though god, was still man, and this is shown by his birth and upbringing. The Greek tragedians, who sought to show him as the pinnacle of humanity, would later capitalize on Heracles’ iconic and unique birth. It’s not unusual that such a unique and blessed baby would go on to do great things with his life: the myth consciously fulfills Heracles’ divine birth and foreshadows his greatness and ascent to divinity.

After coming of age, Heracles left his home and traveled around Greece, getting into many adventures and slaying many monsters. Heracles’ travels took him across the entirety of the known Greek world and past that, giving him the opportunity to interact with many poleis during their development. Heracles was seen as the alexikakos of the Greek people, the destroyer of evil and bringer of justice. Heracles’ early appearances in Greek myth are focused on his status as a “beneficent, regulatory force that fights against the disorderly and abnormal forces of a nature which is in the process of being formed.”

At the time of Hesiod and Homer, the Greek world was taking the first steps toward law and stability. Already seen as a stabilizing figure and one who brought order, Heracles’ wide travels made him readily available to all poleis to claim as their own. Heracles ‘lives up to the Greek ideal that the father’s deeds and fame should live on in his descendants,’” and as the son of the god who re-made the world when he came to power, he fulfills that role.

The deeds that Heracles had to live up to were delineated in Hesiod’s Theogony, a foundational myth that sought to glorify Zeus as the most powerful and most just deity of all. Zeus essentially founded Greece in his image, actually creating man in some accounts, and he appeared in many of the myths concerned with the early formative period of Greece. As the son of Zeus, Heracles was civilizing Greece in the name of his father, who had done the groundwork

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5 Galinsky, The Herakles Theme, p. 16
6 Galinsky, The Herakles Theme, p. 16
7 Galinsky, The Herakles Theme, p. 16
by defeating the unjust Chronos. Thus, Heracles was completing the founding of Greece in the name of the Olympian gods who were led by Zeus.

The Twelve Labors of Heracles

Heracles’ ability to be the *alexikakos*, the bringer of justice through his strength, was also his greatest weakness and led to his greatest sin after the intervention of Hera. After completing many journeys and conquests of the beasts that populated the Greek world in the Age of Heroes, Heracles settled down in solitude with his wife, Megara, and had children. Heracles’ labors were precipitated by divine manipulation on the part of his father’s wife, Hera. Heracles, “struck by madness through the jealousy of Hera,” slew his own children and two of his half-brother Iphicles’ children by throwing them into a fire.\(^8\) When Hera caused him to kill his family, Heracles’ great strength, which had been a boon to him during so many battles, was turned into a curse. The events that engendered Heracles’ Labors illustrate the double-edged nature of the founder’s strength, and the horrible implications of their negative usage. In some sense, Heracles’ Labors are a result of his impiety in regards to his divine destiny: by having a family rather than laboring in his father’s name, Heracles was not fulfilling his obligation to the gods. The Labors were Heracles’ repentance for the crimes that he was able to commit due to his strength, and also gave Heracles more glory than any other hero before or after him. Heracles’ initial founding of Greece, his brief descent into chaos, and his difficult path of repentance and renewal, make him the ideal model for study of all the facets of a founder, good and evil.

The greatest evil a founder can commit is becoming that which he sought to eradicate. Despite Hera’s overt manipulations of the situation, Heracles felt enormous grief from his actions, and, “condemning himself to exile on this account, he was purified by Thespios and

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\(^8\) Heracles and Iphicles were twins born to Alcmene at the same time, though with different fathers. Thus, Iphicles is Heracles’ mortal twin brother and the son of Amphitryon (who raised both Heracles and Iphicles). *Apollodorus, The Library of Greek Mythology*, 2.4.12
went to Delphi to ask the god where he should settle.” As a hero, Heracles had spent his life fighting chaos and monsters, and with a change of fortune became that which he sought to destroy. The Priestess of Apollo first gave Heracles his name at this point in time (Heracles means “Hera” and “glory” – an attempt to make Hera less angry), and “told him to settle in Tiryns while he served Eurystheus for twelve years, and to accomplish the labors that would be imposed on him.” Further the Pythia said that, “after the labors had been accomplished, he would become immortal.”

Heracles was set in the service of King Eurystheus of Mycenae. Eurystheus, a cowardly man who became king instead of Heracles due to the manipulations of Hera at the time of Heracles’ birth, was a hollow shell of a person compared to the glory of his servant. Eurystheus, a man given to hiding in bronze pots so as not to see Heracles after the completion of a task, was an inept and unworthy king. Eurystheus and Heracles could not have been more opposed, and their relationship is primarily ironic and comical in nature. Eurystheus, the corrupt, cowardly, ineffective steward, was put in control of Heracles, the alexikakos, hero, and proto-founder, a situation Heracles had no control over. The events leading to the Labors are a reversal of the natural order of things. Heracles, the just founder, destroys. Eurystheus, the unjust buffoon, gains power.

The Labors are essentially a rediscovery of Heracles’ own nature after he is violently altered by Hera, and are a celebration of his ability to fight against fortune and chaos. Each of Heracles’ Labors is an attempt by Eurystheus and Hera to shame and kill the hero, while also

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9 Apollodorus, *The Library of Greek Mythology*, 2.4.12
10 Apollodorus, *The Library of Greek Mythology*, 2.4.12
11 Apollodorus, *The Library of Greek Mythology*, 2.4.12
12 Hera persuaded Zeus to grant the kingship to the first-born descendant of Perseus, of whom Heracles and Eurystheus had lineage. Hera closed Alcmene’s womb by making the childbirth goddess sit cross-legged, delaying Heracles long enough that Eurystheus was born first.
providing benefits for Eurystheus to claim. The Labors are also an original account of the
phenomenon of “deification through labor” that greatly interested the Greeks and Romans: “He
[Heracles] was born man, became god; suffered labors and gained heaven.”¹³

I. The First Labor

Eurystheus’ first Labor for Heracles was to “fetch the skin of the Nemean lion,” an
invulnerable beast that could not be killed with weapons.¹⁴ The first Labor is a testament to
Heracles’ intelligence and cunning, as well as his enormous strength and courage. Heracles is
sent to kill a beast that no human could even wound; Heracles’ strength made him the only hero
capable of destroying the Lion. Heracles’ parerga¹⁵ during the first Labor focus on his piety and
establish him as an adherent to justice. In addition to the Lion’s immunity to weapons, the beast
had claws that could cut through metal, and hide tougher than any armor. Heracles immediately
traveled to Nemea, and trapped the lion in a cave with two exits. Blocking the first exit with
stones, Heracles engaged the lion in combat, locked it in a stranglehold, killed it, and then set out
upon his return journey to Eurystheus.

On the way back, Heracles met a laborer to whom he had earlier instructed, “if he had
returned safely from the hunt [within thirty days], to offer a sacrifice to Zeus the Savior, but if he
had died, to offer it to himself as a [dead] hero.”¹⁶ Arriving on the last day, Heracles and the
laborer sacrificed to Zeus the Savior instead, before Heracles arrived at Tiryns to drop off his
first labor. “Astounded by his bravery, Eurystheus refused him entry to the city from that day
forth, and told him to exhibit his trophies in front of the gates,” and Eurystheus had a bronze jar
made that he could hide in when Heracles was in the city. After accomplishing this, Heracles

¹³ Galinsky, The Herakles Theme, p. 5
¹⁴ Apollodorus, The Library of Greek Mythology, 2.5.1
¹⁵ Ancient Greek word for side-quests.
¹⁶ Apollodorus, The Library of Greek Mythology, 2.5.1
used one of the Lion’s sharp claws to skin its hide, which he then donned as his iconic lion-skin armor. The gods put the Lion into the sky as a memorial to Heracles’ deeds, creating the constellation Leo.

II. The Second Labor

For his second Labor, “Eurystheus ordered Heracles to kill the Lernaean hydra… [it] had a body of enormous size, and nine heads, of which eight were mortal, but the one in the center immortal.”17 The hydra was an old creature born of the Titans and guarded an entrance to the Underworld.18 Eurystheus, desiring to be rid of the hero, sent Heracles against the immortal foe with the expectation that he would fall in battle. The second Labor is also a reinforcement of the founder’s virtues of self-sufficiency, courage, and intuition, and these principles become underlying elements in the majority of the following Labors. After traveling to the Hydra with his charioteer Iolaos, Heracles engaged the beast in combat. Flinging firebrands at it, Heracles was able to use his club to sever the heads of the hydra; however, from each stump two new heads would sprout. Realizing that he could not defeat it through sheer brute force, Heracles “summoned assistance on his own account by calling Iolaos19, who set fire to part of the neighboring forest, and using brands from it, burned out the roots of the hydra’s heads to prevent them from regrowing.”20 Hera, seeing that Heracles was winning his battle, sent a huge crab after him that he killed; this crab became a constellation afterwards. After severing and branding all the hydra’s heads but one, Heracles severed the immortal head of the hydra, buried it, and placed a heavy rock over it. He slit open the hydra’s body and spread its poisonous innards onto his arrows. For this Labor, Heracles was not rewarded, but was instead told that it “should not be

17 Apollodorus, The Library of Greek Mythology, 2.5.2
18 Hesiod, Theogony, 313
19 Heracles’ chariot driver and nephew.
20 Apollodorus, The Library of Greek Mythology, 2.5.2
counted among the ten, because Heracles had not overcome the hydra on his own, but only with the help of Iolaos.”

The first and second Labors are portrayals of Heracles’ most prominent virtues: his strength and his adherence to justice. Heracles used his strength to subdue the Lion, although he used intuition and tactics as well. During his fight with the Hydra, Heracles’ strength gave him the power to sever the heads of the Hydra, and he also used it to completely crush the Crab. This fight also shows off his intuition, and emphasizes his cleverness more than his strength, although both are necessary for the conflict. In his role as a bringer of justice, the *alexikakos*, Heracles destroyed a monster that was terrorizing local towns, the Lion. Continuing in this role, he killed the monster that Hera had set loose on the world for the sole purpose of killing Heracles and causing as much damage to his reputation as possible through massive collateral damage. Heracles’ courage is evident in these Labors as well: he sets a trap that will force him to engage in hand to hand combat with a monstrous, near-invincible lion, and he directly confronts one of the most fearsome beasts in all of literature, the Hydra. While traveling to his fight with the Hydra, Heracles was also aware that the Hydra was immortal, and that he had to stop it somehow despite both its immortality and the fact that it doubled in ferocity every time he dismembered one of its heads.

III. The Third Labor

Heracles spent a year pursuing the Cerynitian hind, his target for the third labor, which he was ordered to capture alive. Heracles’ first two labors demonstrated his ability to defeat any monster, provoking Eurystheus into increasing the difficulty of the third labor by making him catch an extremely fast deer without killing it or letting it escape. The third Labor primarily reveals Heracles’ piety and his strength, depicted as incredible endurance and mental

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21 Apollodorus, *The Library of Greek Mythology*, 2.5.2
perseverance. Heracles’ success with the Lion and the Hydra had shown Eurystheus that simply forcing Heracles to fight a dangerous beast was not an efficient method of destroying him. Eurystheus and Hera therefore decided that giving Heracles a sacrilegious task was a more effective way to de-glory the hero, especially since the likelihood of Heracles actually catching the hind was minimal due to its speed. This hind, a deer with “golden horns… [that] was sacred to Artemis,” was capable of outrunning arrows, and forced Heracles to wear it down using his godlike endurance. Exhausted by a year of chase, and Heracles’ perseverance and incredible stamina, the enormous hind faltered, giving Heracles the opportunity to shoot it with an arrow and disable its movement. Heracles then set the hind on his shoulder and hurried off, only to come into contact with Artemis and Apollo, whom Eurystheus was trying to turn against Heracles. Reasoning with them, and saying that “the person responsible was Eurystheus,” Heracles was able to return to his master with the live beast and avoid a confrontation with the gods. After bringing the hind to Eurystheus, Heracles told the king that he could only add the hind to his collection of rare animals if the king would come to the gate and take it himself. As soon as Heracles released the hind, it flew off to Artemis, absolving Heracles of any blasphemy against her and completing his labor at the same time. This myth later became the constellation known as “Heracles and the Stag.”

IV. The Fourth Labor

Heracles’ fourth Labor was to bring Eurystheus the Erymanthian boar, the “beast [that] was causing havoc in Psophis.” After Heracles’ success with the Cerynitian hind, Eurystheus had learned that Heracles could catch nonviolent animals without mortally harming them. Combining the difficulty of subduing and transporting a live animal with the danger of fighting a

22 Apollodorus, *The Library of Greek Mythology*, 2.5.3
23 Apollodorus, *The Library of Greek Mythology*, 2.5.3
24 Apollodorus, *The Library of Greek Mythology*, 2.5.4
monster, Heracles’ fourth Labor was actually a combination of his first and third labors. This labor is a testament to Heracles’ intelligence, courage, and strength in the face of compounded adversity. During the parerga of the labor, Heracles also exhibited justice and piety in his dealings with the centaur Cheiron. On his way to combat the boar, Heracles passed through Pholoe, where he stopped for a while as a guest of the Centaur Pholos. When Heracles drank some of the Centaur’s wine, the other Centaurs joined him, became inebriated, and attacked Heracles, forcing him to drive them off with fire. The Centaurs retreated to Cheiron, whom Heracles shot with one of his poisoned arrows in an attempt to hit the violent creatures now hiding behind him. Accidentally striking the innocent Cheiron’s knee, Heracles became distressed, especially because no matter how much he attempted to help, the wound was incurable due to the hydra’s poison. This situation would later become pivotal in the story of Prometheus. Cheiron “wanted to die, but was incapable of doing so, because he was immortal. Only when Prometheus offered himself to Zeus to become immortal in his place was Cheiron able to die.”25 After receiving the Centaurs’ advice on how to defeat the boar, Heracles then left them and chased the boar into deep snow. Exhausting the boar in the snow and tying a noose around it, he hurried off to Mycenae and Eurystheus. Upon his arrival, Eurystheus called out from his bronze jar and begged Heracles to get rid of the boar, which he did by throwing it into the sea. The boar then swam to Italy, where its tusks became part of the Temple of Apollo at Cumae.

