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# I

## THESEUS

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YOU know, Sosius Senecio,<sup>1</sup> how geographers, when they come to deal with those parts of the earth which they know nothing about, crowd them into the margins of their maps with the explanation, 'Beyond this lie sandy, waterless deserts full of wild beasts', or 'trackless swamps', or 'Scythian snows', or 'ice-locked sea'. Now that in writing my *Parallel Lives* I have reached the end of those periods in which theories can be tested by argument or where history can find a solid foundation in fact, I might very well follow their example and say of those remoter ages, 'All that lies beyond are prodigies and fables, the province of poets and romancers, where nothing is certain or credible.'

However, after I had published my account of Lycurgus the law-giver and Numa the king, there seemed to be nothing unreasonable in going back a step further to Romulus, since my history had brought me so close to his times. Then, when I asked myself, as Aeschylus puts it:<sup>2</sup>

With such a champion who will dare to engage?

Whom shall I match against him? Who can face the challenge?

it seemed clear that I could find no more fitting counterpart for the father of glorious and unconquerable Rome than Theseus, the founder of the lovely and far-famed city of Athens. Let us hope, then, that I shall succeed in purifying fable, and make her submit to reason and take on the appearance of history. But when she obstinately defies probability and refuses to admit any element of the credible, I shall

1. One of the most influential of Plutarch's Roman friends. He was four times consul between A.D. 98 and 107, a scholar and a correspondent of Pliny. Plutarch also addresses him at the beginning of the Lives of *Demosthenes* and of *Dion*.

2. *Seven Against Thebes*, 435.

throw myself on the indulgence of my readers and of those who can listen with forbearance to the tales of antiquity.

2. It struck me, at any rate, that there were a number of resemblances which gave point to the parallel. Both men were unacknowledged children of uncertain parentage and were reputed to be of divine descent,

Both of them warriors, as the whole world knows,<sup>1</sup> and both combined a keen intelligence with great physical strength. Of the two most famous cities in the world Romulus founded the one and Theseus made a capital of the other, and each of them resorted to abducting women. Both men suffered misfortune at home and incurred the just resentment of their kinsmen, and both at the end of their lives are said to have fallen out with their fellow countrymen, if we may accept those stories which seem to have been written with the least poetic exaggeration as a guide to the truth.

3. On his father's side Theseus traces his descent from Erechtheus and the earliest inhabitants of Attica, and on his mother's from Pelops. Pelops was the most powerful of the kings in the Peloponnese, not so much by virtue of his wealth as of the number of his children. He married many of his daughters to the highest in the land and established many of his sons far and wide as rulers of the Peloponnesian cities. One of these, named Pittheus, the grandfather of Theseus, founded Troezen;<sup>2</sup> this is, in fact, only a small city, but he himself had the reputation of being the wisest of men and the most deeply versed in the lore of his age. The essence of his wisdom and the form it took seem to have been of the same kind as made Hesiod famous, in particular for the collection of maxims contained in his *Works and Days*. One of these is attributed to Pittheus:

When you promise to pay a friend, then reward him in generous measure.<sup>3</sup>

or so we are told on Aristotle's authority, and Euripides, when he causes Hippolytus to be addressed as 'pupil of the holy Pittheus',<sup>4</sup> shows what opinion the world held of Pittheus.

1. *Iliad*, vii, 281, referring to Telamonian Ajax and Hector.

2. A small, ancient town on the shore of the Saronic Gulf opposite Athens.

3. *Works and Days*, 370.

4. *Hippolytus*, 11.

Now when Aegeus the king of Athens wished to beget children, he is said to have consulted the Pythian priestess, and to have been given that famous oracle in which she commanded him not to have intercourse with any woman until he reached Athens. However, Aegeus thought that this instruction was far from clearly expressed, and so on his way home he turned aside at Troezen and confided to Pittheus the god's actual words, which were as follows:

Loose not the jutting neck of the wineskin, great chief of the people,  
Till you have come once again to the city of Athens.

Pittheus evidently grasped the meaning of the oracle and either persuaded or enticed him into sleeping with Aethra. Afterwards, when Aegeus discovered that the girl was Pittheus's daughter and suspected that she was pregnant by him, he left a sword and a pair of sandals hidden under a great rock, which contained a hollow just big enough for these objects to fit into. He took nobody but Aethra into his confidence and told her that if she bore him a son and he was able, when he reached manhood, to lift the rock and take what had been left underneath, she must then send the boy secretly to him, bringing these tokens and, so far as possible, without anybody knowing of his journey. Aegeus was mortally afraid at that time of the sons of Pallas, his brother, who were plotting against him and who despised him for his childlessness; there were no less than fifty of these brothers, all of them sons of Pallas. After this he left Aethra.

4. According to one version of the story, when Aethra gave birth to a son, he was immediately named Theseus because the tokens for identifying him had been *placed* under the stone. Others, however, say that he was only given the name later at Athens, when Aegeus *acknowledged*<sup>1</sup> him as his son. He was brought up by Pittheus and had a master and tutor named Connidas. Even now the Athenians still offer a sacrifice of a ram to this man on the eve of the festival of Theseus, and indeed this mark of respect is far better deserved than are the honours they pay to Silanio and Parrhasius, who were merely the authors of paintings and statues of Theseus.

5. In those days it was still the custom for youths who were on the point of coming of age to visit Delphi and make a sacrifice to the god

1. The resemblance between this word and the word 'placed', above, obvious in Greek, cannot be reproduced in English.

of some of their hair, which was then cut for the first time. Theseus arrived in Delphi for this ceremony, and there is said to be a place which to this day is named the Theseia after him. However, he cut off only the front part of his hair, just as Homer tells us the Abantes did,<sup>1</sup> and this kind of tonsure was called Theseis in his memory.

Now the Abantes, who were the first to cut their hair in this fashion, did not learn it from the Arabs, as some people believe, nor did they do it out of rivalry with the Mysians. The reason was that they were a warlike people who practised hand-to-hand fighting, and had become more expert than any other race at forcing their way into close combat with the enemy. Archilochus bears witness to this in the following verses:<sup>2</sup>

No room for the whirling sling or the stretch of the bowstring,  
When fierce Ares comes striding to join in the thick of the battle  
Down in the plain: 'tis the sword brings death and mourning to many,  
For this is the hand-to-hand combat of which these men are the masters,  
The far-famed spearmen and lords of Euboea . . .

So in order to deny their enemies a hand-hold on their hair, they cut it off. No doubt Alexander of Macedon understood this, too, when he gave orders to his generals, so we are told, to have the beards of their Macedonians shaved, because these offered the easiest hold in battle.

6. All through his childhood, then, Aethra kept Theseus's true parentage a secret, and Pittheus put about the story that the boy's father was Poseidon. The people of Troezen pay special honours to Poseidon; he is the city's patron god, they offer him the first fruits of their sacrifices and his trident is used as an emblem on their coins. However, when Theseus had grown into a youth and shown that he possessed not only physical strength, but courage and a resolute spirit, combined with good sense and intelligence, then Aethra led him to the rock, explained to him the truth about his birth and told him to take his father's tokens from underneath it and sail to Athens. Theseus put his shoulder to the rock and lifted it with ease, but he refused to make the journey by sea, even though this was the safest route and his grandfather and mother begged him to take it. At this time it was difficult to travel to Athens by land, for the road was infested by bandits and ruffians and scarcely any part of it was free from them.

