

**Part 1:** Story based on 2 primary sources, taken from Theoi Greek Mythology web site. (30%)

- a) Pseudo-Apollodorus, Bibliotheca 2. 92 (trans. Aldrich)
- b) Pausanias, Description of Greece 8. 22. 4 (trans. Jones)

I, Hercules, got another task to complete. This time my cousin king commanded me to clear off Lake Stymphalis from some annoying birds. After strangling a lion, killing a nine headed monster and cleaning some very filthy royal stables, that new deed seemed like a piece of cake.

I travelled to the village of Stymphalos in Arcadia, a mountainous area with thick woods which is good for hunting. The villagers were scared and what I heard was disturbing. They talked about great numbers of monster birds with beaks so strong that could pierce bronze or iron armour. They said that they were fearless beasts like lions or leopards that attacked the hunters and ate their flesh. They suggested that maybe if I was to wear a garment weaved with thick cork, their beaks would be caught in the garment when they attack! I tried to keep a straight face as I imagined myself wearing this ridiculous cork armour full of stuck birds hanging lifeless from my torso!

“Athena, please help me to find a better solution”, I prayed to the goddess and made my way to Lake Stymphalis. I decided to climb up on to a hill to have a better view. Even from quite a distance I could hear the noise of the bird calls and see them fly over the lake and perch on dead tree stumps. Their numbers indeed were great but they did not look that menacing or dangerous. They were certainly large, big as cranes but looked more like ibises only with a straighter and stronger beak. I sat quietly on the hill assessing the situation when I heard wolves howling at the other side of the lake. Suddenly clouds of birds flew up and disappeared into the woods. “If they fear the wolves and don’t attack them, then it is rather unlikely that these birds are cannibals” I thought. Cannibals or not, I still had to find a way to get rid of them. How could I drive them away when they were hidden in these thick woods? They were too many; and I would need an army of archers to kill them all. I had however to accomplish the deed alone.

I sat down in despair when I sensed a presence. I turned around but nobody was there. “Herakles”, a voice said. I could see nobody but I knew that this clear crystal voice belonged to my goddess Athena.

“I have a gift for you, look behind you” I turned and on the ground I saw a pair of bronze rattles. “These are made by my brother, Hephaestos. Use them”. I picked them up, they were shiny and light but when I clacked them together the mountains reverberated with a loud, eerie sound. A cloud of birds rose up in the air; I clapped the rattles again and again. More and more swarms of birds rose up. The flapping of the wings, the panicking bird cries, and the deafening noise of the rattles filled the air; the sky was covered with birds blocking the sun light. After a while the lake was almost clear and there were no birds coming out from the woods; but when some of them started coming back to the lake, I could not resist: I used my arrows. A few pierced bodies fell into the waters and then finally all was quiet and still.

I had completed my 6<sup>th</sup> labour. Thank you Athena, I am lucky to have the gods by my side.

You do not have to include this page into your assignment. However, if you feel the need to make a note in order to explain some parts of your story, you may do so.

Notes: I based the story on the information of the following 2 primary sources. I included all the information from the 1<sup>st</sup> source in my story and I only chose some parts of my 2<sup>nd</sup> source (Highlighted). I chose to present it as a Herakles' monologue.

Pseudo-Apollodorus, Bibliotheca 2. 92 (trans. Aldrich) (Greek mythographer C2nd A.D.) :

"For his sixth labor Herakles was ordered to drive off the Stymphalian Birds. At the polis of Stymphalos in Arkadia was a lake called Stymphalis in a dense growth of trees. Great numbers of birds gathered there for safety, in fear of being seized by the wolves. Herakles was stumped by the problem of driving the birds out of the woods, but Athena got some bronze noise-makers from Hephaistos and gave them to him, and by shaking these from a mountain adjacent to the lake frightened the birds. Not enduring the racket, they flew up in fear, and in this manner Herakles reached them with his arrows."

Pausanias, Description of Greece 8. 22. 4 (trans. Jones) (Greek travelogue C2nd A.D.) :

"There is a story current about the water of the Stymphalos, that at one time man-eating birds bred on it, which Herakles is said to have shot down. Peisander of Kamira, however, says that Herakles did not kill the birds, but drove them away with the noise of rattles. The Arabian desert breeds among other wild creatures birds called Stymphalian, which are quite as savage against men as lions or leopards. These fly against those who come to hunt them, wounding and killing them with their beaks. All armour of bronze or iron that men wear is pierced by the birds; but if they weave a garment of thick cork, the beaks of the Stymphalian birds are caught in the cork garment, just as the wings of small birds stick in bird-lime. These birds are of the size of a crane, and are like the ibis, but their beaks are more powerful, and not crooked like that of the ibis. Whether the modern Arabian birds with the same name as the old Arkadian birds are also of the same breed, I do not know. But if there have been from all time Stymphalian birds, just as there have been hawks and eagles, I should call these birds of Arabian origin, and a section of them might have flown on some occasion to Arkadia and reached Stymphalos. Originally they would be called by the Arabians, not Stymphalian, but by another name. But the fame of Herakles, and the superiority of the Greek over the foreigner, has resulted in the birds of the Arabian desert being called Stymphalian even in modern times. In Stymphalos there is also an old sanctuary of Stymphalian Artemis, the image being of wood, for the most part gilded. Near the roof of the temple have been carved, among other things, the Stymphalian birds. Now it was difficult to discern clearly whether the carving was in wood or in gypsum, but such evidence as I had led me to conclude that it was not of gypsum but of wood. There are here also maidens of white marble, with the legs of birds, and they stand behind the temple."

