

Panyassis  
The Fragments

DELPHI  CLASSICS

Ancient Classics Series

*The Fragments of*

**PANYASSIS**

(fl. 5<sup>th</sup> century BC)



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The Heroic Age of Greece (1912) by H. Munro Chadwick

*The Delphi Classics Catalogue*



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Version 1

*The Fragments of*  
**PANYASSIS OF HALICARNASSUS**



*By Delphi Classics, 2023*

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## *The Fragments of Panyassis*



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## The Translations



*The ruins of the Mausoleum, one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World, at Halicarnassus, Caria (modern-day Bodrum, Turkey) — Halicarnassus was Panyassis' birthplace.*



*Myndos Gate, ruins of the fortifications of Halicarnassus, c. fourth century BC*

## The Fragments



*Translated by P. Laskaris, 2023*

Judged by some as second only to Homer, Panyassis of Halicarnassus remains obscure today to the general reader. He was a fifth-century BC epic poet from the Persian Empire, who was born the son of Polyarchus in Halicarnassus. It is believed that he was either the uncle or cousin of Herodotus, the ‘father of history’. We know very little about Panyassis’ life, save for the fact that was put to death by the tyrant Lygdamis II in c. 454. His chief literary achievement was the epic poem *Heraclea*, composed of 14 books and 9,000 verses, narrating the adventures of Heracles in various parts of the world. The thirty or so fragments that have been preserved reveal an elegant and graceful style, noted for its harmonious rhythm. Panyassis also wrote an *Ionica* in elegiacs, providing an account of the founding and settlement of the Ionic colonies in Asia Minor. Although Panyassis was not especially esteemed by his immediate contemporaries, at a time that was unfavourable to epic poetry, he was highly thought of by later critics and he was ranked by the Alexandrian School as being among the great epic poets.

The chief narrative construct of the epic would have been the completing of the Labours of Heracles, a series of episodes concerning a penance carried out by the hero. They were accomplished at the service of King Eurystheus. The establishment of a fixed cycle of twelve labours was attributed by the Greeks to an earlier epic poem, now lost, written by Peisander, dated to c. 600 BC, almost 150 years before Panyassis’ epic on the same subject.

Considered by the Greeks as the greatest of all the heroes, Heracles was the product of an affair between Zeus, the king of the gods, and the mortal woman Alcmene. Hera, the jealous queen of the gods, was always Heracles’ bitterest foe, tormenting him with numerous attacks. Alcmene was terrified of Hera’s vengeance and so decided to expose her infant son, who was then secretly taken away by either Zeus or his daughter Athena. Ironically, the child was given to Hera to nurse and she failed to recognise Heracles’ identity. The infant suckled so strongly that he caused Hera pain and she pushed him away, her milk spraying across the heavens, forming the Milky Way.

However, with this divine milk, Heracles acquired supernatural strength. Either Zeus or Athena then brought the infant back to his mother and he was subsequently raised by Alcmene and her mortal husband, King Amphitryon. In time, Heracles married Megara, the eldest daughter of King Creon of Thebes. Yet, in a fit of madness induced by Hera, Heracles killed Megara and their children — this is likely the starting point of Panyassis’ epic. After recovering his sanity, Heracles deeply regretted his actions. He was purified by King Thespius, before travelling to Delphi to inquire how he could atone for his actions. Pythia, the Oracle of Delphi, advised him to go to Tiryns and serve his cousin, King Eurystheus of Mycenae, for ten years, performing whatever labours Eurystheus might set him. In return, he would be rewarded with immortality. Heracles despaired at this ruling, loathing to serve a man that he knew was much inferior to himself, yet he feared to oppose his father, Zeus. Eventually, Heracles placed himself at Eurystheus’ disposal.

This king originally ordered Heracles to perform ten labours. The hero accomplished these tasks, but Eurystheus refused to recognise two of the labours: firstly, the slaying of the Lernaean Hydra, as Heracles' nephew and charioteer Iolaus had helped him; and secondly the cleansing of the Augean stables, as Heracles accepted payment for the labour. Therefore, Eurystheus set two further tasks — the fetching of the Golden Apples of Hesperides and the capturing of the three-headed Cerberus from the Underworld, which Heracles also performed, bringing the total number of Labours to twelve.

