

## HEARTY APPETITES: FOOD AND DRINK IN HERAKLES' MYTH AND CULT

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*Wedding of Ceyx*, fr. 264 MW (= Zenobios 2.19, cf. Plato, *Sym.* 274b)

Herakles: 'Good men need no invitation to go to other people's feasts!'

### Xenophon *Memorabilia* 2.1.21ff.: PRODIKOS 'CHOICE OF HERAKLES'

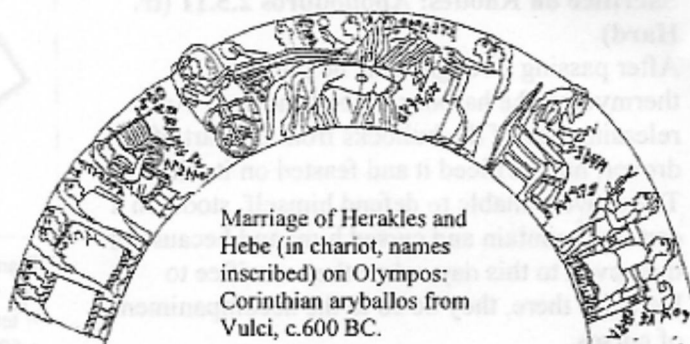
[21-2] They say that when Herakles was setting out from childhood into his prime, a time when the young, now becoming their own masters, show whether they will take the path of virtue (*arete*) in life or the path of vice (*kakia*), he went out to a quiet place and sat not knowing which of the roads to take. There appeared two tall women approaching him, one pretty to look at and of free-born nature, her body adorned with purity, her eyes with modesty, her figure with reserve, and with white clothes. The other was grown into plumpness and softness, her face made up so that it looked whiter and rosier in appearance than it actually was, her figure so that it looked straighter than it was by nature, and she had wide-open eyes, and clothes, so that her charms would shine right through. Often she looked herself over, and looked to see whether anyone was watching her, and she often took a glance at her own shadow. *The two women turn out to be Virtue (Arete) and Vice (Kakia), who each outline to Herakles a different road he might take in life. The way offered by Vice is suitably appealing:* [23-4] 'If you make me your friend, I shall lead you along the pleasantest and easiest road, and you will not miss the taste of a single pleasure, but you will go through life without knowing hardship. In the first place you will not be concerned with wars or responsibilities, but you will always be considering what tasty food or drink you can find, what sight or sound may please you, what scent or touch you may enjoy, which boyfriend's society will gratify you most, how you can sleep most comfortably, and how you can come by all these with the least trouble.' *Whereas the road of Virtue is predictably more like hard work:* [27-8] 'I shall not deceive you with a pleasant preamble, but I shall explain the facts truthfully as the gods have ordained them. For the gods grant men nothing of the things that are really good and admirable without effort and application...' *Most of Virtue's speech takes it for granted that the audience will actually deem desirable the things she says require hard work:* [28] 'If you want the gods to be gracious to you, you must worship the gods; if you wish to be loved by your friends, you must do your friends good deeds; if you desire to be honoured by any state, you must be of assistance to that state; if you expect to be admired for your virtue (*arete*) by the whole of Greece, you must strive to benefit Greece; if you want your land to bear abundant crops, you must cultivate your land; if you think you should make money from your flocks, you must take care of your flocks; if you have an impulse to grow great through war, and want to be able to liberate your friends and subdue your enemies, you must learn the actual arts of war from those who understand them and practise how you should apply them. And if you want to be physically able, you must accustom your body to be subject to your mind, and train it with hard work and sweat.'

### Homer, *Odyssey* 11.601-4

Odysseus: 'After him [Sisyphos] I observed mighty Herakles, his image (*eidolon*); for he himself enjoys the feasts of the immortal gods, and has as his wife fair-ankled Hebe, child of great Zeus and golden-sandalled Hera.'



Herakles fights Geryon. Shield-band from Olympia, c.550 BC.



Marriage of Herakles and Hebe (in chariot, names inscribed) on Olympos: Corinthian aryballos from Vulci, c.600 BC.

### *Homeric Hymn* (15) to Herakles the lion-hearted

I shall sing of Herakles, son of Zeus, by far the best of men on the earth, whom Alkmene bore in fair-dancing Thebes, after she had lain with the dark-clouded son of Kronos. Once he used to wander over the unmeasured land and the sea, sent by lord Eurystheus, and on his own account he both performed and endured many violent deeds. But now he lives happily in the fine seat of snowy Olympos, and has fair-ankled Hebe as his wife. Hail, lord, son of Zeus: Grant me excellence and wealth!

