Herakles and the Panhellenic Idea in Ancient Greek Culture

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Panhellenism in Ancient Greece

• Panhellenic war enterprises
  – The Trojan War (mythical)
  – The Persian Wars (historical: 490/480 B.C.)

• Supra-regional institutions
  – The Oracle at Delphi
  – The Olympic Games

• Rhetoric: political speeches
For, not even the powerful Herakles escaped the doom [of death], although he was dearest to king Zeus, the son of Kronos; but destiny and the painful wrath of Hera overcame him. Such I too, if a similar destiny is meant for me, will be lying there once I’ve died. [...]
Herakles in the *Odyssey*

τὸν δὲ μέτ’ εἰσενόησα βίην Ἡρακληείην, εἴδωλον· αὐτὸς δὲ μετ’ ἀθανάτοισι θεοῖσι τέρπεται ἐν θαλίῃς καὶ ἔχει καλλίσφυρον Ἡβην, παῖδα Διὸς μεγάλοιο καὶ Ἡρῆς χρυσοπεδίλου. (*Od.* 11.601–604)

After this one [= Sisyphus] I saw the powerful Herakles, [that is to say,] his shadow: he himself is enjoying himself among the immortal gods at festivities and has Hebe with the fair ankles [as his wife], a daughter of the great Zeus and of Hera with the golden shoes.

Greek text: van Thiel 1991 – English translation: Silvio Bär
Herakles as the Forefather of the Ptolemaic Dynasty

By lineage what a man was Ptolemy son of Lagus to accomplish some mighty deed when in his heart he had laid up a plan which none other could have conceived. Him the father made of equal honour even with the blessed immortals, and for him is fixed in Zeus’s halls a golden throne; and by his side in friendship sits Alexander, god of the gay diadem, the Persians’ bane. Over against these, and wrought of stubborn adamant, is established the chair of Heracles who slew the Centaurs, and there with the other gods he keeps festival, rejoicing exceedingly in the sons of his sons, in that the son of Cronos has lifted age from their limbs, and that they, his offspring, are called immortals. For to both of these the mighty son of Heracles was forbear, and both in the end trace back their birth to Heracles.

Theocritus, Idyll 17.13–27

Greek text and English translation: Gow 1952
Metopes of the Temple of Zeus in Olympia: The 12 Deeds of Herakles

Olympia, c. 470–457 B.C. (Olympia, Greece and Louvre, Paris)

Herakles as a *deus ex machina*

Apulian amphora, mid-4th century B.C. (Ruvo, Museo Jatta)

Source: *LIMC* I.1, 823 ("Antigone" n. 14)
Herakles as a God on Thasos

Silver tetradrachm from Thasos

Source: https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/7/7f/Tetradrachm_Herakles_Thasos_MBA_Lyon.jpg
References