

Palaiphatos, *On Unbelievable Stories*

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translated from the text of Festa (1902)

Prologue

I have written down the following about unbelievable stories.

While some - those who are more gullible - believe everything that is said because they are untrained in philosophy and science, others – those more cynical and worldly by nature – disbelieve entirely that any of these things actually happened.

I think, however, that everything that is said actually happened. (Names do not come about on their own unless a story about them already exists. The event happened first, and then arose the story about it.) All those forms and shapes that are said to have once existed – but which now do not exist – could never have actually existed. For if something came into being at some time or other, it must also exist in our time and will exist likewise in the future. I for one always endorse what the writers Melissos and Lamiscos of Samos said at the beginning of their work: ‘what exists now came into being previously, and will exist forever’.¹ Poets and storytellers perverted some of what took place and made it more unbelievable and astonishing to astound their audiences.

But I know that such things are not possible, at least not in the way they are told. I have come to understand that if something did not actually happen, it would not be spoken about. I went to many places and I asked the elders what they had heard about each of them; I write down here what I learnt from them. I have personally seen the places, what each is like, and I have written in the following account not the sort of thing that is generally told, but what I have personally gone and researched.

1. The Centaurs

What they say about the Centaurs is that they were beasts that had the shape of a horse, except that their head was human. Some might well believe that such a beast once existed – but it is impossible. Human and equine natures are entirely incompatible: they don’t live on

¹ We translate the punctuation suggested by Diels (ἐν ἀρχῇ λέγοντας “ἔστιν ἃ ἐγένετο, καὶ νῦν ἔσται”) rather than that of Festa (“ἐν ἀρχῇ” λέγοντας “ἔστιν ἃ ἐγένετο, καὶ νῦν ἔσται”).

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the same sort of food, and the food of a horse would not be able to pass through the mouth and throat of a human. If a creature of this shape did once exist, it would still exist now.

The truth is as follows. When Ixion was king of Thessaly, a herd of bulls on Mt Pelion became feral and blocked access to the other mountains. These bulls would come down to the inhabited areas, where they would destroy the trees and crops and kill livestock. And so Ixion announced that he would give a great amount of money to anyone who killed the bulls. Some young men from the foothills, from a town called Cloud, contrived to train their horses to carry riders. (Before this they did not know how to ride horses, only how to use them hitched to chariots.) So they mounted their horses, rode to where the bulls were and attacked the herd with their javelins. Whenever they were charged by the bulls, the young men would escape since their horses were quicker; and when the bulls came to a stop, they would turn and hurl their javelins. Using these tactics they killed them, thus earning the name 'Centaur' since they pierced [*kent-*] the bulls [*tauroi*]. (The name certainly did not come from their having the shape of bulls, for Centaurs have the shape not of a bull, but of a horse and a human: the name must have come from the exploit.)

After the Centaurs got Ixion's money, the pride they had in their achievement and wealth swelled into arrogance: they committed many brutal acts, even against Ixion himself. Ixion resided in the city that is now called Larissa (its residents were then called 'Lapiths'). The Lapiths invited the Centaurs to a feast. The Centaurs got drunk and carried off the Lapiths' wives: they bundled the women onto their horses and galloped homeward. From there they made war on the Lapiths: they would come down onto the plain at night and hide, then burn and pillage by day before returning to the mountains. When they rode away in this manner, those watching from a distance saw them only from behind: they looked like horses but without a horse's head; the rest was like a human, but without the legs. People who saw the strange sight would say, 'The Centaurs from Cloud are attacking us!' And from such accounts, and from their appearance, the unbelievable myth was fabricated: that a 'horse-man' had been created from a cloud on the mountain.

2. Pasiphae

The myth that's told about Pasiphae is that she was consumed by lust for a grazing bull, and that Daidalos made a wooden cow and shut her within it so that the bull would mount and mate with the woman. He impregnated her and she gave birth to a child that had the body of a man and the head of a bull. I for one say that this never happened. To start with, it is impossible for an animal of one kind to mate with one of another unless the womb and genitals are compatible. For it is not possible for a dog and an ape to mate with one another and produce offspring, nor a wolf and a hyena, nor an antelope and a deer (for the fact is that they are of different species). More to the point, I do not think that a bull had sex with a wooden cow: for all four-footed animals smell the genitals of an animal before mating and mount it afterwards. Nor would a woman be able to withstand being mounted by a bull, nor could she have carried a horned embryo.

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The truth is as follows. They say that Minos had pain in his genitals and was taken care of by Procris, the daughter of Pandion, in exchange for the dog and the javelin ...² At this time, a very attractive young man served Minos. His name was Tauros ['Bull']. Pasiphae was seized by love for him, persuaded him to sleep with her, and gave birth to his child. Minos, when he calculated that the child was conceived while he was suffering from genital pain, realised that the child was not his own because they had not had sex during that time. After examining the child closely, he worked out that it was Tauros'. Despite this, Minos decided against killing him since he looked like his own children's brother.

