

THE EARLY DEVELOPMENT OF THE THESEUS MYTH¹⁾

The myth of Theseus has received considerable attention from Classical scholars in the second half of this century. It has been the subject of two general books since the Second World

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War²), and even more recently a German work has appeared which gives a full account of artistic works from the ancient world that depict episodes of this myth³). For the origins and development of the myth, however, the standard work remains the two articles written by Hans Herter before the war⁴).

Herter's work is a mine of information on everything that has to do with the myth of Theseus, but there are two points on which his views could be revised. The first is his theory that Theseus was an Ionian hero rather than an Attic one. This was a very important point for him, as the title of his first article on the myth, "Theseus der Jonier", indicates, and he argued for it at considerable length. He attaches less importance to the second theory, that the Peisistratids were responsible for the expansion of the Theseus myth. This view has, however, been an extraordinarily popular one, and it has been shared to some degree by M. P. Nilsson, G. S. Kirk, W. R. Connor and others. I am not sure that either of these views is correct, and I would like to examine them critically in this article.

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2) Ch. Dugas and R. Flacelière: *Thésée. Images et Récits*, Paris 1958. A. G. Ward, W. R. Connor, R. B. Edwards, and S. Tidworth: *The Quest for Theseus*, New York 1970.

3) F. Brommer: *Theseus*, Darmstadt 1982.

4) H. Herter 1936 and 1939. The conclusions he reached in these articles reappear in his entry on Theseus for the Pauly-Wissowa encyclopaedia (1973).

I

Most of the scholars who have written recently about the myth of Theseus have dealt with its significance for the Athenians from the late sixth century to the Classical Age, so Herter's theory about its origins is really the last one that has ever been proposed. In his approach to this problem, Herter seems to betray an allegiance to the "Historical School"⁵). Its adherents hold that Greek myths were developed by tribes, and the stories followed these tribes in their wanderings. By examining myths carefully we can find traces of the early homelands of these tribes, and we can see how the myths were affected by the movements of the tribes and the various places in which they stayed. This method can produce some unusual results, such as the conclusion of Professor Bethe that the Trojan War had really been fought in Greece⁶). Herter uses this kind of approach in exploring the origins of the myth of Theseus, but he does not apply it so radically, and the results of his research are much more plausible and attractive. Whatever the faults of the school itself, Herter's interpretation must be examined on its own merits.

Herter came under the sway of the historical school in that he relied quite heavily on the research that Toepffer had done on the myth of Theseus. Toepffer wished to explain why it is that episodes from the story of Theseus are located in places so divergent as Thessaly, Marathon, and the Argolid. True to the tenets of the historical school, he concluded that these different locations reflected stages in the wanderings of a Greek tribe. Theseus and Peirithous are the heroes of a Thessalian tribe which is remembered in myth as the Lapiths. According to Toepffer, this tribe migrated from Thessaly by sea, landing first on the north-east coast of Attica near Marathon, and finally settling at Troezen. Since this tribe had inhabited all three regions, stories about Theseus are likewise located in all of them⁷). Herter develops a more sophisticated version of this theory. He believes that the Lapiths represent the ancient Ionians, and that the legends told about the Lapiths recall the occupation of Thessaly by the Ionians

5) This school of thought was criticised by Nilsson several years before the appearance of Herter's articles. Nilsson 1932, 5-10.

6) His particular application of the historical approach was analysed and condemned by Nilsson 1932, 6-7.

7) Toepffer 1897, 155-6 and 157-8.

before the Dorians invaded Greece⁸). Herter concludes that Theseus is an “Attic-Thessalian hero” common to all the Ionians and honoured by them in their myths⁹).

Herter’s theory is attractive in that it shows, as does Toepffer’s interpretation, why the Attic hero Theseus fights against the Centaurs in Thessaly and why he is born and reared in Troezen. It is also more economical than Toepffer’s explanation, since Herter does not have to postulate any unproveable prehistoric migrations. If Theseus is indeed a Pan-Ionian hero, it is perfectly reasonable that other Ionians apart from the Athenians should have invented stories about him. It is indeed true that the two episodes of the Battle with the Centaurs and the birth story create difficulties for those who believe that Theseus is an Attic hero, but are they really enough to make a Pan-Ionian out of Theseus? The answer to this question is the point on which Herter’s theory stands or falls.

The earliest evidence we have that associates Theseus with the Lapiths is line 265 of *Iliad* Book 1:

Θησέα τ’ Αἰγείδην, ἐπιείκελον ἀθανάτοισιν.

This line occurs in a speech of Nestor where he recalls the Lapiths whom he himself had joined in their fight against the Centaurs when he was younger. In keeping with his theory, Herter claims that Theseus is not an Athenian in this passage, so we have Homeric evidence for his Ionian Theseus¹⁰). Unfortunately, most scholars believe that this line is an interpolation because it is missing from the major manuscripts and ignored by the Scholia; besides the same line appears in the *Aspis* attributed to Hesiod¹¹). Brommer even suggests that the *Aspis* line itself might be an interpolation, but this is going a little too far¹²). We do find Theseus fighting Centaurs on the François Vase¹³), and it seems that Cleitias was following the *Aspis* when he was choosing the names of the Centaurs on his vase¹⁴). Theseus still seems, however, to have joined the Lapiths somewhat later than Herter believes him to have done¹⁵). In any case, whenever Theseus is first found as an

8) Herter 1936, 236–7.

9) Herter 1936, 234.

10) Herter 1936, 223, and 1973, 1046.

11) Kirk 1985, note to 1.265.

12) Brommer 1982, 104.

13) Brommer 1982, 105.

14) Russo 1965, 32.

15) Kirk 1974, 155 even suggests that the association of Theseus with the Lapiths was invented by Peisistratus to honour his Thessalian allies.

ally of the Lapiths against the Centaurs, the role he plays in this battle does not merit the elaboration of a new theory. It is not so surprising, after all, that he is found fighting Centaurs, since these creatures are found in the myths of all the Greeks, and any hero was liable to be drawn into their realm¹⁶). In the case of Theseus, there is a particular reason why he would be found in the world of the Centaurs, and this is his friendship with Peirithous. This friendship and his involvement in the battle do not, however, necessarily make him a Lapith.

Peirithous first meets Theseus at Aphidna, and their friendship is an old element in the myth. Nilsson wonders why Peirithous, a Thessalian hero, should be brought to Attica¹⁷). It is at least as important to ask this question as it is to inquire why Theseus should be found among the Lapiths, which is the issue Herter implicitly brought up when he argued that Theseus was originally a Thessalian. Both scholars use the same method to explain why we find the same heroes in these two places, though they come to completely opposite conclusions. The real issue in this controversy is how to explain the presence in different places of heroes who bear the same name. Is it simply a coincidence that they happen to have the same name, or are they actually the same person? We find many such homonyms of which one appears in Attica and the other in Thessaly, though Nilsson notes that such homonyms are not just restricted to the legends from these two regions, but are common in all of Greek myth¹⁸). Herter gives a full list of the Attic and Thessalian ones, which include Theseus, Aegeus, and Peirithous¹⁹), but he discounts the presence of Peirithous in Attica as an attempt by the Athenians to take over a Thessalian hero as their own²⁰). For Nilsson, on the other hand, the friend of Theseus really is the minor Attic hero, Peirithous, who was the eponymous hero of an Attic family and later of a deme, both of which were called Peirithoidai; this hero was then assimilated to this greater Thessalian namesake, and thus Theseus joined him and the other Lapiths as an ally against the Centaurs²¹). When he comes to deal

16) Nilsson 1932, 159.

17) Nilsson 1932, 174–5.

18) Nilsson 1932, 175.

19) Herter 1936, 228–231; 1973, 1157–8.

20) Herter 1973, 1157.

21) Nilsson 1932, 174–5. Toepffer 1897, 156, for rather different reasons, had also pointed out the connection between Peirithous and the deme of Πεγειθοῖδαι.

with Aegeus and Theseus, Herter argues that these heroes were also transposed to Attica at some relatively late period in the development of the myth. Their Thessalian homonyms, on the other hand, reveal the original nationality of these heroes²²). The reason they end up in Attica is that it was the only region of mainland Greece that the Ionians occupied continuously from the time they first came to Greece²³). It is easier, however, to see how a minor Athenian hero might have disappeared in favour of a famous Thessalian, than to believe that two important Thessalian heroes should have vanished from their real homeland and have left so few traces behind them that their true origins were already forgotten by Homer's day. The other Mycenaean heroes were not forgotten or moved elsewhere. Such a displacement to Theseus or Aegeus could have happened only if Athens had been powerful enough to distort the tradition in her own interests. Athens did not, however, enjoy this kind of prestige until the sixth century at the earliest, and if the distortion had occurred so late as this period, it could hardly have changed the entire myth. The evidence for Theseus' early association with Thessaly is simply not strong enough to enable us to speak of a Lapith or Thessalian Theseus, unless such a theory receives strong support from other elements in his story.

