

Classical Civilisation

Topic: The Universal Hero: Heracles/Hercules

This topic covers the following:

- 1 Heracles Early-Life**
- 2 The Twelve Labours of Heracles**
- 3 The Twelve Labours in Art and Sculpture**
- 4 The Twelve Labours on the Temple of Zeus**
- 5 The Homeric Hymn to Heracles**
- 6 The Lesser Adventures of Hercules:**
 - Battle with Cacus**
 - Battle with Achelous**
 - Battle with Nessus**
 - Death of Hercules**

Name:

In this topic, we explore the idea of heroes in Ancient Greece and Rome, with a focus on Heracles (more commonly known as Hercules). We will examine the twelve labours of Heracles, and his importance to Ancient Olympia. For the Roman element we will study Hercules' victories over Achelous and Nessus as told by the poet Ovid. We will also learn about Hercules' victory over Cacus through a section of Virgil's Aeneid. We will also compare and contrast the importance of Hercules to the Greeks and Romans.

The Twelve Labours of Heracles

1	Slay the Nemean Lion	After realising the skin of the lion was impregnable to arrows, Heracles strangled the lion to death. Heracles presented Eurystheus with the lion's skin which he had to remove from the lion using the lion's claw as his own knife would not work on it.	
2	Slay the Lernaean Hydra	Heracles asked his cousin, Iolaus, for help and each time he removed a head, Iolaus would seal the neck with a flaming torch. Heracles removed the immortal head of the Hydra and buried it in the ground, and used its venom for his own arrows.	
3	Capture the Golden Hind of Artemis	This was not quite the same danger as the previous two tasks but was hard because of the speed of the animal. After tracking it for one whole year, he was able to capture it, bind its legs and carried it back to Mycenae. He would later return the animal.	
4	Capture the Erymanthian Boar	Like the Golden Hind, the boar was much larger than normal boars and was terrorising the countryside of Arcadia. Heracles wore the boar down through the thick winter snow. When it tired, Heracles caught it, bound it and took it back to Mycenae.	
5	Clean the Augean Stables	Heracles had to clean the stables of an enormous herd of cattle in one day. It would have been impossible had Heracles cleverly diverted the rivers Alpheios and Peneios through the stables, cleaning them instantly.	
6	Slay the Stymphalian Birds	The birds had been ravaging the lands, some suggested they ate the residents too. To rouse the birds from the marshes, Heracles used a rattle made by Hephaistos from Athena. As the birds flew into the air, he shot them all down with his venomous arrows.	
7	Capture the Cretan Bull	The bull had been destroying homes and farmland in Crete. Heracles crept up behind it and strangled it to the point of death where upon he released it and it came under his control. He rode it back to Mycenae, which includes across the sea (I), and back to Mycenae.	
8	Steal the Mares of Diomedes	The king kept a set of horses that were crazed due to them being fed on the limbs of defeated enemies. Heracles stole the horses and Diomedes sent soldiers after him. Heracles would end up feeding Diomedes to his own horses before taking the horses back to Mycenae.	
9	Obtain the Belt of Hippolyte	Hippolyte's belt was given to her by father, Ares, and Heracles had to steal it. Hippolyte gave him her belt because she greatly admired his work in previous labours. Yet, Hera intervened and disguised as an Amazonian, persuaded them that Heracles was going to steal the Queen herself. It resulted in a battle in which Heracles kills Hippolyte.	
10	Steal the Cattle of Geryon	Heracles stole Geryon's cattle but whilst stealing them, he was attacked by Geryon who had three heads and three sets of arms and legs. Heracles would eventually club Geryon to death and take the cattle back to Mycenae.	
11	Steal the Golden Apples of Hesperides	A monumental task that sees Heracles fight the river god, Achelous, set Prometheus free from his eternal punishment on Mount Caucasus, and steal the golden apples from Hesperides, the daughter's of Atlas. To do this final part, he would trick Atlas into doing it, and then trick Atlas again to return to his eternal punishment of holding up the skies.	
12	Capture and bring back Cerberus	His final task was to bring Cerberus from the Underworld. After winning Persephone's favour, Hades suggested that if Heracles could tame Cerberus, he could take him to Mycenae. Heracles used the stranglehold used so successfully on the Nemean Lion and the Cretan Bull.	

The Birth and Early-Life of Heracles

13	Parents	Heracles has a human mother, Alcmena, and a divine father, Zeus. Alcmena thought she was sharing her bed with her husband, Amphitryon because Zeus disguised himself as him. Yet, Alcmena was also pregnant with Amphitryon's baby meaning she would have two children.
14	Hera's Wrath	Just before the boys were born, Zeus boasted that as he ruled the skies, his son would rule the Earth. Hera was angry at Zeus' affair so made him vow that which ever son was born first would rule. Hera even tried to have Heracles and Alcmena die during the birth. Eurystheus was born first and became King of Mycenae; Heracles had no official power.
15	The Snake Plot	Hera was furious that her plan to have Heracles killed at birth failed, so she sent two snakes to poison Heracles as a baby. Heracles strangled the snakes in his cot showing his immense, and god-like, strength.
16	Athena the Protector	Following the failed snake plot, and frightened by Hera's anger, Alcmena abandoned Heracles in the woods where he was recovered by Athena. She took him to Mount Olympus but he was sent away by Hera. From this point onwards, Athena would be his protector and he was returned to his mother.
17	Hera's Revenge	When he became a man, Heracles married Megara, the daughter of the King of Thebes. Still engaged by Zeus' affair and her hatred of Heracles, she sent the goddess of madness, Mania, to infect Heracles. In his madness he killed his wife and children.
18	Oracle of Delphi	In his depression, Heracles exiled himself from Thebes and consulted with the Oracle of Delphi as to what he should do. It advised Heracles should atone for his crimes. Little did he know, Hera had taken over the oracle of Delphi and this was her plan.
19	The Twelve Labours	To atone for his crimes, King Eurystheus (guided by Hera) set Heracles 10 tasks to complete which he believed would be impossible and see Heracles die. However, it was extended to 12 tasks as during two of them, Heracles received either help or payment.

Heracles and Ancient Olympia

20	Ancient Olympia	Ancient Olympia is the home of the Olympic Games, which were founded in 776BC. Olympia is in the ancient province of Elis. This is the place where Heracles carried out his fifth labour: The Augean Stables.
21	The Temple of Zeus Metopes	Heracles and the Olympic Games will be forever linked due to his twelve labours being represented on the Temple of Zeus with 12 metopes. Six are above the entrance and six over the back entrance.

Roman Hercules: Stories of Cacus, Achelous and Nessus

22	Roman Hercules	The Romans inherited their ideas about Hercules from the Greeks but they do have their own stories about him: The battle with Cacus, the battle between Hercules and Achelous, the battle with Nessus, and his death.
23	Hercules and Cacus	The story of Hercules and Cacus happens during his tenth labour, the Cattle of Geryon. When he was driving the cattle back to Mycenae, he stopped at Pallantium on the River Tiber, where Rome would later be founded. It was here that Hercules heard that Cacus had been terrorising the people of Pallantium. Whilst resting, Cacus would steal Hercules' cattle. This would lead to a fight where Hercules would be triumphant.
25	Cult of Hercules	This led to the cult of Hercules in Rome. This led to an annual sacrifice at the Great Altar of Hercules, which later would become the location of the Temple of Hercules in the Forum Boarium in Rome.
26	Hercules and Achelous	The story of Hercules and Achelous is a fight over who should marry the princess Deianira of Aitolia. Achelous was a river god and both refused to back down so whoever won the fight would marry the princess. Again, Hercules would prove to be triumphant in a fight between the two.
27	Hercules and Nessus	Hercules' confrontation with the centaur, Nessus, would eventually lead to his death. Hercules would kill Nessus for capturing his wife. The arrow used by Hercules contained venom from the Hydra and seeped into Nessus' shirt which he tricked Hercules' wife into accepting as a gift.
28	The Death of Hercules	Juno in her hatred of Hercules continued to spread lies and create problems for Hercules. She spread rumours about how Hercules did not love his wife but another, a princess called Iole. Deianira placed Nessus' cloak around Hercules in the hope it would revive his love for her. The cloak though was cursed and during the heat of a sacrifice it burnt and stuck to Hercules' skin causing him to die.
29	Hercules becomes a God	Upon his death, Jupiter gave a speech to the other Olympian gods and asked that Hercules be allowed onto Olympus for all his heroic deeds on Earth. All agreed, including Juno, so Hercules shed his mortal skin and became an immortal god.

Glossary: The Universal Hero: Heracles/Hercules

	Keyword	Definition
1	Homer	Greek writer of epic poetry; author of the <i>The Iliad</i> , <i>The Odyssey</i> , and <i>The Homeric Hymns</i>
2	Homeric Hymn	The Homeric Hymns are a collection of poems/hymns about the gods, credited to Homer
3	Hydra	A many-headed serpent monster
4	Hind	A deer
5	Pithos Jar	A large clay storage jar
6	Pisa	A town near Olympia in the Greek Peloponnese
7	Linchpin	A fastener used to stop a wheel coming off its axis
8	Pediment	Triangular area at the top of each end of a temple, which usually contained sculpture
9	Metope	Square decorative space for sculpture that ran around a doric temple's frieze
10	Tiber	The main river running through Rome
11	Centaur	A mythical creature with the upper body of a man and lower body of a horse
12	Pyre	A funeral mound made of wood on which to cremate a body
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1 What was Heracles' early-life like?

Task: Read the following information.