1. *Iliad*, ii, 542.

2. Bergk. *Poetae Lyrici Graeci*, ii, 383.

That age, it seems, produced a race of men who, for sheer strength of arm and swiftness of foot, were indefatigable and far surpassed the human scale, but who did not apply these gifts of nature to any just or useful purpose. Instead they exulted in an overbearing insolence and took advantage of their strength to behave with savage inhumanity and to seize, outrage, and murder all who fell into their hands. Consideration for others, justice, fair dealing, or humanity they regarded as qualities which men only praised because they lacked the courage to do wrong, or were afraid of being wronged themselves: they were no concern of men who were strong enough to get their own way. Some of these creatures were destroyed by Heracles on his many travels, but there were others who cowered and shrank into hiding as he passed by, and so escaped him, or else were spared as being too abject for his notice. Later, when Heracles had the misfortune to kill Iphitus, he departed to Lydia and served for a long time as a slave in Omphale's household. During this time there was peace and security in Lydia, but all over Greece the same outrages broke out again, because there was nobody to stamp them out or curb them.

It was therefore very dangerous to travel from the Peloponnese to Athens by land, and Pittheus tried to persuade Theseus to go by sea, by describing what each of these ruffians was like and how he treated strangers. What he did not know was that the young man had long been secretly fired by the renown which Heracles had won through his courage. He admired Heracles above all other heroes, and liked nothing better than to listen to anyone who could speak of the kind of man he was, and especially to people who had been witnesses of anything he had said or done. In fact he was evidently passing through the same state of mind that Themistocles<sup>1</sup> experienced many generations later, when he said that he could not sleep for thinking of Miltiades' victory. So with Theseus the valour of Heracles became his dream by night and in the daytime his desire to emulate the hero seized hold of him and spurred him on to achieve such exploits himself.

7. As it happened, the two were the sons of first cousins, and so related to one another. Aethra was the daughter of Pittheus, while Heracles' mother, Alcmene, was the daughter of Lysidice, and Lysidice and Pittheus were brother and sister, their parents being Pelops

1. See *Themistocles*, Ch. 3.

and Hippodameia. So Theseus felt that it would be an intolerable humiliation if he were to run away from whatever trials of courage he might have to face, while his cousin was setting out against evildoers everywhere and clearing them from land and sea. He would be disgracing his reputed father, Poseidon, by travelling over the sea like a fugitive, and he would be bringing his real father nothing but a pair of sandals and a sword not yet blooded as the evidence of his noble birth, instead of proving it at once by some equally noble exploit. It was in this spirit and with these thoughts in his head that he set out, resolved to do no wrong to any man, but to punish those who offered him violence.

8. So first of all in Epidauria he came upon Periphetes, who used a club as his weapon, and hence was known as the Club-bearer. Periphetes laid hands on him and tried to bar his passage, whereupon Theseus closed with him and killed him. The club took his fancy and so he made it his weapon and continued to use it just as Heracles did the lion-skin. The skin was worn to prove how gigantic a beast the hero had overcome, and Theseus in the same way carried the club, whose stroke he had been able to parry, but which in his hands was invincible.

At the Isthmus of Corinth he killed Sinis the Pine-bender by means of the very trick with which this man had murdered so many others. Theseus did this, too, without ever having learned or practised it himself, thereby proving that true valour will prevail against any amount of contrivance or practice. Now Sinis had a tall and very beautiful daughter named Perigune, who, when her father was killed, ran away and hid herself. Theseus looked for her high and low, but she had disappeared into a place which was overgrown with shrubs and rushes and wild asparagus; the girl in her childish innocence was imploring the plants to hide her, and promising that if they saved her, she would never trample them down or burn them. When Theseus called to her and gave her his word that he would do her no harm but treat her honourably, she came out. Theseus took her to his bed and she bore him a son, Melanippus, and afterwards became the wife of Deioneus the son of Eurytus the Oechalian, to whom Theseus gave her in marriage. Melanippus, in turn, became the father of Ioxus, who took part with Ornytus in leading a colony into Caria, and on this account the descendants of Ioxus, both men and women, have

made it an ancestral custom not to burn the asparagus thorn or the rush, but to revere and honour them.

9. The wild sow of Crommyon, which went by the name of Phaea, was no ordinary beast, but a ferocious creature and very hard to overcome. Theseus went out of his way to find and kill this animal, because he did not want to give the impression that he performed his exploits only when they were forced upon him. He also considered that in his dealings with human beings a brave man ought to fight the wicked only in self-defence, but that against the nobler beasts he should take the initiative and risk his life. Another account, however, has it that Phaea was a robber, a murderous and depraved woman, who lived in Crommyon and was nicknamed The Sow because of her life and habits, and whom Theseus afterwards killed.

10. He went on to kill Sciron on the borders of Megara by flinging him down the cliffs. According to the usual account, Sciron was a robber who preyed on passing travellers, but there is another story that he used to take the insolent liberty of stretching out his feet and ordering travellers to wash them, and as they were in the act of doing so, he would lash out and topple them into the sea. On the other hand Megarian writers challenge this version and, as Simonides expresses it, wage a campaign against antiquity. They say that Sciron was by no means a man of violence or a robber, but that on the contrary he put down robbery, and was not only related to good and just men but actively befriended them. They remind us that Aeacus is generally considered to have been the most upright of all Greeks, while Cychreus of Salamis is paid divine honours at Athens, and everyone knows of the virtues of Peleus and Telamon. Now Sciron was a son-in-law of Cychreus, father-in-law of Aeacus and grandfather of Peleus and Telamon, whose mother was Endeis, Sciron's daughter by Chariclo. They argue, then, that it is most unlikely that these paragons of men would have entered into a family alliance with an out-and-out villain and exchanged the most important and dearest of pledges with him. Their version is that this episode did not take place at all when Theseus first travelled to Athens, but that later he outwitted Diocles, the ruler of Eleusis, and captured the town from the Megarians and it was there that he killed Sciron. These events are beset with contradictions of this kind.

11. At Eleusis, too, he overcame Cercyon the Arcadian at wrestling and killed him. From there, continuing his journey a little further to Erineüs, he killed Damastes, known as Procrustes, by forcing him to make his body fit his own bed, just as Procrustes had done to strangers. In doing this he was following Heracles' example, for that hero always paid back those who offered him violence with the very same treatment that they had intended for him. In this way Heracles sacrificed Busiris, despatched Antaeus at wrestling and Cycnus in single combat, and killed Termerus by smashing his skull to pieces. It is from the last-named, so we are told, that the phrase 'a Termerian mischief' originates, for it appears that Termerus was in the habit of killing everyone who met him by dashing his head against theirs. So Theseus went on his way, punishing the wicked and meting out to them the same violence that they had inflicted on others, so that they were forced to submit to a justice that was modelled on their own injustice.