The extant fragments of the *Heraclea* also reveal events that happened to Heracles after the completion of his Twelve Labours, when he came to Oechalia to compete in a contest of archery for the hand of Iole. Heracles was victorious and yet he was refused the bride by King Eurystus and his sons, except Iphitus, who said that Iole should be given to Heracles. Eurystus feared that Heracles would once again kill his offspring, as he had done to his children by Megara. Shortly after some cattle were stolen by the notorious thief Autolycus and Heracles was held responsible; but Iphitus did not believe this and offered to seek the cattle with him. Heracles promised to do so, but suddenly he was thrown into madness again, casting Iphitus from the walls of Tiryns, killing him instantly. Due to the killing of Iphitus, Heracles was, by the command of the Delphic Oracle Xenoclea, remanded as a slave to Omphale, the queen of the kingdom of Lydia, for the period of a year, the compensation to be paid to Eurystus, who refused it.

In consideration of the surviving fragments and what we know regarding the stories of Heracles from other authors, it is possible to propose a broad summary of the events that take place in Panyassis' lost epic. However, it is important to note that this synopsis should be regarded as speculative.

## **PROPOSED SYNOPSIS OF THE 'HERACLEA'**

### **BOOK 1.**

An invocation to the Muse, calling for consideration of what brought on the madness of Heracles.

How Heracles killed Megara and his children in a fit of madness. (fragment 1)

The journey to Delphi to seek purification for the killing of the children. (fragment 2)

The Oracle tells Heracles to journey to Tiryns and serve Eurystheus for ten years.

Athena consoles Heracles for having to endure servitude to a mortal. (fragments 3,4 and 5)

### **BOOK 2.**

LABOUR 1: Slaying the Nemean lion. (fragment 6)

LABOUR 2: Slaying the nine-headed Lernaean Hydra. (fragment 7)

LABOUR 3. Capturing the Ceryneian Hind.

### **BOOKS 3 AND 4.**



LABOUR 4. Capturing the Erymanthian Boar. (fragment 8?)

LABOUR 5. Cleaning the Augean stables in a single day.

LABOUR 6. Slaying the Stymphalian birds.

LABOUR 7. Capturing the Cretan Bull.

LABOUR 8. Stealing the Mares of Diomedes.

LABOUR 9. Obtaining the girdle of Hippolyta, queen of the Amazons.

#### BOOK 5

LABOUR 10. Obtaining the cattle of the three-bodied giant Geryon. [fragments 10 and 11]

LABOUR 11. Stealing three of the golden apples of the Hesperides. [fragments 13, 14 and 15]

#### BOOK 6

LABOUR 12. Capturing and bringing back Cerberus from the Underworld. [fragments 17 and 18]

#### BOOKS 7 TO 14

King Eurytus hosts Heracles at Oechalia. Heracles takes part in an Archery contest, competing for the hand of Iole. [fragments 19, 20, 21 and 22]

Eurytus denies Heracles his prize for winning the contest.