The Birth of Heracles

The story of Heracles' birth is set in mythical times when Alcmene and Amphitryon lived in Thebes. At this time, Creon was King of Thebes. When Creon was on a campaign with Amphitryon, Zeus visited Alcmene. As is explained in the *Homeric Hymn to Heracles the Lion-Hearted*, Heracles was born to a human mother and divine father. In order to avoid suspicion, Zeus took the form of Amphitryon and therefore Alcmene thought she was sharing a bed with her husband:

Heracles, Zeus' son, I will celebrate, who, greatest and best of those on earth, was born in Thebes' beautiful palaces, Alcmene having slept with the black-clouded son of Cronos.

Homeric Hymn 15, Lines 1-3

Upon his return Amphitryon slept with Alcmene, but then he found out from a seer that Alcmene had slept with another man. Although initially fuming at this, when he discovered that the other man was in fact a god, Amphitryon was surprisingly relieved. Thus, Alcmene was now pregnant with two children, one was Zeus', the other Amphitryon's. When the boys were about to be born Zeus boasted that he would now have a son that could match him on earth: while he ruled the skies, his son would rule the earth.

Enraged by his promiscuities Hera made Zeus vow that the first son of the House of Perseus born that night would indeed rule. Once he did this, Hera asked her daughter Eileithyia [Goddess of midwives and childbirth] to prolong Alcmene's labour until Sthenelus' [brother of Amphitryon] son, Eurystheus, was born. Having succeeded in this, Hera hoped the prolonged labour would kill both Alcmene and the unborn Heracles. However, due to the help of Alcmene's midwife, the plan failed and Heracles was born. However, this still meant that Eurystheus became King of Mycenae while Heracles and his half-brother, Iphicles, held no official power.

Unhappy that her plot to kill Heracles was unsuccessful, Hera sent two snakes to poison Heracles. Again, this plot failed when Heracles strangled the snakes. Frightened by Hera's wrath, Alcmene abandoned Heracles in the woods where he was recovered by Athena. Athena took Heracles to Mount Olympus in the hope that he would be accepted there, but Hera rejected him and ordered that he be returned to Alcmene to raise him. From this point, Athena was Heracles' protector.

The Early-Life of Heracles

Many things he did that were reckless, many things he suffered.

Homeric Hymn 14, Lines 6-7

Here the Homeric Hymn is making reference to Heracles' early-life. When he came of age, Heracles married Creon's daughter Megara. The marriage did not last long. Still enraged by Zeus' affair, Hera sent the goddess Madness to infect Heracles. Driven insane, Heracles killed his children and wife.

In his depression, Heracles exiled himself from Thebes and went to consult the Oracle of Delphi as to what he should do. Again, unbeknown to him, Hera was in control of the Oracle and advised Heracles that he should serve King Eurystheus for ten years. It was from this time that Heracles started his twelve labours.

Task: Using the information on the previous page, answer the questions below.

1. Describe who each of the following people are:

Name	Description
Heracles	
Alcmene	
Amphitryon	
Zeus	
Hera	
Eileithyia	
Sthenelus	
Eurystheus	
Iphicles	

2. Why did Hera take such a disliking to Heracles?

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3. Identify two ways that Hera tried to kill Heracles in his early-life?

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4. Why did both the above ways you have identified fail?

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5. Who did Heracles marry when he became of age?

6. After his marriage, what did Hera do in another attempt to exact revenge on Heracles for Zeus' affair?

7. As a consequence of the above, Heracles visited the Oracle of Delphi as to what he should do next. What did it advise?

THE TWELVE LABOURS

OF

HERACLES

GREEK VISUAL SOURCES

Heracles would be most famous for the twelve labours he has to carry out for King Eurystheus.

The labours were to atone for his killing of his family whilst under the powers of the Goddess Mania, who was acting on Hera's command. Little did Heracles realise that these tasks were set by Eurystheus, but Hera was always in the background determined to see Heracles fail. In return for completing his labours, Heracles was promised immortality, something we will explore in the Roman section of the topic.

Each labour was designed to see Heracles fail and get increasingly more difficult or challenging for Heracles. Originally it was to be ten labours, but this was increased as two were declared invalid: The Lernaean Hydra (Labour Two) and the Augean Stables (Labour Five).

Over the next few pages are the twelve labours of Heracles in more detail and this section of the topic explores how they are represented visually by the Greeks.

1	To slay the Nemean Lion	7	To capture the Cretan Bull
2	To slay the Lernaean Hydra	8	To steal the Mares of Diomedes
3	To capture the Golden Hind	9	To steal the Belt of Hippolyte
4	To capture the Erymanthian Boar	10	To capture the Cattle of Geryon
5	To clean the Augean Stables	11	To steal the Apples of the Hesperides
6	To kill the Stymphalian Birds	12	To capture Cerberus

2 The Twelve Labours of Heracles

1 To Slay the Nemean Lion



This was the first of Heracles' labours, and so in art he is sometimes depicted more youthful than in his later labours.

After attacking the lion with his bow and arrows and his sword, Heracles realised that the skin of the lion was impregnable to weapons, therefore he strangled it to death.

Even dead the lion still posed problems for Heracles, because he needed to present a prize to King Eurystheus as proof of his victory. But he could not skin the lion with his knife.

Finally, Athena told Heracles to use one of the lion's own claws to skin it. He was successful and took the prize back to king. From this point Heracles was often depicted wearing the lion skin as a cloak with the lion's head as a helmet.

2 To Slay the Lernaean Hydra



As the second of the labours Eurystheus tasked Heracles with killing the Lernaean Hydra. The hydra had many heads and venom for blood. The main problem that Heracles faced was that one head was removed from the hydra, two more would grow back in its place.

So Heracles got help from his cousin Iolaus. After Heracles removed one of the heads, Iolaus would seal the neck with a flaming torch.

Enraged at Heracles' progress, Hera sent a giant crab to attack him. After it bit Heracles on the foot, he crushed it and continued his attack on the hydra. Once all the heads were removed, Heracles detached the immortal head and buried it under a pile of rocks.

When the hydra was defeated, Heracles used its venom as poison for his arrows.

Upon returning to the Eurystheus, he was told by the king that the labour did not count as he had received help from his cousin.

3 To Capture the Golden Hind of Artemis



The Golden Hind was known as the Ceryneian Hind as it was from Mount Ceryneia in Arcadia. This hind was special as it was said to be larger than a bull and golden from horn to hooves. It was also sacred to Artemis.

As Heracles' third labour the Golden Hind did not pose the same level of danger as the previous two. However, the task was difficult owing to the swiftness of the animal. Heracles tracked the hind for a whole year before he was finally able to catch it by snaring it. He then bound its legs and carried it back to Mycenae.

On his journey back to Mycenae, Heracles was met by Apollo and his sister Artemis who was angry that Heracles had caught her sacred hind. Fortunately, when he told her that he had been forced into it by King Eurystheus, and that he only intended to borrow the animal, her anger subsided and she allowed him to continue on his way.

4 To Capture the Erymanthian Boar



As his fourth labour Heracles was ordered by King Eurystheus to bring the Erymanthian Boar back to him alive.

Like the Golden Hind, the boar was much larger than normal boars and was terrorising the countryside of Arcadia.

Heracles wore the boar down by chasing it through the thick winter snow. When the boar tired, Heracles caught it, bound its legs and carried it back to Mycenae.

On Heracles' arrival, the king was so scared that he hid in a sunken clay storage jar.

5 To Clean the Augean Stables



As his fifth labour, Heracles was tasked with cleaning the stables of Augeas, King of Elis, in one day. Augeas was famed for having a herd of enormous cattle that produced an extremely large amount of dung and so Eurystheus thought the task impossible.

Heracles once again rose to the challenge and with advice from Athena, he used a combination of brains and brawn to divert the rivers Alpheios and Peneios through the stables, cleaning them instantly.

Initially, Augeas promised Heracles payment. However, once the task was complete, he refused. Enraged at this, Heracles returned with an army and defeated the king.

To commemorate his victory Heracles founded the Olympic Games for his father, Zeus.

6 To Kill the Stymphalian Birds



The sixth of Heracles' labours was to defeat the Stymphalian Birds. The birds had been ravaging the farm lands of Stymphalos, some accounts even suggesting that they ate the residents too.

This task took Heracles deep into the Arcadian forests where the Stymphalian Marsh was. Unsure of how to rouse the birds, Heracles received help from Athena who gave him a rattle made by the god Hephaistos.

After shaking it the birds flew into the sky, and Heracles then shot them down either with his arrows or a sling shot.



For his seventh labour, Heracles had to bring Eurystheus the Cretan Bull to Mycenae.

The bull had been destroying Cretan homes and farmland, and so when Heracles arrived, King Minos was happy to let him remove it.

To do this Heracles crept up behind the bull and strangled it, but importantly, he released his grip before the bull passed out.

He then rode the bull across the sea to Greece. Upon returning to Mycenae, King Eurystheus was once again terrified of the animal brought before him and hid in his clay storage jar again.



Diomedes was the King of the Bistones in Thrace. The king owned a set of horses that he kept tethered in a bronze manger with iron chains.

The horses were crazed as their master fed them on the limbs of defeated enemies and passing strangers. Upon arriving Heracles defeated the stablemen looking after the horses.

When he discovered the loss of his horses, Diomedes set out with his men to overcome Heracles. Heracles left the horses with his companion Abderos while he went to fight Diomedes.

While he was away the horses overpowered Abderos and ate him.

In retaliation, Heracles fed Diomedes to his own horses after defeating him. With their appetites calmed, Heracles took the horses back to Eurystheus.



Hippolyte was the queen of the Amazons, a race of female warriors who lived near the Black Sea. Hippolyte was given a magical belt by her father Ares. Eurystheus' daughter wanted the belt for herself and so the king sent Heracles to retrieve it as his ninth labour.