12. As he pursued his journey and came to the river Cephissus, the men of the race of the Phytalidae were the first to meet and welcome him. He asked to be purified of the guilt of bloodshed, and when they had granted his wish with the usual ceremonies and offered a propitiatory sacrifice, they feasted him in their houses. This was the first act of kindness that had been done him on his journey.

It is said to have been on the eighth day of the month Cronius, now called Hecatombion, that he reached Athens. There he found the city plunged into disorder and strife, and the affairs of Aegeus and his household in great distress. He had living with him Medea, who had been banished from Corinth and had promised to cure him of his childlessness by means of her spells. She was the first to discover who Theseus was, and since Aegeus did not know this and was now far advanced in years and full of fears because of the disturbed state of the city, she persuaded him to entertain Theseus as a foreign guest and kill him off with poison. When Theseus came to the banquet, he thought it best not to declare beforehand who he was: but in order to give his father a clue towards recognizing him, as soon as the meat was served, he drew his sword as if he were about to carve with it, and took care to attract his father's attention. Aegeus at once recognized the token, dashed down the cup of poison, and when he had tested his son, embraced him with delight; then he formally acknowledged Theseus before an assembly of the Athenians, who welcomed him gladly for

his noble qualities. It is said that, as the cup fell, the poison was spilled at the spot which is now the temple of Delphinian Apollo, for that was where Aegeus's house stood, and the statue of Hermes to the east of the sanctuary is known as the Hermes at Aegeus's gate.

13. Before Theseus appeared on the scene, the sons of Pallas had hoped to rule the kingdom after Aegeus, if he died childless, and they were enraged when Theseus was declared the successor. It was bad enough that Aegeus should wear the crown, since he was only an adopted son of Pandion and had no ties of blood with the house of Erechtheus, but that Theseus, a mere immigrant and a foreigner, should become the prospective king was altogether too much, and so they went to war. They divided their forces into two, one of which, led by Pallas, marched openly against the city from Sphettus, while the other hid itself at Gargettus and lay there in ambush, so as to attack the enemy from both sides. However, there was a herald with them named Leos, belonging to the deme of Hagnus, who betrayed to Theseus the plans of the Pallantidae. Theseus made a surprise attack upon the party that was lying in ambush and wiped it out, and when the other force under Pallas heard the news, they scattered. This is the reason, so they say, why the people of the deme of Pallene never intermarry with those of Hagnus, and why even the heralds there are not allowed to begin their proclamations with the customary phrase, 'Hear, ye people!': they detest the very word *leos*, because of the treachery of this man.

14. Theseus, who was eager for action, and anxious at the same time to win the people's favour, now set out against the bull of Marathon, which had been plaguing the inhabitants of the part of Attica known as the Tetrapolis. He mastered it and then drove it alive through the city for all to see, before sacrificing it to Apollo of the Dolphins. The story of Hecale, too, who is said to have welcomed and entertained Theseus on this expedition, seems to have some truth in it. The people of the demes in that neighbourhood were in the habit of meeting to perform the Hecalesian rites in honour of Zeus Hecalus, and they also paid honours to Hecale, whom they called by the diminutive name of Hecaline. This was because when she entertained Theseus, she caressed him as elderly people do children and called him affectionately by diminutive names in the same way, even though he was quite a young man. She made a vow, as the hero was setting out for his

struggle with the bull, that she would sacrifice to Zeus if he came back safely, but she died before he did so; hence these honours were paid to her at Theseus's command as a reward for her hospitality. This is the story which Philochorus has recorded.

15. Soon after this the collectors arrived from Crete for the third time to take away the customary tribute. Most writers agree that the payment of this tribute originated from the occasion when Androgeus was supposed to have been treacherously murdered in Attic territory. Because of this, not only did Minos carry on a war of devastation against the Athenians, but they were also visited with divine vengeance; the land would not bear fruit, there was a great plague and all the rivers dried up. Apollo then declared to them that if they placated Minos and became reconciled with him, the wrath of heaven would cease and they would be delivered from their sufferings. Thereupon they sent heralds and appealed to Minos and entered into an agreement to send him a tribute every nine years, consisting of seven young men and seven girls. According to the most dramatic version of the story, when these young men and women reached Crete, they were thrown into the Labyrinth and there killed by the Minotaur, or else wandered about and finally perished because they could find no way out; while the Minotaur itself, as Euripides tells us, was

A mingled form, where two strange shapes combined  
And different natures, man and bull, were joined.

16. However, according to Philochorus, the Cretans deny this and declare that the Labyrinth was indeed a dungeon, but had nothing wrong with it except that the prisoners could not escape. Minos, they explain, founded funeral games in memory of Androgeus, and the prizes he gave to the victors consisted of these young Athenians, who in the meanwhile were imprisoned in the Labyrinth. The victor in the first games to be held, they say, was the man who at that time possessed the greatest power under Minos, namely Taurus, his general, and he was anything but reasonable or gentle in his disposition and treated the young Athenians harshly and cruelly. Aristotle himself in his treatise *On the Constitution of Bottiaea* evidently does not believe that these young people were put to death by Minos, but that they lived on into old age as slaves in Crete. He says, too, that the Cretans at one time, in fulfilment of an ancient vow, sent some of their first-

born as an offering to Delphi, and that among the victims to go were some descendants of these Athenian slaves. When they found that they could not support themselves in Delphi, they first crossed to Italy and settled near Iapygia, and from there travelled to Thrace and were called Bottiaecans. This, he tells us, is the reason why the girls of Bottiaea, when they perform a certain sacrifice, accompany it with a hymn beginning 'To Athens let us go!'

This suggests how dangerous it is to incur the hatred of a city which is the mistress of eloquence and poetry, for Minos has constantly been reviled and attacked on the Attic stage, and it has not done him much good to be styled 'most royal' by Hesiod or 'Zeus's confidant' by Homer. In the event the tragic poets have had their way and have showered abuse on him from platform and stage and depicted him as a man of cruelty and violence. And yet we are also told that Minos was a king and a law-giver, and that Rhadamanthus was a judge under him and a guardian of the principles of justice which Minos had laid down.

17. So when the time came for the payment of the third tribute, and those fathers, whose sons were not yet married, were obliged to present them so that the victims could be drawn by lot, the cry went up once more against Aegeus. The unhappy people complained that the king, who was the cause of all their troubles, was the only man to be exempted from the penalty; he was content to see them robbed of their lawful children and left destitute, while he made over his kingdom to a bastard son of his own, who was not even an Athenian. Theseus was deeply troubled by this; he thought it only right that he should share the fate of his fellow citizens and not stand aloof from them, and so he came forward and offered to go to Crete himself, regardless of how the lot might fall. The Athenians were struck with admiration at his courage and delighted at his public spirit, and Aegeus, finding that his prayers and entreaties could do nothing to change his son's mind or turn him from his purpose, proceeded to cast lots for the rest.

Hellanicus, however, says that the Athenians did not send out the youths and girls by casting lots, but that Minos himself used to come and choose them, and that he now picked out Theseus first of all, in accordance with the usual conditions. These, he tells us, were that the Athenians should provide the ship and that the youths should embark and sail with him, but that none of them should carry any

warlike weapon, and finally that if the Minotaur were killed, then the penalty should lapse.