The second main argument that Herter advances for the existence of a Pan-Ionian Theseus is the hero's birth at Troezen. As Herter points out, Troezen had been an Ionian city and it maintained some Ionian traditions even after the Dorian invasion²⁴). The state had at least one extra non-Dorian tribe, and its citizens continued to celebrate the Apatouria. As far as Herter is concerned, the story about Theseus' birth is also part of their Ionian heritage. One branch of the Ionians brought the story of Theseus both to the north-east of Attica and to Troezen²⁵). The Athenians later took over the myth for themselves alone, and the Troezenian tales, which would have localised all his adventures near Troezen, died out. As Herter sees it, the story of his birth was an exception to this rule. It was so strongly rooted in Troezen that even the Athenians had to acknowledge that city as his birth-place²⁶).

Once again we run into the issue of homonyms, for Nilsson points out that Pittheus is the eponymous hero of the deme Pithus

22) Herter 1936, 231.

23) Herter 1936, 234.

24) Herter 1939, 274.

25) Herter 1936, 204.

26) Herter 1936, 205; 1939, 275.

in Attica, as well as being the Troezenian hero²⁷). Nilsson also shows that we cannot be certain that Pittheus' daughter was Troezenian either. Homer felt that Aethra was an Athenian, for she appears as one of Helen's handmaids at Iliad 3.144. Her role in this passage, as Nilsson points out, presupposes the story that Theseus had abducted Helen to Attica²⁸). Nilsson is convinced that Theseus is not found in Troezen until relatively late in the myth's development, and he even goes so far as to say that Troezen must have been a post-Mycenaean settlement. He may be correct because Ward, who tried to find genuine Minoan and Mycenaean elements in the myth, is obliged to admit that the site is "a complete blank". She does point out, however, that sherds from the Mycenaean period were found on a nearby hill, which suggests that the site was inhabited during the Bronze Age²⁹). If Nilsson is right about the city of Troezen, then the story of Theseus' birth would be considerably later than those episodes in the myth which locate his heroic achievements in Attica.

Even if Nilsson's belief that Troezen is a post-Mycenaean city were wrong, his conclusion could still be correct. There is another element in the myth which suggests that the story of Theseus' birth there may not be a very old one. This is the group of deeds that he performs on his journey from Troezen to Athens. Herter believes that these deeds along the Saronic Gulf were invented to reconcile his childhood home with the site of his achievements as an adult, and he calls the cycle a compromise between the claims of both places³⁰). He believes that the model for the episodes must have been the adventure with the Bull of Marathon³¹). This is quite possible, and it would help to prove that they are somewhat later than the oldest elements of the myth. Most scholars would, in fact, agree that the cycle did not develop until late in the sixth century, and Herter himself suggests that it was invented shortly before the Peisistratids came to power. If the birth story were really an old one, however, it is very surprising that this compromise version should have appeared so late. Besides, the Athenians had other and better reasons for creating such a cycle in the sixth century. Nilsson suggests that these stories were developed to justify Athens' possession of Eleusis and to

27) Nilsson 1932, 167. Toepffer 1897, 156 made the same connection.

28) Nilsson 1932, 167-8.

29) Ward 1970, 101-2.

30) Herter 1936, 205; 1973, 1052-3.

31) Herter 1939, 280.

support her claim to the Megarid³²). This is surely a better explanation than to attribute the cycle's creation to a very belated embarrassment that the greatest Athenian hero was born in Troezen.

Why Troezen should have been chosen for his birth-place is still something of a mystery. Perhaps the Athenians were attracted by the Ionian origins of the city. Nilsson has argued that by the time of the Peisistratids they had come up with their own story about the colonisation of Ionia. They claimed that the Ionians who left Pylos had first come to Athens, and had then colonised Asia Minor from Athens³³). This suggests that Athens was already beginning to consider herself as the leader of all Ionians on both sides of the Aegean. The proximity of Troezen to Calauria, and the cult of Poseidon which it shared with this town and Athens, may also have helped to determine the choice of the Athenians. Unfortunately, we cannot tell for certain why Theseus should have been born there, but Herter's solution is by no means the only answer nor even the most likely one. Nilsson's conclusion can still stand: "At all events the birth story is a later addition"³⁴).

The two major arguments that Herter adduces to prove that Theseus was a Pan-Ionian hero are not as strong as they might first appear. There is a further and more serious flaw with his theory, and this is the absence of any cult or myth devoted to Theseus in Ionia. Herter realises that this is a difficulty, but he merely says that Theseus became less relevant to the colonial Ionians and eventually disappeared from their world-view³⁵). It is extremely unlikely that this was what happened. The Ionians would not have forgotten their own hero and yet have preserved such an extraordinarily rich tradition about the Achaeans who are remembered so vividly in the works of Homer. The more obvious solution is that Theseus had never been an Ionian hero in the first place.

The silence of the Ionians about Theseus is embarrassing for Herter, but the only trace he can find of the Theseus legend is an obscure story about the foundation of Smyrna. According to this story, Smyrna was founded by someone called Theseus. One version says that the founder was a Eumelid nobleman with this name, the other says that he was the mythical hero himself. Smyrna was not, however, an Ionian colony to start with. Herodotus tells us that it was established by Aeolians and later taken over by

32) Nilsson 1953, 747.

33) Nilsson 1953, 748; 1951, 59-64.

34) Nilsson 1932, 169.

35) Herter 1936, 225; 1939, 245.

Ionian refugees from Colophon. Herodotus' account is supported by the archaeological evidence, in that the pottery changes from Aeolian to Ionian in the eighth century³⁶). Any story that Theseus founded Smyrna must date from the eighth century at the very earliest, so we are not dealing with an old tradition brought over by the colonists from the mainland when they first came to Ionia. Herter acknowledges that the original version of this foundation story is probably the one which attributes it to a historical Eumelid, but he does not believe that this version of the story will undermine his theory. He argues that the very name of this founder would show that the people of Smyrna knew about the hero Theseus³⁷). In fact, however, the opposite is true. If the Ionians who colonised Smyrna really knew of the hero Theseus, the founder of their state could not have been given this name by his parents³⁸). As Herter himself points out in his discussion about Aegeus, a hero's name could not be used by mere mortals as a proper name³⁹). The Thessalian nobles who called their son Theseus had never heard of a hero with this name.

The foundation legend that attributes the establishment of Smyrna to Theseus is an exceptional one; the more common story tells that an Amazon called Smyrna had founded the city and named it after herself. An equally rare story about Theseus had also infiltrated itself into the foundation legend of Chios, and it is interesting to compare this one with the legend of Smyrna. The first ruler of Chios was Oenopion, and the prevalent version had it that he was the son of Dionysus and Ariadne. The more unusual story declared that Oenopion was Ariadne's son by Theseus. Judging by the names of Oenopion and his brother Staphylus, we can hardly believe that this version was the original one, and there is a simple explanation for its appearance. The main sources for the story are a line of poetry written by the pro-Athenian Ion of Chios⁴⁰), and a vase-painting executed by the Lewis Painter which Jacoby believes to depict Theseus as the father of these two chil-

36) Boardman 1964, 49–50.

37) Herter 1936, 225.

38) If the Eumelid nobleman Theseus came directly from Thessaly (which is rather unlikely), his name would refute Herter's opinion that Theseus had ever been a Thessalian hero.

39) Herter 1936, 208. Nilsson 1932, 192 makes the same point about Heracles, and adds the interesting detail that Greek parents gave their children the name Heracleitus as a permissible alternative.

40) Plutarch quotes a line of his in which he refers to Chios as follows: τῆν ποτε Θησεΐδης ἔκτισεν Οἰνοπίων. Plutarch, *Life of Theseus* 20.

dren⁴¹). Clearly, their common source is either Athenian or pro-Athenian. Jacoby concludes that the story either originated with Hecataeus or Pherecydes, or was invented by a Chian poet who looked up to Athens⁴²). It is beyond doubt that the deviant versions, which associate the foundations of Smyrna and Chios with Theseus, were created to justify the position of Athens as leader of the Ionians. They tell us more about the success of the Athenians in getting their version of the past accepted than they do about the Pan-Ionian nature of Theseus⁴³).

Theseus is firmly rooted in Attica alone, and in this respect he differs completely from Heracles whose myths and cults are scattered all over Greece. With Heracles we can say that he is equally at home in Tiryns or Thebes because he is "one of those heroes of whom myths were told everywhere"⁴⁴). The elements in the myth of Theseus that would lead us to believe that he is also such a hero have been created for posterity by the Athenians. Herter's theory that Theseus was a Pan-Ionic hero is a tribute to the success of the Athenians in raising their local hero to the status of "another Heracles".

The birth of Theseus at Troezen should not cause serious doubts about his Attic nature. Heroes often come from "outside". This feature of heroic myth might, perhaps, be a vague echo of the ancient Indo-European custom of fosterage. Even without such an explanation to justify its appearance in the myth of Theseus, the motif is in itself an effective story-telling device and one that Bacchylides exploits effectively in his eighteenth Dithyramb. It no more proves that Theseus was not Attic (or not only Attic) than the stories of Dionysus' arrival from the East prove him to be a foreign god. In Theseus' case, his birth may have been located in Troezen because originally he came to Athens as an outsider from the Attic countryside. Herter himself suggests that such an explanation of Theseus' birth in Troezen is possible, because when he is arguing that Theseus came from Attica rather than from the city of Athens, he concludes with the following remark: "That the future

41) Jacoby 1947a, 6-7.