The third and fourth Labors are inherently more oriented toward the divine than the previous two Labors were. In the third Labor, Heracles is ordered to blaspheme against Artemis, and in the fourth Labor, he initiates the sequence of events that make him the arbiter of the conflict between Zeus and Prometheus. It is important to notice that in both Labors Heracles acts

25 Apollodorus, *The Library of Greek Mythology*, 2.5.4
in complete accordance with the virtue of piety, and is actually shown to have divine will on his side. Heracles, having taken an oath to serve Eurystheus as penance, was religiously obligated to follow Eurystheus’ blasphemous orders, and was able to fulfill them in a way that no blasphemy had actually occurred by the end of the Labor. Heracles’ encounter with the Centaurs shows his adherence to the customs of *xenia*, going so far as to force the Centaurs to respect it when they break the custom in their drunkenness. Further, Heracles does everything in his power to rectify his mistake in wounding Chieron, and eventually does find a solution that adheres to his religious obligations to his own father. The focus on piety, oaths, and *xenia* in these Labors also illustrates Heracles’ righteousness in upholding all these things, showing the internal ordering of his soul and his adherence to traditional Greek virtues.

Heracles is also forced to practice the virtue of self-sufficiency more in these two labors than in the preceding labors. Heracles is punished at the end of the second Labor for receiving help, and in the third and fourth Labors he is deliberately put in situations where he must survive on his own for long periods of time, chasing dangerous and quick beasts. The only prolonged contact he has with anyone in the third and fourth Labors is his short detour to the Centaurs for advice and nourishment. Even this detour is punished by the myth, as Heracles is forced into a situation that he must eventually amend, and one that makes him experience a great deal of regret.

Throughout the rest of the Labors, Heracles acts alone with only slight exceptions. The founder of a city is constantly alone in a sense, as well, although rarely as isolated as Heracles. Heracles’ perpetual loneliness is a theme throughout heroic literature in both the ancient world and our own modern literature. Heracles is joined by heroes such as Odysseus and Aeneas in his long periods of loneliness, and the latter hero was alone in much the same way as Heracles was:
Aeneas labored alone because he had a special role to fill in the creation of Rome. It is the very fact that Heracles can achieve success alone that makes it difficult for him to appear civilized in mythology: Heracles doesn’t need to be part of a group or city to have honor, unlike the Homeric heroes whose reputations depended on the honor they received from their allies.

V. The Fifth Labor

Heracles’ fifth labor, assigned three days after his victory over the boar, was to “remove the dung of the cattle of Augeias without assistance in a single day.” Augeias owned more cattle than any other prince, and had never cleaned his stables out. In addition to this, his cattle were immortal, a quality that disposed them towards the production of impressive quantities of waste. In contrast to the previous labors, which glorified Heracles and his virtue, the fifth labor was designed to humiliate the hero. Instead of doing heroic work like slaying beasts, the great man was consigned to cleaning up an impossible amount of waste, a job that Augeias would not give even to a slave. The fifth task is one of Heracles’ most famous works of strength, as well a display of his great intelligence and piety even in disgusting situations.

After arriving at the stables, Heracles went to Augeias and asked if he would give him a tenth of his cattle if Heracles could clean it in a single day, without telling Augeias that this was one of his Labors. Augeias agreed, because he thought no one could do it and he would get free labor. Heracles then “made a breach in the foundations of [the wall surrounding] the cattle yard, and then, diverting the courses of the Alpheios and Peneios which flowed nearby, he channeled their water into the yard, after first making an outlet through another breach.” When Augeias discovered that this was one of Heracles’ Labors, he refused to pay. Heracles responded by killing Augeias and giving his kingdom to his son, Phyleus, who had supported Heracles and

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26 Apollodorus, *The Library of Greek Mythology*, 2.5.5
27 Apollodorus, *The Library of Greek Mythology*, 2.5.5
testified against his father in the case. When Heracles returned to Mycenae, Eurystheus refused to accept the labor as legitimate because Heracles had accepted payment and the rivers had done the work.

VI. The Sixth Labor

Heracles’ sixth labor was to drive out the Stymphalian birds, which had settled in a swamp in Arcadia. The Stymphalian birds were able to eat men and were atrocious in size, appetite, and demeanor, and had been causing immense trouble for the people of nearby towns. The sheer number of Stymphalian birds also offers a testament to the difficulty of this Labor, as Heracles needed to drive away enough birds that even Eurystheus would be forced to concede defeat. This labor is one of the foremost examples of divine goodwill, which is the reward for piety, intuition, and is one of the few labors where Heracles’ enormous strength takes a backseat to strategy. Needing a way to dislodge the birds from the swamp so he could kill them, Heracles was given bronze castanets by Athena. He shook the castanets and created a horrid clamor, so that the birds were “unable to endure the noise… [and] Heracles was able to shoot them down with arrows.”28 Taking some of the bird carcasses, Heracles presented them to Eurystheus to prove his completion of the Labor. Some of these birds did not die, and would later plague the Argonauts. This Labor is associated with the constellation Sagittarius, which represents both arrow and rattle.

The fifth and sixth Labors represent an attempt by Eurystheus to diminish Heracles’ glory through demeaning, sub-human tasks. The fifth Labor, as previously mentioned, was too disgusting even for a slave to attempt, and the sixth Labor forced Heracles to deal with giant ugly birds: neither of these tasks held any glory intrinsically. However, through these demeaning and anti-glorious tasks, Heracles is actually able to increase his own glory. Heracles manages to do

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28 Apollodorus, The Library of Greek Mythology, 2.5.6
this through a combination of strength in the first labor and divine favor in the second labor, and intelligence in both. These labors illustrate one of the founder’s greatest assets, the ability to turn a negative situation into a positive one. During the founding itself the founder must also be able to turn any disastrous situation into one that will help them move towards the good of the city; flexibility and making every situation constructive for a political purpose is a highly prized skill in politics. This labor is also demonstrative of Heracles’ role as the proto-founder: “he drains swamps, builds cities, and destroys wild beasts and tyrants. He, the supreme champion of justice and civilizer, precedes Greek colonists wherever they go.”

Although Heracles is the “supreme champion of justice,” he does not act justly towards Augeias in this labor; Heracles is still a man and his actions do not always neatly fall into the category of good. This is true for Lycurgus, Aeneas, and Romulus, as well: they are founders and practice virtue, but behave violently and unjustly in some situations because they are human.

Heracles turned the fifth Labor into glory by the very method he used: Heracles diverted the path of an entire river to do his work, literally subjugating nature to his will. The offensiveness of the task pales in comparison to Heracles’ strength. The fifth Labor is remembered as “Heracles diverted the course of a river” rather than “Heracles cleaned up the infinite amount of manure from divine cows.” This change in perception is important. Both sentiments are true, but only the first has glory attached to it.

In the sixth Labor, Heracles’ glory comes from Athena, who chose to assist Heracles directly, placing her confidence in him. The divine goodwill that Athena showed Heracles immediately endowed him with glory because the gods themselves chose him. Heracles’ glory in fighting the Stymphalian birds is also derived from the adaptability he shows during the task: Heracles is not confined to using his strength in a way that other men couldn’t in order to

29 Galinsky, *The Herakles Theme*, p. 148
complete this Labor. The most remarkable incident of the sixth Labor was when he was given the castanets by Athena and was able to generate an incredible amount of noise from them; the number of birds he killed was not a result of his great strength but rather of his skills in archery. Heracles relies on his intelligence and the divine goodwill of Athena in this task, rather than relying on his strength.

VII. The Seventh Labor

Heracles’ seventh labor was to capture the Cretan bull, a mythical beast that had been running wild through King Minos’ kingdom. The Cretan bull was originally sent up from the sea by Poseidon to test Minos’ piety; Poseidon made Minos promise to “sacrifice to him whatever appeared from the sea.” Minos, astounded at the beauty of the white bull, placed it within his herds and tried to sacrifice a different bull to Poseidon. This upset the god, and “in his anger [he] turned the bull wild.” The Cretan bull was the same bull that fathered the Minotaur with Minos’ wife, Pasiphae, the monstrosity that Theseus would later slay. The seventh labor is a testament to Heracles’ intuition, courage, and piety. The seventh labor is mythologically interesting due to its inconsistencies with the second and tenth labors. Eurystheus’ expectations concerning aid in the seventh labor are inconsistent with his expectations in the second labor. During his fight against the hydra, Heracles requests help and the labor is discounted due to this intervention; when trying to capture the Cretan bull, he asks for help but is not penalized for seeking help. Moreover, Hera’s expectations about Heracles sacrificing to her are inconsistent. Later, in the story of the tenth labor, Hera is willing to accept sacrifices attesting to the success of Heracles’ task, but in the story of the Cretan bull her pride prevents her from allowing a sacrifice.

30 Apollodorus, *The Library of Greek Mythology*, 2.5.7
31 Apollodorus, *The Library of Greek Mythology*, 2.5.7
Arriving at Crete, Heracles asked for assistance from Minos, who told him to fight the bull and capture it on his own. Seeking not to scare the wild bull into a rampage, Heracles approached it from behind and subdued it. Once Heracles had taken the bull to Eurystheus, the king wished to sacrifice it to Hera, but the goddess refused to have it sacrificed to her because it was a testament to Heracles’ glory. Heracles then set the bull free, and it wandered to Marathon where it caused great mischief. Theseus would later capture the bull and sacrifice it to Apollo and Artemis as part of his bid to be recognized as his father’s heir. This labor is associated with the constellation Taurus.

VIII. The Eighth Labor

Heracles’ next labor, his eighth, was to steal from King Diomedes his man-eating mares. Diomedes, a giant and son of the war-god Ares, was the king of Thrace. Diomedes, who fed his horses solely on man-flesh, had made them go mad with this irregular and barbarous diet. The eighth labor is a testament to Heracles’ courage and intuition. This labor also prominently displays his sense of retributive justice: Heracles punishes Diomedes in a manner befitting his crime. Faced with a difficult and barbarous task, an ignoble death awaiting him should he fail, Heracles sailed forth with a group of volunteers, “overpowered the men who were in charge of the mangers, and led the mares towards the sea.”\(^{32}\) In some legends, Heracles trapped them on a peninsula and built a trench to trap the horses there, creating an island.

Diomedes, upset at the theft of his prize horses, immediately stormed out against Heracles, who slew him. Heracles’ attendants were killed, including Abderos, “son of Hermes and a beloved of Heracles.”\(^{33}\) Heracles founded the city of Abdera in honor of Abderos, and then fed the body of Diomedes to his mares, which apparently quieted them down. Taking the horses

\(^{32}\) Apollodorus, *The Library of Greek Mythology*, 2.5.8
\(^{33}\) Apollodorus, *The Library of Greek Mythology*, 2.5.8
to Eurystheus, the king then “released them, and they went to the mountain called Olympus, where they were killed by the wild beasts.”34 In some legends, Zeus himself is the one who sent the beasts, so that the horses would not be used for sacrifices.

The seventh and eighth labors are especially focused on Heracles’ pursuit of justice and his adherence to piety. In the seventh labor, Heracles is commanded to essentially reverse the divine judgment of Poseidon upon King Minos, capturing the Cretan bull after it was terrorizing the land for quite some time. Throughout the remainder of his labors, Heracles consistently clashes with either sons of Poseidon or Poseidon himself, and the sea god’s role as an indirect antagonist in his later labors might stem from Heracles’ actions in the seventh labor. If Heracles earned Poseidon’s wrath due to that labor, then Eurystheus’ plan to turn a god against Heracles was actually successful, an almost singular example of success on the part of the comically incompetent king.

This labor sets up an interesting dilemma for Heracles: he is required by his piety, through adherence to oath, to work against the will of a divine being to whom he owes piety, Poseidon. This conflict of religious loyalties is analogous to the founder’s labor in reconciling the will of the people to the good of the city. Lycurgus, the founder of Sparta, and Romulus, the founder of Rome, ran into these problems during their own foundings. Lycurgus had to stage a bloodless military coup and gain sanctification from the Oracle of Delphi during his founding, and Romulus needed both auguries and fratricide to demonstrate that he was the true founder of Rome. Moreover, Aeneas’ piety was a source of conflict for him many times during the Aeneid. Aeneas needed to be pious towards all the gods, both the ones that hurt him, such as Juno (Hera), and the ones that helped him, such as his mother Venus (Aphrodite).

34 Apollodorus, The Library of Greek Mythology, 2.5.8
These labors also reinforce Heracles’ solitude and force him to display his excellence. Heracles actually sought help, or some sort of reward, in the seventh and eighth labors, and he was unable to receive either in any substantial way. In the seventh labor, Heracles ended up catching the Cretan bull without assistance, relying only on himself. Likewise, in the eighth labor Heracles’ entire group of assistants died, making them useful only as live bait for the man-eating mares while Heracles singlehandedly slew Diomedes and herded the mares to Eurystheus. Heracles also exhibited incredible courage in these labors: he fought the father of the Minotaur, a beast that had been divinely ordained to cause havoc, and then spent an extended period of time herding mares that had been accustomed to eat men. The seventh and eighth labors are also perfect illustrations of Heracles’ role as the *alexikakos*, since he liberated the Cretans, gave them peace from monsters, and contained the inherently unnatural evil of the man-eating horse.