He sent him away into the mountains so that when he grew up he might help the herdsmen there. However, when he reached manhood he no longer obeyed the cowherds. When Minos learnt of this, he ordered him back to the city so that he might keep him under control. If he would come willingly, he could travel unrestrained; if not, he would be brought in chains. When he heard this, the young man fled further into the mountains and survived by snatching livestock. Minos sent a larger force to apprehend him and the young man dug a deep tunnel and shut himself up in it. They regularly threw sheep and goats down to him and he survived by eating them. Whenever Minos wanted to punish someone he would kill him by sending him to the man caged up in this dwelling. When Minos captured Theseus, one of his enemies, he brought him also to the place to be killed. But Ariadne had already placed a sword in the enclosure, and there Theseus killed 'Minotauros' ...³ This is the event as it actually happened; the poets altered the story into a myth.

3. The Spartoi

An old tale says that Cadmos, after slaying a serpent, plucked out its teeth [*odontes*] and sowed [*speirō*] them in his own land, and that men with weapons sprung up from them. If this were true, no one would sow anything other than serpents' teeth; and if they would not grow elsewhere then they would at least sow them in the land in which they had sprung up previously.

Here is the truth. Cadmos, a Phoenician by birth, arrived at Thebes to compete against his brother, Phoinix, for the kingdom. The king of Thebes at the time was Draco ['Serpent'], a son of Ares, who, among all the things that a king usually has, owned elephant tusks [*odontes*]. Cadmos killed him and became king himself. Draco's friends began to wage war against him, and his sons also joined forces against Cadmos. When Draco's allies had been defeated in battle, they seized Cadmos' possessions, including the elephant tusks, which were stored in a sanctuary. They began to run away, fleeing to their homelands. They scattered [*speirō*] in different directions, with some going to Attica, and others going to the Peloponnese, Phocis or Locris. From these places they continued to wage war against the Thebans. They were difficult opponents since they spoke the same language and were

² There is a lacuna in the text here, at the end of which appears the word 'Cephalos', the name of Procris' husband.

³ There is a lacuna in the text here.

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knowledgeable about the terrain. After they had stolen the tusks and fled, the townspeople would say, 'Cadmos has harmed us in killing Draco, for, because of that man's tusks, many noble men have risen up [*spartoi*] and prevailed over us.' The myth was fabricated from this real event.

4. The Cadmeian Sphinx

What's said about the Cadmeian Sphinx was that it was a beast born with the body of a dog, the head and face of a girl, the wings of a bird, and the voice of a human. She settled down on Mt Phicios and sang her riddle to each passer-by in turn. She killed whoever could not solve it; but when Oedipus solved the riddle, she threw herself down to her death. The story is unbelievable and impossible. It is impossible for a creature with her appearance to exist; and as for the idea that those who were unable to solve her riddles would be devoured by her: that's childish. And that the Cadmeians would not rain down arrows on the beast, but just stand round and watch fellow townspeople be consumed as if they were enemies: nonsense!

The truth is as follows. Cadmos came to Thebes with an Amazonian wife, whose name was Sphinx. After killing Draco he seized Draco's possessions and his kingdom, and along with them took his sister Harmonia as his wife. Sphinx, when she realised that he was marrying another woman, persuaded many of the townspeople to leave with her. In addition, she took most of his property, including a swift-footed dog, which Cadmos had brought with him. With these things, she went off to the mountain called Phicios, and from there began to wage war against Cadmos. When the time was right she laid ambushes. She carried off those whom she captured, and did away with them. The Cadmeians call an ambush an *ainigma*, a word more typically used in Greek to mean 'riddle'. So while chattering away to each other the townspeople would say, 'Sphinx – that wild creature – is setting a trap for us with her *ainigma*. She has settled down on the mountain, and is picking us off. No one is able to figure out the *ainigma*. We can't fight her out in the open: she doesn't run but instead takes wing – both the dog and the woman together.'

Cadmos announced that whoever killed Sphinx would be given a lot of money. Along came Oedipus, a Corinthian man experienced in military matters, with a swift-footed horse. He formed the Cadmeians into a fighting force and went out during the night. After lying in wait, he figured out the *ainigma* and killed Sphinx. The rest was made into myth from these actual events.

5. The Teumesian Fox

What they say about the Teumesian Fox is that it snatched up and devoured the Cadmeians. This is naive! For no other land-based animal is able to snatch up and carry off a human, and the fox is small and weak.

Something of the following sort took place. There was once a Theban man called Fox. He was handsome and noble – and cunning. For he surpassed everyone else in craftiness. The

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king, afraid that Fox was scheming against him, banished him from the city. So Fox raised a great army, hired mercenaries and captured the hilltop called Teumesos. Using this as his base, he raided the Thebans and carried off captives. And so people would say, 'Fox preys on us and then retreats!' But a man called Cephalos, an Athenian by birth, came to the Thebans as an ally with a great army. He killed Fox and drove off his army from Teumesos. It was from these actual events that those myths arose.

6. Actaion

They say Actaion was consumed by his own dogs. This is false: a dog loves its master, and especially the one who feeds it, and hunting dogs show affection to everyone. Some say that Artemis turned him into a deer and then his dogs tore the deer apart. I think that Artemis is capable of doing whatever she wants; and yet it can't be true that a man changed into a deer, or a deer into a man. The poets fabricated these myths so that those who listened to them would not violate the gods' domain.

The truth is as follows. Actaion was an Arcadian by birth and loved to hunt. Because he was always training his many dogs and hunting in the mountains, he neglected his own affairs. At that time, all men laboured for themselves and did not have slaves; the wealthiest man was the one who was most industrious. Actaion's livelihood was destroyed because he neglected his domestic affairs to go hunting instead. When he had nothing left, people would say, 'Wretched Actaion - he has been consumed by his own dogs!'. It's just like how even today, when someone wastes their fortune in brothels, we say, 'He has been consumed by prostitutes.' Something like this was what really happened in the case of Actaion.