**Part 2: Secondary Sources (30%)****1st source: Three notes on an effort to identify the Stymphalian birds, all in *The Journal of Hellenic Studies*****1. Benton , S., “Note on Sea-Birds”. *The Journal of Hellenic Studies*, Vol. 92 (1972), pp. 172-173**

S. Benton comments on an article written by J.K Anderson on the Greek names of sea birds found in the same issue of the *JHS*.

She identifies the Stymphalian birds with the Great Crested Grebe, a kind of marsh bird. Her arguments are: 1) The birds on the coins of Stymphalos have long necks and ear flaps, a characteristic of the Great Crested Grebe 2) these “sinister” ear flaps give the birds a fierce appearance 3) As J.K Anderson mentions in his article they tend to be aggressive. She believes that the Athenian artists did not portray correctly the water birds of Lake Stymphalis but those that were common in Athens such as swans and geese, marsh birds of a more gentle nature. (See ancient image on p.5)

**2. Anderson, J. K., “Stymphalian and other birds” *The Journal of Hellenic Studies*, Vol. 96 (1976), p. 146**

Anderson agrees with Benton that the birds portrayed on the coins of Stymphalos have the characteristics of the Great Crested Grebe and that Lake Stymphalis is a suitable habitat for them. They use the marsh vegetation to build their nests, they sleep on the water and feed on fish. According to Apollodorus’ version of the myth, however, the birds find refuge in a thick forest to protect themselves from the wolves. Anderson suggests that the birds in Apollodorus’ version might be identified as herons that still live in the area. Herons however do not cause destruction of the crops as Diodorus makes them do in his version of the myth. Diodorus’ birds then might be geese.

**3. Bourne, W. R. P., “The Stymphalian Birds”. *The Journal of Hellenic Studies*, Vol. 102 (1982), pp. 234-235**

The author of that note adds to the discussion that during his visit at Lake Stymphalis he personally recorded many different kinds of water birds, apart from the Great Crested Grebe. His list includes herons, ibises, mallard ducks and terns. He believes that Lake Stymphalis is one of the best habitats for water birds in Greece, south of Corinth. He suggested that the Stymphalian birds of the myth was in fact a collection of different birds which may have made a spectacular noise when they were disturbed but they would not have attacked any one or do a great damage to the crops. Herakles’ aid would not be necessary.

**2<sup>nd</sup> source:**

**Schoo, J., "The fifth Labor of Heracles: The Hero Drives Away the Stymphalian Birds" in *Hercules' Labors. Fact or Fiction?* (Chicago 1969), pp.21-28**

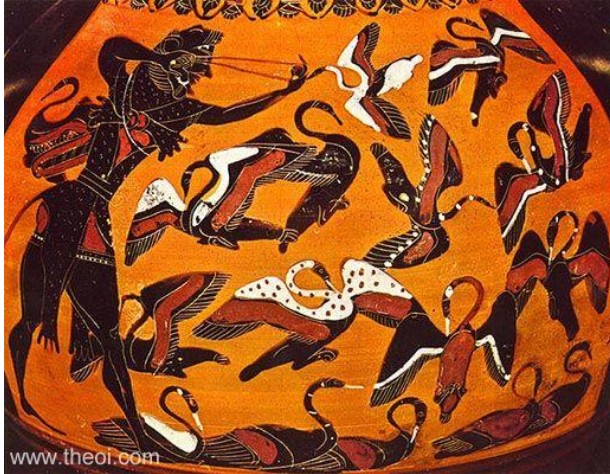
The author explains the meaning of Hercules' rattle in the myth of the Stymphalian birds by examining the landscape and geophysical phenomena of the area. He also draws evidence from the ancient sources as well as the reports of travelers of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Lake Stymphalis is situated in one of the two main plains of the central highlands of Arcadia. The plains take their name from the two ancient settlements of Stymphalos to the east and Pheneos to the west. The entire area is composed of limestone which is partially soluble and as a result water that is trapped in the limestone can be absorbed through large subterranean openings that are called "sinkholes". Both plains of Stymphalos and Pheneos had similar problems of drainage throughout their history. At times dry and cultivable land turned into a flooded plain depending on the blockage of these subterranean openings.