**IX. The Ninth Task**

After completing his eighth task, Eurystheus commanded that Heracles fetch the girdle of Hippolyta, queen of the Amazonians, for his daughter Admete. Hippolyta’s girdle was the “belt of Ares,” given to her as a “symbol of her supremacy over the [other Amazonians].” Heracles’ ninth task shows a combination of all of his founder-oriented virtues. In addition to showing off his virtues, the Amazonian labor includes a great number of *parerga*, giving Heracles ample time to appear in many other legends. Similarly to the “lonely hero” discussed earlier, the “wandering hero” is a common element of ancient and modern mythology. Aeneas and Lycurgus’ founding stories contain a large wandering arc, where they gain the knowledge and power necessary for their foundings. The last three labors provide the basis for many of Heracles’ post-Labor labors: Heracles’ adventures did not end with his labors, nor even with his apotheosis. Before arriving in the land of the Amazonians, Heracles assembled a group of volunteers and put the island of

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35 Apollodorus, *The Library of Greek Mythology*, 2.5.9
Paros under siege. He also assisted Lycos, King of Mysia, in killing the king of the Bebrycians. After these parerga, Heracles arrived at the Amazonian harbor, where he was able to convince Hippolyta to give him her belt. Hera, enraged at Heracles’ success, “assumed the likeness of an Amazon and wandered around in the crowd [of Amazons who had come to witness Heracles’ arrival] saying that the strangers who had just arrived were abducting the queen.” Heracles, thinking that Hippolyta had betrayed him, “killed Hippolyta and robbed her of the belt,” as all the Amazonians were arming to protect her.

After fighting a great many Amazonian warriors, Heracles set sail and arrived at Troy. Poseidon and Apollo were besieging Troy because they had not received payment for the famed walls they had built for Laomedon, king of Troy. “In response [to this arrogance], Apollo sent a plague, and Poseidon a sea-monster which was carried along on a flood and used to snatch away the inhabitants of the plain.” Seeking to assuage the raging gods, Laomedon went to an oracle who “declared that they would be delivered from these misfortunes if Laomedon offered his daughter, Hesione, as prey to the monster.” Heracles, seeing the girl exposed on a rock by the sea, offered to kill the monster if Laomedon would give him the mares that the king had received from Zeus. After Laomedon agreed, Heracles killed the monster; however, Laomedon refused to

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36 The sons of Minos who lived on the island had killed two of his men, so he put them under siege until two of Minos’ sons joined him. Apollodorus, *The Library of Greek Mythology*, 2.5.9
37 Lycos had entertained Heracles, so Heracles came to his aid and essentially won the battle for him. Heracles added a great deal of land to Lycos’ kingdom, a territory Lycos called “Heracleia.” Apollodorus, *The Library of Greek Mythology*, 2.5.9
38 Apollodorus, *The Library of Greek Mythology*, 2.5.9
39 Apollodorus, *The Library of Greek Mythology*, 2.5.9
40 This labor creates a bit of mythological confusion due to the death of Hippolyta. This Hippolyta is certainly the same person whom Theseus carried off and who bore his son Hippolytus. The chronology of events is uncertain, especially as Theseus is sometimes considered to be the murderer of Hippolyta. In an alternate story, Heracles merely steals the belt, rather then killing Hippolyta. In some myths, Theseus is one of the volunteers for Heracles’ quest.
41 Testing Laomedon’s arrogance, the gods took human form and fortified Pergamon to see if he would pay them.
42 Apollodorus, *The Library of Greek Mythology*, 2.5.9
43 Apollodorus, *The Library of Greek Mythology*, 2.5.9
pay the reward, and Heracles set off, “threatening to make war on Troy at some future time.”

On his way back to Eurystheus, Heracles had a few violent encounters with the children of Poseidon, whom he defeated. He stopped at Ainos, where he was entertained; subsequently he killed a son of Poseidon who was causing a good deal of trouble. Heracles then stopped to overthrow the regime on Thasos and killed two grandsons of Poseidon in a wrestling match at Troone. Finally, Heracles arrived at Mycenae and gave the Belt of Hippolyta to Eurystheus.

X. The Tenth Task

Heracles’ tenth labor was to capture Geryon’s red cattle. Geryon was a giant who “had the body of three men joined into one; … united at the waist, but divided into three again from the hips and thighs downwards.” Geryon owned a two-headed dog, Orthos, brother of Cerberus, the three-headed dog that Heracles would later confront. The tenth labor shows Heracles’ great strength, courage, and the rewards of his piety. Heracles is unable to complete his task without direct assistance from the gods, though he does earn their assistance through his own merits. This labor also contains a great deal of conflict between Heracles and Poseidon’s offspring, presumably from his actions in the ninth labor. Traveling a great distance to Erytheia, Heracles “killed many savage beasts” in his travels, before eventually arriving at his destination. On the way, Heracles is said to have been upset by the intense heat of the Sun, and, drawing his bow to shoot it, was rewarded by Helios the Sun with a golden cup for his bravery. Having been detected by Orthos, he killed the beast and Geryon’s herdsman. A nearby herdsman of Hades’ cattle informed Geryon, and the giant confronted Heracles. After killing Geryon with

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44 Apollodorus, *The Library of Greek Mythology*, 2.5.9
45 Apollodorus, *The Library of Greek Mythology*, 2.5.10
46 Apollodorus, *The Library of Greek Mythology*, 2.5.10
47 Based on its uses (i.e. sailing across the sea and transporting cargo), the cup seems to be a vessel.
one of his poisoned arrows, Heracles “put the cattle into the cup, and after he had made the
crossing to Tartessos, he returned [the cup] to the Sun.”

Traveling back to Mycenae, Heracles killed two sons of Poseidon who were trying to
steal the cattle. One of the bulls, breaking loose, swam to Sicily, and then traveled through
Italy, where it was stolen by the monster Cacus. Heracles slew Cacus in battle, after which he
created an altar that became the basis for the first cult in Rome, the Ara Maxima. Heracles then
left Italy, but before he was able to take all the cattle to Eurystheus, “Hera sent a gadfly against
the cattle and they dispersed among the foothills of the Thracian mountains.” Heracles,
recovering most of them over the course of a year, transferred the cattle to Eurystheus, who
sacrificed them to Hera. Upset with the length of the task, Heracles blocked the Strymon River
with rocks, “making it unnavigable.”

Heracles’ ninth and tenth labors further depict the nuances of Heracles’ relationship with
divinity. Heracles’ relationship with divinity, especially Poseidon, is complicated. Heracles
directly challenged Apollo and Poseidon’s judgment when he freed Hesione and killed
Poseidon’s sea monster. Although Heracles came to the same conclusion as the gods, namely
that Laomedon was ungrateful and untrustworthy, he discovered this only through opposition to
plans. Heracles also defeated and killed some of Poseidon’s offspring in these labors, directly
making himself the object of Poseidon’s eventual wrath.

Heracles’ emotional state seems, oddly enough, to shift towards that of a god in these
labors: he unhesitatingly confronts demigods and the gods themselves, notably Helios, and is
actually rewarded for his actions by the sun god. Heracles begins to recognize himself as a god in

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48 Apollodorus, *The Library of Greek Mythology*, 2.5.10
49 Italy is named after this bull, according to myth, because the Tyrrhenian word for bull is *italus*. Apollodorus, *The Library of Greek Mythology*, 2.5.10
50 Apollodorus, *The Library of Greek Mythology*, 2.5.10
51 Apollodorus, *The Library of Greek Mythology*, 2.5.10
these labors, and this in turn affects his relationship with the gods and his piety towards them. Although Heracles still follows his oath, he does so in a manner more befitting a god, dealing judgment and enacting his will on humans and gods alike. This change in attitude, which starts to become apparent once Heracles has stolen the Girdle of Hippolyta, was unjust only because Heracles was not yet fully a god. Heracles’ labors are not complete, the reward is not achieved, and yet Heracles already assumes the completion of his tasks, an assumption that is incorrect. Heracles thus acts with hubris in these labors, although during a recounting of the labors, Heracles’ actions give him the appearance of glory rather than vice.

Heracles’ hubris should be taken as a cautionary tale for the founder, and is a result of too much success resting in one man’s hands. These labors are an example the autocratic inclinations in powerful men. Every founder must resist the temptations brought by success and power, and be cautious against the role of fortune in his affairs. Heracles is fortunate in these labors despite his hubris, and is not actually punished for his actions; if not for the impression he made on Helios, and the other preoccupations of Poseidon, Heracles’ labors might have taken a very different turn. Because of Heracles’ hubris, the tenth labor is the only one where Hera’s actions can actually be considered just. Hera reminds Heracles of her presence when she exerts her power, and also slows down his string of hubris-driven successes.

**XI. The Eleventh Task**

After Heracles had accomplished the first ten labors “in eight years and a month,”

“Eurystheus, who would not acknowledge the labor of the cattle Augeias or that of the hydra, ordered Heracles, as an eleventh labor, to fetch some golden apples from the Hesperides.”

Heracles’ eleventh labor puts him into direct conflict with the ancient deities of Greek

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52 Apollodorus, *The Library of Greek Mythology*, 2.5.11
53 Apollodorus, *The Library of Greek Mythology*, 2.5.11
mythology. Heracles’ eleventh and twelfth labors are decidedly more divine in their scope than his previous labors, as Heracles is forced to have dealings with an incredibly powerful Titan in the eleventh labor and the Olympian god of the Underworld in the twelfth. Although each labor contains a task that only Heracles could perform, his last, additional, labors associate the hero more with divinity than with men. This association serves as a transition to his eventual apotheosis, which is a direct result of his labors.

The eleventh labor seeks to place Heracles on par with the Titan Atlas, and makes him instrumental in the fate of another Titan, Prometheus. The Apples of the Hesperides, located on Mount Atlas, “had been presented to Zeus at the time of his marriage to Hera, and were guarded by an immortal dragon… the Hesperides also kept guard.”\footnote{Apollodorus, \textit{The Library of Greek Mythology}, 2.5.11} The Hesperides were nymphs who lived in the garden, which was named after them. During his travels to the garden, Heracles defeated Cycnos, son of Ares, in a wrestling match; this led Ares himself to challenge Heracles to a duel. As they were about to fight, “a thunderbolt was hurled between the two combatants, bringing the fight to an end.”\footnote{Apollodorus, \textit{The Library of Greek Mythology}, 2.5.11} Heracles then went to find some nymphs, who told him where he could find Nereus, the Old Man of the Sea, who knew the location of the garden. Despite the creature’s shape shifting, Heracles learned of the location and passed through Libya on his way. In Libya he killed the king, Antaios, son of Poseidon. When Antaios was touching his mother, Gaia, he was invincible and would grow stronger, so Heracles “seized him in his arms, lifted him into the air, and crushed him until he was dead.”\footnote{Apollodorus, \textit{The Library of Greek Mythology}, 2.5.11} After defeating Antaios, Heracles traveled through Egypt, where he killed Bousiris and his son Amphidamas for attempting to sacrifice
him.\textsuperscript{57} Heracles then passed through Asia, where he stole an animal and ate it; from thence they always curse Heracles when sacrificing to him. Traveling through Caucasus, Heracles “shot the eagle… that fed on the liver of Prometheus. He then set Prometheus free, taking the fetters of olive for himself, and presented Cheiron to Zeus as an immortal being who was willing to die in Prometheus’ place.”\textsuperscript{58} Prometheus, upon his rescue, gave Heracles advice on how to deal with Atlas.

Heracles, finally arriving at the Garden of the Hesperides but unable to take the apples because he was not related to the nymphs, asked Atlas to take the apples; in return Heracles would hold the sky for him. Atlas, taking the three apples but being unwilling to return to his task of carrying the heavens, offered to take the apples to Eurystheus in Heracles’ place. Heracles, following Prometheus’ advice, accepted Atlas’ offer, but on the condition that he be allowed to prepare a pad for his head. Hearing this, Atlas “placed the apples on the ground and took the sky back.”\textsuperscript{59} Heracles then took up the apples and returned to Eurystheus. The king promptly returned the apples to Heracles, who gave them to Athena. Athena “carried them back [to the garden] again; for it was unholy for them to be deposited anywhere else.”\textsuperscript{60} These apples would appear in later myths as the apples used to slow down Atalanta, and as the apples that started the events leading to the capture of Helen and the Trojan War.

XII. The Twelfth Task

Heracles’ final task, the live capture of Cerberus with no use of weapons, required that he travel to Hades. Cerberus “had three dogs’ heads, the tail of a dragon, and on his back, the heads

\textsuperscript{57} After the land of Egypt had been bare for nine years, Bousiris sent for a diviner from Cyprus to see what could be done. The diviner said that slaughtering male strangers for Zeus every year would make the land fertile. Apollodorus, \textit{The Library of Greek Mythology}, 2.5.11
\textsuperscript{58} Apollodorus, \textit{The Library of Greek Mythology}, 2.5.11
\textsuperscript{59} Apollodorus, \textit{The Library of Greek Mythology}, 2.5.11
\textsuperscript{60} Apollodorus, \textit{The Library of Greek Mythology}, 2.5.11
of all kinds of snakes,” and was the guardian of the passage to the Underworld. The twelfth labor is a testament to all of Heracles’ virtues, and is the pinnacle of his achievement as a hero. Hades’ challenge for Heracles and the hero’s success are portents of his life after the Labors. Heracles is given permission to challenge the guardian of the gate to death, and he wins while handicapped. This labor clearly establishes Heracles’ ability to traverse the world of the living and the dead easily, a privilege that only the gods had hitherto earned. The true founder’s work is not hindered by his death, just as Heracles could not be hindered by the realm of the dead, and founding legend seeks to immortalize its founder in some way. Heracles traveled first to the Eleusinians in order to be initiated into their Mysteries, but was unable to do so until after he had been purified from his murder of the Centaurs during his fourth labor. After receiving the initiation, Athena and Hermes helped him find Tainaron, the mouth of the underworld. All of the souls in the Underworld fled from him, “except for Meleager and the Gorgon Medusa,” and he learned that they were empty phantoms. Heracles, after arriving at the gates of Hades, “discovered Theseus there, and Pirithous.” Pirithous, who wished to steal away Hades’ bride, Persephone, had enlisted Theseus’ help. Heracles, taking Theseus by the hand, was able to raise him out of the dead, but was unable to help Pirithous. Rolling away the stone that imprisoned Ascalaphos, Heracles then wrestled with Menoites, herdsman of Hades, but was stopped by Persephone after he broke Menoites’ ribs. After meeting with Hades, the god “told him to take

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61 Apollodorus, *The Library of Greek Mythology*, 2.5.12
62 Champion of the Calydonian Boar hunt and lover of Atalanta.
63 Monster whose gaze could petrify beings with a single glance. Beheaded by Perseus; Apollodorus, *The Library of Greek Mythology*, 2.5.12
64 Apollodorus, *The Library of Greek Mythology*, 2.5.12
65 Pirithous’ act of trying to steal away a god to be his wife was so blasphemous that not even Heracles could help.
66 Ascalaphos was the man who reported that Persephone had eaten a fruit in the Underworld, which made her Hades’ wife. Hated by the gods for this, he was imprisoned. After his stone was rolled away, Demeter, Persephone’s mother, turned him into an owl and he became Hades’ familiar.
the beast if he could overpower it without using any of the weapons he was carrying."\textsuperscript{67}

Heracles, going into battle with only his breastplate and lion’s skin, “grasped [Cerberus’] head between his arms and never relaxed his grip and stranglehold on the beast until he had broken its will, although [Heracles] was bitten by the dragon in [Cerberus’] tail.”\textsuperscript{68} Taking the defeated creature to Eurystheus, Heracles was released from his labors on the condition that he return Cerberus to Hades. Upon returning Cerberus to Hades, Heracles returned to Thebes.