42) Jacoby 1947a, 7.

43) Plutarch's remark about the reputation of Minos in literature is quite apt (though the Athenian legends do not, of course, indicate any hatred for the Chians or Smyrnaeans): "Ἔοικε γὰρ ὄντως χαλεπὸν εἶναι φωνὴν ἐχούσῃ πόλει καὶ μοῦσαν ἀπεχθάνεσθαι (Plutarch, *Life of Theseus* 16). In the case of Smyrna it was all the easier to invent such a story in that for three centuries there were no Smyrnaeans around to contradict it.

44) Nilsson 1932, 208.

national hero was actually a stranger in his city also produces the consequence in the legend that it unanimously considers Troezen as his birth-place⁴⁵). Most scholars would agree with Herter up to this point, but Herter then makes the further claim that Theseus is not only a stranger in his city but even in Attica itself. He asks how the Athenians could ever have tolerated it that their hero should be born and bred in Troezen unless there were an ancient tradition to that effect. Stories like this which say that a hero spent his early life abroad are, however, quite common in Greek myth.

Theseus does not seem to be Troezenian, but he does not seem to come from Athens either. It is generally agreed, in fact, that his home lies in the north-east of Attica (though Herter would argue that this is simply one of his homelands). This region is the site of the oldest episodes in the legend of Theseus – his abduction of Helen, his struggles against the Bull of Marathon, his meeting with Peirithous⁴⁶). Herter also points out that the local hero, Aphidnus, is the only Attic hero who supports Theseus against the Dioscuri⁴⁷). The stories told about Theseus seem, therefore, to come from this part of Attica, but oddly enough there is no cult of Theseus in this region. Herter is embarrassed by this absence and suggests that there must have been a hero-cult of Theseus at Marathon in historical times⁴⁸). This cannot, however, have been the case because the belief that there are no cults of Theseus outside the city of Athens is not based on an argument from silence, or on the inability of archaeologists to come up with any evidence of such a cult to this date. It is based on an explicit statement to this effect by Philochorus⁴⁹). The Athenians themselves were perplexed by the absence of any cult outside the city, and this is why they invented the curious *aition* that Theseus had generously handed over all his cults-places in Attica to Heracles. All our ancient sources clearly state that there never was a cult of Theseus at Marathon.

We are left, therefore, with the conclusion that the myth of Theseus comes from the Diacria, but the cult of Theseus is situated in Athens. This major discrepancy between the myth and the cult of Theseus can, however, be explained. Theseus is really a hero of myth rather than of cult, and his worship is a relatively late de-

45) Herter 1936, 202–3.

46) Toepffer 1897, 152–3; Nilsson 1932, 170; Herter 1936, 190–1 and 193–5.

47) Toepffer 1897, 153; Herter 1936, 199–200.

48) Herter 1936, 191.

49) Jacoby, FGrH 328 (Philochorus) fr. 18.

velopment. There was never a cult at Marathon, but even the cult in Athens was not an ancient one. As Herter has shown, the Heroon of Theseus would have been situated on the Acropolis if his cult had genuinely been an old Athenian cult. It is located, however, in a new district of the city and must therefore be a new cult⁵⁰). Theseus is thus quite different from such heroes as Erechtheus and Academus, who seem to have been worshipped even before the eighth century B.C. His cult should be compared rather with those of Agamemnon at Argos and Menelaus at Sparta. These were new cults developed by the city-state, perhaps under the influence of epic poetry (as Coldstream has suggested⁵¹), and perhaps also as a reaction by the city to the cults of Bronze Age tombs in the countryside⁵²). We should speak not of a transfer of the cult of Theseus from the north-east of Attica to the capital (as Herter does⁵³), but rather of the invention of such a cult in Athens.

There was, however, a partial transfer of the myth of Theseus from this region of Attica to the city of Athens. Once the synoecism had been attributed to him, Theseus was regarded as an Athenian. This has already happened by the time of the *Iliad*, so Theseus is an Athenian in this epic⁵⁴). The starting-point of his most famous expedition, the voyage to Crete, was therefore moved to Phaleron⁵⁵). Theseus himself became a king of Athens and was forcibly inserted into the list of Athenian kings. It is this change in his citizenship from Diacrian to Athenian that explains the hostility between him and Menestheus⁵⁶). The myth of Theseus is thus attached with some difficulty to Athens, and at this time or later he is given a hero-cult in the city.

To sum up, then, Theseus and his legend originate in the north-east of Attica, for the earliest episodes of his story are localised there. By the eighth century he is already regarded as an Athenian, but the localisation of his myths is not changed from the Diacria to Athens, with the notable exception of the Cretan adventure. His connections with Thessaly and the Centaurs are not central to his myth but derive from his friendship with Peirithous;

50) Herter 1936, 84 and 188-9.

51) Coldstream 1976, 15.

52) Whitley 1988, 178 believes that the cult of such tombs in Attic towns was established by older communities which objected to the growth of the central government in Athens.

53) Herter 1936, 184 and 188-9.

54) Kullmann 1960, 76-7.

55) Herter 1936, 218 and note 1.

56) Kullmann 1960, 74-5.

it is not possible, however, to tell how early this association with the Centaurs developed, though it might be as late as the sixth century. There is no evidence for his connection with the Saronic Gulf until the end of the sixth century, and none for the story of his birth until the century after that. His cult is a late development, artificially created in Athens. In short, Theseus is, as Nilsson concluded, "of local Attic origin"⁵⁷).

II

The earliest surviving representations of episodes from the Theseus legend come from the eighth and seventh centuries, and all of these adventures (apart from the Centauromachy) are located in Attica⁵⁸). In works of art and literature from this period we find his abductions of Ariadne, Helen and Persephone, his fight against the Minotaur, and his participation in the battle against the Centaurs. His fight against the Bull of Marathon does not appear until the middle of the sixth century⁵⁹), but we should not read too much into its absence from earlier art and literature, because both Herter and Nilsson have shown that this is an old episode in the legend⁶⁰). These few episodes are all that survive from the period before the end of the sixth century. Then, quite suddenly, around 510 B.C., we find that a cycle of deeds performed by Theseus starts to appear in Athenian works of art. This cycle consists of the older adventures with the Minotaur and the Bull of Marathon, but it also includes five episodes on the Saronic Gulf which have been created specifically for this cycle⁶¹). Slightly before this, around 520 B.C., Theseus' abduction of Antiope also appears in art and

57) Nilsson 1932, 167.

58) The killing of the Minotaur is, of course, located in Crete, but the expedition sets out from Attica.

59) It is first depicted on an amphora in Paris which Brommer 1982, 28 dates to the decade 550-540 B.C.

60) Nilsson 1932, 169-170; Herter 1936, 190-1.

61) The Cycle consists of the following episodes: Sinis, the Sow of Crommyon, Sciron, Cercyron, Procrustes, the Marathonian Bull, the Minotaur. With the exception of the last two episodes, the others do not appear before the Cycle itself, as Brommer 1982, 67-8 points out. The Cycle appears for the first time on vases and on the Athenian Treasury at Delphi around 510 B.C. (Brommer 1982, 73). In the fifth century, the episodes of Theseus' fight with Periphetes (around 450 B.C.) and of the tokens left by Aegeus (around 420 B.C.) are added to the Cycle (Brommer 1982, 74).

literature⁶²). Once we get into the fifth century, we find writers and artists vying with each other to attribute all kinds of achievements to Theseus. By this time he is the greatest hero of Athens and a model for all its citizens.

The end of the sixth century does indeed mark a turning-point in the legend. Why does this change come about? The answer given by Herter, Nilsson, Kirk and Connor is that the Peisistratids decided to promote Theseus as the great hero of Athens. These scholars (Connor in particular) have gathered quite a number of arguments for their view, but I am not convinced that it is the correct one, so I would like to discuss the arguments for this view one by one. Their arguments can be divided into three main groups corresponding to the ways in which they believe the Peisistratids promoted the myth of Theseus: according to these scholars, the Peisistratids patronised literary works about Theseus, they used the stories about him to justify their foreign policies, and they claimed he was the true founder of several new institutions that they had introduced at Athens.

The Peisistratids, or at any rate Hipparchus, did patronise literature, but there is no evidence that they required their poets to write about the myth of Theseus. The only extant ancient writer who associates Peisistratus with Theseus is Hereas of Megara⁶³). According to him, Peisistratus interpolated line 631 into Book 11 of the *Odyssey*:

Θησέα Πειριθόον τε, θεῶν ἐρικύδεα τέκνα.

At this point in the epic, Odysseus hopes to see some ancient heroes, and mentions these two as examples. Herter discusses the line from the *Odyssey* and points out that there is nothing in the manuscripts to indicate that the line is interpolated. He quite rightly distrusts the evidence of a writer “whose anti-Athenian bias is notorious”⁶⁴). It might seem a little odd that out of all the πρότεροι

62) The abduction of Antiope appears somewhat earlier, around 520 B.C. (Brommer 1982, 110, 112 and 114).

