

APOLLODORUS

(probably 1st or 2nd c. AD, wrote in Greek)

The Library (Bibliothēke) is a mythological work attributed to Apollodorus (sometimes he is called Pseudo-Apollodorus because our author is certainly not the famous scholar Apollodorus, who had written a work on the gods in the 2nd century BC). The work is essentially a basic handbook of Greek myth that was probably compiled sometime during the first two centuries AD. It is organized by lineage: the first book covers the gods and the family of Deucalion; the second the lineage of Inachos; the third the lineage of Agenor. The last section of the work is missing (it breaks off in the middle of the accounts of Theseus), but we have an epitome (an abridged version), which covers the remainder of the tale of Theseus and the events surrounding the Trojan War. The Library is a valuable source for modern students of myth both for its usually clear narration and for the amount of material in it that is derived from earlier writers, including such important mythographers as Acusilaus and Pherecydes. One difficulty caused by this is the presence of sometimes conflicting pieces of information where Apollodorus follows or reports different authorities. Included here are extended excerpts of the Library, mostly centered on creation and the major heroes.

FROM LIBRARY

L2 Minos

After Asterios died childless, Minos wanted to be king of Crete, but was opposed. He claimed that he had received the right to rule the kingdom from the gods, and to prove it he said that whatever he prayed for would happen. He made a sacrifice to Poseidon and prayed for a bull to appear from the depths, promising to sacrifice it when it appeared. Poseidon sent a magnificent bull up for him, and he received the kingdom, but he sent the bull to his herds and sacrificed another.

Poseidon grew angry at Minos because he did not sacrifice the bull. So he made it savage and brought it about that Pasiphae came to desire it. When she had fallen in love with the bull, she took as her accomplice Daidalos, who was an architect exiled from Athens for murder. He constructed a wooden cow on wheels, then took and hollowed it out. Stripping the skin from a cow, he sewed it around the wooden one. He placed it in the meadow where the bull usually grazed and put Pasiphae inside. The bull came and mated with it as if it were a real cow. Pasiphae gave birth to Asterios, who is known as the Minotaur. He had the face of a bull {*tauros*}, but the rest of his body was that of a man. Minos shut him in the labyrinth in accordance with certain prophecies and kept him under guard. The labyrinth, which Daidalos built, was a cell “that confused its exit with tangled twistings.”¹¹ I will give the account of the Minotaur, Androgeos, Phaidra, and Ariadne later in the section on Theseus.

¹¹ Apparently Apollodorus quotes from a lost Greek tragedy.

N1 Theseus (3.15.6–E.1.19)

Aigeus' first wife was Meta daughter of Hoples, and his second was Chalciopé daughter of Rhexenor. Since he had no children and was afraid of his brothers, he went to Pytho and consulted the oracle about having children. The god prophesied to him:

The projecting mouth of the wineskin, O best of men,
Loose not until you come to the Athenians' peak.¹⁵

At a loss about the oracle, he set off to return to Athens. As he traveled through Troizen, he stayed with Pittheus son of Pelops, who understood the oracle, got Aigeus drunk, and put him into bed with his daughter Aithra. During the same night Poseidon also had intercourse with her. Aigeus instructed Aithra to raise the child if it were a boy, but not to tell anyone who the father was. He left under a certain rock a sword and a pair of sandals and told her to send their son to him with the objects when he could roll aside the rock and retrieve them.

N2 Minos' War on Athens

Aigeus returned to Athens and held the Panathenaic Games, where Minos' son Androgeos defeated everyone. Aigeus sent him against the Marathonian bull, and he was killed by it. But some say that while he was traveling to Thebes to attend the funeral games of Laios, he was ambushed and killed by his competitors out of jealousy. When his death was reported to Minos as he was sacrificing to the Charites on Paros, he threw his garland from his head and stopped the flute, but he still finished the sacrifice. For this reason even to the present day they sacrifice to the Charites without flutes or garlands on Paros. Soon thereafter, he attacked Athens with a fleet (he controlled the sea) and captured Megara, a city then ruled by Nisos son of Pandion. He killed Megareus son of Hippomenes, who had come from Onchestos to help Nisos. Through the treachery of his daughter, Nisos also died. He had a purple hair in the middle of his head, and an oracle said that he would die when this was plucked out. His daughter Scylla fell in love with Minos and pulled out the hair. After Minos conquered Megara, he tied the girl by the feet to the stern of his ship and drowned her.