Heracles’ final two labors are celebrations of all of his virtues and of the hero himself. It is in the last two labors that Heracles radically and definitively transcends all other founders and heroes in his exploits. Heracles’ strength, the foundation and source of all his virtue, is the most prominent virtue and trait exhibited in these labors: Heracles uses his strength to support the weight of the heavens and defeat the guardian of death. Through these applications of strength, Heracles is shown to have godlike power over physical and human nature, showing his own nature as a god.

Although Heracles clearly surpasses any human founder in regards to his literal victory over death, his strength and its applications here are very pertinent to the ancient founder. Heracles was able to subject nature to his will and contend with gods, but the ancient founder had not such luxury; founders like Lycurgus and Romulus had to rely on the gods. Heracles’ actions regarding Atlas add a special dimension to the founder’s position, however, because Atlas was given his role by a different god. Hence, during the eleventh labor, Heracles is acting as a refounder, a founder who rebrands that which has already been founded with his own image. Concerning Atlas, this manifests itself as the reprieve that Heracles is able to give Atlas, a reprieve that Atlas will forever remember, because Heracles essentially reassigned Atlas his role.

\textsuperscript{67} Apollodorus, \textit{The Library of Greek Mythology}, 2.5.12
\textsuperscript{68} Apollodorus, \textit{The Library of Greek Mythology}, 2.5.12
Atlas no longer holds the sky because Zeus assigned him that task: Atlas’ responsibility for the sky was relinquished until he was given it back by Heracles.

The twelve labors of Heracles are the literary basis for his roles as proto-founder, *alexikakos*, and mythological paradigm. Heracles’ virtues are displayed prominently in his labors, and he shares these virtues with founders like Lycurgus, Aeneas, and Romulus. Acting as the proto-founder of areas of Greece and Rome, Heracles defeated every evil beast he fought, paving the way for civilization. Heracles is a civilizing force, and he is paradigmatic of later characters who would bring order, such as the founders of Sparta and Rome.

In addition to his paradigmatic role for founders, Heracles was the ancient model for apotheosis. Heracles’ apotheosis took place many years after the completion of his twelve labors, after he had started another family with his third wife Deianira. After their marriage, Heracles and Deianira were crossing a river when Nessus, a centaur, attempted to rape her under pretenses of helping her get across safely. Seeing his wife in trouble, Heracles shot Nessus with one of his poisoned arrows. Nessus told Deianira to take his blood and put it on Heracles’ clothes if she ever suspected he was being unfaithful; the centaur knew that his now-poisoned blood would kill Heracles in the process. Eventually Deianira thought Heracles was being unfaithful and sent the clothes to him. After putting them on, Heracles’ skin began to burn and peel off, and the hero chose to die on a funeral pyre, where his mortal skin was burned away to reveal his divinity. Heracles’ apotheosis was widely copied in the ancient world: the apotheosizes of Oedipus, Aeneas, Romulus, Lysander, the Roman emperors, and others are extremely similar to this account. Unlike Romulus or Aeneas, the Spartan founder Lycurgus was not apotheosized at his death. However, he founded one of the most important and iconic *poleis* in the ancient world, a *polis* influenced by the Heraclean legend.
Chapter Two

Sparta and Heracles

Because of its founding by Lycurgus, Sparta, the most prominent ancient city-state of the Peloponnesus, was connected mythologically and physically to the legend of Heracles. This chapter will attempt to show that the Spartan regime consciously adopted the Heraclean character and virtues as a model for their constitution. According to ancient legends, the Spartans were descendants of the Dorians, a group of people who invaded Greece and gained dominion over the previous inhabitants. Several of these Dorians were descendants of Heracles, the progeny of Heracles’ “Thirteenth Labor.” The “Thirteenth Labor,” as it is humorously referred to by historians, was the event where Heracles impregnated fifty princesses in one night, after being intoxicated to the point that he believed he was only consummating with one princess. The fifty princesses that Heracles slept with were the daughters of Thespius, for whom Heracles had slain a monster. The Spartans trace their lineage back through the ages to these offspring, making all Spartan citizens officially the offspring of Heracles. This physical connection to the myth of Heracles was vigorously upheld and treated as fact by writers such as Herodotus, who traced the lineage of the Spartan kings unbroken back to Heracles.

The Spartans modeled their constitution and society after the examples of Heracles and the Homeric heroes. Essentially, the Spartan regime was formed to perfect certain virtues that all

69 Apollodorus, *The Library of Greek Mythology*, 2.7.8
heroes, both divine and mortal, had typified: strength, intuition, justice, courage, excellence, and above all, piety. The constitution of Lycurgus was seen as a divine mandate, making a full Spartan citizen party to a divine oath. The Spartans were both the freest of men and least free in regards to their status as citizens of Sparta, namely concerning the obedience required by the constitution of Lycurgus. To follow the Lycurgan constitution, and therefore to uphold the divine oath established between the great founder and the Spartan people, was a constant act of piety, since Spartan obedience itself was only piety to the gods.

Sources of Spartan History

The Spartans had a harsh and distinct constitution that was famous throughout ancient times and up to the present day. Our in-depth knowledge of the Spartan constitution comes from the works of Xenophon and Plutarch. Although ancient historians were certainly familiar with the Spartan constitution, most of them did not comment specifically on its structure, probably because it was already well known to their audiences. Xenophon dealt explicitly with the constitution because he was writing for a Pan-Hellenic audience during an age marked with a desire to collect constitutions, and Plutarch dealt with the constitution because he was gathering information about the life of its founder, Lycurgus, hundreds of years later. These historians provide us with essential information concerning the Spartan constitution, or rather the education of Spartans as designated by the constitution. This information is necessary for any sort of meaningful discourse on the Spartans, a people completely defined by their regime.

Spartan citizens were warriors of the highest caliber, trained from birth to be perfect fighting machines. The Spartan constitution sought to perfect all physical virtues of man through rigorous, constant conditioning, and for the most part it succeeded. All of Greece admired and envied the Spartans’ military prowess; even Alexander the Great marched around Sparta when
he subjected Greece to his will, rather than attack the city, despite its fairly recent defeat at the hands of Thebes. Despite the power and the respect accorded to them by other nations and states, the Spartans themselves created very little in the way of literature, art, and even architecture. Were it not for the writings of Herodotus and Thucydides, modern archaeologists would be forced to conclude that Sparta itself was little more than a village, rather than a complex and impressive civilization. This lack of source material can be attributed to two of Lycurgus’ doctrines: 1. that Spartans could not be merchants or craftsmen, in the interest of focusing on military and political matters, and 2. that Lycurgus’ laws could never be written down, but instead would be memorized and lived out every day by the Spartans. Spartans also lived a life devoid of many luxuries, eliminating the need for a great many works of art and architectural advances and styles.

The Spartan restrictions on poetry, luxury, and the arts are important because of the problem they pose to the historical methodology used to understand Sparta. Historians do not have many sources of Spartan history that are not Athenian, such as Herodotus and Thucydides. The one exception we have are the extant works by the poet Tyrtaeus, who lived immediately before the Spartan decline in the arts. Tyrtaeus was one of the few Spartans who composed any sort of poetry, and one of even fewer who explicitly mentioned Heracles. Besides Tyrtaeus, there are no truly Spartan-generated primary sources of use, and so our understanding of Tyrtaeus’ poetry will be augmented with the writings of Herodotus, Thucydides, Plutarch, and Xenophon, all of whom had much to say concerning Sparta.

Tyrtaeus

Tyrtaeus, whose works were meant to ennoble young Spartan men in the Second Messenian War, which occurred during the seventh century BCE, was a general who composed

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70 Thucydides, *The Peloponnesian War*, 1.10.1-2

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elegiac war-hymns in the Homeric style. Tyrtaeus’ poetry is primarily an exhortation to the particular virtues the Spartan constitution engenders in its citizens. The poems also appeal to the Homeric ideal of immortal glory as iterated by Achilles: that by doing great deeds in battle, the warrior can be remembered forever and thus in a sense live forever.

Tyrtaeus explicitly connected the virtues of a Spartan with their Heraclean ancestry, saying that “since ye are the race of invincible Heracles, be ye of good courage; not yet hate Zeus turned his neck aside from you.”\textsuperscript{71} Working within the Heracles mythos, with its focus on the excellence and individual superiority, Tyrtaeus also stated while exhorting the Spartans toward courage that “the whole people together regrets a stout-hearted hero, when he dies, and living he is worthy of demigods. For they behold him with their eyes even as a tower, since, though singlehanded, he performs deeds worth those of many.”\textsuperscript{72}

This idea is particularly important when placed in the context of the Homeric mold. The only men in Homer who can truly do the deeds of many are either supermen of sorts, like Achilles, Ajax, and Odysseus, or not men at all due to their status as a god, such as Poseidon. Tyrtaeus directly exhorts his young Spartan audience to seek the immortal glory that is a large theme of the \textit{Iliad}: “[The young Spartan] having fallen amid the foremost, loses his life, and at the same time having brought renown to his city and people and sire… Never does his fair fame or his name perish, but though he be on earth, he becomes immortal.”\textsuperscript{73} This heroic goal is a desire for lasting fame and recognition of virtue; Heracles achieved this through his labors and apotheosis, the Homeric heroes achieved this through valor in war, and the Spartans sought to gain glory through valor in war as well. By identifying the Spartans with these archaic heroes,

\textsuperscript{71} Tyrtaeus, \textit{The War-Song Fragments}, Fragment II (p. 329)
\textsuperscript{72} Tyrtaeus, \textit{The War-Song Fragments}, Fragment IV (p. 334)
\textsuperscript{73} Tyrtaeus, \textit{The War-Song Fragments}, Fragment III (p. 333)
who themselves are the mythological heirs of Heracles’ legacy, Tyrtaeus identifies the Spartans as the heirs to the Homeric heroes, as well as Heracles.

Tyrtaeus’ identification of the Spartan ability to do alone what must usually be done by many is illustrative of Sparta’s spiritual relationship with the Homeric heroes and Heracles. The fact that Tyrtaeus identifies the genesis of Spartan courage in their Heraclean ancestry further serves to strengthen the very close relationship that Spartans, even early Spartans, held with the hero-god. Sparta gets its virtue from Heracles, both physically (through being a descendent) and mythologically (through being the heir of the Heraclean and Homeric excellence of heroes). Sparta was therefore understood to be founded in the image of Heracles’ virtue, explicitly through the virtue of courage and obviously through their focus on physical virtues such as strength, which Heracles typified.

Herodotus

Two centuries after Tyrtaeus, the Halicanassian Herodotus invented prose history by researching and writing about the Persian Wars. One of Herodotus’ best known depictions of the events of the Persian War is his narrative of the Battle of Thermopylae, where 300 Spartans and a smattering of allied Greeks briefly held off an immensely superior Persian invasion force, sacrificing their lives to the last man in the process. The hero of Thermopylae, King Leonidas of Sparta, was an excellent example of the imitation of Heracles fundamentally present in the Spartan constitution. Leonidas, whom Herodotus introduces by explicitly delineating his genealogy in direct descent from Heracles, was the instrument of a divine plan and sacrificed himself in defense of Greece against uncivilized forces. The small Greek fighting force defending against the massive Persian army also calls to mind Heracles’ fight against nature.

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74 Herodotus, *Histories* 7.205.2-7.228.4
75 Foster, “Thermopylae and Pylos with Reference to the Homeric Background,” p. 188
itself, represented by beasts and monsters. Furthermore, Heracles himself was said to have died in this region. His death is marked by an altar near Thermopylae, making the close connection between Leonidas’ death and Heracles’ death tighter.

Heracles and Leonidas, who were both forces protecting Greece against chaos, exhibited the same virtues and died in the same place. Leonidas’ virtues included courage, the Tyrtaean ideal of “one against many,” self-sufficiency, excellence and the will to do what is necessary against an evil force, all of which Heracles epitomized. This Spartan ideal, the selfless giving of oneself for a just cause against inhuman forces, is Heraclean in nature, as that is exactly what Heracles did during his Labors. Further, Leonidas’ Greek excellence and Greek intransigence, derived from a desire to imitate Heracles, were what enabled him and his men to fight against incredible odds.

At Thermopylae, through his death at the hands of the Persians, Leonidas and the Spartans mirrored Heracles’ own Labors: the Spartans turned a grievous defeat into a moral victory through their labors and obedience. The Spartans died following their constitution, down to the last man, and this gave them their victory as the shining sacrifice and embodiment of Greek resistance to Persian tyranny and obedience to their divine constitution. Herodotus even follows Tyrtaeus through recounting the speeches of Demaratus to the Persian King Xerxes: “Be assured, that if you shall subdue these [Spartans] and the rest of them which remain behind in Sparta, there is no other race of men which will await your onset.” Demaratus’ statement shows

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76 Interestingly, the Greeks were able to hold the pass for three days due to their phalanxes, and due to the Spartan feigned-retreat maneuver: this battle would have been much more difficult if not for the specific Greek virtue of those fighting, just as Heracles’ labors would have been more difficult if he did not have his peculiar Greek virtues but rather fought as the monsters did.
77 Herodotus, Histories, 7.198.2
78 Herodotus, Histories 7.209.4
the Spartans as the heroes of Greece, still in that Tyrtaean role as the heirs of the Homeric heroes and Heracles.