7. The Horses of Diomedes

What they say about the horses of Diomedes is that they were man-eaters: how laughable! Horses much prefer grass and barley to human flesh!

The truth is as follows. In the distant past men laboured for themselves and only by working the land did they get food and other such necessities. At some stage someone figured out how to keep horses and he took such pleasure in his horses that he ended up ruining himself by squandering everything he had to feed them. And from these actual events the myth spread.

8. Niobe

They say that Niobe was a living woman who turned into stone on the grave of her children. Whoever believes that a human can turn into a stone or a stone turn into a human is naive.

The truth is as follows. After her children died, someone made a stone statue of Niobe and stood it on the grave. And so passers-by would say, 'A stone Niobe stands on the grave. We saw her ourselves!' It's just like how some say nowadays, 'I was sitting beside the bronze Heracles' or 'I was beside the marble Hermes'. This was like that too, but Niobe herself was definitely not turned into stone!

9. Lynceus

It's said that Lynceus could even see things underground. This is false.

The truth is as follows. Lynceus was the first to mine copper and silver etc. He took lamps down into the mine. He left them down there and brought up sacks of bronze and iron. And so people would say, 'Lynceus even sees things underground - he goes down there and brings up silver.'

10. Caineus

They say that Caineus was invulnerable. Whoever imagines that a person cannot be wounded by iron is foolish.

The truth is as follows. Caineus was a Thessalian by birth, skilled in military affairs and experienced in fighting. And yet, despite being in many battles, he was never wounded, not even when he died fighting with the Lapiths against the Centaurs. When the Centaurs captured him they merely buried him, and in this way he met his end. The Lapiths dug up his corpse and found no wounds on his body. And so they would say, 'Caineus was invulnerable his whole life - he even died without a wound'.

11. Cycnos

The same story is also told about Cycnos of Colonai: that he too was invulnerable. He was also a warrior and experienced in battle. He died at Troy after being hit by a stone thrown by Achilles, and yet even then there were no wounds on his body. When they saw his corpse, people would say that he was invulnerable just as now they describe unbeaten athletes combatants as invulnerable. As evidence against these stories and in support of my case, consider Telemonian Aias, for he, too, was said to be invulnerable, and yet he died of a self-inflicted sword wound.

12. Daidalos and Icaros

They say that Minos imprisoned Daidalos and his son Icaros for some reason and that Daidalos made wings for both of them, put them on, and flew away with Icaros. To think that a man could fly, even wearing wings: impossible!

What actually happened⁴ is as follows. Daidalos was being held in a prison. He let himself out through a window and – pulling his son down with him – embarked on a small boat and got away. When Minos realised this, he sent ships to pursue them. When they realised that they were being pursued, there was a strong, favourable wind and it seemed as if they were flying. Soon, as they were sailing with a fair south wind from Crete, they capsized. Daidalos reached the shore safely, but Icaros perished. (And from him this sea is called the Icarian.) His body was tossed ashore by the waves and his father buried him.

13. Atalanta & Meilanion

What's said about Atalanta and Meilanion is that he changed into a lion, and she a lioness.

But the truth is the following. Atalanta and Meilanion were hunting. Meilanion persuaded the girl to have sex with him. They entered a cave to have sex. However, deep in the cave was the den of a lion and a lioness; hearing the sound, they emerged, pounced on Atalanta and her husband, and did away with them. Afterwards, when the lion and the lioness came out, Meilanion's hunting companions saw them and deduced that the couple had been transformed into those animals. So, rushing back to the city, they spread the story that Atalanta and her husband had been transformed into lions.

14. Callisto

There is also a similar story about Callisto: that she turned into a bear while out hunting.

But I would say that she, too, came upon a thicket where there happened to be a bear, and it devoured the huntress entirely. The other hunters, who had seen her enter but not emerge, said that the girl had become a bear.

15. Europa

They say that Europa, the daughter of Phoinix, travelled across the sea from Tyre to Crete, riding a bull. But I don't think that a bull – or even a horse – could swim across such an expanse of open water. And nor would a girl climb up onto the back of a wild bull: if Zeus had wanted Europa to go to Crete, he would have found a better way to get her there.

⁴ We translate Vitelli's conjecture γενόμενον ('what happened') rather than the transmitted λεγόμενον, ('what was said').

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The truth is as follows. A man from Knossos called Tauros ['Bull'] was waging war around Tyre. He ended up carrying off many girls – and among them was the king's daughter, Europa. And so people would say, 'Tauros has taken Europa, the daughter of the king, and gone off with her!' And from these events, the myth was fabricated.

16. The Wooden Horse

They say that the best of Achaians sacked Troy in a hollow wooden horse. But this account is excessively mythic!

This is the truth. They built a wooden horse according to the dimensions of the city-gates so that it could not be pulled into the city since it was too tall. The Greek commanders then set up camp in a hollow near the city, which is called 'the Argive ambush' even now. Sinon deserted from the Argives and revealed a prophecy to the Trojans: if they did not bring the horse into the city, the Achaians would return; but if they did, the Achaians would leave. The Trojans listened to him, demolished their walls, and brought the horse inside. As they were feasting in celebration, the Greeks set upon them, coming through the wall which had been demolished. And this is how Troy was captured.