The war dragged on as he was unable to capture Athens, so he prayed to Zeus to punish the Athenians. When a famine and epidemic broke out in the city, the Athenians, following an ancient oracle, first sacrificed the daughters of Hyacinthos, namely Antheis, Aigleis, Lytaia, and Orthaia, on the tomb of Geraistos the Cyclops. (Their father Hyacinthos had come from Lacedaimon and settled in Athens.) When this accomplished nothing, they consulted an oracle about how to rid themselves of

¹⁵ The riddling oracle means that he will father a child during his next sexual encounter ("the projecting mouth of the wineskin" is a veiled reference to his genitals) and should wait until he returns to Athens if he wishes to produce a legitimate heir.

their trouble. The god ordained that they pay Minos whatever penalty he might choose. So they sent to Minos and left it up to him to name the penalty. Minos ordered them to send seven young men and the same number of young women, all unarmed, as food for the Minotaur, who had been shut up in a labyrinth, which was impossible for someone who entered to get out of, for it closed off its secret exit with complex twists and turns.

N3 Daidalos

Daidalos son of Eupalamos (who was the son of Metion) and Alcippe, built the labyrinth. He was the finest architect and the first sculptor of statues. He had gone into exile from Athens for throwing his sister's son Talos, who was his student, off the acropolis because he was afraid of being surpassed by him in talent—Talos found the jawbone of a snake and sawed through a thin piece of wood with it. But Talos' body was discovered, and after Daidalos stood trial in the Areopagos and was condemned, he went to Minos' court in exile.

N4 Theseus' Journey to Athens

[3.16] Theseus was Aigeus' son by Aithra, and when he grew up, he pushed aside the rock, picked up the sandals and sword, and hurried to Athens on foot. He cleared the road of the evildoers who had taken control of it. First, in Epidauros he killed Periphetes, the son of Hephaistos and Anticleia, also known as Corynetes {"Clubber"} because of the club he carried; since he had weak legs, he used to carry an iron club, and with it he would kill passing travelers. Theseus took the club away from him and carried it around. Second, he killed Sinis, the son of Polypemon and Sylea (daughter of Corinthos). Sinis was also known as Pityocamptes {"Pine-bender"} because he lived on the Isthmos of Corinth and forced passing travelers to bend down pine trees and hold them. Since they were not strong enough, they could not do so, and when they were catapulted by the trees, they would be utterly destroyed. This is how Theseus also killed Sinis.

[E.1¹⁶] Third, he killed in Crommyon the sow known as Phaia after the old woman who raised it. Some say it was the offspring of Echidna and Typhon. Fourth, he killed Sceiron the Corinthian, who was the son of Pelops or, according to some, Poseidon. He occupied the cliffs in the Megarid called the Sceironian Cliffs after him and used to force passing travelers to wash his feet. As they washed them, he would cast them into the deep as food for an enormous turtle. But Theseus grabbed him by the feet and cast him into the sea. Fifth, in Eleusis he killed Cercyon, the son of Branchos and the Nymph Argiope. He used to force passing travelers to wrestle and would kill them when they did. Theseus lifted him up high and then slammed him to the ground. Sixth, he killed Damastes, whom some call Polypemon. He had his house by the side of the road and had two beds, one short, the other long, and would invite passing travelers to be his guests. He would make short travelers lie in the large bed and beat them with hammers so that they would be the same size as the bed. He would put tall travelers into the short bed and then saw off the parts of the body that hung over the ends.

After clearing the road, Theseus arrived in Athens. But Medeia, who at that time

¹⁶ From this point on the text of Apollodorus survives only in an epitomized form.

was married to Aigeus, plotted against him. She persuaded Aigeus to be on guard, alleging that Theseus was plotting against him. Aigeus did not recognize his own son and in fear sent him against the Marathonian bull. When he destroyed it, Aigeus got a poison from Medeia that same day and gave it to him. When Theseus was about to drink the poison, he presented his sword to his father as a gift. When Aigeus recognized it, he knocked the cup from his hands. After being recognized by his father and learning of the plot against him, Theseus drove Medeia out of the country.