In the case of Pheneos, the ancient traveller Pausanias reports that Heracles built a canal in the centre of the plain to direct the waters of the river Olvios and prevent flooding of the plain. In the case of Stymphalos however, the story that is told about Hercules' involvement is mythical and fabulous. Heracles' in the majority of the ancient sources drives away the aggressive, and in some versions man eating, birds from Stymphalis using a noise maker instrument. According to Schoo's interpretation the dangerous birds represent the bad air of the marshes and can also be the man eating mosquitos that "fly like birds, dance and have high voices" (p.26). Heracles then, in his effort to save the people from malaria, he drained the plain by directing the water into one of the big subterranean caves. The surface water "disappeared with a thundering noise" (p.27) in the hole. That sound then indicates the drainage of the land and as a result the elimination of the mosquitos. It is that sound that inspired the use of the rattle as the solution to scare the Stymphalian birds away.

**Part 3: Images (20%)**

1. Ancient Image: *Herakles killing the Stymphalian Birds*: Attic Black Figure amphora, attributed to Group E (560 - 530 BC) It is part of the Museum Collection of the British Museum in London . The image is taken from the Theoi Greek Mythology website:  
<http://www.theoi.com/Gallery/M21.1.html>



Herakles is shooting the birds with a sling. The ancient writers mention only the bow and the arrows as the weapon that Herakles used to kill the birds. The use of the sling as a weapon may be another version of the myth which has not survived in any written ancient source.

The birds here resemble the description that Pausanias gives about them *These birds are of the size of a crane, and are like the ibis, but their beaks are more powerful, and not crooked like that of the ibis* (Description of Greece 8. 22. 4)

2. Modern image: *Hercules Killing the Birds of Lake Stymphalis* sculpted in 1909 by Emile-Antoine Bourdelle (1861-1929) Gilded bronze statue exhibited in Musée d'Orsay in Paris, France. Taken from the official website of Musée d'Orsay [http://www.musee-orsay.fr/en/collections/works-in-focus/sculpture/commentaire\\_id/hercules-the-archer-2193.html?tx\\_commentaire\\_pi1%5BpidLi%5D=842&tx\\_commentaire\\_pi1%5Bfrom%5D=729&cHash=5af66f96b4](http://www.musee-orsay.fr/en/collections/works-in-focus/sculpture/commentaire_id/hercules-the-archer-2193.html?tx_commentaire_pi1%5BpidLi%5D=842&tx_commentaire_pi1%5Bfrom%5D=729&cHash=5af66f96b4)



According to the official website of Musée d'Orsay, the artist constructed a remarkable piece of art in term of balance, tension, strength and energy. The artist refers to the ancient Greek art using some of its conventions such as the naked figure of the hero, the almond shaped eyes and straight nose.

It seems to me that the enormous bow and the exaggerated spread of the legs are both symbolic of the larger than life tasks that Herakles had to face

**Part 4: Impact of the myth on modern/popular culture/mass media (15%)**

Two Heavy Metal bands, the “Stymphalian Birds” and the “Black Stymphalian” were created in 2006 and 2008 respectively. According to the Wikipedia entry on Heavy Metal music “the bands that created heavy metal developed a thick, massive sound, characterized by highly amplified distortion, extended guitar solos, emphatic beats, and overall loudness. Heavy metal lyrics and performance styles are generally associated with masculinity and machismo”. These elements of the Heavy Metal music correspond well to the elements that are present in the myth of the Stymphalian Birds:

- a) The reference to metals: According to Pausanias, the birds have beaks so strong that can pierce bronze or iron armour. According to Hyginus, the birds shoot metal feathers against their attackers. In all versions Herakles scares the birds by clapping bronze rattles.
- b) The reference to highly distorted loud sounds and emphatic beats: the myth provides an acoustic experience when the clapping of the Heracles’ bronze rattles is combined with panicking cries and the flapping of wings of thousands of birds.
- c) The reference to masculinity and machismo: Herakles does demonstrate an exaggerated masculinity in the myths with the display of his enormous strength, aggressive behaviour, and impressive sexual powers.



Images related to the Black Stymphalian Band with threatening birds that attack a city



Information on Heavy Metal music and the above bands were taken from the following web sites:

“Heavy Metal Music”, Wikipedia: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Heavy\\_metal\\_music](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Heavy_metal_music)

“The Black Stymphalian”, My space: <http://www.myspace.com/theblackstymphalian>

“There were Ten Tigers”, Blog: <http://thereweretentigers.blogspot.ca/2008/07/stymphalian-birds-featured-in.html>

**PART 5: Self-evaluation, Comments and Ethic Agreement (5%)**

Self- evaluation: Each member of the group should rate his/her effort and performance from 1-5 (5 being excellent) and justify the grade with brief comments.

Comments: You should also provide some brief comments about any aspect of the assignment and give suggestions on how it can be improved in the future.

Ethics Agreement:

We submit this assignment and attest that we have applied all the appropriate rules of quotation and referencing in use at the University of Ottawa. We also confirm that we have taken knowledge of and respected the *Beware of Plagiarism!* brochure found on doc-depot. We attest that this work conforms to the rules on academic integrity of the University of Ottawa. We also attest that the contribution to this assignment of each of the undersigned has been equitable. We understand that this assignment will not be accepted or graded if it is submitted without the signatures of all group members.

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Signature

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Name, Capital letters

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