Like his journey to Diomedes, Heracles once again took an army because he expected trouble. Unbeknown to him, Hippolyte greatly admired the deeds Heracles had performed, so when she greeted him she freely offered her belt to him.

Unhappy with the ease of the task, the goddess Hera took the form of an Amazonian. She then spread rumours that Heracles planned to steal the queen, not just her belt. Enraged by Heracles' apparent scheming the Amazons rode out to kill Heracles and his men.

Seeing the Amazons arriving from a distance Heracles now thought that the queen had been scheming all along and had never planned to hand him the belt. A bloody battle followed in which Heracles killed Hippolyte and took the belt.

10 To Capture the Cattle of Geryon



Unlike his previous nine tasks the cattle of Geryon took Heracles beyond the Greek world to the edge of the earth. Eurystheus tasked Heracles with fetching Geryon's cattle who were famed for the red hides.

To steal the cattle Heracles first had to defeat the herdsman Eurytion and his dog Orthrus. After beating them with his club, Heracles began to leave with the cattle. Another shepherd warned Geryon of Heracles' actions and so Geryon quickly rushed after Heracles.

Geryon was no normal man, he had three heads and three sets of arms and legs. Eventually, Heracles was successful, using his club and bow to defeat Geryon.

The journey back took Heracles through southern Italy and it was here that the Romans forged their link with Heracles in their version of the story. Upon returning to Mycenae, Eurystheus sacrificed the bulls from the herd to Hera.

11 To Steal the Golden Apples of Hesperides



In the garden of the Hesperides grew the golden apples which Gaia presented as a wedding gift to Zeus and Hera. The apples were guarded by the Hesperides, who were Nymphs, daughters of Atlas, and were associated with the light of the world. Heracles' eleventh task was to collect the golden apples.

This turned out to be one of Heracles' longest tasks as he was initially unaware of where the garden was. His journey took him from Northern Africa to the Near East, then to Illyria. It was in Illyria that he fought the river god Achelous.

His final stop was on Mount Caucasus. It was here that the Titan Prometheus was chained. For defying the gods, Zeus chained him to the mountain and each day an eagle would come and peck out his liver. Each night his liver would grow back and the process started again. When Heracles arrived, he killed the eagle. As a reward, Prometheus told Heracles how to acquire the apples.

Heracles travelled to Atlas who had been tasked with holding up the skies by Zeus. Heracles offered to hold the sky if Atlas would get the apples. Atlas accepted. When he returned, Atlas offered to deliver the apples himself so that he would not have to take back the skies. Heracles now showed his cleverness. He accepted Atlas' offer but asked that Atlas take them back for one moment while he got some pillows to cushion his shoulders. When Atlas took them back, Heracles picked up the apples and ran off with them.

As the apples were the property of Zeus they were not allowed to stay with King Eurystheus. Once Heracles presented them to him, Athena took them back to the garden.

12 To Capture Cerberus



Heracles' final task was the retrieval of Cerberus from the underworld.

In order to gain the favour of Persephone, Heracles was initiated into the Eleusinian Mysteries [a cult to Persephone].

Upon arriving in the underworld, he was greeted by Persephone and Hades who presented Heracles with a challenge. If he could capture Cerberus without any weapons, he would be allowed to take him to Eurystheus. Heracles accepted and used his stranglehold that had proved so successful against the Nemean Lion and Cretan Bull.

After presenting Cerberus to Eurystheus he was returned to Hades to guard the entrance to the underworld.

Task: Answer the following questions using the information about the twelve labours of Heracles

1. Why couldn't Heracles kill the Nemean Lion with his bow and arrow or sword?

2. Why was the Lernaean Hydra such a difficult monster to kill?

3. Which goddess did Heracles offend when capturing the golden hind?

4. How did Heracles clean the Augean stables in just one day?

5. Who gave Heracles help in killing the Stymphalian birds?

6. Why were the Mares of Diomedes so crazed as animals?

7. Which goddess intervened in Heracles' quest to steal the belt of Hippolyte, and why?

8. Describe what Geryon looked like?

9. Which god did Heracles rescue from his eternal punishment when on his quest for the golden apples of Hesperides?

10. Which god did Heracles trick into holding up the skies for him during his quest for the golden apples of Hesperides?

11. List the labours that Heracles used his stranglehold to complete his task.

12. List the labours that Heracles received help in, and who specifically from.

13. What heroic qualities did Heracles display while completing his labours?

14. Using the heroic traits identified in question 1, which of Heracles' labours was his most heroic? Justify your answer with evidence.

Read the following two definitions.

Dangerous

able or likely to cause harm or injury.

Challenging

testing one's abilities; demanding.

1. Complete the chart below by dividing Heracles' labours into Dangerous or Challenging, or both.

Dangerous	Both	Challenging

2. Which of the above would you argue was Heracles' most dangerous labour?

3. Which of the above would you argue was Heracles' most challenging labour?

It is imperative that we are able to identify Heracles and his twelve labours in art and sculpture, much like we did with the Gods and Goddesses back in the first topic.

We should be able to recognise the labour by recognising clues within the piece of art that depict the labour or through symbols associated with it – this is not always easy and misidentification can lead to exam questions being answered wrongly. For example, we should be able to identify his first labour through either the lion being depicted, Athena being present to help, or him removing the lion pelt.

There are exam questions that ask you directly to identify a labour depicted on a piece of pottery or a piece of sculpture, and explain how you are able to identify them.

The example below shows what we mean by this. The pottery is a Greek amphora and shows a depiction of Heracles' first labour: the slaying of the Nemean Lion.

We know it is this one because, despite it not being easily recognisable, the lion is seen being strangled by Heracles.



Identified Labour

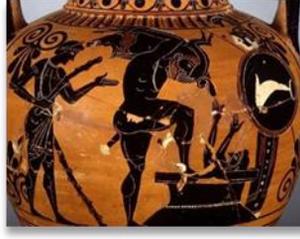
The slaying of the Nemean Lion

Explanation why

- Lion depicted in centre of vase and identifiable through mane and tale.
- Heracles has the lion in a stranglehold which was how Heracles killed him.



Task: Look at all the pieces of pottery below and identify which of Heracles' labours are depicted on it, and explain why.

	Identified Labour	Explanation why
		
		
		
		
		
		

Task: Look at the Roman sarcophagus below. Can you identify which of Heracles' twelve labours are depicted in the sculpture and explain how you know? Your task is to annotate the sarcophagus directly. The first one has been done for you.



Labour: Nemean Lion
Lion skin being dragged by
Heracles.

All temples have a frieze, and they are found below the roof and above the tops of a colonnade of columns. The frieze is one area where relief sculpture would be displayed. The sculpture displayed would be chosen specifically to project an image or message to the people viewing it. Doric temples friezes were divided up into sections called metopes, whereas ionic temple friezes would have one continuous scene. The image below shows one corner of the Parthenon frieze which is doric.



metope

A square-shaped panel decorated with relief sculpture (where the sculpture remains attached to the background). These panels would decorate the space between the bottom of the roof and the tops of the columns of a Greek temple.

triglyph

A series of three vertical grooves separating metopes.

Example: A metope from the Parthenon

The success of a metope can be judged through three key criteria, and the example shows how that criteria has been fulfilled.

The criteria is:

The scene is recognisable:

The scene is recognisable as a scene of the Centauroomachy as it clearly has a centaur in it seemingly in conflict with a human.

The scene is dynamic and contains movement/action:

The scene has a tremendous amount of dynamism to it. This is best demonstrated by the movement of the human and centaur away from each other. The sculptor has the human almost pushing on his right leg to move away from the centaur whilst also reaching out to the centaur and pulling him back, shown with the arched back of the centaur.

The potential blank space in the metope is cleverly filled.

The scene has the potential blank space but the sculptor has cleverly filled this with the human's cloak. The way it drapes over his arms and shoulders and falls between him and the centaur means the potential blank space between him and the centaur is gone.

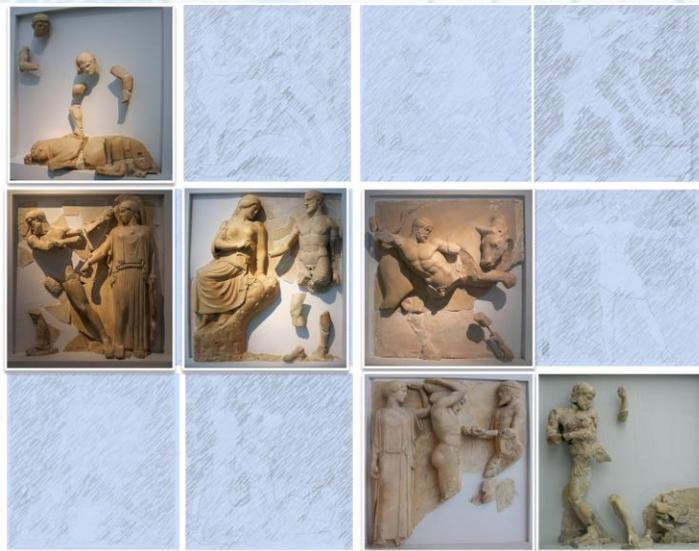


The Temple of Zeus at Olympia is a doric temple with, therefore, metopes on its frieze. As we know from our study of the Temple of Zeus in Topic Two: Religion in the City, the metopes depict Heracles twelve labours.

Below are what the original metopes would have looked like if all twelve had survived next to an image of the remaining metopes we actually have.

Artist Impression of Metopes on Temple of Zeus:

Actual Remaining Metopes from Temple of Zeus:



It is of vital importance that we are able to identify Heracles' twelve labours from these metopes and explain how we know it is that specific labour. We also have to be able to refer our understanding of the metope back to the criteria for what makes it successful. Let's explore one of these metopes as an example as is of his seventh labour: capturing the Cretan Bull.

