

Heracles

I. Introduction. *Greek god–hero.* The Greek myth of H. was broadly attested in the entire Eastern and Western Mediterranean world since Homeric times (the name is lacking in the Mycaenean tablets). His diffusion was intensified after Alexander’s conquest of the Orient in Hellenistic and Roman times (BONNET 1992: 165–198). The Heracleian myths, transported through different local cults, convey insights into the relationship between human beings and nature, between men and women, the chaos, man’s destiny after death, and the Greek colonial expansion in the Mediterranean for which H. was a symbol and the standard bearer of Hellenism (JOURDAIN–ANNEQUIN 1987). His iconography seems to appear at the beginning of the 1st mill. or slightly earlier, but the identity of a warrior (against animals or monsters) and the eventual mythological background of such images is hard to identify when he does not bear any specific attributes (BONNET 1997: 830–834; AHLBERG–CORNELL 1992). The typical Heracleian iconography emerges progressively in the Archaic period at the Oriental shores of the Mediterranean: an athletic man with a lion skin (*leonte*) and a bow and/or club who fights with traditional opponents such as the Nemean lion, the Hydra of Lerna, or a three-headed giant and thus becomes one of the most expressive iconographical medium of the Archaic and Classic culture. During the 5th and 4th cent., especially in Olympia and Thebes, rich iconographic material is set in place through a cycle known as the *dodekathlon* which is made up of twelve canonical episodes, also attested by many local variants. During the elaboration of the traditional Heracleian iconography some Oriental models were influential, e.g., the image of the god/king who fights with a lion as a symbol of overcoming chaos or death that threatens order and life (especially documented in relation to “heroic” figures such as Gilgamesh); or the iconography of the smiting god (→Smiting deities), present in Syria, Phoenicia, and Palestine/Israel, particularly in the form of the →storm god. Cyprus appears to have been the place where Greek iconographical elements met traditional Oriental models, leading to the new “syncretistic” Heracleian image, attested since the 8th cent. (BONNET/JOURDAIN–ANNEQUIN 2001: 195–223), even if his name is not present in Cypriote inscriptions until the Hellenistic period. During the 1st mill. the Near Eastern region, which is the main focus of this article, pro-

vides only few images of H. The real problem is to identify the character: is he the Greek hero who is well attested everywhere or is he the *interpretatio graeca* of some local oriental god, especially →Melqart, the Tyrian →Baal who was assimilated with H. in the 5th cent. or probably somewhat earlier (Herodotus, *Historiae* 2.44; BONNET 1988; BONNET 1997: 830–834)?

II. Typology

II.1. Phenotypes

1. CONTROLLING OR FIGHTING WITH A LION 1.1. Striding, brandishing a club, and holding a lion by one or both hind legs (1–17) 1.2. Wrestling with a lion (18) 1.3. Carrying a lion on his shoulder (19) 2. STANDING OR RUNNING WITH LEONTE, BOW, OR CLUB (20–29) 3. ATTACKING GERYON’S HERD (30) 4. FIGHTING A SERPENT (31) 5. POSSIBLE 6. UNLIKELY

1. CONTROLLING OR FIGHTING WITH A LION

1.1. Striding, brandishing a club, and holding a lion by one or both hind legs. Striding H. brandishing a club in one hand and holding a lion by one leg with the other is attested in Near Eastern glyptic from Palestine/Israel (1*–4) and Syria (5–7), and by the Sidonian coinage of the Persian period under the reign of Baana (8–9). Probably the same motif was also depicted on a fragmentary Phoenician name seal (LEMAIRE 1986: fig. 1a–b). H. grasping a lion by both legs is represented as limestone statue from Syrian (10–12), Palestinian (13), and Cypriote (14–17) sites. The model for this syncretistic image was the smiting god (→Smiting deities) typology, which seems to have been used for different gods especially in Cypriote contexts: first for H./→Melqart, but also for Apollo/→Resheph (at Idalion) as Greek and Phoenician *interpretatio* of the local Cypriote god.