On the two earlier occasions, there had seemed to be no hope of deliverance, and so the Athenians had sent out their ship with a black sail, believing that it was carrying their youth to certain doom. But this time Theseus urged his father to take heart and boasted that he would overcome the Minotaur, and so Aegeus gave the pilot a second sail, a white one, and ordered him on the return voyage to hoist the white canvas if Theseus were safe, but otherwise to sail with the black as a sign of mourning.

According to Simonides, however, the sail that Aegeus gave the pilot was not white, but 'a scarlet sail dyed with the juicy blossom of the luxuriant holm-oak', and he intended this to be the sign of their deliverance. Again in Simonides' version the pilot was Phereclus, the son of Amarsyas, but, according to Philochorus, Theseus had Nausithoüs sent him by Scirus of Salamis as his pilot and Phaeax as his lookout. The reason for this was that the Athenians had not yet turned their attention to the sea and Scirus did him this favour, Philochorus tells us, because one of the chosen youths, Menesthes, was his daughter's son. This story is supported by the evidence of the memorial shrines for Nausithoüs and Phaeax, which Theseus had built at Phalerum, near the temple of Scirus, and it is said that the festival of the Cybernesia, or Pilot's festival, is held in their honour.

18. After the lot had been cast, Theseus took all those on whom it had fallen from the Prytaneum and went to the temple of the Dolphins, where, on their behalf, he dedicated his suppliant's symbol to Apollo: this was a bough from the sacred olive tree, wreathed with fillets of white wool. Then, when he had offered up his prayers, he went down to the sea. It was the sixth day of the month Munychion, and on this date, right up to the present, the Athenians still send their girls as suppliants to the temple of the Dolphins to propitiate Apollo. There is a story, too, that he was commanded by an oracle from the god at Delphi to make Aphrodite his guide and beg her to accompany him on his voyage, and that as he was sacrificing the customary she-goat to her on the shore, it was suddenly transformed into a male, and hence the goddess has the surname Epitragia.

19. When he arrived in Crete, as most of the historians and poets tell us, Ariadne fell in love with him; it was she who gave him the

famous thread and taught him how to find his way through the mazes of the Labyrinth, and there he killed the Minotaur and sailed away with Ariadne and the young Athenians. Pherecydes tells us that Theseus also stove in the bottoms of the Cretan ships and thus prevented them from pursuing him. And Demon adds that Minos's general Taurus was killed in a naval battle in the harbour as Theseus was sailing away. However, in Philochorus's version, Minos was holding the funeral games and Taurus was expected once again to beat all his rivals, but this success was far from being popular. Taurus's disposition had made his authority hated and there was a scandalous rumour that he was too intimate with Pasiphae, the queen. So when Theseus asked leave to challenge him, Minos granted his request. As it was the custom in Crete for women as well as men to watch the games, Ariadne was present and was not only captivated by Theseus's appearance, but filled with admiration at his strength as he overcame all his opponents. Minos, also, was especially pleased because he had defeated Taurus at wrestling and humiliated him, and so he restored the Athenian youths to Theseus and released Athens from the tribute.

Cleidemus, on the other hand, gives an unfamiliar and more ambitious account of these events, which begins a long way back. There was, he says, a decree in force throughout Greece that no trireme should sail from any port carrying a crew of more than five men. The only exception was made for Jason, the commander of the *Argo*, who sailed the seas clearing them of pirates. But when Daedalus escaped from Crete in a merchant ship and made for Athens, Minos, in defiance of the decree, set off in pursuit with his warships and was driven off his course by a storm to Sicily, where he lost his life. His son, Deucalion, who was by no means averse to a war with the Athenians, sent them a message demanding the surrender of Daedalus and threatening, if they refused, to put to death the young Athenians whom Minos had taken as hostages. Theseus replied in mild terms, but declined to give up Daedalus, who was his own cousin and blood-relation, his mother being Merope, the daughter of Erechtheus. In the meantime Theseus set himself to build a fleet, part of it in Attica at the deme of Thymoetadae, far away from any public high road, and part of it under the direction of Pittheus at Troezen, as he wanted to keep his plans secret.

When the ships were ready he set out, taking Daedalus and a

number of Cretan exiles as his guides. The Cretans had no warning of his movements and supposed that the oncoming fleet was friendly, so that Theseus was able to seize the harbour, disembark his men, and reach Cnossos before his arrival was discovered. There he fought a battle at the gates of the Labyrinth and killed Deucalion and his bodyguard. As Ariadne now succeeded to the throne, he made a truce with her, recovered the young Athenians, and concluded a pact of friendship between the Athenians and the Cretans, who swore that they would never in future begin a war with Athens.

20. There are many different accounts of these events, and of the story of Ariadne, none of which agree in their details. According to some versions she hanged herself when Theseus deserted her, while others tell us that she was taken to Naxos by sailors, that she lived there with Oenarus, the priest of Dionysus, and that Theseus had abandoned her because he was in love with another woman,

A passionate love for Aigle burned in his breast,  
Panopeus's daughter.

Hereas of Megara remarks that this line was removed from Hesiod's poems by Pisistratus, who also inserted into Homer's description of the underworld the verse

Theseus and Pirithous, illustrious children of the gods<sup>1</sup>

simply to please the Athenians. There are others who say that Ariadne actually bore two sons to Theseus, Oenopion and Staphylus, and among these writers is Ion of Chios, who refers to his native city

which long ago  
Oenopion, the son of Theseus, founded.

Now the more pleasing of these legends are common knowledge, one might say, but a very singular version of the story has been given us by Paeon, a native of the Cypriot town of Amathus. He says that Theseus was driven off his course by a storm to Cyprus, that Ariadne, who was pregnant and was suffering terribly from the motion of the ship, was put on shore by herself, and that Theseus, while trying to rescue the vessel, was swept out to sea again. The women of the island took care of Ariadne and tried to comfort her distress at being left alone by bringing her forged letters, supposed to have been written by

<sup>1</sup> *Odyssey*, xi, 631.

Theseus. They nursed and tended her while she was in labour, and when she died before the child was born, they buried her. Paeon adds that Theseus returned later and was overcome with grief: he left money with the people of the island, charging them to offer sacrifices to Ariadne, and also had two statuettes set up in her honour, one of silver and one of bronze. Paeon further tells us that at the sacrifice in her memory, which is held on the second day of the month Gorpiaeus, one of the young men lies on the ground and imitates the cries and movements of a woman in labour, and also that the people of Amathus call the grove, where they show her tomb, the grove of Ariadne Aphrodite.

Some of the Naxian writers also have a version of their own, to the effect that there are really two Minoses and two Ariadnes. One of these, they say, was married to Dionysus in Naxos and bore him Staphylus and his brother, while the other at a later date was carried off by Theseus and deserted by him and came to Naxos accompanied by a nurse named Corcyne, whose tomb they point out. This Ariadne, they say, also died here, but she is honoured in quite a different way from her predecessor; the festival to commemorate the first Ariadne is celebrated with gaiety and revelling, but in the sacrifices performed for the second it is a spirit of sorrow and lamentation which prevails.