Herodotus is very useful because he supplies a picture of actual Spartans practicing those virtues exhorted by Tyrtaeus. Without Herodotus we have little evidence for or against the actual practical application of Tyrtaeus’ poetic exhortations. Herodotus thus confirms that not only did the Spartans say they were courageous due to their Heraclean ancestry, they also believed it and died pursuing this destiny. Heracles’ myth profoundly and actually influenced the sentiments of the Spartan people, inducing real action (a powerful myth and influence on the character of Sparta indeed). Even the composure the Spartans exhibited in battle, combing their hair and making laconic jests to alleviate fear, is indicative of the Heraclean basis of the Spartan constitution: the Spartans trained to be as confident and comfortable in battle as Heracles, who never hesitated and never despaired.79

Sparta was a very conservative polis that always sought to preserve its traditional way of life. After the Lycurgan reform, most new or foreign ideas were distrusted and rejected, on the basis that they would corrupt the Spartan state. For example, Lycurgus stipulated that currency in Sparta would be nearly worthless, which had the effect of reducing trade. This led fewer merchants to come to Sparta, since Spartan money was awful, which led to a less frequent exchanges of ideas than in a polis like Athens, which usually had an open port. Since Sparta was conservative and rejected foreign ideas, it is safe to say that the Heraclean character of the Spartan regime was not due to foreign ideas being brought to the regime. Further, if the Heraclean character was not a foreign introduction, and if it’s true that the Spartan regime changed very little over the hundreds of years it existed, then the Heraclean influence was

79 Herodotus, Histories 7.226.2: Dieneces’ calm jest concerning the shade provided by a hail of arrows; C.f. Foster, “Thermopylae and Pylos with Reference to the Homeric Background,” p. 204
formative during the Spartan founding period. Sparta of all Greek poleis was most renowned for holding to the same system of laws with few changes for many centuries, and the Lycurgan constitution was a jealously protected divine obligation. For us, Herodotus perfectly complements Tyrtaeus’ war-hymns with practical application, reinforcing the notion that the Spartans were fundamentally affected by the legend of Heracles and his virtues, and that they consciously modeled themselves after his myth.

Thucydides

Our next literary source concerning the Spartans is the Athenian historian Thucydides’ account of the Peloponnesian War. The Peloponnesian War was a massive conflict between Athens and Sparta 50 years after the Greek victory against the Persians. In addition to his account of the War itself, Thucydides introduced his work by analyzing briefly the history of the civilization of Greece. During this history of civilization, referred to as the “Archaeology,” Thucydides mentioned the development especially of Sparta and Athens, to whom the rest of the book was largely devoted. Focusing on the “Archaeology” will allow us to analyze the character of Sparta closer to its founding, rather than analyzing Thucydides’ contemporary Spartans, who were not fighting barbarians but rather other Greeks. The very fact that in the Peloponnesian War Spartans were fighting Athenians rather than barbarians makes them difficult to compare to Heracles, who never really sought to destroy past allies. The character of the Spartans’ situation thus makes the Peloponnesian War unfit for our purposes; the “Archaeology” is more suited to analyzing the Spartan-Heraclean connection than a war that made the Spartans act in ways contrary to their founding and traditional character.

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80 Thucydides, *The Peloponnesian War*, 1.18
Thucydides’ main contribution to the history of Sparta’s founding, and thus to the history of its commitment to Heraclean virtue, is in the “Archaeology,” where he speaks to the particular role that Sparta played in the infancy of Greece. As Thucydides said,

“For although Lacedaemon, after the conquest of the country by the Dorians who now inhabit it, remained long unsettled, and indeed longer than any country which we know, nevertheless she obtained good laws at an earlier period than any other, and has never been subject to tyrants; she has preserved the same form of government for rather more than four hundred years, reckoning to the end of the Peloponnesian War. It was the excellence of her constitution which gave her power, and thus enabled her to regulate the affairs of other states.”\(^{81}\)

The Spartans were thus a force against tyranny; from the very beginning of their regime they had a Heraclean destiny, a civilizing purpose. This Heraclean destiny, to shake off tyrants and fight the chaos of the outside world (a chaos that is a major theme in Thucydides’ “Archaeology”) is thus represented by both Herodotus, for instance through his depiction of the intransigence of Leonidas and the 300, and by Thucydides’ depiction of the early Spartans’ actions against the tyrants. The theme of chaos is prevalent in Thucydides, and is represented by such forces as pirates and constant invasions.\(^{82}\) These invasions and pirates finally become tyrannical/monarchical regimes, which were then overthrown and replaced with what we usually identify as Greek city-states. By adopting a Heraclean core for their constitution, the Spartans gave themselves the ability, and perhaps even the duty, to free other city-states.

In fact, much of the Spartan rationale for fighting the Peloponnesian War, however misleading it may have been, was to free the other Greek city-states from the Athenian Empire.

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81 Thucydides, *The Peloponnesian War*, 1.18.1
82 Thucydides, *The Peloponnesian War*, 1.4, 1.5, 1.7, 1.8
The Spartans used their well-known tradition of bringing justice to tyrants as their rationale for their actions, emphasizing the importance of this principle in Spartan foreign policy. Even if this reason conceals the Spartan’s true aim, which seemed to be to check Athens’ growing power (out of fear), it nevertheless is a perfectly understood role of the Spartan people, one that is invested in their very constitution. In Thucydides’ “Archaeology” and the narrative of the Battle of Thermopylae by Herodotus, the Spartans practiced the Heraclean virtues that Tyrtaeus exhorted the young Spartans towards by means of his war-elegies. Tyrtaeus, Herodotus, and Thucydides each saw this Spartan principle, even if the Spartans of their day were not practicing it.

The Peloponnesian War is considered to be a sort of Pyrrhic victory for the Spartans: although they defeated Athens, the Spartans citizen population plummeted and they began losing battles, until they were decisively defeated by Thebes at the battle of Leuctra in the 4th century BCE. Although there were many factors involved in Sparta’s loss to the Thebans, the primary being their incredibly low numbers of full Spartan citizens, these factors were certainly influenced by a disinclination from the Lycurgan constitution, and thus from their Heraclean genesis. Challenging Athens to a direct fight, regardless of the reasons for and against making such a decision, destroyed many Spartan lives and without a doubt led to the Spartan defeat by Thebes. Thucydides thus actually provides a negative heroic example of the Spartans, depicting what happens when acting Heraclean shifts to talking Heraclean. Even these faults remind the reader of Heracles, though, who made many mistakes in his life and had to deal with the disastrous consequences of his actions.

83 Thucydides, The Peloponnesian War, 1.23.5-6
84 Xenophon, Hellenica, 6.4.13-15; This was the first time the Spartan army at full strength had lost a land battle.
Xenophon

Thucydides’ *History of the Peloponnesian War* ends in 411 BC, whereas the Peloponnesian War itself ended with the surrender of Athens to Lysander in 404 BC. The bulk of our historical knowledge pertaining to the seven years between Thucydides’ account and Athens’ surrender is provided by Xenophon. Xenophon was born an aristocratic Athenian, although he later lived in Sparta, where he contracted a severe case of laconophilia. Xenophon is known primarily for his *Hellenica* and *Anabasis*, and he wrote a clear treatise on the government of the Spartans. Although it is dangerous to rely upon an obviously biased source for information about any sort of regime, Xenophon’s work is acceptable to use because it is corroborated by other writers and is how the Spartans themselves viewed their regime.

Xenophon’s *Constitution of the Lacedaemonians* is the premiere classical source historians possess for knowledge of Spartan laws. The Spartan constitution phenomenon, namely the fact that no one wrote a description of the Spartan constitution before Xenophon, is rather strange considering the influence and power exerted by the Spartan state, and thus the desire to know the causes of that prestige. Herodotus and Thucydides speak about the Spartans in a way that suggests that the reader, a literate Greek, already knows a great deal about the Spartans themselves. Although Herodotus and Thucydides mention specific Spartan practices as they relate to the war they are chronicling, they do not see any reason to talk about the Spartan institutions themselves.

The *Constitution of the Lacedaemonians* begins with an analysis of the educational system of the Spartans, rather than a political analysis of their kings, ephors, and councils. Xenophon thus depicts Spartan education as central to the Spartan regime, attributing this education to the efforts of Lycurgus, rather than the structure of the government itself. In other
words, becoming a Spartan is prior to being ruled as a Spartan, meaning that for Xenophon the core of the Spartan regime is their education, rather than mixed government.

Xenophon began his analysis of the Spartans with an encomium of their legendary lawgiver Lycurgus, and before shifting to a discussion of the Spartan marriage practices, dictated as part of the education of men and women. The Spartan formation and presence in the life of an infant began even before he was born: it was fundamentally involved in the very act of marriage. Spartan men and women were educated to choose a mate while they were in the prime of their lives, and to keep themselves in a constant state of physical superiority, in order that the child created would be the strongest specimen available. Further ordinances from Lycurgus proposed that a woman should bear children to any man with the appropriate physical virtue, in order to have healthy and vigorous children for the divinely founded city of Sparta. The peculiarities of the Spartan marriage system were indicative both of the emphasis the Spartans placed on men and women possessing great physical virtue, and the submission (obedience and piety) that households exhibited to the Spartan regime.

After having described the steps towards the creation of the child to be educated, Xenophon immediately described the education of the Spartans themselves. The focus of this education was to produce the worthiest physical specimens in the entire world, a direct emulation of the virtues of Heracles. Spartan boys were not pampered by their parents in their education, but were rather put through constant trials. Spartan youths were not allowed to wear shoes, wear more than one outfit, or eat until they were full, in the interest of tempering their body. Spartan youth were also encouraged to steal food in order to alleviate their hunger – this taught them to be cunning, stealthy, and quick, and also taught them to perform every action to the best of their

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85 Xenophon, *The Constitution of the Lacedaemonians* 1.4, 1.6
86 Xenophon, *The Constitution of the Lacedaemonians* 2.2
ability, lest they be whipped. In Sparta, stealing was punishable not due to a scarcity of food, or
due to a moral disinclination, but rather because if a thief was caught, he was not an exemplar of
the craft. Thus the Spartans sought to inculcate excellence, even in questionable activities. These
basic educational practices pushed Spartan boys towards the Heraclean model of physical
perfection while also attending to the virtues of intelligence. Of course, since the boys were
guided through their youth by the “wardens,” older men who kept discipline over the boys, they
were also officially training to become full Spartan citizens, an example of their piety to
Lycurgus’ educational system.

After a long period of education in their younger years, the boys “ceased to be children
and became lads,”87 at which point their education was augmented further towards virtue. This
period of time was when the Spartans assigned their children the toughest tasks, seeking to edify
the boys against pleasures and laziness by keeping them constantly occupied. These constant
labors were modeled on the never-ending nature of Heracles’ labors: once the first task was
completed, it was replaced by another, and so on until there was no task but the pinnacle of
humanity left to achieve. For Heracles, this pinnacle was ultimately an apotheosis from hero to
hero-god, and for the Spartans this pinnacle was to finally become a full Spartan citizen, a mini
Heracles. Heracles was able to claim great honor and glory through his labors, and this is
reflected in a sort of opposite way by the Spartan attitude: if a Spartan boy does not complete his
labors, he is accorded shame.88

Finally, once the Spartan youths had grown into men, they were given the opportunity to
compete for honor in athletic games. Xenophon stated, “if these [Spartans in the prime of their

87 Xenophon, The Constitution of the Lacedaemonians 3.1
88 Xenophon, The Constitution of the Lacedaemonians 3.3
Nicholas Granitz

life] were of the right stamp they must exercise a powerful influence for good on the state."

The honors accorded to prime Spartans were indicators of the physical virtues perfected by them, and further, were evidence of the “right stamp” that obligated them to exercise an influence on the state. Spartan competition separated the best Spartans from the rest (who were physically excellent as well), and those best Spartans were expected to wield their influence in a way that contributed to the good of the state, just as Heracles was expected to labor for the good of humanity.

Spartan physical virtue came with a responsibility to do good. For Spartan citizens, the responsibility to do good meant preserving the divine regime that the gods had given the Spartans through Lycurgus, usually through warfare. This is a direct parallel to the expectations placed on Heracles. Because Heracles wielded great strength, he was obligated to use that strength towards the good of the world. He had to protect the world of his father Zeus from that which sought to destroy it. This responsibility that the best Spartans were directly given, and which all Spartans were laden with since each Spartan was integral to the constitution due to their small number, calls directly to mind Thucydides’ “Archaeology.” The “Archaeology” asserted that the Spartans were the destroyers of tyranny in other Greek poleis. Following the Heraclean model, the Spartans believed that their physical virtues came packaged with an obligation to protect the good, and this imitation of Heracles was built into their education from the beginning.

The remainder of The Constitution of the Lacedaemonians is concerned not with education as such, but rather with extra precautions taken to protect the Spartans against physical pleasure and vice. Xenophon mentioned that all Spartans ate at a common mess, which served as an opportunity for the old to advise the young, and also discouraged drinking or eating to

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Xenophon, The Constitution of the Lacedaemonians 4.1
Nicholas Granitz

excess.\textsuperscript{90} Xenophon also described peculiar Spartan institutions in detail, more related to the daily activities of citizens, like sharing slaves, than to any sort of particular virtue. Xenophon asserted that one of the greatest qualities of the Spartan regime was its focus on obedience to the law,\textsuperscript{91} and that “what he [Lycurgus] did was to ensure that the brave should have happiness, and the coward misery.”\textsuperscript{92} This is another example of the influence Heracles exerted on the Spartan founding: Lycurgus noted that the brave should be happy (and could be) while the cowardly should not be happy (and could not be). The Spartans were educated to be like Heracles – strong, brave, and ultimately happy – rather than like Eurystheus – who was weak, cowardly, and ultimately unhappy. In addition, Xenophon noted that Lycurgus “compelled” the men of Sparta to be virtuous,\textsuperscript{93} just as Heracles was constantly compelled by being assigned labors.