Another of Heracles' labours was to capture the Cretan Bull. He sailed to Crete where King Minos allowed him to remove the bull because it had caused a series of problems for Crete, destroying the agriculture. In capturing the bull, Heracles is seen to be bringing civilisation by ridding the area of a monster.

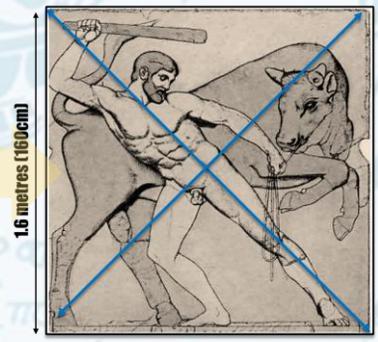
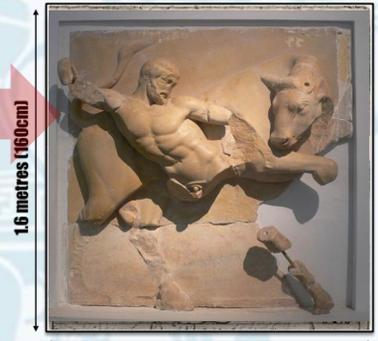
The composition of this metope consists of two diagonal lines as Heracles and the bull cross one another. Heracles leans to the left, by resting his weight on his bent right leg and seemingly lunging to the side. He has pulled the bull's head round so that beast and man confront each other. Their eyes bring the focus into the centre of the metope. The dramatic turn of his head behind him shows he is in full control of the animal, as he tames it.

The bull, however, probably rested on its back feet with the front two in the air; this mid-action pose makes the scene more dramatic and active, and reflects how the bull is in a weaker position than its new master.

The X-shape formed by the two bodies creates a powerful composition as the contestants strain away from one another. This dynamic design reflects the difficulty of the task, as well as the strain Heracles experienced when taming this wild beast. The sculptor has tried to fill the whole available space of the metope, using the bull's tail to occupy the top-left corner.

Heracles is depicted as a mature figure, with a beard. His developed musculature does not show youth, but rather his mature physical strength.

The sculptor has tried to make his torso respond to the twist in his body while still showing off his exaggerated strength, but it is not yet a naturalistic depiction of the human form.



Task: Your task is to annotate the following metopes from the Temple of Zeus according to the criteria that makes a metope successful. Your annotations should refer to specifics from the metope to support your answer.



Identified Labour:

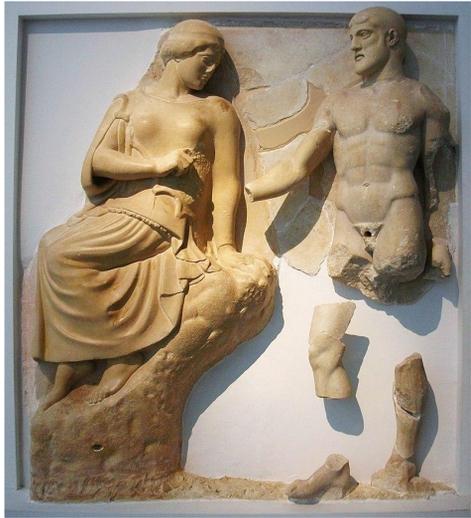
Criteria	Evidence
Recognisable	
Dynamism	
Blank Space	



Identified Labour:

Criteria	Evidence
Recognisable	
Dynamism	
Blank Space	

Task: Your task is to annotate the following metopes from the Temple of Zeus according to the criteria that makes a metope successful. Your annotations should refer to specifics from the metope to support your answer.



Identified Labour:

Criteria	Evidence
Recognisable	
Dynamism	
Blank Space	



Identified Labour:

Criteria	Evidence
Recognisable	
Dynamism	
Blank Space	

Task: Your task is to annotate the following metopes from the Temple of Zeus according to the criteria that makes a metope successful. Your annotations should refer to specifics from the metope to support your answer.



Identified Labour:

Criteria	Evidence
Recognisable	
Dynamism	
Blank Space	



Identified Labour:

Criteria	Evidence
Recognisable	
Dynamism	
Blank Space	

What can we learn about Heracles from the Homeric Hymn to Heracles?

Homer is a classical poet from Ancient Greece who would write *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*, which are both considered major works that profoundly changed the course of western literature. He would also write a series of poems, or hymns, about the gods, one of which is about Heracles.

The Homeric Hymn to Heracles the Lion Hearted is very short, in fact, just a couple of lines long, compared to others such as the Homeric Hymn to Demeter which is over 400 lines long. The hymn is outlined below.

Task: Your task is to annotate each line of the hymn with your understanding of what it means from everything we have learnt about Heracles and his twelve labours.

Parents: Zeus and
Alcmene - means he
is a demi-god as he
has one mortal and
one immortal parent.

Heracles, Zeus' son, I will celebrate, who, greatest and best

of those on earth, was born in Thebes' beautiful places,

Alcmene having slept with the black-clouded son of Cronus:

At one time, by lands and seas impossible to count,

He wandered, sent away by Lord Eurystheus,

Many things he did that were reckless, many things he suffered:

Now, however, in the beautiful abode of snowy Olympus

He dwells, enjoying himself with beautiful-ankled Hebe.

Farewell, lord, Zeus's son: grant both excellence and happiness.

Source D: Homeric Hymn to Heracles the Lionhearted**Source D:
Homeric Hymn to Heracles the Lion Hearted**

Heracles, Zeus' son, I will celebrate, who, greatest and best of those on earth, was born in Thebes' beautiful places, Alcmena having slept with the black-clouded son of Cronus: At one time, by lands and seas impossible to count, He wandered, sent away by Lord Eurystheus, Many things he did that were reckless, many things he suffered: Now, however, in the beautiful abode of snowy Olympus He dwells, enjoying himself with beautiful-ankled Hebe. Farewell, lord, Zeus's son: grant both excellence and happiness.

Source E: A section of the frieze at the Temple of Apollo at Bassae**Study Sources D and E**

- 8** 'Heracles deserved his heroic status.' How far do you agree with this statement? Use Source D and E as a starting point and your own knowledge to answer the question.

Deserving of his heroic status	Undeserving of his heroic status

A series of horizontal dashed lines for writing.

THE LESSER ADVENTURES OF HERCULES

ROMAN WRITTEN SOURCES

Whilst Heracles is a Greek hero, famous for his twelve labours, he is also a Roman hero known as Hercules and is worshipped as a god.

We explore this relationship with the Romans through three key stories that are the lesser-known adventures of Hercules: the battle with Cacus, the battle with Achelous, and the battle with Nessus that would lead to Hercules' death.

Over the next pages are these adventures in more detail and this section of the topic explores how they are represented by the Romans in written sources.

Key Stories:

Battle with Cacus



This story sees Hercules arrive in Italy and save a town from a monster called Cacus. Told through Virgil's Aeneid.

Battle with Achelous



This story sees Hercules fight a river god called Achelous for the hand in marriage of Deianira. Told through Ovid's Metamorphoses.

Battle with Nessus



This story sees Hercules confront and kill a centaur called Nessus, of which the consequence will usher in Hercules' mortal death. Told through Ovid's Metamorphoses.

Death of Hercules



The death of Hercules is set several years after his battle with Nessus, but would be directly connected. It also tells of him becoming immortal. Told through Ovid's Metamorphoses.

The Story of Cacus

Then he replied briefly, so: 'How gladly I know, and welcome you, bravest of Trojans! How it brings back your father's speech, the voice and features of noble Anchises! For I recall how Priam, son of Laomedon, visiting the realms of his sister, Hesione, and seeking Salamis, came on further to see the chill territories of Arcadia. In those days first youth clothed my cheeks with bloom, and I marvelled at the Trojan leaders, and marvelled at the son of Laomedon himself: but Anchises as he walked was taller than all. My mind burned with youthful desire to address the hero, and clasp his hand in mine: I approached and led him eagerly inside the walls of Pheneus. On leaving he gave me a noble quiver of Lycian arrows, a cloak woven with gold, and a pair of golden bits, that my Pallas now owns. So the hand of mine you look for is joined in alliance, and when tomorrow's dawn returns to the earth, I'll send you off cheered by my help, and aid you with stores.

Meanwhile, since you come to us as friends, favour us by celebrating this annual festival, which it is wrong to delay and become accustomed to your friends' table.'

When he had spoken he ordered the food and drink that had been removed to be replaced, and seated the warriors himself on the turf benches.

He welcomed Aeneas as the principal guest, and invited him to a maple-wood throne covered by a shaggy lion's pelt.

Then the altar priest with young men he had chosen competed to bring on the roast meat from the bulls, pile the baked bread in baskets, and serve the wine. Aeneas and the men of Troy feasted on an entire chine of beef, and the sacrificial organs.

When hunger had been banished, and desire for food sated, King Evander said: 'No idle superstition, or ignorance of the ancient gods, forced these solemn rites of ours, this ritual banquet, this altar to so great a divinity, upon us. We perform them, and repeat the honours due, Trojan guest, because we were saved from cruel perils.

Now look first at this rocky overhanging cliff, how its bulk is widely shattered, and the mountain lair stands deserted, and the crags have been pulled down in mighty ruin. There was a cave here, receding to vast depths, untouched by the sun's rays, inhabited by the fell shape of Cacus, the half-human, and the ground was always warm with fresh blood, and the heads of men, insolently nailed to the doors, hung there pallid with sad decay. Vulcan was father to this monster: and, as he moved his massive bulk, he belched out his dark fires.