63) Hereas is quoted by Plutarch in his *Life of Theseus* at 20.1–2. The evidence of Hereas is discussed by Connor 1970, 145, and by Herter 1939, 264.

64) Herter 1939, 264. Stanford 1959, note to *Od.* 11.631, makes a similar point: “But Megarians were prone to anti-Athenian feelings, so one would prefer less suspicious authority.” Bolling 1925, 242–3 has discussed the manuscript evidence in his work on interpolation in Homer: “There is no direct evidence for the existence of texts without this line.” Bolling, however, is not absolutely sure that Hereas is wrong.

ἀνέρες whom he hoped to see, Odysseus should happen to choose Theseus and Peirithous and them alone. They constitute, however, just like Odysseus himself, a very special case; Odysseus, Heracles, and Theseus and Peirithous are the only men that went down to Hades alive. Odysseus has just seen the ghost of Heracles, so it is natural that he should think next about his other two predecessors on this journey to the Underworld.

Hereas also says that Peisistratus deleted the following line from Hesiod's *Aigimios* (fr. 298 MW):

Δεινὸς γάρ μιν ἔπειρεν ἔρωσ Πανοπηίδος Αἴγλης.

The line explains why Theseus deserted Ariadne, and the excuse does not do any credit to the hero. Connor points this out as one of the “indications of Pisistratid interest in the legends of Theseus”⁶⁵). Hereas' story is a very odd one. It was plausible that Peisistratus might have tampered with the Homeric texts used for the Panathenaic Games, but how he could have changed the text of this obscure Hesiodic work is unclear. In any case, these two remarks by Hereas are the only direct ancient evidence that might associate the increased popularity of the legend of Theseus with the Peisistratids.

Hipparchus invited Simonides of Ceos, Anacreon of Teos, Lasus of Hermione and other writers to the court of the tyrants at Athens. Perhaps we should seek some evidence for a new literary interest in Theseus among their works. We shall have to give up on Anacreon; heroic deeds were not quite his line. Lasus wrote Dithyrambs, but nothing survives that would indicate a poem about Theseus. There is, however, a fragment of Simonides (fr. 45 PMG) which describes the sail that the crew were to hoist if Theseus was still alive on their return from Crete. This sail given by Aegeus was not white, as in the normal version, but purple:

Φοινίκεον ἰστίον ὑγρῷ
πεφρυμένον ἀνθεὶ πρίνου ἐριθαλέος

Connor believes this is clear evidence that the patronage of the Peisistratids had given birth to a new branch of literature devoted to the hero⁶⁶). “Simonides”, he claims, “was one of the first

65) Connor 1970, 145.

66) Podlecki 1975, 18 on the other hand, thinks that this poem comes much later in Simonides' career, and was sponsored by Themistocles, perhaps for the festival of the Oschophoria. Podlecki argues that this festival had been established by Themistocles in the 470's B.C.

Greek poets we know to treat Theseus⁶⁷). This statement is true as far as it goes, but Simonides was, in fact, only one among many early Greek poets who refer to Theseus⁶⁸). Simonides has many predecessors in writing about Theseus, and we cannot conclude from his work that the Peisistratids patronised a new literature glorifying the deeds of Theseus.

Connor also suggests that the Peisistratids may have commissioned an epic about Theseus, the *Theseid*⁶⁹). Herter takes the same view because he also looks upon Theseus as the political forerunner of the Peisistratids in that he was a strong ruler of a centralised state; the Peisistratids would, therefore, have had a natural interest in promoting an epic devoted to this heroic monarch⁷⁰). Practically nothing is known about this epic. There are several references in ancient sources to “the poet (or writer) of the *Theseid*”⁷¹), but only one of them gives his name. A comparison of the Scholia to Pindar, Ol. 10.83 reveals that the composer of the *Theseid* was Diphilus. There are two Scholia to this line. The first refers to “the man who wrote the *Theseid*”, and quotes a line from another work of his. The second quotes the same line and the one that followed it, and attributes them to “Diphilus, the man who composed the *Theseid*”⁷²). There is no evidence that there was any other *Theseid* apart from the one that he wrote⁷³).

67) Connor 1970, 145.

68) Homer, *Iliad* 2.265 (although this line is an interpolation, it is presumably quite early), *Odyssey* 11.322, Hesiod, *Shield of Heracles* 182, *Catalogue of Women* fr. 147 (Merkelbach-West), Aigimios fr. 298 (Merkelbach-West), *Perithoou Katabasis* fr. 280 (Merkelbach-West), *Minyas* fr. 1 (Davies), *Alcman* fr. 21 (Page-Davies), *Sappho* fr. 206 (Lobel-Page).

69) Connor 1970, 145.

70) “In any case, we should not hesitate to push back the poem deep into the sixth century, and so we shall rather associate it with the time of the tyranny . . .” Herter 1939, 284.

71) Aristotle, *Poetics* 1451a16, Plutarch, *Life of Theseus* 28, Scholium to Pindar, *Olympians* 3.50b, and Scholium to Pindar, *Olympians* 10.83. The first three references are also given in EpGF p. 155/6 (Davies).

72) Δίφιλος ὁ τὴν Θησιίδα ποιήσας, Scholium to Pindar, *Olympians*, 10.83.

73) Arguing against those who believe that Diphilus was only one among many (presumably later) poets who wrote *Theseids*, Schmid and Stählin 1934, 541, n. 11 say “There was only one and Diphilus is called ὁ τῆς Θησιίδος ποιητής, ὁ τὴν Θησιίδα γράψας, EGF 1 217 f.” Herter 1939, 283, believes that Diphilus was one of several writers who wrote a *Theseis* based on a sixth century original: “As author of such a *Theseis*, Schol. Pind. Ol. 10.83 names Diphilus, who is usually placed in the early fifth century, but perhaps only belongs to the third century; other *Theseids* are even later. On the other hand it is probably the old epic poet who is cited by Plut. *Thes.* 28.1 as ὁ τῆς Θησιίδος ποιητής: here ἡ Θησιίς is the

Diphilus must have written in the fifth century at the latest⁷⁴), because a Scholium to Aristophanes, *Clouds* 96 says that Diphilus was the first poet to mock a philosopher, which means that he must have done so before Aristophanes followed his precedent in 423 B.C.

There may, however, be some evidence to show that he wrote during the previous century. Jacoby notes that a phrase used by Diphilus also appears in the work of Pherecydes, and he concludes that Pherecydes must have read the *Theseid* before writing his own work⁷⁵). If Jacoby is right on this point, the *Theseid* must have appeared around the end of the sixth century, because Jacoby, using other evidence, was able to date Pherecydes' work to the period between 508/7 B.C. to 476/5 B.C.⁷⁶). Herter also believes that there was an early *Theseid*, but he bases his belief not just on the references to "the man who wrote the *Theseid*", but also on "the agreement between the monumental and literary tradition about a definite form of the sagas"⁷⁷). As we shall see, the epic would, in this case, have appeared by the last decade of the sixth century at the latest. Herter feels that Jacoby's dating is too late, and that the date of the epic should be pushed well back into the sixth century, considerably before the myths of Theseus are arranged in a definite order⁷⁸). The "definite form of the sagas" on which he bases his argument is the Cycle of Theseus.

The myth of Theseus was indeed unusual in that its episodes were organised into a cycle⁷⁹). The cycle first appears in literature in Bacchylides' *Theseus* (Dithyramb 18), and is depicted for the

old *Theseis* κατ' ἔξοχὴν, whose author already was no longer known by name." To support this view, Herter has to play down the meaning of the expression referred to by Schmid and Stählin; speaking of Diphilus, he says (1939, 283, n. 187): "When he is described Schol. Ol. 10.83 f. as ὁ τὴν Θησίδα ποιήσας, it cannot be concluded that he composed the only, i.e. the old, *Theseis*: rather, the Scholiast is just attributing the iambic poem to the author of that particular *Theseis* that belonged to Diphilus."

74) "All that we can say, and that not with much certainty, about a Diphilus who wrote a *Theseid* and of whom two choliambic lines survive (Anth. Lyr. fasc. 3.138 D), is that he lived in the fifth century" (Lesky 1966, 304). Schmid and Stählin 1934, 541 also take him to be a fifth century author.

75) Jacoby 1947b, 31, n. 46.

76) Jacoby 1947b, 33.

77) Herter 1939, 283-4.

78) Herter 1939, 284; 1973, 1046.

79) "It is a peculiarity of Theseus' that the deeds of such a hero should be combined into a cycle and that this should often be portrayed in its entirety" (Brommer 1982, 65).

first time on works of art during the last decade of the sixth century B.C.⁸⁰). It does not follow, however, that we should credit the Peisistratids with having stimulated the composition of a *Theseid* which inspired the creation of this cycle. Herter and Barrett⁸¹) argue that it must have taken quite a while for the epic to influence artists, and Barrett even postulates the existence of some other works between the *Theseid* and the vases depicting the Cycle⁸²). Other scholars, however, have made the opposite argument. Jacoby says that the vase-paintings must be close in date to the epic, and Dugas draws our attention to how suddenly the Cycle appears in art⁸³). So, even if we do accept that the depictions of the Cycle on vases owe their existence to a sixth-century *Theseid*, we cannot tell whether this work was contemporary with the paintings and belonged to the period when the Peisistratids had already fallen, or whether it was considerably prior to the vase-paintings and created during the Peisistratid age.