17. Aiolos

It is said that Aiolos was a man who ruled over the winds and that he gave them to Odysseus in a bag. I think it is clear to everyone that such a thing could not happen.

It is likely that Aiolos was an astronomer and that he explained to Odysseus about the seasons and under which constellations which winds blew. They also say that his city was encircled by a wall of bronze, which is false: he had hoplites guarding his city.

18. The Hesperides

It is said that there existed certain women called the Hesperides who possessed a tree with golden apples on it guarded by a serpent, and that Heracles mounted an expedition to get these apples.

But the truth is as follows. Hesperos was a Milesian man who dwelt in Caria and had two daughters, who were called Hesperides ['daughters of Hesperos']. He had excellent, profitable sheep, of the breed which one still finds in Miletos. For this reason, they were named 'golden', for gold is a most fine thing and these sheep were likewise most fine. People referred to them as *mela* - an old-fashioned word for sheep that also happened to mean 'apples'. Heracles saw them grazing by the sea, herded them onto his ship, and took them home. He also killed their shepherd, who was called Draco ['Serpent']. Hesperos was no longer alive, but his daughters were still living. Accordingly, people would say, 'We saw

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the golden *mela* which Heracles took from the Hesperides, after he killed their guardian, Draco.’ From this, the myth arose.

19. Cottos and Briareos

They say about Cottos and Briareos that they each had one hundred hands, even though they were men. How is this not naive?

The truth is as follows. The name of the city in which they lived was Hundred-hands; this was in Chaonia and is now called Orestias. I base my claim on the fact that they fought alongside the Olympians in the battle against the Titans and these lands border on Olympos. And so people would say, ‘Cottos and Briareos, the Hundred-handers, helped the Olympians and drove the Titans from Olympos’.

20. Scylla

What’s said about Scylla is that she was some kind of beast in the Tyrrhenian sea: a woman down to her navel, from there dogs’ heads sprouted, and the rest of the body a snake. But to imagine her as such a creature is really quite naive.

The truth is this. Tyrrhenian ships used to plunder the coast of Sicily and the Ionian Gulf. There was also at that time a ship - a fast trireme. Its name was ‘Scylla’, and the creature was depicted on its prow. This trireme would often apprehend other boats and make mincemeat out of them, and many stories were told about her. Odysseus, taking advantage of a strong and favourable wind, managed to escape this ship; and in Corcyra he described to Alcinoos how he’d been chased and how he’d escaped and what the skiff looked like. And thus the myth was fabricated.

21. Daidalos

What’s said about Daidalos is that he crafted statues that moved by themselves. But I think it impossible that a sculpture could walk by itself.

The truth is something like this. Sculptors of that time created statues of men and gods with feet together and arms straight down – Daidalos was the first to create a statue with one foot striding ahead of the other. Because of this people would say, ‘Daidalos made a walking statue, rather than a standing one’. It’s just like how we say even today, ‘in that picture, there are men fighting’ or ‘horses running’ or ‘a ship thrown about in a storm’. So it was said that Daidalos created walking statues.

22. Phineus

The account given about Phineus is that the Harpies plundered his livelihood. Some think that they are winged creatures who carried off Phineus' food from his table.

This is the truth. Phineus was the king of Paionia. He became blind as an old man and his sons died. His daughters Eraseia and Harpyreia ...⁵ squandered his livelihood. And so the townspeople would say, 'Wretched Phineus! The Harpies are plundering his livelihood.' Pitying him, his neighbours Zetos and Calais, sons of Boreas (a man, not the wind), came to help. They chased his daughters out of the city, collected some money for him and appointed one of the Thracians as a trustee.

23. Mestra

They say about Mestra, daughter of Erysichthon, that she could change shape whenever she wanted. This is an utterly ridiculous myth! For how is it possible for a girl to turn into a cow, and then a dog or bird?

The truth is as follows. Erysichthon was a Thessalian who became poor after wasting his money. He had a beautiful daughter named Mestra, who was of marriageable age. Whoever laid eyes on her was overcome with desire. At that time, men did not offer money for a bride, but instead offered gifts – some of horses, others of cows or sheep, or whatever Mestra wanted. The Thessalians, watching Erysichthon's wealth increasing, would say, 'The horse, cow and everything else, they've all come to Erysichthon from Mestra.' It's from this that the myth was fabricated.

24. Geryon

They say that Geryon was three-headed. But it is impossible for a body to have three heads.

Something like this actually happened. There is a city on the Black Sea called Trihead. Geryon was famous among people at that time for his wealth, amongst other things. Heracles came for his marvellous herd of cattle and killed Geryon when he resisted. People who saw the cattle being driven off were amazed: for although they were of small stature, they were long from the head to the loins and had flat noses, no horns, and large, broad bones. And so they would say to anyone who asked, 'Heracles drove off the cattle belonging to Triheaded Geryon.' Because of this response, some thought him to have three heads.

⁵ There is a lacuna in the text here.

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25. Glaucos, son of Sisyphos

They say that Glaucos was consumed by his horses. What they don't realise is that he was a breeder of horses and that, because he suffered serious losses and didn't look after his affairs, he was destroyed.