Xenophon’s portrayal of the Spartan constitution is unwaveringly Heraclean. This portrayal would later go on to influence the great biographer Plutarch, who compiled many myths about the legendary and great Greeks and Romans in his \textit{Parallel Lives}, Lycurgus and the Spartans included.

\underline{Plutarch}

Plutarch’s contribution to the modern day understanding of ancient Sparta is primarily through his \textit{Life of Lycurgus}. Plutarch stated that Lycurgus was “sixth from Patrocles and eleventh from Heracles,”\textsuperscript{94} and that he was briefly a regent king of Sparta before his just actions and the corruption of a woman persuaded him to go into exile. After leaving his beloved Spartans, Plutarch said, Lycurgus traveled across the Greek landscape, learning a great deal about the world and various cities and their foundings, and “considering their several forms of

\begin{footnotes}
\item\textsuperscript{90} Xenophon, \textit{The Constitution of the Lacedaemonians} 5.2-8
\item\textsuperscript{91} Xenophon, \textit{The Constitution of the Lacedaemonians} 8.5
\item\textsuperscript{92} Xenophon, \textit{The Constitution of the Lacedaemonians} 9.3
\item\textsuperscript{93} Xenophon, \textit{The Constitution of the Lacedaemonians} 10.4
\item\textsuperscript{94} Plutarch, \textit{The Life of Lycurgus} 1.4
\end{footnotes}
Through his travels, Lycurgus compiled the best aspects of many different forms of government, but he especially honored the contributions of the lyric poet and lawgiver Thales, who sang of “exhortations to obedience and concord… [making people] reunited in a common admiration of virtue.”96 These exhortations that Lycurgus valued, and that he would eventually incorporate into the education of the Spartan regime, were aimed at the virtues that Heracles possessed and was best known for. Heracles practiced piety, was a civilizer (one who brought about concord), and was the object of much veneration for his virtues (especially those which the Spartans would seek to nurture).

After some time, the Spartans called for Lycurgus to come back, missing the “true foundation of sovereignty, a nature made to rule, and a genius to gain obedience”97 that Lycurgus possessed. Lycurgus’ “nature made to rule” and “genius to gain obedience” were qualities that Heracles also possessed, although, as mentioned before, Heracles never used them in a founding, but rather was himself the proto-founder. While traveling back to Sparta, armed with the knowledge and support necessary to found Sparta in his image, Lycurgus visited the Oracle of Delphi where the Oracle called him “beloved of God and rather God than man.”98 This heroic characterization of Lycurgus creates a strong similarity between Lycurgus and Heracles.

Heracles was indeed beloved of God and rather God than man, as proven both by his labors and his apotheosis. Heracles performed superhuman, i.e. godlike, tasks before finally shedding his human skin. Lycurgus fundamentally altered the nature of the Spartans through education in a way that was completely unique, an alteration that would normally be considered just as impossible as slaying a hydra. Furthermore, when Lycurgus died, he did so to bind the

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95 Plutarch, *The Life of Lycurgus* 4.1
96 Plutarch, *The Life of Lycurgus* 4.2
97 Plutarch, *The Life of Lycurgus* 5.1
98 Plutarch, *The Life of Lycurgus* 5.3
Spartans to their regime forever, and in so dying made himself more than man because his power extended past his death.\(^99\)

Lycurgus’ Spartan regime attempted to make men who rivaled the demigods in physical virtue, and for the most part, it succeeded. Lycurgus, as the founder of Sparta, can be viewed as an anthropomorphic typification of the regime of Sparta itself, because Lycurgus imprinted his own image onto the state. In fact, the Lycurgan imprint was so powerful that it lasted hundreds of years: not until the life of Lysander did the Spartans truly deviate from their constitution.\(^{100}\) Lycurgus’ laws led Plutarch to praise the regime of Sparta saying:

“While these [Lycurgus’ laws] remained in force, Sparta led the life, not of a city under a constitution, but of an individual man under training and full of wisdom. Nay rather, as the poets weave their tales of Heracles, how with his club and lion's skin he traversed the world chastising lawless and savage tyrants, so we may say that Sparta, simply with the dispatch-staff and cloak of her envoys, kept Hellas in willing and glad obedience, put down illegal oligarchies and tyrannies in the different states, arbitrated wars, and quelled seditions, often without so much as moving a single shield, but merely sending one ambassador, whose commands all at once obeyed, just as bees, when their leader appears, swarm together and array themselves about him. Such a surplus fund of good government and justice did the city enjoy.”\(^{101}\)

Thus Lycurgus, who was a direct descendant and imitator of Heracles, made the Spartan regime a direct imitation of Heracles through his founding. The virtues attributed to Lycurgus, and the

\(^{99}\) Plutarch, *The Life of Lycurgus* 31.5
\(^{100}\) Lysander’s role in Spartan history is that of a second founder. He introduced pleasures into the city of Sparta by flooding it with money and a desire for rule over other *poleis*, and in so doing he corrupted the nature of the regime in a way that none had been able to since Lycurgus.
\(^{101}\) Plutarch, *The Life of Lycurgus* 30.2
virtues he gave the Spartans are both literal allusions to Heracles and metaphorical as well: the Spartans as Lycurgus defined them were defined by the legend of Heracles.

After Lycurgus, the Spartan state sought to imitate Heracles’ virtues through preserving their constitution. The Spartan desire to imitate Heracles is evidence of Heracles’ role in the mythological and historical context of early Greece. In addition, Xenophon and Plutarch showed us that Lycurgus, the embodiment of the Spartan constitution, shared his own personal virtues with Heracles, virtues that were upheld and venerated by the Spartan people for the entirety of their adherence to the Lycurgan regime. For our sources, Lycurgus’ decision to imitate Heracles and Lycurgus’ own personal virtue combine to become a decisive influence on Spartan society. Tyrtaeus the war-poet exhorted young Spartans to seek and imitate these Heraclean virtues they had inherited, according to Tyrtaeus, from Heracles himself. Herodotus and Thucydides gave us accounts of the practical application or rejection of these virtues. These ancient writers give us reason to believe that the Spartans consciously continued to base their policies and actions on Heracles’ myth and his character. The Spartan practice of removing tyrants, rigorous education, and behavior on the battlefield are a few examples of their Heraclean policy. Several kinds of influence are at play in the connection between Heracles and Sparta: the hero’s pervasive presence in Greek religion and Sparta’s adoption of the Heraclean model show the powerful effect myth had on Spartan society. Heracles was also imitated in the founding myths of a people who thought themselves similar to the Spartans, namely the Romans, who claimed to be the descendants of the Trojan prince Aeneas.
Chapter Three

Rome and Hercules

The Romans knew Heracles, the hero-god of the Greek tradition, as Hercules. Hercules was an important deity in the Roman tradition, and was linked directly and metaphorically to the founding of Rome. Hercules’ role in the Roman founding was primarily that of a proto-founder, a hero, rather than that of a founder per se. The founders discussed in this chapter range from hero (proto-founder) to founder. Hercules, whose role involved foundational work such as dispensing justice to violent beasts, is the pinnacle hero. Aeneas, who performed heroic acts in addition to founding and governing an area, is the midpoint of the spectrum. Romulus, whose concerns were dominated by founding and ruling rather than by heroic labor, is firmly ensconced in the founder end of the spectrum. The Roman founding as a whole reflects the necessary progression from hero to founder in the establishment of a city: Hercules cleared the chaos and founded Italy in a general sense, Aeneas labored heroically and then founded “Roman” Italy politically, and finally Romulus founded the city of Rome itself. The two primary foundings of Rome occurring after Hercules’ proto-founding sought to retain the characteristics of the hero. In other words, Aeneas and Romulus were similar to Hercules because their foundings were posterior to his and were partly built upon Hercules’ actions and character.
The Roman founding stories are a mosaic of Greek and native Italian legends. According to the literature available to historians, the city of Rome and its surrounding areas were founded at least three times. Evander the Arcadian, a Greek man guided by the goddess Pallas (Athena), founded the city of Pallantium on the site of what would later be the city of Rome. Aeneas the Trojan, child of the goddess Venus (Aphrodite) and Anchises, brought together the ancestral Latin peoples in Italy and the Arcadians after his alliance with Evander and the conquest of Italy. Finally, Romulus founded the city of Rome after he murdered his brother Remus. Each of these founders were directly influenced by Hercules, or were molded after his character. Traditionally, Evander’s founding is only a pre-extension of Aeneas’, and will be treated as such. I will treat the Aeneas-Evander and Romulus-Remus foundings separately.

The physical connection between Rome and Hercules originates during Hercules’ Tenth Labor, which required that he acquire the cattle of Geryon. While driving the cattle back to Eurystheus, one of the cattle escaped and made its way to Italy. Hercules, bound to his labors through his piety, chased the cattle and reclaimed it. In Italy, Cacus stole Hercules’ cattle and hid them in his cave. Hercules discovered Cacus’ location and slew him in combat. Evander proclaimed Heracles to be a son of Jove (Zeus) and established the cult of Hercules in Italy. At this point, Evander’s and Cacus’ roles in this myth vary greatly depending on whether the literary work describing them is the Aeneid or not. In traditional myth, Evander was a Greek refugee living in Italy, and Cacus was simply a greedy, tricky shepherd.

Hercules’ presence in Italy is not merely the invention of late-Republic, and early imperial poets, who sought to glorify Rome and Augustus through association with Hercules.

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102 Additionally, the Romans living in the time of Augustus Octavius Caesar may have seen their emperor as a refounder of Rome, in the sense that he returned them to their earlier foundings.
103 Virgil, Aeneid 8.219-261
104 Virgil, Aeneid 8.262-279
The earliest extant Roman historian Fabius Pictor also sought to glorify Rome through an association with Hercules. In the Annals of the Pontifex Maximus in 125 BCE, Fabius Pictor recounteded history of Rome, beginning with the arrival of Hercules, proceeded to the arrival of Aeneas and his alliance with Lanoios (the hero of Lavinium), and finally the founding of Rome by Romulus. This account by Fabius Pictor reflects common Italic folktales about the influence of Hercules and Aeneas in Italian culture, and although the entry is written in Greek, the language of choice for the aristocratic Roman, it does show an Italian belief in Hercules’ role in the founding of Rome. The stories featured in Fabius Pictor’s account were revisited and greatly expanded by poets and writers such as Ovid, Horace, Propertius, Livy, and Virgil. The latter poet is most useful and interesting for our purposes, due primarily to his masterpiece, the *Aeneid*, written during the reign of Augustus.

**The Aeneid**

The *Aeneid* is an epic poem based on the Homeric epics. It chronicles the wanderings, labors, and wars of the Trojan hero Aeneas after the fall of Troy. Aeneas’ travels and his final settlement in Italy were an important part of the destiny of Rome, which in the *Aeneid* reached its climax during the victory of Octavius over Antony. The epic explores the founding of Rome, in an *ethos* sense rather than a *polis* sense: the *Aeneid* is about the founding of the Augustan Roman civilization, rather than specifically about the city of Rome. Aeneas is both the genesis of Rome, and like Lycurgus, a human model of all that his state will be.

A complex epic, the *Aeneid* has been the subject of many interpretations in the 2,000 years since its composition. The *Aeneid* relies heavily on a system of parallels in order to flesh

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105 Frier, *Libri Annales Pontifex Maximus*, p. 230 (Greek)
106 At the Battle of Actium, in 31 BC.
out the characterization of Aeneas and the destiny of Rome.\textsuperscript{107} For example, Aeneas is compared to Odysseus in Books 1 through 5, during which he wanders around the Mediterranean Sea, getting into various adventures and being tempted in various ways, and compared to Achilles and Hector (and Hercules) in Books 6 through 12, in which he visits the Underworld, builds an army, and fights like a force of nature against his unjust foe on the battlefield.\textsuperscript{108}

Besides using clever allusion and imitation, which allowed Virgil to draw upon the rich Greek tradition in addition to his own Roman tradition, the \textit{Aeneid} focuses on opposites. Certain characters typify certain virtues or archetypes, and some typify multiple virtues. Aeneas exhibits the pinnacle of the virtue \textit{pietas}, duty to his gods, family, and homeland, and is the major characterization of \textit{labor} as well, suffering and enduring through trials to achieve some end. Hercules and Aeneas were assigned their labors by the same goddess as well: Juno (Hera) gave Hercules his labors when she drove him to madness and attempted to impede his completion of these labors by making him subject to Eurystheus and by directly intervening in his labors herself. Juno gave Aeneas his labors in the Aeneid and similarly blocked him at every turn. Juno, who attempts to kill Aeneas or at least prevent his success at founding Rome, typifies fortune, chaos, and struggle against fate, while her husband Jupiter (Zeus) is justice and adherence to fate.\textit{Aeneid Book VIII: Hercules and Cacus}

Evander, a military ally and mentor of Aeneas, is introduced in Book 8 of the \textit{Aeneid}. Identified as an Arcadian who did not fight in the Trojan War, Evander was the leader of Pallantium, which rested on the future site of Rome. Evander was a hero-founder like Aeneas,

\textsuperscript{107} Galinsky, “The Hercules-Cacus Episode in \textit{Aeneid} VIII,” page 18
\textsuperscript{108} The division of the books of the \textit{Aeneid} into mini-narratives is very hotly contested. Some scholars hold that the Book 5 is the dividing point, some say Book 7 is, some say the \textit{Aeneid} is a trilogy, etc. This debate is beyond the modest aim of this thesis.
and introduced Aeneas to his future land and its history. Cacus was a fire breathing half-man half-beast who attacked the lands where Pallantium was founded – only after his defeat at the hands of Hercules was the land ready for the founding of a city.

