

Herakles: Lord and Guardian of the Fresh Waters

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Recibido: 23 de octubre de 2019 / Aceptado: 6 de marzo de 2023.

Abstract. Heracles lacks a comprehensive program that includes many of his adventures. This pattern could originate from the fact that up to 21 of his enemies are descendants from seawater in all its mythological manifestations: Poseidon, Pontus, Phorcis, Cetos. This review can be compared to the cosmological role of Ninurta and Marduk in Mesopotamian mythology fighting to Tiamat and some of their acts and scenarios. We can therefore verify that Herakles does a great deal of their work: he controls mountains and freshwater springs, organizes river courses by opening gorges or building canals, cleans mouths and the seaside. Herakles would then be a good son of his father.

Keywords: Herakles; Marduk; Ninurta; Tiamat; Poseidon; Enemies; Salty-waters; Fresh-waters; Rivers; Sea; Mountains; Fords; Canals; River mouths.

[es] Heracles: señor y guardián de las aguas dulces

Resumen. Heracles carece de un programa estructurado que incluya muchas de sus aventuras. Este patrón podría originarse en el hecho de que hasta 21 de sus enemigos son descendientes del agua de mar en todas sus manifestaciones mitológicas: Poseidón, Ponto, Forcis, Ceto. Esta revisión se puede comparar con el papel cosmológico de Ninurta y Marduk en la mitología mesopotámica que lucha contra Tiamat y algunos de sus actos y escenarios. Se puede comprobar que Herakles realiza gran parte de sus trabajos: controla montañas y manantiales de agua dulce, organiza cursos de ríos abriendo gargantas o construyendo canales, limpia las desembocaduras y la costa. Herakles sería un buen hijo del dios de la lluvia.

Palabras clave: Heracles; Marduk; Ninurta; Tiamat; Posidón; enemigos; agua dulce; agua salada; ríos; mar; montañas; vados; canales; desembocaduras.

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How to cite: Gómez Segura, E. (2023). Herakles: Lord and Guardian of the Fresh Waters, in *Ilu. Revista de Ciencias de las Religiones* 28, e-87407. <https://dx.doi.org/10.5209/ilur.87407>.

1. The complex mythology of Herakles and its origins

The complexity and extension of the Heraklean mythology have generally been a problem when trying to understand this singular character. His popularity as an aristocratic ethical and social model, and at the same time as a fulfillment of the aspirations of the most popular social classes, who saw him as a savior and destroyer of evil, turns his legendary trajectory into a labyrinth². In order to overcome this complexity, classical studies have been focusing on the East of the Mediterranean for some time, a fact that has allowed deciphering the origin of some questions that seemed initially obscure. This type of analysis has shown that, although there is still confusion, it is advisable to constantly examine the connections between the classical and the oriental world in order to establish schemes that allow for a better understanding of this demigod³.

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² A brief and complete panorama on this complexity, very well documented, in Padilla 1998.

³ Levy 1934; Stella 1953; Burkert 1988 and 1992; West 1997; López Castro 1997; Penglase 1994. Recently, Rollinger 2001, Fenno 2005; Larson 2005; Kelly 2007; Ogden 2021b, XXIV-XXV.

In the case of Herakles specifically, it is common to speak of Gilgamesh or Ninurta⁴ when trying to explain some points of the origin of the character and its huge number of adventures, as well as the early date of its structured appearance in the Greek tradition⁵.

In fact, these data pointed out so far invite us to undertake more thorough in-depth research, because the antiquity and the great amount of historical and cultural changes experienced by the Mesopotamian mythology and religion advise to observe other characters that could have been assimilated to Ninurta. Marduk stands out among all of them, as there is evidence that the cult of the two gods was related in the Neo-Babylonian era. This situation raises the possibility of testing the mythology about Marduk, mainly the *Enuma Elish*⁶, who informs about the great myth of Marduk as creator and restorer of order. The poem describes the cosmic combat between Tiamat and Marduk. Tiamat⁷, the sea, faced Marduk⁸ when he, after two universal crises, decided to lead the gods' side against Tiamat.