26. Glaucos, son of Minos

This myth, too, is completely laughable. It says that after Glaucos died in a barrel of honey, Minos buried an Argive man, Polyidos, son of Coiranos, in his tomb. Polyidos had seen a serpent treating another serpent which had died with a herb and resurrecting it and it is said that he did the same thing to Glaucos and resurrected him. But this is impossible. A dead man cannot be resurrected – nor a snake, nor any other living being!

Something of this sort happened. Glaucos drank some honey and it upset his bowels. He became ever more sick and fell unconscious. Among the physicians who came, greedy for money, was Polyidos. He knew that a certain herb would help -- he had learnt about it from a physician called Draco ['Serpent']. When Glaucos was close to death, he treated him using this plant and returned him to health. And so people would say, 'When Glaucos died from honey, Polyidos resurrected him with a plant he had learnt about from Draco'. And from this storytellers fashioned the myth.

27. Glaucos of the sea

It is said that *this* Glaucos once ate a certain herb, became immortal, and now lives in the sea. The idea that Glaucos alone would have happened upon this particular herb is utterly naive. And the same can be said of the idea that a human – or any other terrestrial animal – could live in the sea when not even river creatures can survive in the sea (or, conversely, sea creatures survive in rivers). So, the story is foolish.

The truth is as follows. Glaucos was a fisherman from Anthedon and a diver without equal. While he was diving in the harbour, and people were watching him from the town, he swam across to a certain spot and was not seen for several days by the townspeople. They caught sight of him swimming back and asked him, 'Where were you these last few days?', and he said, 'In the sea'.

He also kept fish in a tank and, whenever there was a storm and none of the other fishermen could catch fish, he would ask the townspeople which fish they would like, and he would provide them whatever they wanted. Glaucos got the nickname 'of the sea' in the same way that today, when someone lives in the mountains and is a good hunter, this man is called 'of the mountain'. So it was just because Glaucos spent most of his time in the sea that he was dubbed 'Glaucos of the sea'. And he died when he encountered a savage sea creature. Since he didn't emerge from the sea, people created the myth that he was living in the sea and would live there for the rest of time.

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28. Bellerophon

They say that Bellerophon rode Pegasos, a winged horse. But I don't think that a horse would ever be capable of flight, not even if it had all the wings of flying creatures. And if such a creature existed then, it would exist now too. They also say that he killed Amisodaros' Chimaira. The Chimaira was 'a lion at the front, a serpent at the back and a she-goat in the middle'. Some think that such a beast really did exist even though it had three heads upon one body. But it is impossible for a snake, a lion and a goat to eat the same sort of food. And a mortal being able to breathe fire? Absurd! And which of the heads did the body obey?

The truth is this. Bellerophon was an exile from Corinth, a handsome and noble man. He equipped a large ship and set about plundering and looting the coastal territories as he sailed by. The name of his ship was Pegasos (just as now every ship has a name; and I think the name Pegasos would more likely be given to a ship than to a horse).

King Amisodaros lived near the Xanthos river on a high mountain onto which encroached the Telmissis wood. There are two routes up the mountain: the one at the front from the city of Xanthos, the other, at the back, from Caria. Everywhere else is steep cliffs. In the middle of these is a great chasm in the earth, from which fire erupts. The name of this mountain is Chimaira. Those living near it say that at one time a lion lived along the route at the front and a serpent along the route at the back and that both of these would attack woodcutters and shepherds. Then Bellerophon came and set fire to the mountain. The Telmissis wood was completely burnt down and the beasts killed. And so, those living nearby would say, 'When Bellerophon arrived with Pegasos, he destroyed Amisodaros' Chimaira'. The myth was fabricated from this actual event.

29. The Horses of Pelops

They say that Pelops came to Pisa with winged horses to court Hippodameia, the daughter of Oinomaos. I repeat what I said about Pegasos. If Oinomaos had noticed that Pelops' horses had wings, he would never have let his daughter step foot in his chariot.

What can be said instead is that Pelops came with a ship upon whose cabin were depicted winged horses. He seized the girl and fled. And so people would say that Pelops seized the daughter of Oinomaos and fled on 'winged horses'. And so the myth was fabricated.

30. Phrixos and Helle

The story that they tell about Phrixos is that the ram warned him that his father intended to sacrifice his own children, so he took his sister and climbed up onto its back with her. They crossed the sea and arrived at the Black Sea, completing the entire journey in about three or

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four days. This in particular is fanciful – that a ram could swim through the sea faster than a ship, and to do this carrying two people, and sufficient food and water for himself and for them. (Presumably they could not survive without food for such a length of time!)

And then – so the story goes – Phrixos slaughtered the ram who had warned him and had brought him to safety. He flayed him and gave the fleece to Aietes as a bride price for his daughter. (Aietes was king of that region at the time.) See how rare fleeces were then: a king took a sheepskin in exchange for his own daughter! Or did he consider his own daughter worth so little? To avoid ridicule some now say that the fleece was golden. But if the fleece really had been golden, the king ought not to have taken it from a foreigner. It has also been said that it was for this sheepskin that Jason set out in the Argo with the best of the Greeks. Phrixos would not have been so ungrateful as to murder his protector, nor would the Argo have sailed in search of the skin even if it had been studded with emeralds.