Now at last time brought what we wished, the presence and assistance of a god. Hercules, the greatest of avengers, appeared, proud of the killing and the spoils of three-fold Geryon, driving his great bulls along as victor, and his cattle occupied the valley and the river.

This story is taken from Virgil's Aeneid and tells the story of how Hercules defeats a monstrous creature called Cacus who has been terrorising a city.

It is being told by King Evander to the Trojan hero, and later Roman hero, Aeneas.

To place in context, Aeneas and his followers have fled Troy after it was destroyed by the Greeks at the end of the Trojan War.

Aeneas has arrived in Italy just as King Evander is about to celebrate an annual festival - this annual festival is dedicated to Hercules for what he did to save the city. King Evander asks Aeneas and his men to join the sacrifice and celebrate with them.

Notice the reference to Hercules' lion pelt when they sit ready for the feast that follows the sacrifice.

It is at this point that Evander tells them of how Hercules came to rescue them from '...cruel perils' and why it is important they remember this.

The description of Cacus and his home is brilliant and incredibly vivid by Virgil. He describes Cacus as a 'fell shape', 'half-human', of 'massive bulk', and 'he belched out his dark fires'. You get an instant impression that Cacus is definitely the antagonist of the story.

Virgil describes his home equally vividly. He calls it a 'cave' suggesting it belongs to a savage or beast. He describes the ground 'as always warm with fresh blood' suggesting Cacus has killed, but then confirmed with the doors being covered with heads that have been nailed to it.

Virgil then juxtaposes the description of the antagonist with a description of the protagonist, Hercules. He is described as 'the greatest of avengers', and most importantly, as 'a god'.

The Story of Cacus

And Cacus, his mind mad with frenzy, lest any wickedness or cunning be left un-dared or un-tried drove off four bulls of outstanding quality, and as many heifers of exceptional beauty, from their stalls. And, so there might be no forward-pointing spoor, the thief dragged them into his cave by the tail, and, reversing the signs of their tracks, hid them in the stony dark: no one seeking them would find a trail to the cave.

Meanwhile, as Hercules, Amphitryon's son, was moving the well-fed herd from their stalls, and preparing to leave, the cattle lowed as they went out, all the woods were filled with their complaining, and the sound echoed from the hills. One heifer returned their call, and lowed from the deep cave, and foiled Cacus's hopes from her prison.

At this Hercules's indignation truly blazed, with a venomous dark rage: he seized weapons in his hand, and his heavy knotted club, and quickly sought the slopes of the high mountain. Then for the first time my people saw Cacus afraid, confusion in his eyes: he fled at once, swifter than the East Wind, heading for his cave: fear lent wings to his feet.

As he shut himself in, and blocked the entrance securely, throwing against it a giant rock, hung there in chains by his father's craft, by shattering the links, **behold Hercules arrived in a tearing passion, turning his head this way and that, scanning every approach, and gnashing his teeth. Hot with rage, three times he circled the whole Aventine Hill, three times he tried the stony doorway in vain, three times he sank down, exhausted, in the valley.**

A sharp pinnacle of flint, the rock shorn away on every side, stood, tall to see, rising behind the cave, a suitable place for vile birds to nest. He shook it, where it lay, it's ridge sloping towards the river on the left, straining at it from the right, loosening its deepest roots, and tearing it out, then suddenly hurling it away, the highest heavens thundered with the blow, the banks broke apart, and the terrified river recoiled. **But Cacus's den and his vast realm stood revealed, and the shadowy caverns within lay open, no differently than if earth, gaping deep within, were to unlock the infernal regions by force, and disclose the pallid realms, hated by the gods, and the vast abyss be seen from above, and the spirits tremble at incoming light.**

So Hercules, calling upon all his weapons, hurled missiles at Cacus from above, caught suddenly in unexpected daylight, penned in the hollow rock, with unaccustomed howling, and rained boughs and giant blocks of stone on him. He on the other hand, since there was no escape now from the danger, belched thick smoke from his throat (marvellous to tell) and enveloped the place in blind darkness, blotting the view from sight, and gathering smoke-laden night in the cave, a darkness mixed with fire.

Evander, after describing the two main characters, continues his story and reveals the whole narrative of what happens between Cacus and Hercules.

It starts with Cacus who manages to steal four of the prized-bulls from Hercules. Remember, these bulls are no ordinary bulls, they are the cattle that Hercules stole from Geryon on his tenth labour, and it is during his return to Mycenae that he encounters Cacus.

Cacus might be a vicious monster but he is quite clever as he reverses the cattle into his cave making the hoof prints look like they are going the other way. In fact, Hercules only notices they have gone when the other cattle start lowing for the missing ones.

Hercules responds in a rage, and there are some beautiful metaphors used by Virgil - 'venomous dark rage'. Cacus responds with genuine fear, probably never having come across someone to challenge him.

Cacus responds by shutting himself in his cave by dropping a giant rock in front of it and shattering the chains that allow it to move up and down - interestingly, the chains were made by his father, Vulcan.

Hercules reaction is furious, but confused as he cannot get into the cave. He circles the hill three times, three times he tries to break open the door, and he fails and looks defeated. This is a good literary device used by Virgil here, he slows the pace creating a situation for the reader where it looks like Hercules cannot win, which is what the reader is expecting.

We then get the resolution as Hercules uses his strength to tear open Cacus' cave. We get a brilliantly vivid description of the interior of the cave with lines such as 'infernal regions' and the 'pallid realms' and the 'vast abyss' suggesting it is almost hellish in appearance.

As Hercules exposes the cave, we see Cacus almost spotlighted by the light entering. We see the monstrous nature of Cacus as he realises his end is nigh and in one last bid to survive, he breathes thick smoke to make it difficult for Hercules to spot him.

The Story of Cacus

Hercules in his pride could not endure it, and he threw himself, with a headlong leap, through the flames, where the smoke gave out its densest billows, and black mist heaved in the great cavern. Here, as Cacus belched out useless flame in the darkness, Hercules seized him in a knot-like clasp, and, clinging, choked him the eyes squeezed, and the throat drained of blood.

Immediately the doors were ripped out, and the dark den exposed, the stolen cattle, and the theft Cacus denied, were revealed to the heavens, and the shapeless carcass dragged out by the feet. The people could not get their fill of gazing at the hideous eyes, the face, and shaggy bristling chest of the half-man, and the ashes of the jaw's flames.

Because of that this rite is celebrated, and happy posterity remembers the day: and Potitius, the first, the founder, with the Pinarian House as guardians of the worship of Hercules, set up this altar in the grove, which shall be spoken of for ever by us as 'The Mightiest', and the mightiest it shall be for ever.

Come now, O you young men, wreathe your hair with leaves, hold out wine-cups in your right hands, in honour of such great glory, and call on the god we know and pour out the wine with a will.'

He spoke, while grey-green poplar veiled his hair with Hercules's own shade, hanging down in a knot of leaves, and the sacred cup filled his hand. Quickly they all poured a joyful libation on the table, and prayed to the gods.

Hercules, showing true bravery or foolishness, dives headlong into the cave and darkness to find Cacus who continues to belch out smoke and fire.

We see Hercules, like we have in so many of his previous tasks, use his strength and stranglehold to kill Cacus. The description is incredible vivid with 'eyes bulging' and the throat 'drained of blood' suggesting how tight he has strangled him.

The town now celebrate the victory and each year offer a sacrifice to Hercules for what he did.

At this Hercules's indignation truly blazed, with a venomous dark rage: he seized weapons in his hand, and his heavy knotted club, and quickly sought the slopes of the high mountain. Then for the first time my people saw Cacus afraid, confusion in his eyes: he fled at once, swifter than the East Wind, heading for his cave: fear lent wings to his feet.

3. How successfully does Virgil create a vivid scene in the above lines? Explain your answer.

4. How does Virgil create a fearsome monster in Cacus? Find examples from the text where Virgil has described either Cacus' appearance or his characteristics.

5. Did Hercules use brain or brawn in his pursuit of Cacus? Justify your answer with evidence from the Aeneid.

Achelous Wrestles with Hercules

Theseus, the hero, reputed son of Neptune, asked Acheloüs why he had sighed, and the reason for his damaged forehead: to which the Calydonian river-god, his uncut hair wreathed with reeds, replied: 'You ask something painful of me. Who wants to recall the battles he has lost? But, I will tell it as it happened: since the shame of being beaten is no less than the honour of having fought. It is a great consolation to me that the victor was so famous.'

If her name has ever come to your notice, Deianira was once the most beautiful girl, and the jealous hope of many suitors. When, with them, I entered Oeneus's house, her father, and the man I sought as my father-in-law, I said: "Accept me as your son-in-law, son of Parthaon." Hercules, scion of Alceus, said the same. The others gave way before the two of us. Hercules declared that he could offer Jove as his bride's father-in-law, spoke of his famous labours, and of how he had survived what his stepmother, Juno, had prescribed for him. On my side I said: "It would be shameful for a god to concede to a mortal" – He was not yet a god – "In me you see the lord of the waters, that flow in winding rivers, through your kingdom. As your son-in-law I would not be a stranger sent from a foreign shore, but a native, and wedded to your own interests. Only don't let it harm my case that Queen Juno does not hate me, and all the punishment of the labours, she demanded, passed me by!"