The existence of this cycle does not necessarily prove, however, that someone had written a *Theseid* at this period. Artists were, after all, no less inventive than writers, and we do not have to posit a literary source for their works. They had a rich, non-literary, oral tradition on which they could draw, and we sometimes find surprising differences between artistic and literary representations of myth⁸⁴). Some scholars have, therefore, been dubious about the very existence of a sixth-century *Theseid*. Huxley says he is not sure whether there was sixth-century *Theseid* or not⁸⁵), but Wilamowitz has no doubts on the subject: It was certainly not through a *Theseis* that has disappeared without a trace that Theseus became an Athenian ἄλλος Ἡρακλῆς⁸⁶). It must be admitted, however, that the way in which the Theseus Cycle systematises the episodes of the Theseus myth is typical of the lesser epic poets. On balance, we can only say that the date and nature of the sixth-century *Theseid* are completely unknown, and that its very existence may legitimately be doubted. It has,

80) Brommer 1982, 73.

81) Herter 1973, 1046; Barrett 1964, 3.

82) Barrett 1964, 3, n. 1. This hypothesis implicitly acknowledges that a mid-fifth century *Theseid* would have been too early to influence these vases.

83) Dugas 1943, 18.

84) Snodgrass 1980, 72.

85) Huxley 1969, 116–8.

86) v. Wilamowitz-Moellendorff 1937 [1925], V 2. 58–9.

therefore, very little value as evidence that the Peisistratids promoted the myth of Theseus.

The only definite connection we can establish between the Peisistratids and any literary work devoted to Theseus is that Simonides wrote a poem about him and that Simonides had been at the court of the Peisistratids; but we cannot even tell whether he wrote this poem during his stay there. If the Peisistratids did commission some poets to write works dealing with Theseus, no record of their doing so has survived.

A politician was not restricted to sponsoring works of literature if he wanted to use myths to bolster his position. He could establish a more direct link between himself and the figures of myth by acting like such a character himself. One of the most extraordinary cases of such an assimilation with the men of the heroic age was the theatrical return of Peisistratus to Athens in 556 B.C., which marked the beginning of his second tyranny. He dressed a tall woman up as Athena, and sent heralds to proclaim that the goddess was escorting him back to her city. However we may interpret this episode⁸⁷), we need have no doubts that Peisistratus was quite glad to use myth for political ends. Herter, Nilsson, Connor and Kirk believe that the Peisistratids used the Theseus myth in this way.

They claim that the Peisistratids used pre-existing myths, changed some of them, and even invented new ones, to supply even further mythical precedents for their actions⁸⁸). Connor ad-

87) Herodotus 1.60.3–5. Connor 1987, 46 suggests that Peisistratus was merely Athena's "brave but subordinate charioteer." Herodotus, however, reports the proclamation made by the heralds of Peisistratus at this time, and it states that Athena was bringing him home from exile. This suggests that Athena was the charioteer, not Peisistratus. She plays the same role for Diomedes at Iliad 5.840–1.

88) "Interesting is the well known fact," says Nilsson 1953, 748, "that Theseus emerges suddenly to a great popularity in the vase painting of the last years of Pisistratus... The Theseus myths emerge in the age of Pisistratus, which is sometimes called the 'Golden Age', and their intent is clear." "Once again we have reasons to suspect that myth was being exploited – even fabricated – for the glorification of the ruling dynasty" (Connor 1970, 150). "Theseus, by contrast, owes much of his mythical persona to the desire of Athenians, and especially the tyrant Peisistratus in the sixth century B.C., to make him a national hero" (Kirk 1974, 152). "When we notice, then, that it is precisely during the rule of Pisistratus and his sons that the Theseus myth begins to grow in popularity and prominence in Athens, we naturally ask whether these rulers did not benefit from and perhaps encourage or even direct this development. Is this another case of Pisistratus' exploitation of the widespread belief in myth? This suspicion can be confirmed by some small but telling details" (W. R. Connor 1970, 145). In fact, the new popu-

mits that some of the parallels he draws between episodes in the Theseus story and historical events in the time of the Peisistratids might be regarded as coincidences⁸⁹), but this objection could be applied to all of them. The plain fact is that there is no ancient evidence that the Peisistratids looked upon Theseus as their mythical predecessor. The theory that they did so was developed by modern scholars. The first Athenian we know to have used the myth of Theseus in this way is Kimon, but in his case, several ancient sources tell us about this⁹⁰). If the Peisistratids had made such extensive use of the myth of Theseus as this theory requires, surely some ancient author would have mentioned it, just as Herodotus records that Peisistratus did use Athena for such political purposes. Unfortunately, no such statement has survived.

In short, modern scholars may draw many parallels between various details of the myth of Theseus and events in the careers of the Peisistratids, but there is no evidence that the Athenians or the Peisistratids themselves ever did so. In the particular cases brought up by these scholars, it can usually be shown that the parts of the myth they believe to have been promoted or invented by the Peisistratids were current before the time of the Peisistratids, or might not have been completely suitable as parallels.

Some scholars have spotted what they believe to be significant parallels between the heroic deeds of Theseus in north-east Attica, and the military adventures of Peisistratus in that same region when he seized power for the third and last time. Peisistratus defeated the Eupatrids at Pallene in 546 B.C., and Pallene was also the site of Theseus' victory over the Pallantids. Connor refers to the victory of Theseus as an "ancient exemplar" for that of Peisistratus, and Herter more cautiously suggests that the historical battle of Pallene may have coloured the image of the mythical one⁹¹). Unfortunately, no evidence has survived that people in

larity of Theseus in vase-painting occurs around 510 B.C., exactly when the Peisistratids have been expelled. The conclusions of Bury and Meiggs 1975, 131–2 are a little odd when they deal with this point. They acknowledge that Heracles is popular in the art of the Peisistratean Age (570–510 B.C.) and that "about the time of the fall of the Peisistratids, Theseus has begun to seize the popular imagination," and yet they suggest that Peisistratus might be responsible for this new popularity of Theseus.

89) "Some he [an imaginary visitor in Peisistratid Athens] might dismiss as pure coincidence" (Connor 1970, 146).

90) Jacoby, FGrH 328 (Philochorus) fr. 18; Pausanias 1.17.6; Plutarch, Life of Theseus 36.3; Life of Kimon 8.5–6.

91) Connor 1970, 147; Herter 1936, 187.

the sixth century took any interest in the battle against the Pallantids. As far as works of art are concerned, it is not certain that this battle was ever represented. The east pediment of the Hephaisteion, which is heavily damaged⁹²), might perhaps have depicted the Pallantids. The temple was built around 449 B.C., but if the theme of the pediment is really some other mythical battle (perhaps that of the gods and the giants), then no artistic representation of Theseus' battle against the Pallantids has survived. We do not find any literary source until Euripides' *Hippolytus*⁹³), so we have no reason to associate this particular episode with the Peisistratids.

Even if we do assume (without any evidence) that the legendary battle was used by sixth-century politicians, we would not necessarily have to equate Theseus with Peisistratus. Nilsson denies that any parallel could have been drawn between the two in this case because Peisistratus had gained a victory over the Athenians, not for them⁹⁴). Figueira makes a similar point, though he argues for it in more detail, when he says that Theseus was adopted by the Eupatrids as their model. The Eupatrids used Theseus' synoecism of Attica and his campaign against the Pallantids as propaganda against the Peisistratids⁹⁵). They claimed, according to Figueira, that only those belonging to the party of the Plain were true aristocrats for they alone were descended from the royal family. He suggests that they saw Theseus' enemies as being the fore-runners of their own opponents, Pallas standing for the people from the Paralia, and Lycus for the party of the Diacria. And this, Figueira concludes, is why "Peisistratus and his followers did not see Theseus as their exemplar and antecedent"⁹⁶). Figueira's theory is as valid as that of Connor, but there is little evidence that anyone in the sixth century, whether Peisistratid or Eupatrid, drew any parallel between the mythical and historical battles of Pallene.

Connor believes that Theseus' subjection of the Marathonian Bull is related to the landing of Peisistratus at Marathon in 546 B.C.⁹⁷). This point receives some support from vase-painting in that the first representation of this event occurs on an almost

92) Thompson and Wycherley 1972, 147.

93) Brommer 1982, 137-9.

94) Nilsson 1951, 53.

95) Figueira 1984, 464-5. Note also the East Frieze of the Hephaisteion where Theseus fighting the Pallantids is portrayed in the pose of Aristogeiton.

96) Figueira 1984, 465.

97) Connor 1970, 146-7. For a completely different interpretation of this same episode, see Sourvinou-Inwood 1979, 50-53.

contemporary piece of pottery, the Paris Amphora of 550–540 B.C.⁹⁸), but Theseus had been associated with Marathon long before then⁹⁹), and this particular episode is generally accepted as an old one¹⁰⁰). To identify Peisistratus with Theseus and his Athenian opponents with the bull seems even less plausible than the similar equation in the case of Theseus and the Pallantids.