The truth is as follows. Athamas, son of Hellen's son Aiolos, was king of Phthia. He had entrusted his property and his kingdom to a man whom he considered especially loyal and greatly deserving. His name was Crios ('Ram'). When Phrixos' mother died, Athamas gave his kingdom to him, since he was the elder. ...⁶ Crios learned about the plot and said nothing to Athamas, but instead spoke to Phrixos and instructed him to leave the country. Crios prepared a ship, placed in it all of Athamas' valuables, and loaded it with his property and wealth. Amongst these was a statue of the mother of Merops, daughter of Helios, whose name was Cos ('Fleece'). She had used her own money to have a life-sized statue of herself made out of gold. (It was a huge amount of gold, so the story surrounding it became legendary). Anyway, Crios loaded all this onto the ship along with Phrixos and Helle, and they left. Helle became sick and died during the voyage. (It was after her that the Hellespont was named). The others arrived in Phasis and settled there. Phrixos married the daughter of Aietes, king of Colchis, and gave the golden statue of Cos as a bride price. Later, when Athamas died, Jason sailed on the Argo in search of this golden statue of Cos, and not for a ram's fleece. This is the truth.

31. The Daughters of Phorcys

The story told about these women is much more laughable: that Phorcys had three daughters who had a single eye they each made use of in turn. The one using it would insert it in her head in order to see; she would then hand the eye over to the next one, and this is how they all saw. Perseus crept up behind them silently and grabbed their eye. He said that he would not give it back unless they showed him where to find the Gorgon. So they showed him the way. After Perseus cut off the Gorgon's head, he went to Seriphos, showed it to Polydectes, and thus turned him to stone. But this is even more laughable: a living man turning to stone after seeing the head of a corpse? What is the power of a corpse?

⁶ There is a lacuna in the text here, in which the plot of Athamas' new wife towards her stepchildren was probably described.

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What happened was something like this. Phorcys was a Cernaian. The Cernaians were descendants of the Ethiopians who lived on the island of Cerne outside the Pillars of Heracles. They worked Libyan land by the river Annon,⁷ directly opposite Carthage. They were exceptionally rich in gold. This man Phorcys ruled the islands (there are three) outside the Pillars of Heracles and he made a golden statue of Athena, four cubits tall. The Cernaians call Athena 'Gorgon', just as the Thracians call Artemis 'Bendis', the Cretans 'Dictyna', and the Lacedaimonians 'Oupis'. Anyway, Phorcys died before the statue could be dedicated in the sanctuary, and left behind three daughters: Stheno, Euryale and Medousa. The women didn't want to marry anyone, so they divided up their father's estate and each ruled one of the islands. Regarding the Gorgon, the women decided neither to dedicate it in the sanctuary nor to divide it between them. Rather, each in turn kept it in her own treasury. Phorcys had a companion, a handsome and noble man, who helped them in all matters, just as if he were their eye.

Perseus was an exile from Argos and was raiding along the coast with ships and a band of men. After learning that there was a kingdom ruled by women, rich in gold, and few in fighting men, he travelled there. He lay in wait in the narrows between Cerne and Sarpedonia, and then captured the Eye when he was sailing through from one island to another. The Eye explained to Perseus that there was nothing worth taking from the women except the Gorgon, and revealed that it was made entirely of gold. When the Eye had not arrived at the agreed-upon time, the women gathered in one place and began accusing one another. Each denied having him, so they began to wonder what had happened. While they were gathered there Perseus launched an attack against them with his ships. He announced that *he* had the Eye and said that he would not give him back unless they revealed where the Gorgon was. He threatened also to kill the three of them if they did not obey. Medousa refused to disclose the location, but Stheno and Euryale did. So Perseus killed Medousa and handed over the Eye to the other two. He took the Gorgon and dismantled it. He fitted out a trireme, set the head of the Gorgon on it and gave the ship the name 'Gorgon'.

He sailed around in the trireme exacting money from the islanders and killing those who refused to hand it over. So one day he sailed to the island of the Seriphians and demanded money from them; they asked him for a few days to gather the money. They brought together stones the height of men, deposited them in their agora, and then abandoned Seriphos. Perseus sailed back again for the money that he had demanded, but on entering the agora he found no one there, only stones the height of men. And so Perseus would say to other islanders, when they did not give him his money, 'Beware that you don't suffer what the Seriphians did, who gazed at the head of the Gorgon and were turned to stone!'

32. The Amazons

What I say about the Amazons is that they were not women who fought in battle, but they were foreign men who wore full-length tunics, like Thracian women do, and tied up their

⁷ The form of the placename is corrupt; 'Annon' is one of several (all unlocatable) variants in the manuscripts. Sharing and remixing permitted under terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 License (CC-BY)

hair with bands and shaved their beards like the men of Patara on the Xanthos river⁸ do even now. Because of this, they were called women by their enemies. This race of Amazons was good at fighting. It is unlikely that an army of women ever existed, for there's no such thing anywhere today.

33. Orpheus

False, too, is the myth about Orpheus: that four-legged beasts, reptiles, birds and trees would follow him when he played the cithara.

I think that this is how things came to pass. Bacchantes in their frenzies tore livestock to pieces in Pieria; amongst the other violent things they did, they decamped to the mountains and spent their days there. While they were up there the townsfolk, worried about their wives and daughters, had to summon Orpheus to devise a plan to get them down from the mountain. After sacrificing to Dionysos, he led down the frenzied women playing his cithara. They came down from the mountain holding then for the first time stalks of giant fennel and branches from all sorts of trees. People watching were amazed by the foliage and said, 'Even the forest comes down from the mountain when Orpheus plays his cithara'. And from this event the myth was fabricated.