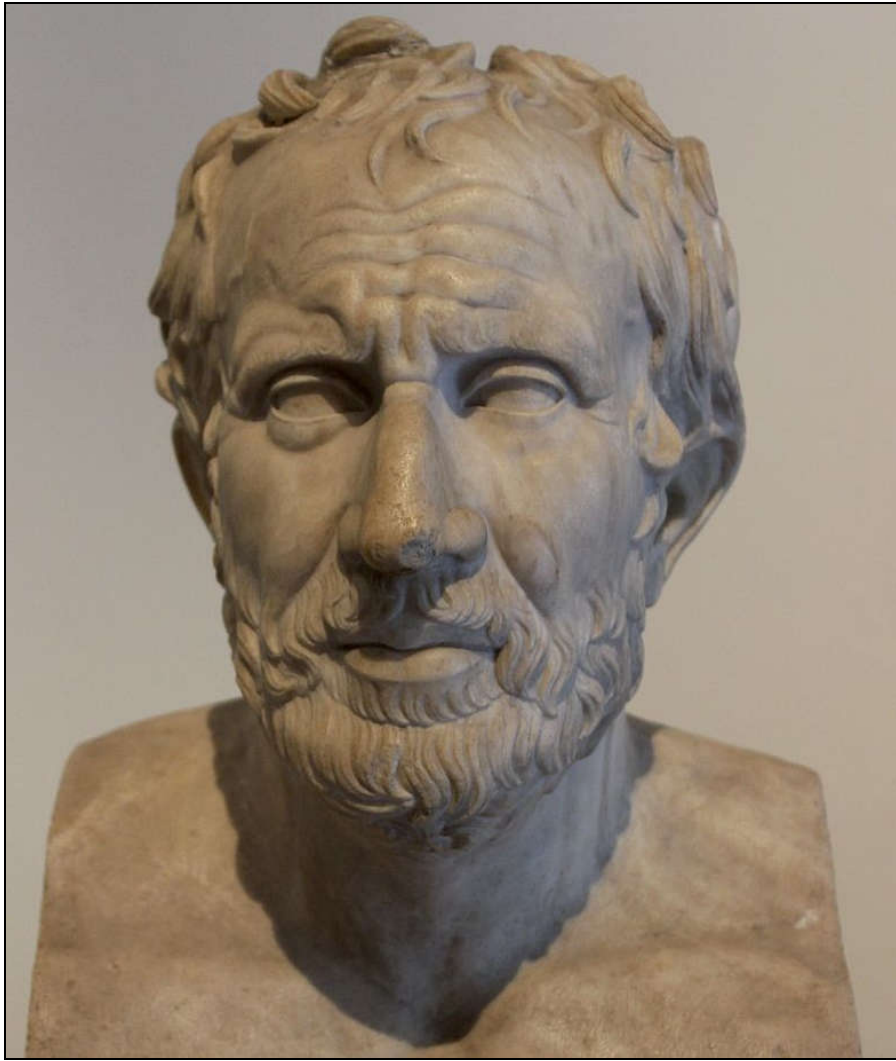
Due to the murder of Iphitus, Heracles is placed in servitude to Omphale for a year in Lydia.

During his stay in Lydia, Heracles captures the city of the Itones and enslaves them, kills Syleus and then captures the monster Cercopes.

After some time, Omphale frees Heracles and takes him as her husband. They travel to the grove of Dionysus and plan to celebrate the rites of Bacchus at dawn. [fragments 23, 24 and 25]

Heracles sails to King Neleus in Pylos, and asks him to cleanse him of a blood-debt, but is refused. In retaliation, he kills Neleus and his sons, except for Nestor. Hera is also shot and injured by Heracles. [fragments 26, 27 and 28]

Hera's wounding by Heracles would serve as an apposite conclusion to the epic, offering the hero some justice for his sufferings at the hands of the goddess, which commenced from Book 1.



*Bust of Panyassis, Museo Archeologico Nazionale, Napoli, found in Villa dei Papiri in Herculaneum*



*A terracotta kantharos in the form of the head of Heracles, attributed to the Syriskos Painter, c. 470 BC*

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*A Roman relief from the third century AD, depicting the Labours of Heracles, representing from left to right the Nemean lion, the Lernaean Hydra, the Erymanthian Boar, the Ceryneian Hind, the Stymphalian birds, the Girdle of Hippolyta, the Augean stables, the Cretan Bull and the Mares of Diomedes*



*Heracles slaying the Nemean lion, as depicted on a Roman mosaic from Llíria, Spain, third century AD*



*One of the most famous depictions of Heracles, the 'Farnese Hercules', a Roman marble statue based on an original by Lysippos, 216 AD, National Archaeological Museum, Napoli*



*'Heracles drunk and Omphale', antique fresco from House of the Prince of Montenegro, Pompeii*



## FRAGMENT 1. From Pausanias' *Description of Greece* (9.11.2)



ἐπιδεικνύουσι δὲ (οἱ Θηβαῖοι) Ἡρακλέους τῶν παιδῶν τῶν ἐκ Μεγάρων μνημα,  
οὐδέν τι ἄλλοίως τὰ ἐς τὸν θάνατον λέγοντες ἢ Στησίχορος ὁ Ἴμεραῖος (PMGF 230)  
καὶ Πανύασσις ἐν τοῖς ἔπεσιν ἐποίησαν.

The Thebans also have a memorial by Megara dedicated to Heracles' children, telling the same story [i.e. Heracles killing his children in a fit of insanity] about their death as that told in the verses of Stesichorus of Himera and Panyassis.

[This first fragment likely relates to the events detailed in the first Book of Panyassis' epic poem, the *Heraclea*, narrating how Hera drove Heracles mad, causing him to slay his wife Megara and their children.]

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