Translations

MYTH OF THE BIRTH OF THE HERO

[A PSYCHOLOGICAL INTERPRETATION OF MYTHOLOGY]

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PARIS

Apollodorus relates of the birth of Paris: King Priamos had with his wife Hekabe a son, named Hektor. When Hekabe was about to bear another child, *she dreamed* that she brought forth a burning log of wood, which set fire to the entire city. Priamos asked the advice of Aisakos, who was his son with his first wife Arisbe, and an expert in the interpretation of dreams. Aisakos declared that the child would bring trouble upon the city, and advised that it be exposed. Priamos gave the little boy to a slave, who carried him to the top of Mount Ida; this man's name was Agebos. *The child was nursed during five days by a she-bear.* When Agebos found that he was still alive, he picked him up, and carried him home to raise him. He named the boy Paris; but after the child had grown into a strong and handsome youth, he was called Alexandros, because he fought the robbers and protected the flocks. Before long he discovered his parents. How this came about is told by Hyginus, according to whose report the infant is *found by shepherds*. One day messengers, sent by Priamos, come to these herders to fetch a bull which is to serve as the prize for the victor in the combats arranged in commemoration of Paris. They selected a bull which Paris valued so highly that he followed the men who led the beast away, assisted in the combats, and won the prize. This aroused the anger of his brother Deiphobos, who threatened him with his sword, but his sister Kassandra recognized him as her brother, and Priamos joyfully received him as his son. The misfortune which Paris later on brought to his family and his native city, through the

abduction of Helena, is well known from Homer's poems, and their prologue and epilogue.

A certain resemblance with the story of the birth of Paris is presented by the poem of Zal, in Firdusi's Persian hero-myths (translated by Schack). The first son is born to Sam, king of Sistan, by one of his consorts. Because he had white hair, *his mother concealed the birth*. But the nurse reveals the birth of his son to the king. Sam is disappointed, and commands that the child be exposed. The servants carry it on the top of Mount Alburnus, where it is raised by the Somurgh, a powerful bird. The full grown youth is seen by a travelling caravan, whose members speak of him "as whose nurse a bird is sufficient." King Sam once *sees his son in a dream*, and sallies forth to seek the exposed child. He is unable to reach the summit of the elevated rock where he finally espies the youth. But the Somurgh bears his son down to him, he receives him joyfully and nominates him as his successor.

TELEPHOS

Aleos, King of Tegea, was informed by the *oracle* that his sons would perish through a descendant of his daughter. He therefore made his daughter Auge a priestess of the goddess Athene, and threatened her with death should she mate with a man. But when Herakles dwelt as a guest in the sanctuary of Athene, on his expedition against Augias, he saw the maiden, and when intoxicated he raped her. When Aleos became aware of her pregnancy, he delivered her to Nauplios, a rough sailor, with the command to throw her into the sea. But on the way she gave birth to Telephos, on Mount Parthenios, and Nauplios, unmindful of the orders he had received, carried both her and the child to Mysia, where he delivered them to King Teuthras.

According to another version, Auge secretly brought forth as a priestess, but kept the child hidden in the temple. When Aleos discovered the sacrilege, he caused the child to be exposed in the Parthenian mountains. Nauplios was instructed to sell the mother in foreign lands, or to kill her. She was delivered by him into the hands of Teuthras.

1. In the version of Euripides, whose tragedies "Auge" and "Telephos" are extant, *Aleos caused the mother and the child to be thrown into the sea in a box*, but through the protection of Athene this box was carried to the end of the Mysian River,

Kaikos. There it was found by Teuthras, who made Auge his wife and took her child into his house as his foster son.