34. Pandora

The story about Pandora is not acceptable: that she was moulded from clay and then passed on her likeness to others. I don't think this is the case.

Rather, Pandora was a very wealthy Greek woman and, whenever she went out, she would adorn herself by applying a lot of clay to her skin. She was the first to discover how to use a lot of clay to enhance her complexion. (Many women do this now, but none of them attracts comment for it because it's so common). That was the actual event, but the story was turned into something impossible.

35. The Meliai

Among the other foolish things people say is that the first race of humans was born from ash trees [*meliai*]. But I think it is not possible for humans to be born from wood.

Rather, there was a man called Melios, after whom were named the Meliai ['daughters of Melios'], just as the Hellenes were named after Hellen and the Ionians were named after Ion. But that whole family line perished and the name was lost. Likewise, the races of iron and bronze never existed, but are made-up nonsense.

⁸ The form of the placename is corrupt. Following Stern we translate Froehner's conjecture.

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36. Heracles

The same thing happened with regard to Heracles. It is said that he had leaves on his body. ...⁹ And so Philoites ...¹⁰ the first individual to invent this method, burnt [the wounds] and returned him to health. The story was elaborated from this actual event.

37. Ketos

What's said about Ketos ['the sea monster'] is that he would periodically emerge from the sea at Troy. If they gave it girls to eat, it would go away, but if they didn't, it would ravage their land. But it's naive for people to make pacts with fish – who doesn't know that?

This is what happened. There was a great king – very powerful and with a large navy – who subjugated the whole coast of Asia. Those subjugated to him paid taxes which they called 'tribute'. The people of that time did not use currency but paid in goods. From some cities he demanded horses, from others, cattle, and from others, girls. This king's name was actually Keton, but those who could not speak Greek called him 'Ketos'. He would sail around demanding the tribute at the appointed time and destroy the land of whoever did not hand it over.

At one of these times, Heracles arrived at Troy with an army of Greeks. King Laomedon paid him to help the Trojans. Keton unloaded his troops and advanced on foot. When Heracles and Laomedon, each with his own army, met him in battle, they killed him. And the myth was fabricated from this event.

38. Hydra

It is said about the Lernaian Hydra that it was a snake with fifty heads but one body, and that whenever Heracles cut off one of its heads, two more would grow. It is also said that Crab came to the rescue of the Hydra and that on that occasion Iolaos aided Heracles, seeing as Crab was aiding the Hydra. If anyone believes that such a thing existed, they're a fool: the image is laughable! And why, whenever Heracles cut off one of the heads, was he not devoured by the others and consumed by pain?

Something like this must have happened. Lernos was the king of this region and it took its name from him. (At that time, everyone there lived in small villages; this is now Argive territory.) In those days there existed the cities of Argos, Mycenae, Tiryns,¹¹ and Lerna, and a king was appointed to each. The other kings were subject to Eurystheus, son of Persues'

⁹ The text of this entry is corrupt. The lacunae cannot be reconstructed with any certainty.

¹⁰ The text of this entry is corrupt. The lacunae cannot be reconstructed with any certainty.

¹¹ We translate Westermann's conjecture Τίρυνς rather than the transmitted Τυρ(ρ)ήνη.

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son Sthenelos, as he had the greatest and most populous territory, that of Mycenae. But Lernos had no desire to be subject to him, and this is why they went to war. There was then, on a pass that gave access to Lernos, a formidable fort. It was guarded by fifty brave bowmen who manned a tower unceasingly, day and night. The name of this fort was Hydra.

Eurystheus sent Heracles to conquer the fort. Heracles' men began to attack the archers with fiery missiles, but whenever any one of them was struck and fell, two would step up in his place, following the brave example of the fallen man. Since Lernos almost besieged by Heracles, he hired Carian mercenaries. There arrived a tall and warlike man named Carcinos ['Crab'] at the head of the army. With his help, they held out against Heracles.

Then Iolaos, son of Iphicles and Heracles' nephew, arrived to help out with an army from Thebes. He approached Hydra and set fire to the regenerating tower. And thus, with this force, Heracles conquered the Lernaian: he defeated Hydra and destroyed the army. This is the event that they wrote up with the Hydra as a snake, and so fabricated the myth.

39. Cerberos

What is said about Cerberos is that he was a dog with three heads. It is clear that, just like Geryon, he too was from the city called Trihead and so people would say, 'That's a large and handsome Triheaded hound!' It is said that Heracles led him up out of Hades: such a myth!

What happened was something like this. Guarding his cattle Geryon had two large, spirited dogs whose names were Cerberos and Orthos. Orthos was done away with by Heracles in Trihead after he had rounded up the cattle. Cerberos, meanwhile, went along with the herd. Wanting the dog, a Mycenaean man by the name of Molottos first asked Eurystheus to give him the dog. After Eurystheus refused, Molottos persuaded the herdsman to let him keep the dog penned up in a cave on Cape Tainaron in Laconia. Because Cerberos sired excellent offspring, he would lower down female dogs for him to mount.