Kirk brings up the friendship of Theseus for the Lapiths of Thessaly and points out that Peisistratus had been supported by Thessalian cavalry. He proposes that it was Peisistratus who first placed Theseus among the Lapiths¹⁰¹). Since the Homeric passage which tells us that Theseus fought the Centaurs has been suspected, we have no clear and datable evidence for his participation in that battle before the François Vase (575–550 B.C.). His appearance in the Hesiodic *Aspis*, however, though not entirely above suspicion, does seem less easy to undermine than his appearance in the *Iliad*, and this Hesiodic work was certainly composed before the time of Peisistratus. Once again, as in the case of the Marathonian Bull, we find that the episode predates the Peisistratids.

Finally, the stories of Theseus' adventures against and assortment of bandits on the Saronic Gulf have also been associated with the foreign ambitions of Athens under the Peisistratids. Connor compares Theseus' victories over these bandits with the operations of Hippias against pirates, and he suggests that in this case, we may be dealing with a fabrication of myths by the Peisistratids¹⁰²). Peisistratus himself, for that matter, had seized Nisaea earlier in his career¹⁰³). The deeds of Theseus along the Saronic Gulf were made part of the cycle which first appears around 510 B.C., and they are not found individually before this date¹⁰⁴). The same five episodes are found in all cases: Sinis, Phaia, Sciron, Cercyon, and Procrustes. This is more than a coincidence, and even the cautious Brommer believes that "a political decision must have stood behind this [cycle]"¹⁰⁵). We must ask who might have made this decision.

Connor and Nilsson take it that these adventures were based on the activities of Peisistratus and his sons in the Megarid¹⁰⁶). The

98) Brommer 1982, 28.

99) Herter 1936, 190–1, 196, and 200; Nilsson 1932, 170.

100) Nilsson 1932, 169–170; Herter 1936, 190–191.

101) Kirk 1974, 155.

102) Connor 1970, 149–150.

103) Herodotus 1.59.4 and Aristotle, Constitution of the Athenians 14.1.

104) Brommer 1982, 73.

105) Brommer 1982, 68.

106) Connor 1970, 149–150; Nilsson 1951, 56 and 1953, 747.

dating of their first appearance is, however, a little late for this theory to work. Besides, the Peisistratids were not the only Athenians to take an interest in the Megarid. In fact, Athens had been involved with the Megarid from the time of Solon down to the last decade of the sixth century. If Theseus' deeds are to be associated with a specific episode in Athens' involvement with the Megarid, there may be a historical event much closer to 510 B.C. which might have inspired them. The dispute between Athens and Megara over Salamis was finally settled through outside arbitration when the Spartans handed the island over to the Athenians. Plutarch, our source for this Spartan decision, thought it occurred in the time of Solon¹⁰⁷), but Bury and Meiggs have dated it to around 509 B.C.¹⁰⁸). This dating is attractive because the Spartans, having set up a new government in Athens, would naturally want to settle the country's external affairs as well. It would also explain why Cleisthenes might have established a cleruchy on the island (if indeed he did do this), because such an action would be senseless if Athens had been in secure possession of the island since the time of Solon. These events seriously threatened Megara and strengthened the position of Athens on the Saronic Gulf. They are, in addition, almost exactly contemporary with the appearance of the Athenian treasury at Delphi and the first appearance of vases depicting the bandits on the Saronic Gulf. The Saronic adventures of Theseus may, therefore, be looked upon as mythical parallels for Athenian intervention in the time of Solon, or in the last years of the tyrants, or in the years following their expulsion. Alternatively, and more plausibly, perhaps, these episodes in the story of Theseus could have been invented to assert in a general way that Athens had legitimate interests in the Saronic Gulf. Whether this assertion was simply a general one or whether it was motivated by some specific intervention in the Gulf, the fact remains that the Athenians did not create a mythical precedent for this assertion until the last decade of the sixth century.

Theseus did not, however, just engage in battles with wild animals, bandits, and Centaurs. He was also the king of Athens, and there are several institutions that he is said to have set up whose real origins might be traced to the age of the Peisistratids. Herter points out that Theseus was supposed to have renewed the

107) Plutarch, *Life of Solon* 10.

108) Bury and Meiggs 1975, 127 and 526, note 2.

Panathenaic Festival of Erichthonius and that Peisistratus reorganised this festival in 566 B.C., so this event would have been included among the deeds of Theseus in order to glorify his historical successor¹⁰⁹). It is not clear, however, that the establishment of the Greater Panathenaia should be attributed to Peisistratus in the first place. The Philaid Hippocleides was archon in 566 B.C., and Andrewes concludes from this that the Greater Panathenaia could not have been created by Peisistratus¹¹⁰). Even if we do accept Peisistratus as the founder of the penteteric festival, there are still some difficulties with the view that Theseus was his mythical predecessor in doing so. Firstly, there are two versions of the story associating Theseus with this festival. One maintains that Theseus founded the Panathenaic Festival, the other merely says that he renewed it. We cannot read too much into the version that says he reorganised the festival, because it is fairly certain that it was invented to reconcile the story that Theseus had founded this festival with the version that claimed Erichthonius as its real founder. Secondly, and more importantly, both these stories refer to the annual Panathenaic Festival and not the penteteric one that was established in 566 B.C. The story that Theseus founded or renewed the Panathenaic Festival is obviously a piece of aetiology, but there is no telling when it came into being.

The Cretan voyage and Theseus' dance of victory on Delos have also been connected with the Peisistratids, because the "Crane Dance" is portrayed for the first time on the François Vase (575–550 B.C.)¹¹¹). Furthermore, in later times, a sacred triaconter used to set off from Brauron, Peisistratus' hometown, and it was supposed to be the very ship that Theseus had used on his Cretan expedition¹¹²). Connor suggests, therefore, that the Peisistratids may have initiated this later custom. The Athenians, however, were interested in Delos long before the age of Peisistratus, and although Peisistratus maintained this interest, his reasons for doing so had nothing to do with Theseus. As early as Solon's time, we find *kyrbeis* referring to priests called *Deliaistai*¹¹³), and the association between Athens and Delos may have been even more an-

109) Herter 1936, 185 and n.5 on 185; Connor 1970, 146.

110) Andrewes 1974, 106 and 114.

111) Brommer 1982, 105.

112) Plutarch, *Life of Theseus* 23. The Athenians replaced each part of the ship, bit by bit as it wore out, so it was in a sense still the same ship! This was the sacred ship whose voyage delayed Socrates' execution (Plato, *Phaedo* 53a–b).

113) Athenaeus 6.234e–f.

cient¹¹⁴). Peisistratus did, it is true, purify Delos in 543 B.C.¹¹⁵), but he did this because he was interested in the Cyclades¹¹⁶), and because he wanted to counterbalance the influence of the Alcmaeonids at the other great centre of Apollo's worship¹¹⁷). Peisistratus seems to look upon Delos more as an Apollonian centre than as a place that has close links with the Theseus legend. For that matter, the sending of the sacred ship cannot be attributed to him either, nor can the François Vase be related to his involvement with Delos, because Cleitias thought of the dance as being on Crete¹¹⁸). It is true that this dance was later felt to have taken place on Delos, and Nilsson very oddly attributes this change to the Peisistratid era¹¹⁹). Our major piece of evidence from the Peisistratid era, the François Vase itself, shows that the opposite is true. In fact, there is no evidence for placing the victory-dance on Delos until well after the Classical period¹²⁰). So with the Athenians involved in rites at Delos almost half a century before his time and the "Crane Dance" being believed to take place on Delos long after his day, Peisistratus falls out of the picture altogether.

Finally, there is some evidence from coinage that might establish a link between Peisistratus and Theseus. There was actually a story that Theseus had invented coinage¹²¹), but Connor brings up a more specific point: "Coinage in Peisistratids times bore the ox-head symbol traditionally ascribed to the mythical coins of Theseus"¹²²). He seems to be supported by Philochorus who says that tetradrachms were called γλαῦκες because they bore the images of Athena and an owl, whereas the previous coins were di

114) v. Schroeder, *Delos*, RE IV (1901) 2473 ff.

115) MacKendrick 1981, 179.

116) Lygdamis of Naxos had helped him to return to power in 546 B.C., and the Naxians had controlled Delos from at least the seventh century B.C.

117) Scheffold 1946, 62-3 argues that Peisistratus built a Panhellenic temple on Delos. The Alcmaeonids, in rebuilding the temple of Apollo at Delphi with Parian marble, would, therefore, have been rivalling this temple of Peisistratus and the later rebuilding of the temple of Athena Polias in marble by his sons, Hippias and Hipparchus, around 525 B.C. "The tyrant Peisistratus ... no doubt favored Apollo of Delos because his enemies, the noble clan of Alcmaeonidae, were enjoying in exile the hospitality of Apollo of Delphi" (Mac Kendrick 1981, 179).

118) Dugas 1943, 11-12; Nilsson 1951, 59 and 1953, 746; Brommer 1982, 84.

119) Nilsson 1951, 59 and 1953, 746.