21. On his way back from Crete, Theseus touched at Delos. There, when he had sacrificed to Apollo and dedicated in his temple the statue of Aphrodite which he had received from Ariadne, he and the Athenian youths with him executed a dance, which they say is still performed by the people of Delos, and which consists of a series of serpentine figures danced in regular time and representing the winding passages of the Labyrinth. The Delians call this kind of dance the Crane, according to Dicaearchus, and Theseus danced it round the altar known as the Keraton, which is made of horns all taken from the left side of the head. They also say that Theseus founded games at Delos and that he began there the practice of giving a palm to the victors.

22. The story goes that as they approached the shore of Attica Theseus was so overcome by joy that he forgot, and so, too, did his pilot, to hoist the sail which was to signal their safe return to Aegeus and he in despair threw himself down from the cliff and was killed.



Theseus meanwhile put in to the shore and himself offered up the sacrifices he had vowed to the gods at Phalerum when he sailed away, and sent a herald to announce his homecoming. The messenger found many of the people mourning the king's death, and others who were naturally enough overjoyed and ready to welcome him and crown him with garlands for their deliverance. He accepted the garlands and wreathed them around his herald's staff, but on his return to the seashore, he found that Theseus had not yet poured his libations to the gods, and so, as he did not wish to disturb the sacrifice, he waited outside the precinct. Then after the libations had been made, he announced the news of Aegeus's death, whereupon Theseus and his companions hurried with cries and lamentations into the city. So it is, the tradition says, that to this very day at the festival of the Oschophoria the Athenians do not crown the herald himself, but his staff, and at the libations the bystanders cry out 'Eleleu! Eleleu!': the first of these is the cry of eager haste or of triumph, the second of trouble or confusion.

After the funeral of his father, Theseus paid his vows to Apollo on the seventh day of the month Panepsion, for this was the day of their safe return to the city. The custom of boiling different kinds of pulse, which is observed on that day, is said to have originated from the fact that the young men whom Theseus had rescued mixed up all that was left of their provisions, boiled these in a single pot and ate the whole lot up together. At this festival the Athenians also carry the so-called Eiresione, which is an olive-bough wreathed with wool – such as Theseus had carried as a suppliant – and laden with various offerings of first-fruits, to signify that the time of scarcity is past. As they walk along they sing,

Eiresione brings figs for us and leaves of the finest wheat-flour,  
Brings us honey in pots, and oil to rub off from our bodies,  
And a beaker of heady wine for us all to go mellow to bed on.

Some writers claim that these ceremonies are performed in memory of the sons of Heracles, whom the Athenians received and entertained as suppliants in this way, but most report the tradition as I have done.

23. The thirty-oared galley in which Theseus sailed with the youths and returned safely was preserved by the Athenians down to the time

of Demetrius of Phalerum.<sup>1</sup> At intervals they removed the old timbers and replaced them with sound ones, so that the ship became a classic illustration for the philosophers of the disputed question of growth and change, some of them arguing that it remained the same, and others that it became a different vessel.

It was Theseus, too, who founded the Athenian festival of the Oschophoria, or carrying of the vine-branches. The story goes that he did not take with him all the young girls who had been chosen by lot on that occasion. Instead he picked out from among his friends two youths, who possessed plenty of nerve and spirit, but at the same time had fresh and girlish complexions. He gave them hot baths and kept them out of the sun, dressed their hair, made their skin smooth and improved their complexions with unguents, and in this way completely transformed their appearance. He also taught them how to imitate girls in their speech, their dress, and their walk, until they could pass unobserved, and he then included them among the girls destined for Crete without anybody discovering the secret. On his return, he and the young men led a procession, dressed in the same way as those who now carry the branches at the Oschophoria. They carry these in honour of Dionysus and Ariadne, because of the part which these two played in the story, or rather because Theseus and his companions returned to Athens at the time of the vintage. The women known as Deipnophoroi – supper-carriers – join in the procession and take part in the sacrifice to represent the mothers of the young men and girls who were chosen by lot, because they kept visiting their children to bring them bread and meat. At this festival, too, fables are recited, because these mothers used to tell their children stories to comfort them and keep up their spirits. These are the details, at any rate, which Demon has recorded for us. A sacred precinct was also set aside for Theseus, and he laid it down that those families which had given up their children as tribute for the Minotaur should pay for a sacrifice for himself. This sacrifice was presided over by the Phytalidae, whom Theseus rewarded in this way for their hospitality to him.<sup>2</sup>

24. After Aegeus's death Theseus conceived a wonderful and far-reaching plan, which was nothing less than to concentrate the inhabitants of Attica into a capital. In this way he transformed them into one

1. Regent of Athens for king Cassander of Macedon from 317 to 307B.C.

2. See Ch. 12.

people belonging to one city, whereas until then they had lived in widely scattered communities, so that it was difficult to bring them together for the common interest, and indeed at times they had even quarrelled and fought one another. So he now travelled around Attica and strove to convince them town by town and clan by clan. The common people and the poor responded at once to his appeal, while to the more influential classes he proposed a constitution without a king: there was to be a democracy, in which he would be no more than the commander of the army and the guardian of the laws, while in other respects everyone would be on an equal footing. Some were convinced by his arguments without any difficulty, and others, because they feared his power, which was already great, and his enterprising spirit, preferred to be persuaded rather than forced into agreement. He then proceeded to abolish the town halls, council chambers, and magistracies in the various districts. To replace them he built a single town-hall and senate house for the whole community on the site of the present Acropolis, and he named the city Athens and created a Pan-Athenaic festival as a ceremony for the whole of Attica. He also founded the *Metoeia*, or festival of the resident aliens, on the sixteenth day of the month Hecatombaeon, and this is still celebrated. Next he laid down his own royal power, as he had undertaken to do, and set to work to draw up the constitution, invoking for this purpose the authority of the gods. He had sent to Delphi to consult the oracle about the future of the city and this was the answer he received:

Son of the royal line of Aegeus and Pittheus's daughter,  
 Many the cities whose bounds and destinies shall be encompassed  
 Within your citadel's walls, for so has my father ordained it.  
 Be not oppressed with fear, but be counselled by bold resolution,  
 The bladder shall buoyantly ride the surging waves of the ocean.

And later on, so it is said, the Sibyl prophesied to Athens in the same strain, when she cried out,

The bladder may be submerged, but shall not drown: this is appointed.

25. As he was ambitious to increase the size of the city still further, Theseus invited people from every quarter to settle there on equal terms with the Athenians. In fact, the current phrase, 'Come hither, all ye peoples!', is supposed to have originated as a proclamation, employed by Theseus, when he established a commonwealth which

embraced all sorts and conditions of men. But he did not allow his democracy to fall into the disorder and confusion which an indiscriminate influx might have produced. He was the first to divide the city into three distinct classes, consisting of noblemen, husbandmen, and artisans. To the noblemen he assigned the care of religious rites, the filling of the magistracies, the teaching and administration of the laws, and the interpretation of all sacred matters, and for the rest of the citizens he established, as it were, a balance of privilege, on the assumption that the noblemen would excel in dignity, the husbandmen in utility, and the artisans in numerical strength. Aristotle says that he was the first ruler to incline towards democracy and give up the royal power, and this judgement seems to be confirmed by Homer too, for in the Catalogue of Ships in *The Iliad* it is the Athenians alone to whom he refers as 'a sovereign people'.