In Book 8 of the *Aeneid*, Evander recounts to Aeneas the story of the conflict of Hercules and Cacus. This Hercules-Cacus episode is a powerful allegorical model for the remaining four books of the epic, and acts as a microcosm for the relationship between Aeneas and Turnus, Aeneas’ nemesis. This account implicitly identifies Aeneas with Hercules and Turnus with Cacus. Turnus, who is very similar to Achilles, is characterized by his irrational rage and immoral actions. Turnus acts like a monster in the last books of the epic, as vividly exemplified by his brutal murder of the young Pallas. Turnus’ very existence disallows the founding of Rome, and particularly the Rome which Aeneas represents. Virgil’s Cacus literally is a monster, an unholy beast of rage and chaos who attempts to kill Hercules after stealing his livestock. Cacus and Turnus play similar roles in the *Aeneid*: they are characters who attempt to prevent the completion of the hero’s labors.

Similar parallels exist between Aeneas and Hercules. As mentioned before, Hercules was in Italy due to his pious obligation to complete his labors. The labors were both caused by his mother Juno, who instigated the fit of madness that drove him to kill his family, and controlled by her, through the orders of her puppet Eurystheus. This background motivation for Hercules reveals a parallel with Aeneas. Aeneas, who was piously obeying the divine mandate that he be part of the creation of the Roman peoples, was the premier example of the laboring hero in the

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110 Galinsky, “The Hercules-Cacus Episode in *Aeneid* VIII,” p. 42
111 Virgil, *Aeneid* 8.184-261
Aeneid. Aeneas’ labors were initiated by Juno, who literally blew him off his path in Book 1 and continued to torment Aeneas throughout the entirety of the epic. Thus Hercules’ and Aeneas’ labors were engendered by Juno’s actions, and also continued by her.

In addition to the virtues of labor and piety, Hercules and Aeneas shared the virtues of justice, courage, strength, and excellence. Together with Galinsky, I argue that Aeneas was just according to Roman and Greek ethical systems, as seen by his actions at the end of Book 12 where he slew Turnus in order to avenge Turnus’ desecration of a holy oath. Aeneas was an obvious exemplar of Hercules’ physical virtues: courage and strength. The Aeneid itself is a testament to the courage of Aeneas because it is an epic record of all the dangerous trials he went through to fulfill his destiny – a destiny he was not actually enthusiastic about fulfilling. Aeneas’ strength is evident when reading through the Iliadic books, for example Book 11 or 12 where Aeneas almost singlehandedly turned the tide in battle in his search for Turnus after Turnus murdered Pallas. These books further show the excellence of Aeneas: he outclassed every opponent he faced throughout the epic, and was the moral standard against which other characters are judged.

Beyond the similar backgrounds and motivations driving Aeneas and Hercules, we find a parallel of purpose and role. Hercules and Aeneas performed the same function in the ancient world: they acted as destroyers of evil and upholders of civilization. Aeneas killed Turnus and Mezentius, characterized in the Aeneid as immoral, physically dominating monstrous men: his actions allowed greater civilization to take root. Hercules killed monster after monster and his actions were the civilizing force that allowed cities to be founded. Aeneas’ purpose was the same

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113 Virgil, *Aeneid* 1.29-33
116 Virgil, *Aeneid* 12.500-528
as Hercules’, with the caveat that Aeneas was more focused on Rome’s genesis specifically, rather than all of Italy and Greece. With this distinction of specificity and generality in mind, it is important to remember that without Hercules, the Cacus would not have been defeated. Thus the city of Pallantium could not have been founded, and Evander would never have possessed enough power to help Aeneas in any meaningful way. Hercules’ civilizing actions were part of the divinely ordained destiny of Rome, and explicitly provide the framework for Aeneas’ actions and success from Book 8 onwards.

The connection between Aeneas and Hercules is furthered strengthened in Book 8 by the actions of Evander. Evander, who can be viewed as the master of the cult of Hercules in Pallantium due to his leadership in the rites, implicitly identified Aeneas with Hercules by giving Aeneas a lion-skin garb, the traditional clothing of Hercules after his first labor. Evander’s identification of Aeneas with Hercules also serves to draw Aeneas into a further communion with the native Italian peoples, because Aeneas explicitly worshiped the household gods of the Italian people. Hercules was certainly the most important god for Evander’s city, and thus he was their household god. Aeneas’ identification with Hercules means that Evander recognized Aeneas as an heir to Hercules in some way, even if it was only insofar as Aeneas was virtuous through labor and piety and Hercules was the personification of virtue through labor and piety.

The cult of Hercules that Evander leads in the Aeneid is that of the Ara Maxima, Rome’s oldest cult. It is necessary to note that Hercules was the alexikakos, the destroyer of evil: this was a title that the Romans could easily apply to Aeneas as well, in light of his similarities to

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117 Virgil, Aeneid 8.262-279
118 Virgil, Aeneid 8.175-183
119 Galinsky, “The Hercules-Cacus Episode in Aeneid VIII,” p. 44
120 Papaioannou, “Vergil’s Evander,” p. 693
Hercules. Hercules’ destruction of Cacus in his role as the _alexikakos_ was the reason for the genesis of the cult of Hercules in the first place. Not only did Hercules give Rome the ability to be founded, but he also provided it with its first cult, a cult that would later instruct Aeneas and give him the allies needed to found Italy in preparation for the Roman people. This title seems appropriate for Aeneas: Evander identifies him with Hercules in Book 8, and then joins in alliance with him against Turnus, who is an evil and violent person. Hercules destroying Cacus is evidential of his role as the _alexikakos_. Following through with our comparison between Hercules and Aeneas, we can see Aeneas performing this role as well, especially by destroying the evil Turnus.

The regrettable side effects of being a pious _alexikakos_ were also present in Aeneas and Hercules: neither man was able to focus on his family or pursue romance while his labors were being completed, and if he did have a family, they were removed from him in some way. This is especially true for Hercules, who famously slaughtered his family. Aeneas’ wife died in Book 2, his father Anchises died in Book 3, and his budding relationship with the Carthaginian queen Dido was ended by divine intervention, which led to Dido’s suicide.\(^{121}\) Although Aeneas’ son lived and was present with him for some of his travels, Aeneas did not really do any fathering activities throughout the epic, and even his major pedagogical instruction to his son rings Herculean: “My son, now I shall give you an example of valor and the struggle which duty demands. About good fortune you must learn from others.”\(^{122}\)

Hercules’ connection to Aeneas is also interesting in regard to one of Hercules’ _parerga_, in which the hero-god defeated the city of Troy. Through the conquest of Troy, Hercules synthesized a part of Trojan society to himself: Hercules becomes part of the story of Troy and

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\(^{121}\) Virgil, _Aeneid_ 4.666  
\(^{122}\) Virgil, _Aeneid_ 12.435-436
thus part of the story of Rome. The idea that a society’s gods, or in other words the household gods of a city, could be claimed through conquest was an important reason for Aeneas’ actions during the Siege of Troy in the *Aeneid*, when he left with his household gods and his family.\(^{123}\) The Trojan household gods were not taken by the Greeks because they were absent from the city when it was conquered. This shows Aeneas’ desire to not be synthesized to the Greeks but instead to others, namely the Roman nation he would help found. Hercules, who was originally a Greek hero, became a Greek-Trojan hero after his conquest of Troy, and finally became a Greek-Trojan-Roman hero after he slew Cacus and Aeneas was identified with him. The *Aeneid* itself is a testament to this Greek-Trojan-Roman synthesis.

As Samotta stated, Roman authors such as Fabius Pictor and Cato the Elder “bestowed upon the Italic settlements a Greek descent, thus demonstrating the Romans and Italians to be the true heirs of former (archaic and classical) Greek greatness.”\(^{124}\) In the *Aeneid*, this synthesis was accomplished by claiming the hero-god Hercules and Evander, who was an Achaean. In addition, the union of Achaeans (Evander) and Dorians (Aeneas) gave the Romans a claim to the full range of Greek ethnicity and thus established the Romans as the heirs of Greek civilization. Recalling the previous chapter’s focus on the Spartan inheritance of the Homeric heroes, who themselves were heirs of Heracles, we can affirm that the Romans were heirs of the Greek heroes on both sides of the Trojan War, and thus could claim to be heirs of Hercules in a fuller sense than their Greek neighbors.

Considering the massive impact that Greek civilization exerted on Rome and the subsequent Roman domination of Greece, the role of Hercules in the founding of Rome is important because it foreshadows the Roman destiny: like Hercules, the Romans would conquer

\(^{123}\) Virgil, *Aeneid* 2.752-795ff
\(^{124}\) Samotta, “Herodotus and Thucydides in Roman Republican Historiography,” p. 357
all enemies and establish for themselves a lasting divinely-mandated civilization. A major part of the establishment of a Roman civilization would naturally have been claiming inheritance and superiority over the Greeks, to which they could refer in their founding myths through Hercules. The Hercules-Aeneas connection is thus important for understanding the Roman sense of destiny as a whole, and for understanding the mindset of those chroniclers of the early Roman founding myths before Romulus.

Romulus

Although Aeneas laid the groundwork for the formation of Rome, Romulus founded the city itself and imprinted his image upon it. The story of Romulus and Remus is well known and ubiquitous in Roman architecture, art, and literature. The Romulus founding myth was prevalent in Roman culture at least as early as Fabius Pictor, who outlined this myth, as well as the Aeneas story, in his annals, and was certainly a beloved founding account among the Italians before Pictor committed it to the record of history. In *The History of Rome*, the Roman historian Livy summarized the connection between Aeneas and Romulus: Romulus (and his brother) were descended from Aeneas through their grandfather Numitor. Numitor was the king of Alba Longa until his brother Amulius deposed him and slew Numitor’s son, depriving him of any male heirs. Numitor’s daughter, Rhea Silvia, was allowed to live, but only on the condition that she become a Vestal virgin, and thus “by consigning her to perpetual virginity, [Amulius] deprived her of the hope of children.” After her conscription into the order of the Vestal virgins, however, Rhea was impregnated, as she herself hypothesized, by the god of war, Mars

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125 Frier, *Libri Annales Pontifex Maximus*, p. 230
126 Livy, *The History of Rome*, 1.3.1-10
127 Livy, *The History of Rome*, 1.3.10-11
128 Livy, *The History of Rome*, 1.3.11
(Ares). The boys, who had “size and beauty more than human,” were condemned to exposure because their birth threatened the authority of Amulius and because they were born to a woman sworn to virginity. They were rescued by a she-wolf, who nursed them until a shepherd named Faustulus adopted them into his family. Plutarch offers an alternate story of Romulus’ progeny, in which Hercules won a game of dice against the priest of his temple and won the affections of a woman for his prize. The woman provided gave birth to Romulus and Remus.

The young Romulus and Remus grew up to be strong young men. As Livy said, “the boys, thus born and reared [by the she-wolf and shepherd], had no sooner attained to youth than they began — yet without neglecting the farmstead or the flocks — to range the glades of the mountains for game. Having in this way gained both strength and resolution, they would now not only face wild beasts, but would attack robbers” as well, banishing evil from the land that Romulus would later rule. Romulus and Remus later became leaders among the neighboring shepherds and deposed Amulius, restoring their grandfather to the throne. The twins then moved outside of Numitor’s kingdom so that they could found their own city; they arrived at the site of what would be the city of Rome.

The brothers decided to found a city, but differed on the actual site of the city, each settling on one of the seven iconic Roman hills. The brothers decided to let augury decide which site was better, and although Remus received the first signs, Romulus’ signs doubled Remus’. Remus then jumped over the walls Romulus was building, after which Romulus committed fratricide and named the city after himself. The two sites discussed in this legend refer to two

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129 Livy, *The History of Rome*, 1.4.2
130 Plutarch, *The Life of Romulus*, 3.3
131 Livy, *The History of Rome*, 1.4.7-8
132 Plutarch, *The Life of Romulus*, 5.1-3
133 Livy, *The History of Rome*, 1.4.8-9
134 Livy, *The History of Rome*, 1.6.3-7.3
types of cities: the aborted city of Remus and the real city of Romulus. Remus’ city is similar to the attempt to refound Troy in Book 3 of the *Aeneid*: the founding was not sanctioned by the gods and so did not come into being.\(^{135}\) There was, however, something divine about Romulus’ city, and so it was actually founded, made real.

“His [Romulus’] first work was to fortify the Palatine hill where he had been brought up. The worship of the other deities he conducted according to the use of Alba [Longa], but that of Hercules in accordance with the Greek rites as they had been instituted by Evander… out of all foreign rites, [this] was the only one which Romulus adopted, as though he felt that an immortality won through courage, of which this was the memorial, would one day be his own reward.”\(^{136}\)

Based on this passage, we can conclude that Livy (as well as Plutarch) explicitly connected Romulus to Hercules based on a recognition of their similar natures and destiny. During the remainder of Romulus’ life, he consolidated power through conquest and established Rome as a stable city under his monarchical rule. At the end of his life, however, Romulus began to act autocratically. Mythologically, Romulus’ reign ended with his apotheosis directly into heaven, although ancient historians agree that he was killed by the Roman Senate for tyrannical behavior.\(^{137}\) Romulus was then worshipped as the god Quirinus, a deity of war.

Romulus, as the heir of Aeneas, was very Herculean in nature. Above all, Romulus represents strength and determination, two fundamental characteristics of Hercules. Throughout his entire life, Romulus pursued his destiny: founding a great city that would conquer the world. This was not so different from Hercules’ goal, which was to found Greece (and the rest of the

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\(^{135}\) Virgil, *Aeneid* 3.135-191

\(^{136}\) Livy, *The History of Rome*, 1.7.3-15

\(^{137}\) Livy, *The History of Rome*, 1.16.1-8; Livy states that after Romulus was taken into heaven, a rumor went around claiming that he was torn limb from limb by the senate; the apotheosis myth was made to soothe the peoples’ anger.
world) in the name of his father. Both men had a civilizing role: Romulus’ consolidation of power among the Italian tribes was the first step to creating a unified Italian peninsula, free of chaos; Hercules’ exploits need no further elucidation. Romulus’ role as a civilizer was also shown in his youth, where the young Romulus slew monsters and robbers, just as Hercules did in his labors. Just as Aeneas was the heir to Hercules’ founding efforts in Italy, so was Romulus the heir to Aeneas’ founding efforts and to Hercules’ essential characteristics.