120) Brommer 1982, 83.

121) Ἐκοψε δὲ καὶ νόμισμα, βοῦν ἐγγαράξας, Plutarch, *Life of Theseus* 25.

122) Connor 1970, 147 and note to illustration 153 on 146.

drachms and bore the image of a bull¹²³). The coins that Connor is referring to are *Wappenmünzen*, and after the third quarter of the sixth century, these issues were no longer minted in Attica. They were replaced with the “Owls”, but *Wappenmünzen* were still being issued at this time by the Alcmaeonids at Delphi¹²⁴). The old view that these coins bore the arms of aristocratic families has been disproved¹²⁵), but it still seems to be the case that the Peisistratids, far from producing coins with a bull’s head on them, would actually have been responsible for suppressing such issues. It would be equally wrong, however, to suggest that bull coins are an attempt by the Alcmaeonids to claim that Theseus is on their side. The importance of these bull coins has been greatly exaggerated. As Rhodes correctly points out, “the bull is indeed found . . . but only as one device among many”¹²⁶).

Various myths tell us, therefore, that Theseus founded the Panathenaic Festival, instituted the custom of sending the sacred ship to Delos, and invented coinage. We cannot prove, however, that the Peisistratids are responsible for any of these myths.

There is one final episode in the myth that makes its first appearance towards the end of the Peisistratid era, though it can hardly be connected with any of their achievements¹²⁷). Representations of the rape of Antiope first appear in Greek art either in 520 B.C. or 510 B.C. The theme was surprisingly popular from this period up until 490 B.C.¹²⁸). It even appears on the pediment of the Temple of Apollo Daphnephoros at Eretria, which makes this the first sculptural work to portray Theseus. This work has been dated to around the time of the Alcmaeonid temple at Delphi, in which case the Eretrians would probably have started building it during

123) τῶν προτέρων διδράχμων ὄντων ἐπίσημόν τε βοῦν ἐχόντων, Jacoby, FGrH 328 (Philochorus) fr. 200.

124) MacKendrick 1981, 212.

125) Part of the evidence for the old view was that one of the *Wappenmünzen* has a triskeles, since it was believed that the triskeles was the emblem of the Alcmaeonids. This latter view was based on the Scholion to Aristophanes’ *Lysistrata* 665–670. The Scholiast, annotating the word λευκόποδες, says that the Alcmaeonids had an ἐπίσημον λευκόν on their shields. Hopper 1960, proved that the Scholiast read λυκόποδες and said, in fact, that the Alcmaeonids had a wolf on their shields: ἐπίσημον λύκον.

126) Rhodes 1981, 169, note to *Athenaion Politeia* 10.2.

127) Perhaps this is why it has not been brought up by the scholars that wish to say that it was the Peisistratids that brought about the new importance of Theseus.

128) Brommer 1982, 113.

the reign of the Peisistratids¹²⁹). Since the Knights of Eretria supported Peisistratus and offered their city as a base to him in 546 B.C., it is possible that this political alliance may have had something to do with the theme of this pediment, if it does indeed date from the time of the tyrants. Tyrrell, taking the opposite view, suggests that it might have commemorated the victory of the Athenians over Chalcis in 507 B.C., since the Eretrians would hardly have been displeased at the annihilation of their ancient rivals¹³⁰). In any case, the pediment honoured the mythical Attic hero, though, mercifully, no one has tried to see in it a reference to any of the marriages of Peisistratus.

There is a more general parallel between Peisistratus and Theseus. It lies not in any particular achievement of the one or the other, but rather in the political role they played in Athens. Herter refers to Theseus as “the ideal of monarchy”, “the prototype of the successful monarch”, “the mythical archegete of the monarchy”¹³¹). According to Herter, it is because Theseus was a great monarch that the Peisistratids patronised the writing of a *Theseid* and established a national cult to honour the hero (for Herter believes that they did both these things)¹³²). Like most mythical heroes, Theseus was a king, but it is a different matter to try to make him into “the prototype of the successful monarch”, or “the archegete of monarchy”. If Peisistratus wanted to look for a model of princely behaviour in the heroic age, surely he could not have found a better one than his own ancestor, Peisistratus the son of Nestor. Nilsson believes that the Peisistratids actually did use the mythical Peisistratus as a prototype. He reminds his readers of the text of Herodotus (Hist. 5.65) from which we learn that “the Pisistratidae were, by origin, Pylians and Nelidae and that because of this Hippocrates remembered to give the name Pisistratus to his son, attributing to him the name of Nestor’s Pisistratus”¹³³). Connor supports a modified version of Herter’s theory, for he argues that what Theseus and Peisistratus had in common was that both of them were pan-Athenian leaders. He reminds his readers that

129) von Bothmer 1957, 126–7. Tyrrell 1984, 7–9.

130) Tyrrell 1984, 8.

131) Herter 1939, 309, 284, and 290.

132) Herter 1939, 284 and 290.

133) P. Nilsson 1953, 748. He concluded from this association of Nestor’s Peisistratus with the Peisistratids that the legend that has the Pylian refugees stop in Athens on their way to Asia Minor must be an innovation created by the Peisistratids.

Peisistratus had helped conquer Salamis earlier in his career, had reconciled the widely dispersed Athenians to his rule, had established district judges, and used to tour the country on inspection-trips¹³⁴). The same comparison could be made with many Athenian leaders, and would apply equally well to Solon or Cleisthenes, but once again there is no evidence whatsoever that any sixth-century political figures ever drew this comparison.

All these similarities between the achievements of Theseus and various events of the Peisistratid era might have provided the tyrants with some reasons for choosing Theseus as a heroic role-model; they do not prove that they actually did so. The only facts we know of that would associate the Peisistratid era (not Peisistratus himself or his successor) with the myth of Theseus are the following: the Cretan Crane Dance is found for the first time on the François Vase in the period 575–550 B.C.; the Bull of Marathon appears for the first time on a vase dating from 550–540 B.C.; the rape of Ariadne the first appears on vases at the end of the Peisistratid age (520–510 B.C.); and Simonides, who had been paid to write by the Peisistratids, did at some time in his life write a poem about Theseus. The connection between Theseus and the Peisistratids lacks, therefore, a very solid foundation.

The theory of Connor, Herter, Kirk and Nilsson seems even weaker when we consider that Jacoby, Schefold, and Sourvinou-Inwood, using the same methods as they did, have reached precisely the opposite conclusion. These scholars trace the origins of Theseus' popularity to Cleisthenes, and see the hero as his mythical forerunner. All three of them also believe in the existence of a sixth-century *Theseid*. The myth of Theseus is not a major concern of Jacoby's, but he does remark that it dates from the end of the century rather than the height of the Peisistratid era, and that it was promoted by those Athenians who were opposed to the tyrants¹³⁵). Schefold argues for the existence of a sixth-century epic

134) Connor 1970, 146.

135) Jacoby 1947a, 6 note 6 makes the following general comment about Theseus and the Peisistratids: "I simply state my opinion that the *Theseid* and the increase in importance of Theseus must not be dated in the reign of Peisistratos, who certainly did not think himself as a new Theseus. The poem belongs to the last two decades of the sixth century, and it had its origin in the circles of opposition against the tyrants." In a later work he goes a little further and says of the *Theseid*: "it had its origin not in the circle of Peisistratus but more likely in that of the opposition. If matters are put in a formula: Theseus, the achiever of synoecism, is not Peisistratus, but Cleisthenes," (Jacoby 1949, 195 note 23).

by pointing out to the new appearance of the complete cycle of Theseus' deeds (including those on the Saronic Gulf) on vase-painting around 510 B.C.¹³⁶). Schefold believes that this work must be of Alcmaeonid origins because Theseus stands in contrast to the more primitive nature of the Dorian Heracles (who, he believes, would have been favoured by the aristocrats) and also to the "Ionian luxuriousness" of the Peisistratids. He also refers to details in the myth that could be paralleled to the ups and downs in the fortunes of the Alcmaeonids. When Theseus first arrives in Attica, he is really "returning from a sort of exile", just like the Alcmaeonids themselves; the epic, he argues, "must have given the exiles a new self-awareness". There was a place called Theseia at Delphi, and Theseus was supposed to have dedicated his hair to Apollo there on reaching manhood; Schefold sees this as another allusion to the exile of the Alcmaeonids. Finally, Theseus founded democracy at Athens, and is therefore "the mythical role-model of Cleisthenes". There is, however, no evidence for this part of the myth of Theseus until much later. Sourvinou-Inwood, in her analysis of the story of the recognition and attempted poisoning of Theseus by Medea, argues that Theseus represents Cleisthenes, Medea the Peisistratids, and Aegeus the Athenian people misled by these evil men¹³⁷).

I do not believe that these scholars are right either, but their view has, somewhat inexplicably, been far less popular than that of their opponents. Their conclusions are important, however, in that they clearly show that in applying this sort of approach to Greek myth, equally competent scholars can come to completely different results. The fault does not lie with one group or the other but with the method itself. Vidal-Naquet rightly condemns both those who try to see Theseus as representing Peisistratus and those who think he is Cleisthenes¹³⁸). Any attempt to attribute the dissemination of this myth to any one political personality seems futile. As Kron has pointed out, *all* Athenian politicians used Theseus as a model¹³⁹); he stood for the whole of the Athenian state¹⁴⁰).