Theseus also struck a coinage and stamped it with the figure of an ox: here he may either have been commemorating the bull of Marathon, or possibly Taurus, Minos's general, or else he may have wished to encourage farming among the citizens. At any rate it was from this coinage that the phrase *worth ten* or *worth a hundred oxen* originated. He brought the territory of Megara securely under Athenian control and afterwards he set up that famous pillar on the Isthmus of Corinth, and carved on it the inscription which marks the frontier between the two countries. This consisted of two trimeters, of which the one facing east bore the legend:

Here is not the Peloponnese, but Ionia,

and that facing west:

Here is the Peloponnese, not Ionia.

He also founded games here to rival those of Heracles; his ambition was that just as the Greeks at Heracles' instance celebrated the Olympian games in honour of Zeus, so through his own initiative they should celebrate the Isthmian games in honour of his reputed father, Poseidon. The games which had previously been established at the Isthmus in honour of Melicertes were held at night and were organized more in the form of a religious rite than of a spectacle or a great public gathering. Some writers, however, have made out that the Isthmian games were founded in memory of Sciron, and that Theseus wished in this way to atone for his murder because of the

kinship between them, for Sciron was a son of Canethus and Henioche, who was the daughter of Pittheus. Others say that their son was not Sciron but Sinis, and that it was in his honour that Theseus founded the games. However this may be, Theseus established the festival and made an agreement with the Corinthians that Athenians who came to visit the games should be provided with a place of honour in as large a space as could be covered by the sail of the state galley, which brought them there, when it was stretched out on the ground. This is what we are told by Hellanicus and by Andron of Halicarnassus.

26. According to Philochorus and various other writers, Theseus also sailed to the Black Sea and took part in a campaign with Heracles against the Amazons and here he was given Antiope as a prize for his valour. But most authorities, including Pherecydes, Hellanicus, and Herodorus, tell us that Theseus made an expedition of his own there after the time of Heracles and took the Amazon prisoner, and this is a more convincing story. For there is no record that any of his companions captured an Amazon, while Bion mentions that even this one was carried off by a trick. The Amazons, according to him, were by nature well disposed to men and did not try to escape from Theseus when he landed on their coast. On the contrary, they even sent him presents and he invited the bearer of these to come on board his ship; then, as soon as she did so, he put out to sea.

An author named Menecrates, who wrote a history of the Bithynian city of Nicaea, says that Theseus with Antiope aboard his ship stayed for some time in those parts, and that he happened to have serving with him on this expedition three young Athenians who were brothers, named Euneos, Thoas, and Solois. Solois, he tells us, unknown to the others, fell in love with Antiope, and confided the secret to one of his intimate friends. This man approached Antiope on his behalf, but she firmly rejected him, although she handled the affair gently and with discretion and did not accuse him in front of Theseus. Solois in despair threw himself into a river and was drowned, and Theseus, when at last he heard of the young man's fate and the reason for it, was deeply distressed, and in his sorrow there came back to him the words of an oracle he had once been given at Delphi. The Pythian priestess there had charged him that when trouble came upon him and he was plunged into grief in a foreign land, he should found

a city there and leave some of his followers to govern it. So he founded a city on this spot and named it Pythopolis after the Pythian god, and the nearby river Solois in memory of the young man who had been drowned in it. He left Solois's two brothers to be the city's chief magistrates and lawgivers, together with Hermus, an Athenian nobleman. After him the people of Pythopolis call a certain place in the city the house of Hermes, mistakenly lengthening the second syllable and transferring the honour due to a hero to the god Hermes.

27. Now this expedition was the origin of the war with the Amazons, which seems to have been anything but a trivial or womanish affair; for the Amazons could never have pitched their camp inside the city walls or fought hand to hand close to what is now the Pnyx and the Museum, unless they had first overrun the surrounding country and so could safely approach the city. It is less easy to believe Hellanicus's statement that they came round by the Cimmerian Bosphorus, having crossed over on the ice, but the fact that they encamped almost in the heart of the city is confirmed both by the names of certain places there and also by the tombs of those who fell in battle.

Both sides held aloof for a long time and hesitated to begin the fighting, but at last Theseus, after sacrificing to Fear in obedience to an oracle, attacked the women. The battle took place in the month Boedromion on the day on which the Athenians still celebrate the festival of the Boedromia. Cleidemus, who sets out to give the exact details, states that the Amazons' left wing extended to what is now called the Amazoneum, while their right rested on the Pnyx, at the point where the gilded figure of Victory now stands. He says that the Athenians engaged the left wing, attacking it from the Museum, and that the tombs of those who fell are on either side of the street leading to the gate near the shrine of the hero Chalcodon, which is now known as the Piraeic gate. On this flank, he tells us, the women routed the Athenians and forced them back as far as the shrine of the Eumenides. But on the other side, the Athenians who attacked the Amazons from the Palladium and Ardetus and the Lyceum, drove their right wing back to their camp and killed great numbers of them. Cleidemus adds that after three months a peace was arranged through Hippolyta (for it is this name, not Antiope, which he gives to the Amazon whom Theseus married).

There is another story that Hippolyta was killed as she fought at

Theseus's side by a javelin thrown by Molpadia, and that the column which stands near the sanctuary of Olympian Earth was set up in her honour. But it is hardly surprising that history should go astray when it has to deal with events so remote in time as these. There is, for example, another tradition that Antiope had the wounded Amazons secretly moved to Chalcis and nursed there, and that some were buried in that neighbourhood near what it now called the Amazeum. However, we have at least some evidence that the war was ended by a treaty. The proof of this is the name of the place adjoining the Theseum, which is called Horcomosium, because of the oaths that were sworn there, and also the sacrifice which in ancient times was offered to the Amazons before the festival of Theseus.

The people of Megara also show a place in their country where Amazons were buried: it is on the way from the market square to the place named Rhus, where the so-called Rhomboid stands. Other Amazons are said to have died near Chaeronea and to have been buried by the banks of the little stream which in ancient times was apparently called Thermodon, but today has the name of Haemon. I have discussed the origins of these names in my life of Demosthenes.<sup>1</sup> And it appears that in Thessaly, too, the Amazons did not pass through unopposed, for their graves are pointed out to this day in the neighbourhood of Scotussa and Cynoscephalae.

28. So much, then, for the most important events in the story of the Amazons. There is, it is true, the so-called *Rising of the Amazons*, which was composed by the author of the *Theseid*, and tells how, after Theseus's marriage to Phaedra, Antiope and the Amazons who fought to avenge her attacked Theseus and were killed by Heracles, but this bears all too clearly the marks of a fable. Theseus certainly married Phaedra, but not until after the death of Antiope, by whom he had a son, Hippolytus, or Demophoön, as Pindar calls him. As for the terrible fate of Phaedra and Hippolytus, there is no contradiction between the versions of the historians and the tragic poets, and so we must suppose that it happened as all the tragedians represent it.