According to the current tradition, *Auge exposes the newborn child* and escapes to Mysia, where the childless King Teuthras adopts her as his daughter. The boy, however, is nursed by a doe, and is found by shepherds who take him to King Korythos. The king brings him up as his son. When Telephos has grown into a youth he betakes himself to Mysia, on the advice of the oracle to seek his mother. He frees Teuthras, who is in danger from his enemies, and in reward receives the hand of the supposed daughter of the king, namely his own mother Auge. But she refuses to submit to Telephos, and when he in his ire is about to pierce the disobedient one with his sword, she calls on her lover Herakles in her distress, and Telephos thus recognizes his mother. After the death of Teuthras he becomes king of Mysia.

PERSEUS

Akrisios, the king of Argos, had already reached an advanced age without having male progeny. As he desired a son, he consulted the Delphian oracle, but this warned him against male descendants, and informed him that his daughter Danae would bear a son through whose hand he would perish. In order to prevent this, his daughter was locked up by him in an iron chamber, which he caused to be carefully guarded. But Zeus penetrated through the roof, in the guise of a golden rain, and Danae became the mother of a boy.¹ One day Akrisios heard the voice of young Perseus in his daughter's room, and in this way learned that she had given birth to a child. *He killed the nurse*, but carried his daughter with her son to the domestic altar of Zeus, to have an oath taken on the true father's name. But he refuses to believe his daughter's statement that Zeus is the father, and *he encloses her with the child in a box,*² *which is cast into the sea.* The box is carried by the waves to the coast of Seriphos, where *Diktys, a fisherman*, usually called a brother of King Polydektes, *saves mother and child by drawing them out of the sea with his nets.* Diktys leads the two into his house and keeps them as his relations. Polydektes, however, becomes enamoured of the beau-

¹ Later authors, including Pindar, state that Danae was impregnated, not by Zeus, but by the brother of her father.

² Simonides of Keos (fr. 37, ed. Bergk), speaks of a casement strong as ore, in which Danae is said to have been exposed. (Geibel's: *Klassisches Liederbuch*, page 52.)

tiful mother, and *as Perseus was in his way, he tried to remove him* by sending him forth to fetch the head of the Gorgon Medusa. But against the king's anticipations Perseus accomplishes this difficult task, and a number of heroic deeds besides. In throwing the discos, at play, he accidentally kills his grandfather, as foretold by the oracle. He becomes the king of Argos, then of Pir-yuth, and the builder of Mykene.³

GILGAMOS

Aelian, who lived about 200 A. D., relates in his "Animal Stories" the history of *a boy who was saved by an eagle*.⁴

"Animals have a characteristic fondness for man. An eagle is known to have nourished a child. I shall tell the entire story, in proof of my assertion. When Senechoros reigned over the Babylonians, the Chaldean fortune-tellers foretold that the son of the king's daughter would take the kingdom from his grandfather; this verdict was a prophecy of the Chaldeans. The king was afraid of this prophecy, and humorously speaking, he became a second Akrisius for his daughter, over whom he watched with the greatest severity. But his daughter, fate being wiser than the Babylonian, conceived secretly from an inconspicuous man. For fear of the king, the guardians threw the child down from the Akropolis, where the royal daughter was imprisoned. The eagle, with his keen eyes, saw the boy's fall, and before the child struck the earth, he caught it on his back, bore it into a garden, and set it down with great care. When the overseer of the place saw the beautiful boy he was pleased with him and raised him. The boy received the name Gilgamos, and became the king of Babylonia. If anyone regards this as a fable, I have nothing to say, although I have investigated the matter to the best of my ability. Also from Achaemenes, the Persian, from whom the nobility of the Persians is derived, I learn that he was the pupil of an eagle."⁵

³ According to Hüsing, the Perseus myth in several versions is also demonstrable in Japan. Compare also, Sydney Hartland, *Legend of Perseus*, 1894.

⁴ Claudius Aelianus, "Historia animalium," XII, 21, translation by Fr. Jacobs (Stuttgart, 1841).

⁵ It was also told of Ptolemaös, the son of Lagos and Arsinoë, that an eagle protected the exposed boy with his wings against the sunshine, the rain and birds of prey (*loc. cit.*).

(To be continued)