"Now, listen, Hercules, you, son of Alcmena: Jupiter, whose child you boast of being, is either wrongly called your father, or is truly a wrongdoer. You seek your father in a mother's adultery. Choose whether you prefer this fiction of Jove as a father, or to be born the son of shame." As I spoke, he gazed at me fiercely, all the while, and unable to act like a man and control his blazing anger, he merely replied in these words: "My right hand is more powerful than my tongue. As long as I beat you at wrestling, you can win the talking", and he came at me ferociously. I was ashamed to retreat, after my words: I took off my green robes; put up my arms; held my hands, fingers curved, in front of my chest in fighting stance; and readied my limbs for the match. He caught up dust in the hollow of his hands and threw it over me, and, in turn, was, himself, gilded by the yellow sand. Now he caught at my neck, or you might think he caught me, now at my legs, now at my loins: and attacked me from every side. My weight protected me, and his attempts were useless. I was like a massive pile that the roaring flood assaults with all its might: it remains, secure in its own bulk.

We pulled away for a moment, returned to the conflict, and stood firm, determined not to concede. Foot was set against foot, and I pushed at him, with my chest full forward, fingers locked with fingers, and head to head. I have seen two strong bulls come together like that, when they try for the sleekest heifer in the pasture as their prize in the contest. The herd watches in fear, not sure to which one victory will grant overriding supremacy. Three times without success Hercules tried to push my gleaming chest away from him. At the fourth attempt, he broke my grip, loosed himself from my constricting arms, and with a blow of his hand – certainly, I myself confess it is the truth – he turned me about, and clung, with all his weight, to my back.

The next episode of Hercules' story is after he has completed all his labours and is the story of how he met his wife, Deianira.

Like the previous story with Cacus, Ovid uses the technique of flashback to tell it. It is in fact Heracles' cousin, Theseus, who is discussing with Achelous how he came to have a damaged head. Achelous tells the story as he feels no shame in how it happened as his opponent, not yet revealed to the reader, was 'so famous'.

Deianira was a beautiful girl who many suitors wished to marry. However, two dominate this: Achelous and Hercules. Both argue to their prospective father-in-law, their reasons why they were the better match. Hercules speaks of his famous labours, and how he had survived Juno's [Hera's] attempts to kill him. Achelous argument was that he was a god and just because Juno did not hate him, he should not be disadvantaged.

Achelous then antagonises Hercules – he goads him by questioning who his father really is, insults his mother, and we see Hercules react in a similar manner to which he did with Cacus; he responds with rage and the two fight.

Achelous describes the fight in real detail and we get a real sense of just how powerful Hercules is as he grapples with Achelous. We get a sense of his speed as well as Achelous describes him coming at him from all angles.

However, like the story of Cacus, and like Virgil, Ovid creates a moment of doubt for the reader, even if we know that Achelous will be hurt by Heracles. There is even a similar line, 'Three times without success...'

Yet, this doubt is removed when Hercules finally gets Achelous in some form of grip. Achelous in telling the story is quite open about how he achieved it: '...and with a blow of my hand – certainly, I myself confess it is the truth – he turned me about...'

Achelous Wrestles with Hercules

If you can believe it – I am not seeking to gain false credit by saying it – I seemed to have a mountain pressing on top of me. With difficulty I thrust my arms, pouring with sweat from the great effort it took, under him, and, with difficulty, freed his firm hold on my body. He pressed me hard, as I gasped for breath, prevented me from gathering my strength, and gripped my neck. Then, at last, my knee touched the ground, and my mouth tasted sand. **Inferior to him in strength, I turned to my magic arts, and slipped from his grasp in the shape of a long snake. But when I had wound my body in sinuous coils, and, hissing fiercely, darted my forked tongue at him, Tiryns's hero laughed, and mocking my magic arts, said: "My task in the cradle was to defeat snakes, and, though you are greater than other reptiles, Acheloüs, how big a slice of the Lernean Hydra would your one serpent be? It was made fecund by its wounds, and not one of its hundred heads was safely cut off without its neck generating two more. I overcame it, and having overcome it, disembowelled that monster, with branching snake-heads, that grew from their own destruction, thriving on evil. What do you think will happen to you, who are only a false snake, using unfamiliar weapons, whom a shifting form hides?"**

He spoke and knotted his fingers round my throat. **I was suffocating, as if my throat was gripped by a vice, and struggled to tear his thumbs away from my windpipe. Overpowered in this form, only my third, fierce, bull-shape remained. So I fought on, my limbs those of a bull.** From the left he threw his arms round my bulging neck; and followed me as I charged off; dragging at me, my horns piercing the hard ground as he pulled me down; and toppling me into the deep sand. **As if that was not enough, holding the tough horn in his cruel hand, he broke it and tore it away from my mutilated brow. The Naiades took it, filling it with fruit and scented flowers, and made it sacred: the Goddess of Abundance is rich now because of my horn of plenty."**

The analogy of Hercules given by Achelous gives a vivid impression of his strength – 'I seemed to have a mountain pressing on top of me.'

We see Hercules attempts to kill Achelous with his stranglehold, squeezing the life out of it.

Then the plot takes a twist as Achelous shape-shifts into a snake and escapes Hercules grasp.

Yet, Hercules, now feeling significantly more confident, taunts Achelous and references the time Juno [Hera] tried to kill him as a toddler with snakes, and then the Hydra.

Hercules then grabs the snakes' throat and tries to strangle him to death. Achelous then turns to his third form: a bull and charges at Hercules.

It is at this point Achelous is defeated, and we learn of how he became disfigured. As Hercules is pulling him to the ground, he rips off his horn with his bare hands.

The horn is then apparently taken away and the gods turn it in to the cornucopia or the 'horn of plenty'.

As a consequence of his defeating Achelous, Hercules would win the hand in marriage of Deianira.

The Shirt of Nessus

He spoke: and a nymph, one of his attendants, dressed like Diana, her hair streaming over her shoulders, came to them, bringing all of autumn's harvest in an overflowing horn, and, for an aftertaste, delicious fruits. Light gathered, and as the first rays struck the mountain summits, the warriors left, not waiting for the river to flow calmly and placidly or for the falling waters to subside. Acheloüs hid his wild features and his head, marred by its broken horn, in the depths of the waves.

Nevertheless he only had the loss of that treasured horn, which had been taken from him, to lament: he was otherwise unhurt. Also he hid his loss with a wreath of willow leaves or reeds. But you, fierce Nessus, the centaur, a passion for that same virgin girl destroyed you, hit in the back by a flying arrow.

Hercules, son of Jupiter, on his way to his native city with Deianira, his new bride, came to the swift waters of the River Euenus. The flood was higher than normal, increased by winter rains, with frequent whirlpools, and impassable. He had no fear of going on himself, but was anxious for his bride, when Nessus approached, strong of limb, and knowing the fords. 'With my help, Alcides,' he said, "she will be set down on the far bank. Use your strength to swim!" The Theban handed over the Calydonian girl, she, pale with fear, frightened of the river and of the centaur himself.

Straight away, weighed down as he was by his quiver and his lion's skin – he had thrown his club and his curved bow across to the other bank – the hero said: 'Let me endure the river since I have started to cross.' He did not hesitate, and did not search for where the river was calmest, scorning to claim the water's allegiance. He had gained the bank, and was picking up the bow he had thrown, when he heard his wife's voice, and shouted to Nessus, who was preparing to betray his trust: 'Where are you carrying her off to, you predator, trusting in vain to your swiftness of foot? I am speaking to you, Nessus, the twice-formed. Listen: do not steal what is mine. If you have no respect for me, the thought of your father, Ixion, on his whirling wheel might prevent this illicit union. However much you trust in your horse-craft, you will not escape. With wounds, not feet, I will follow you.' He made good his last words with his actions, shooting the arrow he fired, across, at the fleeing back. The barbed tip jutted from the centaur's chest. When the shaft was pulled out, blood, mixed with the deadly arrow-poison of the Lernean Hydra, gushed out simultaneously from the entry and exit wounds. Nessus trapped this, and murmured, to himself of course: 'I will not die without revenge' and gave his tunic soaked with warm blood to Deianira, whom he had abducted, presenting it to her as if it were a gift for reviving a waning love.

A long space of intervening time passed by, and the tales of mighty Hercules had filled the world, and overcome his stepmother's hatred. As the victor at Oechalia, in Euboea (where he had avenged an insult offered him by King Eurytus) he was preparing to sacrifice to Jupiter at Cenaeum, when loquacious Rumour, who loves to add lies to fact, and expands from the tiniest truth by her falsehoods, brought her tale on ahead, to your ears, Deianira. She claimed that Hercules, reputed son of Amphitryon, was filled with passion for Iole, daughter of Eurytus.

Ovid picks up the story of Hercules and Deianira after the battle with Achelous with his encounter with Nessus, a Centaur.

The newly wed couple are returning to Hercules' homeland when they come to the River Euenus. The river was high due to winter rains and it seemed impassable. Hercules felt confident of getting across himself but worried about his bride.

At this point, Nessus arrives and offers to carry Deianira across the river. Hercules consented and he starts to make his way across the river.

As he reaches the other side, Hercules hears his wife's screams as Nessus tries to flee with her – Ovid has already indicated this earlier when he writes of Nessus' passion for Deianira. Hercules calls out to Nessus to stop and refers to him as twice-formed – a reference to him, as a Centaur, as part human, part horse.

Hercules on the other side of the river to Nessus, fires an arrow into the back of Nessus so hard it juts out of his chest. As Nessus collapses to the floor and pulls out the arrow, blood and the 'deadly arrow poison' rush out the wound and soak his tunic/shirt.

It is at this point, well worth remembering that following his killing of the Hydra, Hercules used to tip his arrow heads in Hydra-venom making them deadly.

As he dies, Nessus says to himself, 'I will not die without revenge.' Yet, this revenge will not be realised in Nessus' lifetime, but he will have it.

Nessus, presumably as Hercules tries to get to his wife, presents Deianira with the tunic saying it is a gift that has the power to revive [restore to life] a waning [becoming weaker] love.