Eurystheus sent Heracles on the hunt for the dog. Having wandered the whole Peloponnese, he arrived at the place where he had been tipped off that the dog was to be found. He descended into the cave and led the dog out. And so people would say, 'Having descended through a cave into Hades, Heracles led the dog up out of there.'

40. Alcestis

The tragic myth told about Alcestis is that, when Admetos was about to die, Alcestis volunteered to die on his behalf, and that Heracles, on account of her piety, rescued her from Thanatos ['Death'] and returned her to Admetos. I don't think anyone is capable of bringing someone back to life after they have died.

Rather, something like this happened. When Pelias' daughters killed him, Pelias' son Acastos went after them, wanting to kill them to avenge his father. He captured the other sisters,

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but Alcestis escaped to Pherai to her cousin Admetos. There she sat as a suppliant at his hearth so that Admetos couldn't agree to Acastos' demands to give her up. Acastos positioned a large army around the city and began to attack them with fiery missiles. During the night, Admetos went out but happened upon the enemy captains, and he was captured alive. Acastos threatened to kill him unless he gave up Alcestis even though she was a suppliant. When Alcestis learnt that Admetos was about to die because of her, she came out and handed herself over. Acastos released Admetos and apprehended Alcestis. And so people would say, 'Alcestis is so brave she was willing to die for Admetos.' This certainly did not happen as the myth says it does.

It was then that Heracles was passing through from somewhere with the horses of Diomedes. When he arrived Admetos welcomed him as a guest. Admetos lamented the misfortune of Alcestis and Heracles became indignant.¹² He attacked Acastos and annihilated his army. He then divided up the spoils among his army and handed Alcestis over to Admetos. And so people would say that Heracles had come along and rescued Alcestis from death. The myth was fabricated from these actual events.

41. Zethos and Amphion

Hesiod, among others, records that Zethos and Amphion built the walls of Thebes with a cithara. Some people think that when they played the cithara the stones rose of their own accord to the top of the walls.

The truth is as follows. Zethos and Amphion were exceedingly talented cithara players and they performed for payment. People at that time did not have currency. So Amphion and his brother ordered those who wanted to hear them play to go work on the walls. But it was not the stones themselves who listened and obeyed! Thus in fact people were speaking perfectly correctly when they said that the walls were built with a lyre.

42. Io

They say that Io was a woman who was turned into a cow and, goaded by a gadfly, she crossed the sea from Argos and came to Egypt. This is implausible: the very idea that ...¹³ she could survive so many days without food!

The truth is as follows. Io was the daughter of the king of Argos. The people from the city did her the honour of making her priestess of Argive Hera. She fell pregnant and, afraid of her father and the townspeople, fled the city. The Argives went out searching, and, had they found her anywhere, would have apprehended her and put her in chains.¹⁴ So they would

¹² We translate the variant tradition ἀγανακτησάμενος ('became indignant') rather than ἀνακτησάμενος ('recovered (himself)') as printed by Festa.

¹³ There is a lacuna in the text here.

¹⁴ We translate Stern's suggestion of replacing the transmitted sentence with a contrary-to-fact statement. Sharing and remixing permitted under terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 License (CC-BY)

say, 'She's like a cow: she's goaded and she flees'. ...¹⁵ In the end, she handed herself over to some foreign traders and begged them to take her to Egypt. After arriving there she gave birth. And so the myth was fabricated.

43. Medeia

They say that Medeia made old men young again by boiling them. But no-one can prove that she made anyone young: if she boiled someone, she surely killed them.

Something like this happened. Medeia was the first to discover black and red dyes. She made the hair of old men seem black and auburn: by applying dyes she changed white hair into black and auburn. ...¹⁶ Medeia was the first to discover that steam baths were beneficial for people. She ran baths in secret for those who wanted them, and made them swear an oath not to mention it to anyone, to prevent any of the physicians from finding out. The name of this bathing technique was 'boiling'. People who had these baths became healthier and more relaxed. For this reason, and because they saw her with a cauldron and fire, they believed that she was boiling people. Pelias, a frail old man, died in the bath. And from this the myth arose.

44. Omphale

It is said about Omphale that Heracles was enslaved to her. The story is foolish. He would have been able to control her and everything she owned ...¹⁷.

Something like this happened. Omphale was the daughter of Iardanos, king of Lydia. She heard of Heracles' strength and feigned love for him. When Heracles met her, he was overcome with desire and fathered a son with her. He was infatuated and did whatever she asked. Naive people assumed that he was enslaved to her.

45. The Horn of Amaltheia

They say that Heracles carried around with him everywhere the so-called horn of Amaltheia and that from it emerged anything he wanted when he prayed for it.

The truth is as follows. When Heracles was travelling through Boiotia with his nephew Iolaos, he stayed in Thespias at an inn run by a woman called Amaltheia, who was youthful and exceptionally beautiful. Heracles was infatuated with her and enjoyed her hospitality for quite a long time. This affected Iolaos badly and he decided to take Amaltheia's profits, which she kept in a horn, and use them to obtain whatever he wanted for himself and

¹⁵ There is a lacuna in the text here.

¹⁶ There is a lacuna in the text here.

¹⁷ There is a lacuna in the text here.

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Heracles. And so the other travellers would say, 'Heracles had the horn of Amaltheia, and from it he obtained whatever he wanted for himself.' From these events the myth was fabricated, and artists depicting Heracles came to depict the horn of Amaltheia with him.