1.2. Wrestling with a lion. On a limestone statue from Pyrgos near Amathous, H. fights with a lion raised up on hind legs (18). It is unclear whether the hero with a lion skin wrestling with a lion on the external border of the Idalion bowl from Cyprus (see 19*; BONNET 1997: no. 26) should be identified with H. The same is true for a similar representation on a bulla from Wadi ed-Daliyeh (LEITH 1997: pl. 6:WD42).

1.3. Carrying a lion on his shoulder. In a scene on the Idalion silver bowl 19*, the hero with the lion skin is depicted carrying the animal on his shoulders.

2. STANDING OR RUNNING WITH LEONTE, BOW, OR CLUB. This phenotype is found in Cypriote statuary (20*–21) and coinage (22–23; in addition see DESTROPPER–GEORGIADES 1995: pls. 11:39–12:44, 48, 53–54). The god bears a short dress with a belt the *leonte* (for separated heads with a

leonte see 24 from Lachish and 25 from Cyprus), a bow with arrows in a quiver, and sometimes a club. In Palestine this phenotype is known from bullae of Wadi ed-Daliyeh (26–28*) and a seal from Atlit (29). However, in the context of Cypro-Phoenician culture it is also possible that this H. was regarded as →Melqart. The identification of a figure with Heracles on a fragmentary seal from Al Mina is uncertain (BUCHANAN/MOOREY 1988: no. 17: bowman; NUNN 2000: pl. 47:63: soldier; BOARDMAN 2003: no. 32/11: Heracles).

3. ATTACKING GERYON'S HERD.

Only one example from Cyprus shows H. in a smiting pose on a podium as he attacks Eurytion, the keeper of Geryon's herd, after killing the dog Orthros with an arrow (30).

4. FIGHTING A SERPENT. Striding H. brandishing a club in one hand and holding a serpent with the other behind his back occurs on a scarab allegedly coming from Sidon (31). Along the border of the seal a running dog is depicted in front of H.

5. POSSIBLE. Two examples from Cyprus may depict H. struggling with the Hydra of Lerna: a White-Painted I plate (HERMARY 1990: no. 28) from Palaipaphos-Skales shows two persons (H. and Iolaos?) with bows and swords fighting with a great two-headed serpent, and limestone fragments from Golgoi depict →serpents and a crab on H.'s foot (HERMARY 1990: no. 29).

6. UNLIKELY. On a bulla from Wadi ed-Daliyeh (LEITH 1997: pl. 12:WD47) a frontal nude figure holds two →lions by a leg in the pose of the Oriental iconography of the Master-of-lions. However, the suggested identification with H. seems very hypothetical.

II.2. Associations

1. ASSOCIATED WITH ANIMALS

1.1. Lion. The →lion frequently appears with H.: the hero is slaying (1*–18), carrying (19*), or, more generally speaking, dominating the animal. This phenotype derives from the old Oriental perception that the king is responsible for the cosmic order. The relationship with the lion illustrates the human/royal dominion over nature, chaos, savagery, and also probably death. H. borrows this Oriental motif through a Cypriote relay. Different Oriental gods, like →Baal or Shadrappa, have adopted the same imagery with the same general meaning. For H. the Greek mythology of the victory over the Nemean lion provides a narrative background, which was probably known by the Oriental population since the Archaic period.

1.2. Dog, serpent. The →dog and the →serpent are also occasionally associated with H. The dog sometimes appears helping the hero in slaying a lion (1*, 3, →Dog § II.2.1.3) or serpent (31). This association probably refers to a mythological account (LUCE 2008) and has some echo in Sicily as well, but it is hard to understand its meaning except that H. acts as a hunter accompanied by a dog. In the Greek mythology H. is also a serpent slayer since his birth (see also § II.1.5). Since the serpent is considered as a malefic animal, H. acts as a “cultural hero” who purifies the earth from danger and threat to the human collectivity.