N5 Crete, the Minotaur, and Ariadne

Theseus was chosen for the third group sent as tribute to the Minotaur, though some say he volunteered to go. The ship had a black sail, but Aigeus instructed his son that if he came back alive he should rig the ship with white sails. When he arrived in Crete, Minos' daughter Ariadne fell in love with him and offered to help him if he promised to take her back to Athens and make her his wife. After Theseus promised and swore oaths on it, she asked Daidalos to reveal the way out of the labyrinth, and at his suggestion she gave a thread to Theseus as he entered. Theseus tied this to the door and went in dragging it behind. He found the Minotaur in the innermost part of the labyrinth and beat him to death with his fists. He got out by following the thread back. During the night he arrived on Naxos with Ariadne and the children.¹⁷ There Dionysos fell in love with Ariadne and carried her off. He brought her to Lemnos and slept with her, fathering Thoas, Staphylos, Oinopion, and Peparethos.

Grieving for Ariadne, Theseus forgot to rig the ship with white sails as he put into port. From the Acropolis Aigeus saw that the ship had black sails and thought that Theseus was dead, so he jumped off and died. Theseus succeeded to the rule of the Athenians and killed the sons of Pallas, fifty in all. Likewise any who thought to oppose him were killed by him, and so he alone came to hold all the power.

N6 Daidalos, Icaros, and the Death of Minos

Minos, learning of the escape of Theseus and his companions, held Daidalos responsible and put him into the labyrinth along with his son Icaros, whom he had with Naucraste, one of Minos' slaves. But Daidalos made wings for himself and his son, and told his son not to fly too high when he was aloft, or else the glue would be melted by the sun and the wings would fall apart, and not to fly near the sea, or else the wings would fall apart from the moisture. But Icaros, lost in delight, paid no attention to his father's instructions and went ever higher. When the glue melted, he plunged into the sea that is named the Icarian Sea after him and died. Daidalos made it safely to Camicos in Sicily. But Minos pursued Daidalos, and as he searched each land, he brought with him a murex shell, promising to give a great reward to anyone who could pass a thread through the spiral shell. He was sure that he would find Daidalos by this means. When he came to the court of Cocalos in Camicos in Sicily, where Daidalos was being hidden, he showed the shell. Cocalos took it, promised to thread it, and gave it to Daidalos, who attached a thread to an ant, bored a hole in the shell, and let the ant go through it. When Minos found out that a thread had been passed through the shell, he understood that Daidalos was with Cocalos and

¹⁷ The young Athenians sent as tribute.

demanded him back immediately. Cocalos promised to give him back and invited Minos to be his guest. But after Minos took a bath, he was killed by Cocalos' daughters, though others say that he died when he had boiling water poured over him.

N7 The Amazons, Phaidra, and Hippolytos

Theseus joined Heracles' campaign against the Amazons and carried off Antiope, though others say Melanippe, and Simonides says Hippolyte. So the Amazons marched against Athens. They set up their camp around the Areopagos, but Theseus and the Athenians defeated them. He had a son Hippolytos with the Amazon woman, but from Deucalion¹⁸ he later got Minos' daughter Phaidra, and when his wedding to her was being celebrated, his Amazon ex-wife showed up dressed for battle with her Amazonian companions and intended to kill the guests. But they quickly shut the doors and killed her. But some say that she was killed by Theseus in battle. After Phaidra bore two sons for Theseus, namely Acamas and Demophon, she fell in love with the son he had with the Amazon and begged him to sleep with her. He hated all women and shrank from sleeping with her. Phaidra, afraid that he would tell his father, broke open the doors to her bedroom, ripped open her clothes, and made up a story that Hippolytos raped her. Theseus believed her and prayed to Poseidon that Hippolytos be destroyed. As Hippolytos rode on his chariot and was driving along the sea, Poseidon sent forth a bull from the waves. The horses were spooked and the chariot was smashed to pieces. Hippolytos, tangled in the reins, was dragged to death. Phaidra hanged herself when her love became public knowledge.

¹⁸ Minos' son, who succeeded him as king.