29. There are, however, other traditions about various marriages of Theseus which had neither an honourable beginning nor a happy ending, but these have never found their way on to the stage. For

1. *Demosthenes*, Ch. 19.

example Theseus is said to have carried off Anaxo, a girl from Troezen, and after killing Sinis and Cercyon to have ravished their daughters, and besides this to have married Periboea, the mother of Ajax, and later on Phereboea and Iope, the daughter of Iphicles. Then again it was because of his passion for Aigle, the daughter of Panopeus, that he is accused of having deserted Ariadne, as I have mentioned earlier, and this was neither an honourable nor even a decent action. Lastly, his kidnapping of Helen is said to have plunged Attica into war and brought about his own exile and his death. We shall return to this episode later.

Although there were many great exploits performed by the heroes of those days, Herodorus does not believe that Theseus played a part in any of them, except for fighting on the side of the Lapiths against the Centaurs. But there are other writers who claim that he not only went with Jason to Colchis but also helped Meleager to kill the Calydonian boar, and that his courage gave rise to the saying 'Not without Theseus'. They go on to say that he achieved many other noble exploits without the help of any companion, and that he inspired the phrase 'Here is a second Heracles'. He also helped Adrastus to recover the bodies of those who had been killed before the walls of the Cadmeia at Thebes, and he did this not by defeating the Thebans in battle, as Euripides makes out in *The Suppliants*,<sup>1</sup> but by persuading them to agree to a truce. This, at least, is what most writers say, and Philochorus adds that this was the first truce ever concluded for the purpose of recovering the bodies of the dead, although the stories written about Heracles mention that he was the first to restore the bodies of the dead to his enemies. The graves of the rank and file who fell before Thebes can be seen at Eleutherae, and those of the commanders near Eleusis, the latter burial being a favour which Theseus granted to Adrastus. What Euripides says about this in *The Suppliants*<sup>2</sup> is contradicted by Aeschylus in his *Eleusinians*,<sup>3</sup> where Theseus is brought on to tell the story as I have given it.

30. His friendship with Pirithous is said to have come about in this way. Theseus had won a great reputation for strength and courage and Pirithous wanted to put it to the test. So he drove Theseus's cattle

1. *Suppliants*, 653 ff.

2. *Suppliants*, 1213 ff.

3. Not extant.

away from the plain of Marathon, and when he found that the hero had taken up arms and set off in pursuit, he did not run away but turned and faced him. When they came in sight of one another, each was so struck with admiration for his opponent's person and courage that they refrained from fighting. Pirithous was the first to stretch out his hand; he then asked Theseus to make himself the judge of his robbery and declared that he would willingly submit to any penalty the other might inflict on him. At this Theseus not only let him off free, but invited him to be his friend and comrade in arms, and they sealed their friendship with an oath.

Later, when Pirithous was to marry Deidamia, he invited Theseus to the wedding to see the country and become acquainted with the Lapiths. He had also invited the Centaurs to the wedding feast, but as they became heated with wine, they grew insolent and began to lay hands on the women, whereupon the Lapiths instantly took revenge. They killed many of the Centaurs on the spot, and the rest they defeated in battle and drove out of their country, and Theseus fought on their side both at the wedding-feast and later in the war. Herodorus, however, gives a different account of this affair. He says that the war had already started when Theseus came to help the Lapiths, and that on his way there he saw Heracles for the first time. He had made a point of seeking him out at Trachis, where the hero was resting after his labours and long travels, and, according to Herodorus, the meeting took place with expressions of respect, goodwill, and generous praise on both sides. In spite of this, one might be more inclined to listen to those historians who say that the two heroes often met, and that it was at Theseus's desire that Heracles was initiated into the Eleusinian Mysteries and was also purified before the initiation at his own request, on account of various headstrong actions he had committed.

31. Theseus was already fifty years old, so Hellanicus tells us, when he took part in the kidnapping of Helen, who was not yet of an age to marry. There are some writers who consider this the worst of all the charges against him, because of his age at this time. And so in the attempt to exonerate him, they make out that it was not he who carried off Helen, but Idas and Lynceus, who handed her over for Theseus to guard and look after, and that he then refused to surrender her to her brothers Castor and Pollux when they demanded her back; others, if you can credit this, say that her father, Tyndareus, entrusted

her to Theseus for fear of Enarsphorus, the son of Hippocoön, who was trying to take her by force while she was still a child. However, the most likely account, and the one on which most writers agree, runs as follows.

Theseus and Pirithous travelled to Sparta together, laid hands on the girl as she was dancing in the temple of Artemis Orthia, and escaped with her. Their pursuers did not follow them any further than Tegea, and so the two friends, when they had crossed the Peloponnese and were out of danger, struck a bargain with one another: whichever of them drew Helen by lot was to marry her, but must also help the other to find another wife. On this understanding they cast lots and Theseus won, but as the girl was still too young to marry, he took her to Aphidnae.<sup>1</sup> Here he placed her in his mother's company and entrusted both of them to the care of his friend, Aphidnus, telling him to guard them in absolute secrecy. Then, by way of repaying Pirithous's service, he travelled with him to Epirus to ask for the hand of the daughter of Aidoneus, the king of the Molossians, who called his wife Phersephone, his daughter Kore, and his dog Cerberus. Every prospective suitor was obliged to fight the dog and his daughter's hand was promised to whoever should be the victor. However, when Aidoneus found out that Pirithous and his friend had come there not to woo his daughter but to carry her off, he seized them both. He disposed of Pirithous by letting the dog kill him, but he kept Theseus in close confinement.

32. Meanwhile back at Athens, Menestheus, the son of Peteos, grandson of Orneus and great-grandson of Erechtheus, had taken a hand in affairs. He was the first man, they say, to cultivate the arts of the demagogue and to ingratiate himself with the people. He began by uniting the nobles and stirring up their resentment. They had long harboured a grudge against Theseus, because they felt that he had deprived each of the country magnates of his rule and authority and then herded them all into a single city, where he treated them as subjects and slaves. At the same time he also set the masses in a ferment with the accusations he brought against Theseus. He told them that while they might delude themselves with the dream of liberty, the truth was that they had been robbed of their native cities and their sacred rites, and all to make them look up to a single master

1. A town in Attica, some twenty miles north-east of Athens.

who was an immigrant and a foreigner, in place of the many excellent rulers of their own blood. While Menestheus was hard at work sowing discontent, the sons of Tyndareus marched against the city and the war did a great deal to help his revolutionary schemes; in fact some writers go so far as to say that it was he who induced the invaders to come.

At first they offered no violence, but merely demanded back their sister. But when the Athenians replied that she was not in their hands, nor did they even know where she had been left, then the war began in earnest. However, Academus, who had discovered by some means that Helen was hidden at Aphidnae, told them the secret. For this reason he was honoured by the sons of Tyndareus for the rest of his life, and on the many later occasions when the Spartans invaded Attica and devastated all the country round about, they spared the ground which is known as the Academy<sup>1</sup> for his sake. Dicaearchus, on the other hand, says that there were two Arcadians, Echedemus and Marathus, serving in the army of the Tyndaridae at this time, and that it was after the first of these that the present Academy was originally named Echedemia, while the second gave his name to the town of Marathon; this was because, in obedience to some oracle, he allowed himself to be sacrificed in front of the whole army.