III. Sources

III.1. Chronological range. Except for the uncertain Palaipaphos plate (HERMARY 1990: no. 28; 11th cent.?), the chronological range extends from the 8th (19*) to 4th (18, 26–29) cent., with a remarkable concentration of material during the 6th–5th cent. (1*–10, 12, 14–16, 18, 20*–25, 29–31). This seems to be the period in which the Heracleian iconography was formed and defined.

III.2. Geographical distribution.

The iconography of H. is especially attested along the Levantine coastal region (1*–13, 29, 31) and in Cyprus (14–23, 25, 30), rarely in the Levantine *hinterland* (24, 26–28*). This region seems to have played a fundamental role in the elaboration of H.'s iconography through the adaptation of Oriental models in the Archaic period. There H. and →Melqart meet, just as Greeks, Aramaeans, Phoenicians, and Cypriotes met for commercial reasons. In this context a new mixed image was progressively invented, which was in some way a “bilingual” image: “H.–Melqart”. In sacral Cypriot contexts (including rural cult places in the central or Oriental part of the island), it is possible that the same iconography was used to “translate” other gods, such as Apollo (assimilated to →Resheph) or the local Cypriote great god.

III.3. Object types. H. is frequently represented as a statue (10–18, 20*–21). Other media are seals (1*–7, 29, 31), bullae (26–28*), or coins (8–9, 22–23). A silver bowl (19*) or plaque (25) may also depict H., as well as a terra-cotta figurine (24) or relief (30) on the base of a statue.

IV. Conclusion. The Heracleian images in the ancient Near East are not very abundant and difficult to interpret, particularly because of the mixed cultural and cultic background. However, they provide important evidence of the syncretism between H. and some Oriental gods, first with

→Melqart of Tyre. In this syncretistic process Greek iconography functions as a mediating language from the time of the Archaic period and even more during the Hellenistic period.

The main role of H.'s iconography is functional and not related to a mythological background. Except for some of the most famous deeds of H., such as overcoming the lion and the hydra or stealing Geryon's herd, the images do not refer to specific myths but rather to functions: protection against the chaotic powers and dominance over nature and animals. H. fighting the lion reflects the victory of life's power over negative forces. As a →smiting god, H. conveys the power and courage of a hero but also sovereignty and kingship over animals, nature, humanity, life, and death (just as Melqart is "King of the City"). In the Persian period such an image may have been used to express the Mazdean duality between positive and negative divine powers (NUNN 2000a: 359–374).

The functional context of the representations of H. is of cultic nature: they are gifts to the gods who can protect and defend communities as well as help the individual in their everyday life. Finally, when these objects are placed into graves they will be of help in the netherworld, which H. has already visited. A related theme in this regard is the episode of H. taking Geryon's herd, which prepares for his descent into the netherworld and his apotheosis. His victory over the lion as a symbol of the negative forces of life may also have an eschatological connotation in funerary contexts. In a functional context, the specific identity of the god/hero is not as important; the imagery of H. may have been understood in different ways depending on if it was perceived by a Greek, Cypriote, or Oriental person. For this reason it is difficult to clearly delimit H.'s iconography to Near Eastern areas. To sum up, the imagery of H. is that of an active god, heroic, triumphant, and royal, who could be named in different ways ("polysemantic" image).