Little does Hercules or Deianira realise that the trap has been set for revenge.

Some time passes now between the death of Nessus and the next events.

Under Juno's instructions, the goddess Rumour begins her work by convincing Deianira that Hercules has fallen in love with another.

The Shirt of Nessus

The loving wife believes it, and terrified at first by the rumour of this new affair, she indulges in tears, and the poor girl vents her misery in weeping. But she soon says 'Why do I weep? That adulteress will laugh at my tears. Since she is coming here, I must plan quickly, while I can, while another has not yet taken my place. Should I complain, or keep silent? Return to Calydon or stay? Should I leave my house? Or, if I can do nothing else, should I at least stand in their way? What if, remembering I am your sister, Meleager, I prepare, boldly, to commit a crime, and, by cutting that adulteress's throat, show what revenge and a woman's grief can do?'

Her thought traced various courses. Of all of them she preferred that of sending the shirt, imbued with Nessus's blood, to restore her husband's waning love. Unwittingly, she entrusted what became her future grief, to the servant, Lichas, he not knowing what he had been entrusted with: and the unfortunate woman, ordered him, with persuasive words, to give the present to her husband. Hercules, the hero, took it, without a thought, and put on the shirt of Nessus, soaked in the poison of the Lernean Hydra.

We then see a vivid description of Deianira's thought process with this information.

She moves from tears and weeping to being more resolute to considering murder.

Her final decision is to consider Nessus' shirt as it had the power to revive a dying love. She gives Lichas, a servant, the shirt and entrusts him to give it to Hercules to wear.

Hercules does indeed wear the shirt.

3. How heroic is Hercules in this episode? Use evidence from the extract to support your answer.

4. Consider what Nessus said to Hercules before he died and his gift to Deianira. What do you think is going to happen?

The Agony of Hercules

He was making offerings of incense and reciting prayers over the first flames, and pouring a libation bowl of wine on to the marble altar. The power of the venom, warmed and released by the flames, dissolved, dispersing widely through the limbs of Hercules. With his usual courage, he repressed his groans while he could. When his strength to endure the venom was exhausted, he overturned the altar, and filled woody Oeta with his shouts.

He tries at once to tear off the fatal clothing: where it is pulled away, it pulls skin away with it, and, revolting to tell, it either sticks to the limbs from which he tries in vain to remove it, or reveals the lacerated limbs and his massive bones. His blood itself hisses and boils, with the virulence of the poison, like incandescent metal, dipped in a cold pool. There is no end to it: the consuming fires suck at the air in his chest: dark sweat pours from his whole body: his scorched sinews crackle. His marrow liquefying with the secret corruption, he raises his hands to the heavens, crying: 'Juno, Saturnia, feed on my ruin: feed, cruel one: gaze, from the heights, at this destruction, and sate your savage heart! Or if this suffering seems pitiable even to an enemy, even to you, take away this sorrowful and hateful life, with its fearful torments, that was only made for toil. Death would be a gift to me, a fitting offering from a stepmother.

Was it for this I overcame Busiris who defiled the temples with the blood of sacrificed strangers? For this that I lifted fierce Antaeus, robbing him of the strength of his mother Earth? For this, that I was unmoved, by Geryon's triple form, the herdsman of Spain, or your triple form, Cerberus? For this, you hands of mine, that you dragged down the horns of the strong Cretan bull: that the stables of King Augeas of Elis know of your efforts: the Stymphalian Lake: and the woods of Mount Parthenius, with its golden-antlered stag? For this, that, by your virtue, the gold engraved girdle of Hippolyte of Thermodon was taken, and the apples of the Hesperides, guarded by the sleepless dragon? Was it for this, that the Centaurs could not withstand me, nor the Erymanthian Boar that laid Arcady waste?

For this, that it did not help the Hydra to thrive on destruction and gain redoubled strength? What of the time when I saw Thracian Diomedes's horses, fed on human blood, their stalls filled with broken bodies, and, seeing them, overthrew them, and finished off them, and their master? The Nemean Lion lies crushed by these massive arms: and for Atlas these shoulders of mine held up the sky. Jupiter's cruel consort is tired of giving commands: I am not tired of performing them.

But now a strange disease affects me that I cannot withstand by courage, weapons or strength. Deep in my lungs a devouring fire wanders, feeding on my whole body. But Eurystheus, my enemy is well! Are there those then who can believe that the gods exist?' So saying he roamed, in his illness, over the heights of Oeta, as a bull carries around a hunting spear embedded in its body, though the hunter who threw it has long gone. Picture him there, in the mountains, in his anger, often groaning, often shouting out, often attempting, again and again, to rid himself of the last of the garment, overturning trees, or stretching his arms out to his native skies.

The story now follows Hercules from his agony to his death.

We pick the story up with Hercules making a sacrifice to Jupiter and it is the heat of the flames that reignites the venom from within the shirt and it penetrates into Hercules' skin.

This is then perhaps we read the most vivid of Ovid's descriptions, the description of Hercules trying to remove the shirt causing him so much pain.

From this description we get a real sense of Hercules' pain. He tries to remove the shirt but it tears the flesh from his body, his blood boils and hisses, his sinews crack under the heat, until he cannot tolerate any more and cries out to the heavens.

It is here that he cries out not to Jupiter, his father, but Juno, his enemy. He calls on her to end his life, a life that he describes as 'hateful'. In his rant to Juno he laments on his life and the labours and struggles he went through, to now still lose to Juno. It is interesting that we a vulnerable side to Hercules that we have not seen up to this point.

Hercules, in his agony and illness, he retreats to the mountains and Ovid uses a lovely simile to describe this. He compares him to a bull that has been hit by a hunting spear but it has not killed him instantly – he staggers through the countryside awaiting an inevitable death. The fact that the hunter of the bull in the simile is not there to see the death is a nod to Nessus who is also long gone.

The Death and Transformation of Hercules

Then he caught sight of the terrified Lichas, cowering in a hollow of the cliff, and pain concentrated all his fury. 'Was it not you, Lichas,' he said, 'who gave me this fatal gift? Are you not the agent of my death?' The man trembled, grew pale with fear, and, timidly, made excuses. While he was speaking, and trying to clasp the hero's knees, Alcides seized him, and, swinging him round three or four times, hurled him, more violently than a catapult bolt, into the Euboean waters. Hanging in the air, he hardened with the wind. As rain freezes in the icy blasts and becomes snow; whirling snowflakes bind together in a soft mass; and they, in turn, accumulate as a body of solid hailstones: so he, the ancient tradition says, flung by strong arms through the void, bloodless with fright, and devoid of moisture, turned to hard flint. Now, in the Euboean Gulf, a low rock rises out of the depths, and keeps the semblance of a human shape. This sailors are afraid to set foot on, as though it could sense them, and they call it, Lichas.

But you, famous son of Jove, felled the trees that grew on steep Oeta, and made a funeral pyre, and commanded Philoctetes, son of Poeas, who supplied the flame that was plunged into it, to take your bow, your ample quiver, and the arrows, that were fated to see, once more, the kingdom of Troy (as they did when you rescued Hesione.) As the mass caught light from the eager fire, you spread the Nemean Lion's pelt on the summit of the pile of logs, and lay down, your neck resting on your club, and with an aspect no different from that of a guest, reclining amongst the full wine cups, crowned with garlands.

Now the fierce flames, spreading on every side, were crackling loudly, and licking at his body, he unconcerned and scornful of them. The gods were fearful for earth's champion. Saturnian Jupiter spoke to them, gladly, since he understood their feelings. 'O divine beings, your fear for him delights me, and I willingly congratulate myself, with all my heart, that I am called father and ruler of a thoughtful race, and that my offspring is protected by your favour also. Though this tribute is paid to his great deeds, I am obliged to you, also. But do not allow your loyal hearts to feel groundless fears. Forget Oeta's flames! He, who has defeated all things, will defeat the fires you see, nor will he feel Vulcan's power, except in the mortal part that he owes to his mother, Alcmena.

What he has from me is immortal, deathless and eternal: and that, no flame can destroy. When it is done with the earth, I will accept it into the celestial regions, and I trust my action will please all the gods. But if there is anyone, anyone at all, who is unhappy at Hercules's deification, and would not wish to grant this gift, he or she should know that it was given for merit, and should approve it, though unwillingly.' The gods agreed. Juno, also, appeared to accept the rest of his words with compliance, but not the last ones, upset that she was being censored.

Meanwhile, Mulciber had consumed whatever the flames could destroy, and no recognisable form of Hercules remained, no semblance of what came to him from his mother: he only retained his inheritance from Jove. As a snake enjoys its newness, sloughing old age with its skin, gleaming with fresh scales; so, when the Tirynthian hero had shed his mortal body, he became his better part, beginning to appear greater, and more to be revered, in his high majesty. The all-powerful father of the gods carrying him upwards, in his four-horse chariot, through the substance-less clouds, set him among the shining stars.

In one last act of defiance, revenge, and anger, Hercules comes across the servant, Lichas. Hercules' response is to kill him by throwing him from a cliff – Hercules still having the strength to do this against other mortals despite dying.

Hercules then constructs his own funeral pyre, lays the Nemean Lion's pelt and club, both so symbolic of Hercules, on top and sets alight the pyre. He climbs on top and lays there to face his death – arguably a last courageous and heroic act.