136) Schefold 1946, 67.

137) Sourvinou-Inwood 1979, 27.

138) Vidal-Naquet 1981, 402.

139) "In no way does Theseus play a role just in the political propaganda of certain Athenian clans, such as the Philaids, but since Peisistratus he stands as a mythical role-model for all Athenian politicians" (Kron 1976, 224).

140) "Theseus . . . stood for the entire Athenian state and cannot just be assigned to a portion of it" (Kron 1976, 224).

We should abandon the search for correspondences between mythical and historical events or personages, but it is still worth our while to find out when Theseus did start to become popular in Athens. Boardman has shown that Theseus scenes were quite rare on Attic pottery during the era of the Peisistratids in comparison with scenes showing Heracles, and that scenes with Heracles were far more popular in Attica during this period than they were anywhere else in Greece. 44% of Attic vases at this time have Heracles scenes whereas the average figure for selected artefacts from the rest of Greece is roughly 26%¹⁴¹). During the same period Theseus is found on only 5% of the vases from Attica. In the first quarter of the fifth century, Theseus rises in popularity and almost comes to equal Heracles: he is represented in 13.2% of pottery paintings, while Heracles goes down to 19.4%¹⁴²). From this evidence, Boardman argued that Peisistratus identified himself with Heracles¹⁴³), which is to replace one error with another, but fortunately he was not too serious about this suggestion¹⁴⁴). The important point is that the rise in the frequency of Attic vases depicting Theseus coincides with the building of the Athenian Treasury and the creation of the series of deeds on the Saronic Gulf.

The years around 510 B.C. mark a turning-point in the myth of Theseus. Herter and Barrett argue that the new popularity of Theseus is a delayed result of the policy of the Peisistratids¹⁴⁵). This does not explain why Theseus remains popular from 510 B.C. on, nor why the promotion of Theseus by the Peisistratids should have been so ineffective until this date. Their only aim in promoting the myth would have been to bolster their power, but such a policy is pointless unless it is immediately effective¹⁴⁶). If the Peisistratids planned to promote Theseus as their mythical predecessor (though we have no evidence for this plan), they failed to

141) The figures for the rest of Greece are as follows: Peloponnesian shield-bands, 25,5%; Corinthian pottery, 27%; Spartan pottery, 27,5%; "Chalcidian" pottery, 23% (Boardman 1975, 1).

142) Boardman 1975, 2.

143) Boardman 1972, 59.

144) Boardman ended an oral presentation of this thesis with the words, "If you believe that, you'll believe anything"! (Moore 1986, 38 note 7).

145) Herter 1939, 284 and 1973, 1046; Barrett 1964, 3 and note 1 to that page.

146) Moore 1986, 38 note 25 has already made this point in a different context: "Political symbolism in art tends to lose its edge and meaning rather quickly and one should be particularly cautious about seeing political allusions well after the relevant event."

do so in time, and it was, in fact, the restored government of Athens that put their plan into effect and that reaped its benefits.

Both Connor and Herter acknowledge that the popularity of the Theseus myth after 510 B.C. is awkward for their theory, but they point to the absence of Theseus from Cleisthenes' eponymous heroes and suggest that this indicates some dissatisfaction with a hero promoted by the Peisistratids¹⁴⁷). Connor refutes his own point himself: "the fact that one tribe was named after his son Acamas shows that his exclusion from the list was not due to any feeling against Theseus"¹⁴⁸). Herter and Kron have supplied the reason for this omission. Theseus, they point out, was the hero of the entire people and the entire state; he could not, therefore, become the hero of just one tribe¹⁴⁹).

An extremely important feature of the new adventures created by Athenian artists around 510 B.C. is that they are modelled on the labours of Heracles. This is a point recognised by all scholars¹⁵⁰), and even Plutarch tells us that Theseus was fired to tackle these bandits by his admiration for Heracles¹⁵¹). When Theseus becomes very popular after 510 B.C., he becomes so not only as a hero common to all Athenians, but also as the Athenian alternative to Heracles. This would make a lot of sense in the period following Cleisthenes' victory. Heracles was, after all, taken to be a Dorian hero, and we would hardly expect the Athenians to honour him after 510 B.C. The Spartans had, of course, helped them to expel the Peisistratids, but the Athenians preferred to forget that, and later they even affected to believe that the Tyrannicides had put an end to the dictatorship. This was partly just a matter of national pride, but their lack of appreciation for the help they had got from the Spartans was not unjustified, since the Spartans had undone whatever favour they might have won with the Athenians by sending their army back to Athens to impose the government of Isagoras upon them. The years after 510 B.C. also mark a turning-point for Athens herself. She cannot challenge Sparta's position as the leading state of mainland Greece, but she begins to assume her position as leader of the Ionians, and when they rebel against Persia, she will give them the aid that the Spartans refuse.

147) Herter 1939, 290; Connor 1970, 150.

148) Connor 1970, 150.

149) Herter 1939, 290; Kron 1976, 224.

150) Nilsson 1932, 164 and 1951, 53-55; Herter 1939, 281 and 303; Schefold 1946, 66-67; Kirk 1974, 109; Boardman 1975, 2.

151) Plutarch, *Life of Theseus* 6-7.

The Athenians had, therefore, good reasons for asserting the prowess of a hero of their own, and for setting him up as a rival to the universally admired hero of the Dorians. Plutarch records a saying of the Athenians, which, though it may date from a later period, reveals why a fixed cycle of deeds was established for Theseus. They claimed, Plutarch tells us, that Theseus was an ἄλλος Ἡρακλῆς¹⁵²). The hope that this claim would one day be accepted by all the Greeks is what inspired the creation of the cycle.

A significant token of the new official popularity of Theseus is that the Athenian treasury at Delphi, erected around 507 B.C.¹⁵³), should have been decorated in part with metopes that depict his adventures. These metopes make it quite clear that the Athenians in this very period after 510 B.C. are already deliberately comparing Theseus with Heracles. The nine metopes on the long southern side show the adventures of Theseus, the corresponding metopes on the northern side show the labours of Heracles. On the shorter sides of the frieze, the eastern metopes with their portrayal of Theseus fighting against the Amazons balance the western metopes which show Heracles and the cattle of Geryon¹⁵⁴). The most easterly metopes at the corners of the long sides stress this comparison, because the last metope of the southern side shows Theseus with an Amazon, while the metope at the eastern corner of the northern side shows Heracles with an Amazon, and both lead into the metopes of the eastern side which represent Theseus fighting against the Amazons. The middle metope on the southern side is also remarkable. It portrays Theseus alone with Athena, and this is extremely rare. Boardman has argued that the reason Athena is so seldom shown beside Theseus is that she was felt to be the special protector of Heracles, and it took the Athenians a long time to get used to the idea that she could be represented as helping Theseus instead¹⁵⁵). Brommer's remarks on this particular metope of the treasury are worth quoting: "Athena can always be present at the deeds of the hero. But otherwise she is not represented alone with him or without any connection with a deed. The wish to raise the hero to the level of Heracles through his nearness to Athena played a role the choice of this theme"¹⁵⁶).

152) Plutarch, *Life of Theseus* 29.3.

153) Schefold 1946, 90-1; Brommer 1982, note 8 on 68.

154) Brommer 1982, 68-9.

155) Boardman 1975, 2-3.

156) Brommer 1982, 69. Boardman 1975, 2-3 makes the same point.

This metope is unique both in crediting Theseus with the same high favour that Heracles had enjoyed and in showing that Theseus is by now the representative hero of Athens, just as Athena is the patron-goddess of the city.

The expulsion of the Peisistratids marks the beginning of a new heroic age for Athens, a period in which this new power will try to assert herself in every way against the established power of Sparta. This is why the Athenians now turn to the figure of Theseus. Athens had never been a great power like Sparta, and Theseus had never been a Pan-Hellenic hero like Heracles; he had always been just an Attic hero. After 510 B.C., however, he becomes *the* hero of Athens, and just as Athens will one day be the equal of Sparta, so Theseus becomes a hero capable of rivalling the Dorian Heracles himself.

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METAITIOS, WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO SOPHOKLES, TRACH. 1234

At Soph. Tr. 1233–1236, Herakles' son Hyllos, confronted with his father's demand that he marry Iole, objects. Iole, he says, has caused his mother's death and his father's mortal agony, so he would have to be mad to marry her:

τίς γάρ ποθ', ἢ μοι μητοῖ μὲν θανεῖν μόνη
μεταίτιος, σοὶ δ' αὖθις ὡς ἔχεις ἔχειν,
τίς ταῦτ' ἄν, ὅστις μὴ ἕξ ἀλαστόρων νοσοῖ,
ἔλοιτο;

The phrase μόνη μεταίτιος causes problems which tend to be insufficiently recognized by commentators¹). To judge from its etymo-

1) Commentators with pertinent remarks on μεταίτιος (here or at line 260 or 447, where the word also occurs) are L. Campbell (Oxford 1881), P. E. Easter-