V. Catalogue

1* Scarab, greenstone-facies, 13.7 x 11 x 7.2 mm, Atlit, 539–332. Jerusalem, IAA 32.469 (disappeared 1967 from the exhibition in the Rockefeller Museum). JOHNS 1933: pl. 14:496; *KEEL 1997: 'Atlit no. 4 **2** Scarab, greenstone-facies, Atlit, 539–332. JOHNS 1933: pl. 14:687; KEEL 1997: 'Atlit no. 15 **3** Scarab, greenstone-facies, Atlit, 539–332. JOHNS 1933: pl. 14:705; KEEL 1997: 'Atlit no. 16 **4** Scarab, greenstone facies, Palestine/Israel, 500–300. TUSHINGHAM 1985: pl. 17 **5** Scarab, greenstone facies, Amrit, 500–300. BUCHANAN/MOOREY 1988: no. 478; BOARDMAN 2003: no. 32/25 **6** Scarab, greenstone facies, Amrit, 500–300. RIDDER 1911: pl. 18: 2780 **7** Scarab, greenstone facies, Amrit, 500–300. RIDDER 1911: pl. 18: 2781 **8–9** Coin, silver, Sidon, 450. HILL 1965: pl. 45:3–4; BONNET 1997: no. 28 **10** Statue, limestone, Amrit, 475–450. HERMARY 1990: no. 12; JOURDAIN–ANNEQUIN 1992:

pl. 1:1 **11** Statue head, limestone, Tell Sukas, 500. BOUNNI 1986: 377, fig. 4b **12** Statue head, limestone, Ras Ibn Hani, 500–400. BOUNNI et al. 1979: 288, fig. 55a–b; JOURDAIN–ANNEQUIN 1992: 21, fig. 4c **13** Statue, limestone, Tell eš-Şafi, 500. BLISS/MACALISTER 1902: 146, pl. 75, top row, second from left **14** Statue, limestone, Kition, 500. HERMARY 1990: no. 9 **15*** Statue, limestone, 56 cm, Idalion, 450–500. Paris, Louvre Museum, AM 641. HERMARY 1990: no. 7c; SOPHOCLEOUS 1985: pl. 7:2 **16** Statue, limestone, Lefkoniko, 450. HERMARY 1990: no. 11 **17** Statue, limestone, Golgoi, 350–300. HERMARY 1990: no. 14 **18** Statue, limestone, Pyrgos, 500. HERMARY 1990: no. 26 **19*** Bowl, silver (inner surface gold-plated), 18.5 cm, Idalion, 710–675. Paris, Louvre Museum, AO 20134. MARKOE 1985: 170f, no. Cy2, 245f, pl. Cy2; BONNET 1997: no. 26; *JOURDAIN–ANNEQUIN 1992: pl. 15 **20*** Statue, limestone, 50.5 cm, Golgoi, 550. New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, 74.51.2661. HERMARY 1990: no. 1; SOPHOCLEOUS 1985: pl. 5:2 **21** Statue, limestone, Kazaphani, 525. HERMARY 1990: no. 1; SOPHOCLEOUS 1985: pl. 6:1 **22** Coin, silver, Kition, 475. DESTROOPER–GEORGIADIS 1995: 161, pl. 11:38; BABELON 1910: no. 1196, pl. 130:4 **23** Coin, silver, Lapethos, 525. DESTROOPER–GEORGIADIS 1995: 162, pl. 12:47; DIKAIOS 1935: 173, no. 530, pl. 15:8 **24** Figurine head, clay, Lachish, 500. TUFNELL et al. 1953: pl. 31:19 **25** Plaque, silver, Cyprus, 600–500. HERMARY 1990: no. 20 **26** Bulla, clay, Wadi ed-Daliyeh, 350. LEITH 1997: 87–89, no. WD11C, pl. 6:WD11C **28*** Bulla, clay, Wadi ed-Daliyeh, 350. *LEITH 1997: 90f, no. WD39, pl. 6:WD39 **29** Scarab, carnelian, Atlit, 500–300. KEEL 1997: 'Atlit no. 8 **30** Relief, limestone, Golgoi, 490–480. HERMARY 1990: no. 27 **31** Scarab, allegedly from Sidon, 500–300. Boardman 2003: pl. 35:32/49

VI. Selected bibliography

HERMARY 1990 • JOURDAIN–ANNEQUIN 1992 • BONNET 1997 • BONNET/JOURDAIN–ANNEQUIN 2001

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