Romulus’ birth and death were also very similar to Hercules’, and may have been based on the legend of the hero-god. Romulus was conceived by the union of a god and human woman, was exposed to danger as an infant, was raised by shepherds after flirting with the supernatural, and did not die, but rather was raised to heaven. These circumstances immediately recall Hercules, with the differences that Hercules protected himself from danger in his youth and did not rely on the unnatural graces of a wolf.

Also like Romulus, Hercules had a twin brother, Iphitus, who was not destined for the sort of glory Hercules would earn: this is mirrored by Romulus’ brother Remus, who would be unable to match his brother’s glory. In the scope of their accomplishments, Hercules and Romulus were divine, while Iphitus and Remus were merely mortal. Romulus was described as appearing more beautiful than human at his birth, and thus superhuman or divine, just as Hercules was. The only resounding difference between the youth of Hercules and the youth of Romulus was the degree of their divinity: although descended from Mars, Romulus was never nursed by a goddess, and he did not possess the strength to act autonomously as Hercules did. In effect, the difference between Romulus and Hercules lay in their capacity to be a hero. Romulus’ purpose was always confined to the founding and ruling of a city, and so he acted with the power
of a founder. Hercules’ purpose was that of a hero, i.e. the founder of civilization and ruler of none, and so he acted with the power of a proto-founder.

Even in death Romulus’ legend sought to match the Herculean myth. Romulus was apotheosized at the end of his life, presumably due to the greatness of his actions, just as Hercules was. Hercules’ mortal skin was burned off of him, revealing his divinity, while Romulus was taken wholly up into heaven and out of the city, leaving nothing but his legacy behind. It is useful to interpret Romulus’ apotheosis through the lens of a crucial assertion made earlier in this thesis: the founder of a city cannot remain in a city because he is superior to it in some way and will eventually act out his superiority. Romulus’ existence in Rome threatened the very survival of the city itself, and his apotheosis was a useful and tidy mythological device for several reasons: it removed him from the city without branding him (and thus his city) as vicious, it glorified him (and thus the city) on the basis of his labors for the city of Rome, and it connected him to the best-known apotheosis in Greco-Roman culture, that of Hercules/Heracles.

Romulus’ apotheosis did not reveal his true nature: it made him into something else entirely. This is a deviation from the Herculean apotheosis, in which Hercules’ true nature is revealed, rather than crafted. This point of difference reminds us of the different roles of Hercules and Romulus: Hercules had a more basic task and was closer to the original mythological foundations of the Greco-Roman self-conception. The monarchical nature of Romulus was so abhorrent to the Romans that they had to make him a god so he would be useful for posterity. The relationship between Romulus and Hercules is thus a good example of the relationship between the founder and proto-founder on whom he is based. This analysis fits in well with the argument that in mythology the founder is superior to what he founds, as well,
because Hercules is superior to Romulus, and because in some way Hercules founded Romulus, even if only in the construction of Romulus’ legend.

In addition to the very close similarities between Hercules and Romulus that suggest Romulus’ legend was based on Hercules’, it is useful to point out where Romulus’ legend is directly connected to Hercules. For Plutarch, some variations of the Roman founding myth say that Romulus was the son, and thus direct heir, of Hercules. For Livy, out of all the ancestral cults of the Italian peoples, Romulus had retained only the cult of Hercules, the oldest cult in Rome. For Virgil, this cult was significant for Aeneas, and remained so for Romulus: both founders saw something of their own destiny in the cult and were pious towards Hercules, who was their model. These writers intended to show Hercules as a model for the Roman people, and sought to bring the benefits of Hercules’ myth, like virtue, out of his cult and into real life.

Hercules’ priority in the founding of Rome, in addition to being a useful connection in its own right, is worthwhile for the commentary it lends to the Roman character itself. Hercules the hero had a strong sense of destiny, as clearly evidenced by his youth and explicitly stated by his labors. The Romans had a strong sense of destiny as well, as shown by Fabius Pictor who depicted the Romans as heirs to the greatness of the Greeks, Livy, who described Romulus as an heir to the Herculean destiny, and the Aeneid, which could be appropriately titled “The Destiny of Aeneas and the Manifestation of Roman/Caesarean Glory.” The fact that the Romans deified Romulus and emperors after Julius Caesar is a further indication of the Herculean destiny towards which the Roman people saw their leaders driven. The Romans viewed their emperors, and in some sense themselves, as destroyers of evil (such as Cleopatra) and bringers of peace (the “Saecula Aurea”), and these labors were perfectly exhibited by Hercules himself; if the Roman emperors labored just as Hercules did, why should they not be given the reward of
Hercules, i.e. deification through labor? The traditional Roman virtues, manliness, courage, strength, and piety, were also perfectly exhibited in the character of Hercules. Simply put, the Roman founders are reminiscent of Hercules because the Romans themselves sought to be like Hercules. Of all the heroes and gods, Hercules is the oldest emblem of Roman virtue, and thus the model for the founders of that virtue.
Conclusion

Heracles and the Foundings of Sparta and Rome

The myth of Heracles, the hero, god, and proto-founder, exerted considerable influence on the foundings of Sparta and Rome. In this thesis we looked at the hero’s own character, the character of founders in general, the founders of Sparta and Rome in particular, and the character of the Spartan and Roman states. I hope to have shown that Heracles’ character is demonstrated by his six primary virtues, strength, intuition, justice, courage, piety, and excellence, as shown in his Labors. Further, I hope to have shown that Heracles’ myth was consciously adapted as a model by the Spartans, and that the Spartan and Roman founding stories were modeled after Heracles’ legend.

We began our study of Heracles’ influence on the foundings of Sparta and Rome by analyzing the hero himself. Understanding Heracles’ myth is necessary for understanding his influence on Greco-Roman society, and so we looked at the many roles he performed in myth and the ubiquity of his legend: Heracles was the unifier of the Greek *ethnos*, the *alexikakos*, and the proto-founder to whom Greek cities sought to connect themselves. We recognized Heracles’ virtues, justice, strength, intuition, excellence/self-sufficiency, courage, and piety, and analyzed their importance for the proto-founder and founders. Heracles exhibited internal and external
justice, overwhelming strength, practical wisdom, self-sufficiency, courage, and a heroic commitment to piety, especially considering the hateful actions of his stepmother Hera.

After recognizing the virtues that Heracles, and Heracles as a founder, possessed, we systematically identified them in Heracles’ major mythological contribution, the Twelve Labors. The labors, which were Heracles’ repentance for his crimes against his family, gave Heracles the opportunity to earn glory and apotheosis by his deeds. Each labor was indicative of several virtues we had identified in Heracles and the founders, and in addition they provided us with some specific lessons about founders and mythological construction. Heracles’ third and seventh labors showed us that the hero and founder had to confront situations which made them choose between conflicting pious obligations. The third and fourth labors taught us that the proto-founder and founder are lonely men forced to practice self-sufficiency, and the ninth labor showed us that wandering was a recurring element of myth present in heroic and founding stories. Heracles’ actions in the tenth labor provided a cautionary tale against hubris, while his fifth and sixth labors clearly exhibited his role as the *alexikakos*. After studying the labors we discussed Heracles’ apotheosis. We concluded by identifying the paradigmatic role played by Heracles’ mythology. He was the model for the *alexikakos* and a model for the virtues of a founder and proto-founder. In addition his life’s story, his birth, and his apotheosis were significantly paradigmatic for later myths that include deification.

Having gained a clearer understanding of Heracles’ mythology, we sought to understand the influence this myth had on the founding of Sparta. The Spartan regime identified itself genealogically with Heracles: every Spartan citizen was officially a descendant of Heracles, the progeny of his “Thirteenth Labor.” In addition to this kinship with Heracles, the Spartans modeled their constitution and society on the example of Heracles and the Homeric heroes. The
Spartan society, which sought to perfect physical virtues, also sought to instill a Heraclean ideology in its citizens; this ideology required that Spartans labor for the good of the state and bring order to places in disorder. Spartan also tried to imitate Heracles’ piety; Spartans held that their Lycurcan constitution was a divine mandate, and so obedience to the constitution was piety to the gods.

The writings of Tyrtaeus, Herodotus, Thucydides, Xenophon, and Plutarch are our historical sources for analyzing Sparta, and provided evidence for their conscious adaptation of a Heraclean model for their society. Tyrtaeus’ poems exhorted young Spartans towards the immortal glory sought by Achilles in the Iliad, identified Spartan courage as a result of their Heraclean ancestry, and recognized the Spartans as the heirs of the Homeric heroes and Heracles. Herodotus’ depiction of Leonidas at the Battle of Thermopylae showed us that the Spartans sought to imitate Heracles and the Tyrtaean ideals. Leonidas was the heir of the Homeric heroes and Heracles, and his actions during this battle are indicative of Heracles’ actual influence on Spartan behavior and action. Leonidas’ Heraclean behavior was recognized as traditional Spartan behavior.

Thucydides provided us with a picture of Spartan actions during the early civilizing periods of Greek history in his “Archaeology.” Thucydides recognized, like Tyrtaeus and Herodotus, that the Spartans performed Heraclean actions, such as overthrowing tyrannies and providing order. It was left to Xenophon to depict the education that led Spartans to act this way, however, and he wrote about this in his Constitution of the Lacedaemonians. The Constitution of the Lacedaemonians showed us that education was central to the Spartan regime, and that Spartans were educated to emulate Heracles. Spartans were expected to labor for the good of Sparta, and they felt obligated to behave like Heracles and imitate his actions. The Spartan
regime was designed to create a society of “mini-Heracleses.” At last we explicitly studied Lycurgus through Plutarch’s biography of him. Lycurgus was similar to Heracles through his labors on behalf of Sparta, his virtues, and his direct relation to Heracles, making him the hero’s heir. Lycurgus made the Spartan regime a direct imitation of Heracles, and the combined influence of Lycurgus and Heracles had a decisive influence on Spartan society.

Having shown Heracles’ influence on the Spartan founding, we turned to Hercules, the Roman name for Heracles, and analyzed his influence on the founding of Rome. Hercules’ presence in Rome, which happened during his tenth labor, was reflected in Italian myth by historians like Fabius Pictor. Hercules’ mythology influenced the Roman founders, Evander, Aeneas, and Romulus. Desiring to analyze Hercules’ influence on Evander and Aeneas, we consulted the Aeneid, which portrayed the Trojan Aeneas as a Roman Hercules by emphasizing his Herculean qualities such as piety, labor, and suffering. Aeneas and Hercules were mythologically connected by the role Juno played in their legend: the angry goddess forced both of them to undertake labors and impeded their progress at every point.

Virgil identified Hercules with Aeneas and Cacus with Turnus using the Hercules-Cacus episode in Book 8 of the Aeneid. The Hercules-Cacus account functioned as a microcosm for Books 9 through 12 of the Aeneid, and using this account we observed that Aeneas and Hercules had similar legends, and that these legends played similar roles in the mythological history of Rome. Evander, who was the founder of Pallantium and an acolyte of Hercules’ cult, the Ara Maxima, identified Aeneas with Hercules and saw Aeneas as the heir of Hercules. Aeneas practiced the Herculean virtues, functioned as an alexikakos in the framework of the Aeneid, and suffered a similar loss of family because of his role as the alexikakos. We saw that claiming Evander and Aeneas as founders of Rome strengthened Rome’s claim to be heirs of Heracles and
the Homeric heroes in a fuller sense than Greece. Along with the Hercules myth, this claim foreshadowed Rome’s destiny, which was to conquer the world and provide Roman order.

Our analysis of the *Aeneid* showed the mythological roots of the founding of Rome. After that, we transitioned to the legend of the founder of the actual city of Rome, Romulus. Romulus was the heir of Aeneas and Evander, and was descended from the eponymous hero of the *Aeneid* himself, through his grandfather Numitor. Livy, the ancient author of the *History of Rome*, directly identified Romulus with Hercules, noticing the similar direction of their mythology and Romulus’ desire to have Hercules’ reward, apotheosis. Romulus’ goal, which was to dispel tyranny and civilize Rome, was very similar to Hercules’ goal; in addition to this, Romulus’ birth and death were similar to Hercules’ as well, and the Roman founder’s mythology may have been based on that of Hercules. Some legends concerning the Roman founding present Romulus as the son of Hercules, which is indicative of an Italian desire to make their founder the heir of Hercules, similar to how Lycurgus was Hercules’ heir. Romulus also worshipped and respected Hercules: out of all the native Italian cults, Romulus preserved only the cult of Hercules. Hercules was intended to be a model for the Roman people, and is useful for understanding the Roman self-conception. Hercules, who shared qualities with and was emulated by Aeneas and Romulus, was the oldest emblem of Roman virtue, and was the model for the practitioners of that virtue, the Roman founders.

Understanding Heracles and his mythology is important for understanding the foundings of Sparta and Rome, which consciously imitated the hero-god and were influenced by his pervasive mythology. Heracles’ role in Greek mythology as the proto-founder and the *alexikakos* gave his mythology paradigmatic influence on Greek and Roman mythological constructs such as apotheosis. The centrality of Heracles’ mythology makes his legend particularly useful for the
study of ancient foundings and the relationship between myth and history. The power of Heracles’ myth is pervasive and fundamental: his myth influenced the foundings of many cities in the ancient world, and in this thesis we have looked at two of these cities, Sparta and Rome.
Bibliography

Ancient


Modern


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Nicholas Granitz attended Ashland University from January 2009 until December 2011, where he majored in History and Philosophy, and minored in Classical Civilization. He was an Ashbrook Scholar and member of the Honors Society. He was Dr. Foster's research assistant, founded the FORUM book review, tutored in the history and philosophy departments, and interned for the Honors Program. He functioned as the president and secretary of Philosophy Club, performed in multiple music ensembles, and is a member of the History and Philosophy honorary societies. This senior thesis is the undergraduate culmination of a lifelong interest in classics and ancient history, and he will be further pursuing this passion in graduate school.