This text seems to have influenced the Greek culture of the dark centuries. In general, the influence of Marduk on Zeus is recognized⁹, even when it comes to naming the planet of the solar system Jupiter¹⁰. Moreover, some studies have found a clear influence of *Enuma Elish* on other Greek deities: Penglase, for example¹¹, recognizes several *Enuma Elish* motifs in the story of two sons of Zeus, Apollo and Hermes, as they are described in their respective *Hymni Homerici*. But the case of Apollo, the clearest, is also important because it points to several aspects that lead directly to Herakles: Python serpent as a female monster; the death by a crush of this one; its association to a river¹²; Telphousa and its conversion into a fountain; the relationship between the Python serpent and the goddess Hera, which resembles Tiamat and her monster¹³.

And, looking specifically at Herakles, it is very interesting what Bottéro-Krammer¹⁴ write about the combat between Marduk and Tiamat: «jusqu'en bien des détails, son usage et son traitement ici nous donnent à penser que nos auteurs ont transporté sur Marduk, avec seulement plus d'emphase, et un encadrement différent, l'antique aventure de Ninurta». So, to look at Ninurta and Marduk from the classical world could be opportune.

A first comparison between Marduk and Herakles offers the following similarities:

1. Herakles is son of Zeus, like Apollo; Marduk is the son of the main divinity, Ea / Enki;
2. The animosity of Hera, who sends two serpents to Herakles, is parallel to that felt by Tiamat; the same can be said of her role as nurse¹⁵;
3. Ishtar develops the role of enemy of his consort, just as Hera does with Zeus;
4. It is relevant, mentioned since ancient times, the combat with the Hydra: not only Apollo buries Telphousa under a rock as Marduk buries Tiamat under a mountain, Herakles himself also buries the Hydra under a rock;
5. The return trip from the sea to his temple resembles Apollo with Ninurta, but the sequence of events also coincides with Marduk, and it is not uncommon to see Herakles travel to the sea and return from it to his adopted home, Mycenae, where he shows, like Marduk in his temple, his exploits to Eurystheus.
6. The weapons of Marduk and Apollo are the bow and arrows, but also of Herakles; the club belongs both to Marduk and Herakles.
7. Certain *Enuma Elish*¹⁶ passages list the beings against whom Marduk will fight: giant dragons, full of poison; leviathans; hydras, formidable dragons, sea monsters, colossal lions, guard dogs, scorpion men, men-fish, gigantic bison. Eleven beings (like Ninurta), an amount only equaled by Herakles in classical mythology, although there are feats common to other heroes¹⁷.
8. Marduk fights against the forces of chaos as Heracles helps the gods in the gigantomachy.

⁴ Complete study on Ninurta, Annus 2002.

⁵ Brundage 1985, Levy 1934; Brenk 1991; van Dijk 1982; Stella 1953, Burkert 1992; West 1997, 458-472. All the problems of these perspectives, in Burkert 1988, 14-19 and 1998.

⁶ About the text, Bottéro-Krammer 1993 602-679. I will follow this translation. On the influence of *Enuma Elish* on Homer, Burkert 2002 *passim*.

⁷ Heffron-Worthington 2013.

⁸ Sommerfeld 1990; Abush 1999.

⁹ West 1997, 68.

¹⁰ Burkert 2002, 76.

¹¹ Penglase 1994, 103-107; 164.

¹² Penglase 1994, 103 note 31, cites Challimachus, *Hymn to Delos* 92: θηριον αινωγενειον από Πλειστοϊο καθέρπων.

¹³ Padilla 1998, 20-21 on Apollo and Herakles.

¹⁴ Bottéro-Krammer 1993, 675.

¹⁵ Penglase 1994, 104, notes: «in this role of nurse, Tiamat was equated with Ishtar, the battle goddess, with whom nursing is also a strong feature». Diodorus Siculus (IV 9, 4-9) writes about an abandoned Herakles in a plain, picked up by Athena and suckled by Hera.

¹⁶ I 129-146; II 15-32; III 19-36 and 77-94.