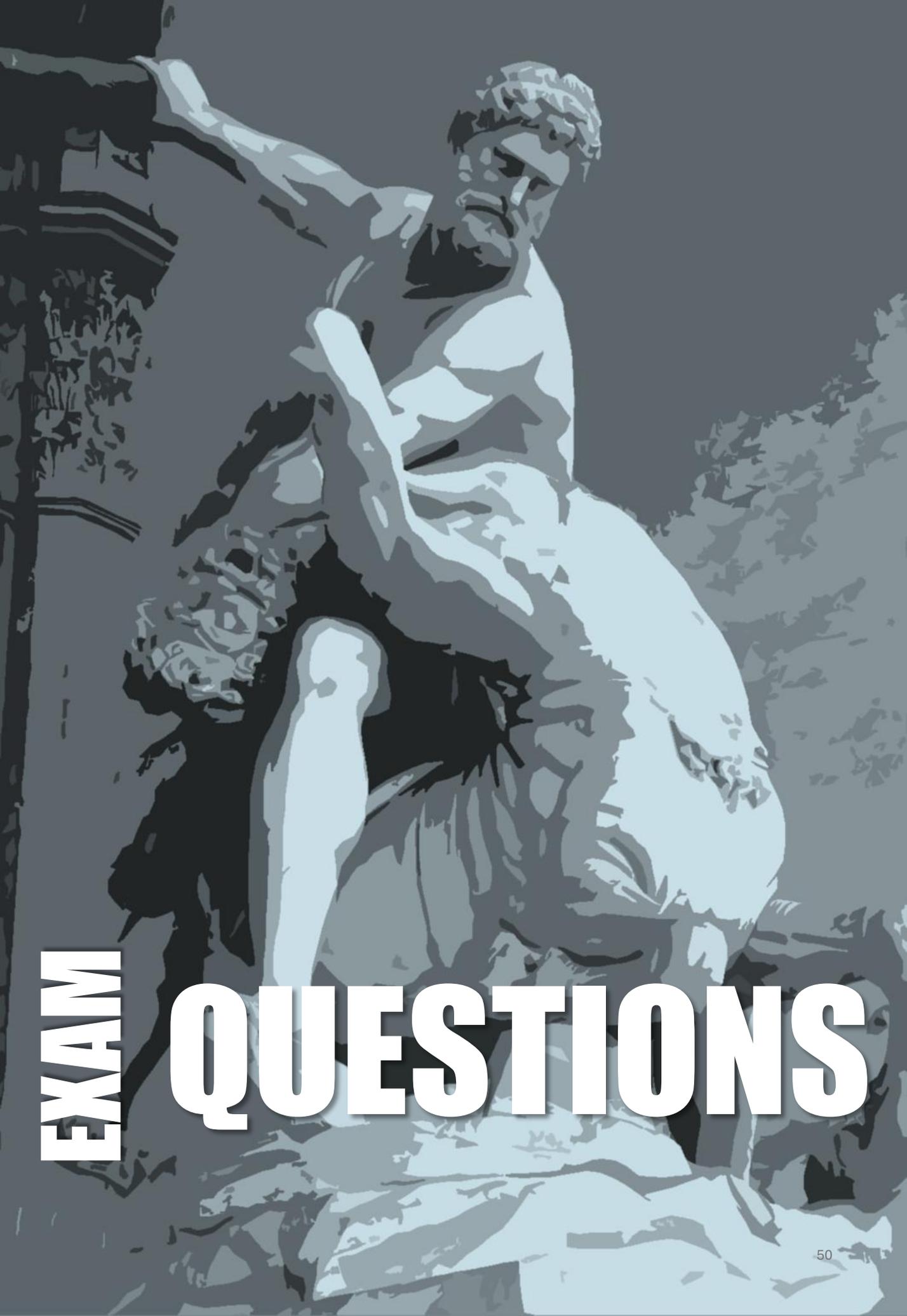
It is at this point, the narrative switches to his father, Jupiter, who addresses the rest of the Olympians as Hercules slowly dies.

Jupiter explains to the Olympians that whilst it is expected that they worry for Hercules and feel sad for his death, it is only his mortal self dying. Hercules is Zeus' son and so will become immortal.

Jupiter then challenges everyone, but it is primarily aimed at Juno, to accept his decision that Hercules will become divine. Everyone, including Juno, accepts the decision.

Interestingly then, that despite his difficult and challenging life, Hercules is ultimately victorious over Juno who tried to destroy him throughout his life.

The last scene is a vivid description of Hercules transformation into a god. The simile to a snake shedding its old skin, sees Hercules reborn, and Jupiter himself carried him up to the heavens.



EXAM

QUESTIONS

Source D: A mythological story shown on a Greek vase



Study Source D

9 (a) What mythological story is shown in Source D?

..... (1)

(b) Who are the parents of the child labelled A in Source D? Give both parents' names.

- 1.
- 2.

(2)

10 (a) Who is the character labelled B in Source D?

.....

(b) Give two ways you know this from looking at Source D.

- 1.
- 2.

(1)

(2)

Source A: A pot showing Heracles attacking the Hydra



Study Source A

1 Why did Heracles have to carry out the labours?

.....

(1)

2 What problems did Heracles face in the labour shown in **Source A**? Make **three** points.

1.

.....

2.

.....

3.

.....

(3)

3 (a) How did Heracles manage to defeat the Stymphalian birds? Make **two** points.

1. -----

2. -----

(2)

(b) Choose **one** of these points. What does it tell you about Heracles?

(1)

Source C: A metope showing one of Heracles' labours.



Study Source C

4 (a) Which of Heracles' labours is shown in **Source C**?

(1)

(b) State two things Heracles did to complete this labour.

1.

2.

(2)

Study Source C

5 (a) State two reasons why Source C could be considered a well-sculpted metope.

1.

.....

2.

.....

(2)

(b) State one reason why metopes were a better way of displaying Heracles' twelve labours compared to using a pediment.

.....

.....

.....

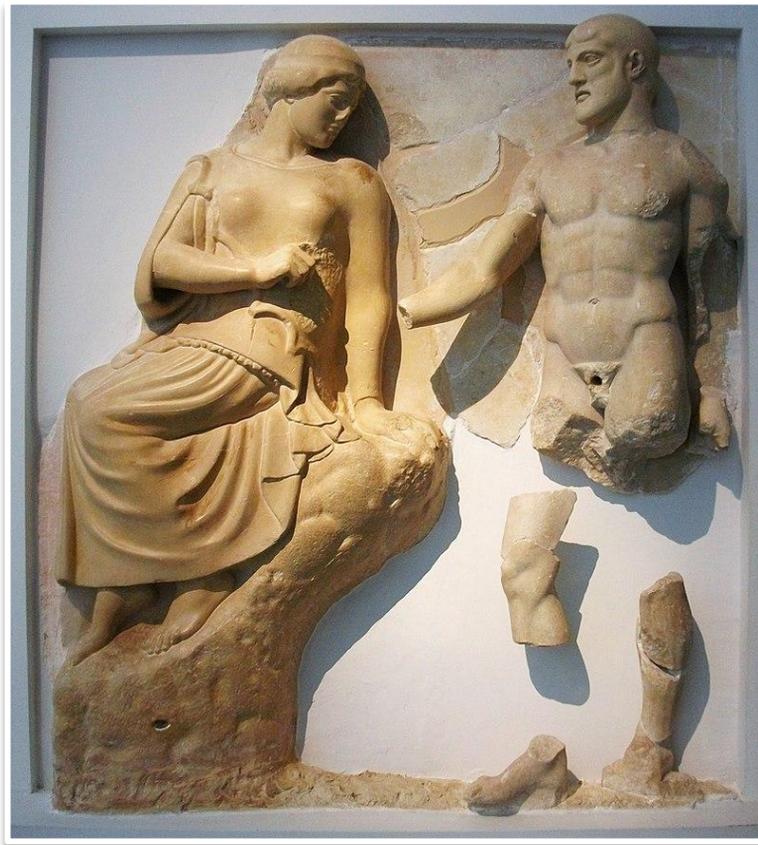
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(2)

Source C: A metope showing one of Heracles' labours.



Study Source C

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2.

.....

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(b) State one reason why metopes were a better way of displaying Heracles' twelve labours compared to using a pediment.

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

(2)

Source J: An extract describing Hercules' battle with Achelous

As I spoke, he gazed at me fiercely, all the while, and unable to act like a man and control his blazing anger, he merely replied in these words: "My right hand is more powerful than my tongue. As long as I beat you at wrestling, you can win the talking".

Study Source J

17 What is the name of the Roman author who wrote **Source J**?

..... **(1)**

18 (a) State **two** things that Achelous said to argue that he was better than Hercules.

1.
.....

2.
.....

(2)

(b) Why were Achelous and Hercules arguing?

..... **(1)**

19 (a) What was the final form Achelous took when fighting Hercules?

..... **(1)**

(b) What did Hercules tear from Achelous' body when he was in this form?

..... **(1)**

Source H: An extract describing Hercules' battle with Achelous

'Where are you carrying her off to, you predator, trusting in vain to your swiftness of foot? I am speaking to you, Nessus, the twice-formed. Listen: do not steal what is mine. If you have no respect for me, the thought of your father, Ixion, on his whirling wheel might prevent this illicit union. However much you trust in your horse-craft, you will not escape. With wounds, not feet, I will follow you.' He made good his last words with his actions, shooting the arrow he fired, across, at the fleeing back. The barbed tip jutted from the centaur's chest.

Study Source H

14 Who had Hercules fought immediately before the episode described in **Source H**?

.....

(1)

15 Where does the conversation in **Source H** take place?

.....

.....

(1)

16 (a) Why does Hercules describe Nessus as 'twice-formed' (line 2)?

.....

(1)

(b) 'Do not steal what is mine' (line 2). Who had Nessus stolen?

.....

(1)

17 (a) What substance had Hercules added to the tip of the arrow used to shoot Nessus?

.....

(1)

(b) Where did this substance originally come from?

.....

(1)

(c) How did this substance later kill Hercules?

.....

(1)