The sons of Tyndareus came to Aphidnae, then, won a battle there and captured the town. It is said that Sciron's son, Alycus, who was fighting at that time in the army of the Dioscuri, was killed there, and that a place in Megara, where he was buried, bears the name of Alycus after him. However, Hereas writes that Alycus was killed at Aphidnae by Theseus himself,

He whom Theseus slew on the broad plain of Aphidnae,  
Fighting for fair-haired Helen.

On the other hand it does not seem likely that Theseus was there himself when his mother and the town of Aphidnae were captured.

33. At any rate Aphidnae was taken and panic reigned in Athens. However, Menestheus persuaded the people to receive the sons of Tyndareus into the city and treat them hospitably. He pointed out that it was only with Theseus, who had been the first to commit

1. A grove near the river Cephissus about a mile north-west of Athens, where Plato and his disciples taught.

violence, that they were at war, but that to the rest of mankind they behaved as saviours and benefactors. And, indeed, their conduct confirmed what he said, for although they were now the masters of the whole city, the only demand they made was to be initiated into the Eleusinian Mysteries, on the grounds that they had as close a connexion with the city as Heracles. This privilege was granted to them after they had been adopted by Aphidnus, just as Heracles had been by Pylus. They also received divine honours, such as are paid to the gods, and were addressed as *Anakes*. This title may have been derived from the fact of their having stopped the war, or else from the great care they took that nobody should suffer injury, even with so large an army inside the walls. Those who guard or take care of anything are said to do it *anacos*, and it may be that this is why kings are called *Anaktes*. Another explanation is that the sons of Tyndareus are called *Anakes* on account of the appearance of their twin stars in the heavens, because the Athenians use the words *anekas* and *anekathen* for *ano* and *anohen* to mean *above* or *on high*.

34. It is also said that Aethra, Theseus's mother who had been captured at Aphidnae, was carried off to Sparta and from there later to Troy, and Homer confirms this when he says that Helen was attended by

Aethra, the daughter of Pittheus, and ox-eyed Clymene.<sup>1</sup>

Other people, however, reject this verse as spurious, as well as the story of Munychus, who is said to have been the illegitimate child of Laodice and Demophoon, and whom Aethra helped to bring up at Troy. On the other hand Ister, in the thirteenth book of his *History of Attica*, tells a very strange and quite different story about Aethra. There is a tradition, he says, that Paris was defeated in battle by Achilles and Patroclus on the banks of the river Spercheus in Thessaly, but that Hector captured and plundered the city of Troezen and carried off Aethra, who had been left there. But this seems a very unlikely tale.

35. Now while Heracles was being entertained by Aidoneus the Molossian, the king happened to mention the affair of Theseus and Pirithous, explaining to him what they had come there to do and how they had been punished when they were found out. Heracles was

1. *Iliad*, iii, 144.

shocked to hear how the one had died ignominiously, while the other was only waiting for death. He felt that it was useless to blame the king for Pirithous's fate, but he begged him to release Theseus and claimed this as a favour to himself. Aidoneus granted his plea and Theseus was set free and returned to Athens, where his friends had not yet altogether lost their power. All the sacred places which the city had previously set apart for him he now dedicated to Heracles, and he changed their names from Theseia to Heracleia, with only four exceptions, as Philochorus tells us. But when he attempted to set himself up as before as the head of the state, he found himself plunged into all kinds of disturbances and party strife. He discovered that the hatred of those who had been his enemies when he went away was now reinforced by contempt, and also that a great part of the people had been spoiled and now expected to be flattered into obeying his commands, instead of accepting them without question. When he tried to get his way by force, he found himself outmanoeuvred by demagogues and factions and finally, despairing of his prospects, he sent his children away secretly into Euboea to Elephenor, the son of Chalcodon. Then, after solemnly calling down curses upon the Athenians at Gargettus (where to this day the spot is named Araterion, or the place of curses) he sailed away to Scyros. He expected to be well received there, and he also owned some ancestral estates on the island. At that time Lycomedes was king of Scyros and Theseus applied to him to have his lands restored, as he intended to live there, although according to another account he asked the king to help him against the Athenians. But Lycomedes, either because he was afraid of a man of Theseus's reputation, or else because he wanted to do Menestheus a favour, led Theseus up to the highest point in the island under the pretext of showing him his estate from there, and then pushed him over the cliffs to his death. There is another story, however, that Theseus slipped and fell of his own accord while he was taking a walk, as his habit was, after his evening meal. At the time nobody paid much attention to his death. Menestheus was now king at Athens, while Theseus's sons served with Elephenor as private citizens on the expedition to Troy, but after Menestheus's death in the Trojan war, they returned by themselves and regained possession of the kingdom. In later times, however, there were various reasons which led the Athenians to honour Theseus as a demi-god; the most remarkable of these was the fact that many of the men who fought the Medes at Marathon believed

that they saw the apparition of Theseus, clad in full armour and charging ahead of them against the barbarians.

36. After the Persian wars, when Phaedo was archon,<sup>1</sup> the Athenians consulted the oracle at Delphi and were instructed by the Pythian priestess to bring home the bones of Theseus, give them honourable burial in Athens and guard them as sacred relics. It was a difficult task to discover the grave and take away the remains because of the inhospitable and savage temper of the Dolopians, who at that time were the inhabitants of Scyros. However, Cimon captured the island, as I have described in his *Life*,<sup>2</sup> and made it a point of honour to find the spot where Theseus was buried. He caught sight of an eagle, at a place which had the appearance of a mound, pecking at the ground with its beak and tearing it up with its talons, and by some divine inspiration he concluded that they should dig at this place. There they found a coffin of a man of gigantic size and, lying beside it, a bronze spear and a sword. When Cimon brought these relics home on board his trireme, the Athenians were overjoyed and welcomed them with magnificent processions and sacrifices, as though the hero himself were returning to his city. He lies buried in the heart of Athens near the place where the Gymnasium<sup>3</sup> now stands, and his tomb is a sanctuary for runaway slaves and all those who are poor and down-trodden and fear the strong, for Theseus all through his life was the champion and helper of the distressed and always listened kindly to the petitions of the poor. The principal sacrifice which the Athenians offer in his honour falls on the eighth day of the month Pyanepsion, the day on which he returned from Crete with the Athenian youths. Besides this day they also honour him on the eighth day of the other months, either because he originally came to Athens from Troezen on the eighth day of the month Hecatombaeon, as Diodorus the Topographer has recorded, or else because they regard this number as being peculiarly his own, as a reputed son of Poseidon. The reason for this is that they pay honours to Poseidon on the eighth day of every month. The number eight is the first cube of an even number and also the double of the first square. It is therefore an especially appropriate symbol for the immovable and abiding power of this god, whom we call the stay and upholder of the earth.

1. 476-475 B.C.

2. *Cimon*, Ch. 8.

3. Built by Ptolemy Philadelphus and described in Pausanias, i, 17.

# THE RISE AND FALL OF ATHENS

NINE GREEK LIVES  
BY PLUTARCH

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THESEUS  
SOLON  
THEMISTOCLES  
ARISTIDES  
CIMON  
PERICLES  
NICIAS  
ALCIBIADES  
LYSANDER

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TRANSLATED WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY  
IAN SCOTT-KILVERT

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