¹⁷ In this paper I only take into account the number of feats, the scenarios and the genealogy of the enemies of Heracles, not the period in which we can verify them in the literature and the archaeological record. On this question, it is interesting to remember that Day 1985, 38-49 used late literature (The Book of Job) to verify the antiquity of the myth that tells of the combat between Yahweh and the dragon and the sea. On the antiquity of the Heracleian canon and the problem of its date and a theoretical oriental influence, Ogden 2021b, XXV-XXX.

However, *Enuma Elish*¹⁸ indicates that the great weapon of Marduk is the deluge, apparent contradiction with Herakles on which I will return later. And Marduk confronts the primeval divinities embodied in monsters with marine roots (we can effectively consider Tiamat as a primordial enemy), something to check in the case of Herakles.

These similarities and differences encourage the comparison between Ninurta and Marduk on the one hand and Herakles on the other. I will start looking for a possible relationship between the enemies of Herakles with the sea in case there is a deep resemblance to the theme of Tiamat facing Ninurta-Marduk. Perhaps it is possible to answer a question that Burkert¹⁹ was left with: «Quale è la significazione degli athla?»

2. The monsters, the enemies

At the beginning of this comparison, it is necessary to point out that Herakles' exploits should not be confused with his twelve labors. While these are a solid basis for comparing our hero with Ninurta or Marduk, that should not be considered the only way to work. It should be born in mind that only some enemies of Herakles were monsters, he is more than a «master of animals»²⁰. It should be checked whether there is some unnoticed clue that connects these diverse feats. As Huard has demonstrated already for Hesiod²¹, Herakles fights on earth as Zeus fought cosmologically to establish his new kingdom of order: the son created cosmos as his father did.

In order to explore Herakles' cosmological role, and considering the similarities between our hero and Mesopotamian deities, I will focus briefly on the origin and genealogy of the enemies that the Greek hero stands out in case they share this same marine origin with the Mesopotamian monsters and enemies.

This approach seems especially stimulating particularly if we look at the reality ensuing from Hesiod's *Theogony*²². Confronted with the opinion of Burkert²³, who claimed that it is noteworthy that wild animals do not come simply from nature but «in tradizioni molteplici vengono di un Aldilà», it is necessary to gather more information from the genealogical line of the same monsters and human characters that Herakles faces. Genealogy is important, considering that Clay²⁴ indicates three ways that Hesiod employed to define a specific deity: «by name, by identifying epithet or description, and, above all, in genealogical terms as the product of a certain parentage and, in turn, as the generator of certain offspring». Thus, the genealogy²⁵ may be a way to cross Burkert's «Aldilà». As will be seen, there could be another way of describing the Lernaian Hydra (and the Hesperides Snake, one could add) instead of as an «animal chthonien».²⁶

To carry out this task we have to trace the ancestors of each enemy of Herakles until we find or discard marine origins, whether they are Pontus, Phorcys, Ceto, Poseidon or even gifts sent by the latter. The result, attending to the seawater proof, is as follows²⁷:

1. The lion of Nemea is the son of Orthrus and Echidna, the latter daughter of Phorcys and Ceto according to Hesiod²⁸, that is, a descendant of Ge and Pontus. Pherecydes has Echidna as the daughter of Phorcys²⁹.
2. The Lernaian Hydra is a daughter of Typhon. Typhon is recognized as the son of Ge and Tartarus, a place which Hesiod describes as firmly closed by Poseidon³⁰. In addition, the Lernaian Hydra is also the daughter of Echidna, granddaughter of both the primordial humidity and Pontus. This genealogy could solve the objections of Boardman³¹.
3. The Herperides' snake is a descendant of Phorcys and Ceto³² or Typhon and Echidna³³. Despite being different and distant in time, both sources report marine ancestors.
4. The bull of Crete³⁴, was the one who abducted Europe. According to some sources, arrived from the sea; but other authors point out that the bull was the one sent by Poseidon³⁵, the gift presented by the

¹⁸ IV 49 and 79.

¹⁹ Burkert 1992b, 113.

²⁰ Padilla 1998, p. 21s., with references to this topic.

²¹ Huard 2020.

²² Clay 1998; Huard 2020.

²³ Burkert 1992b, p. 117.

²⁴ Clay 1998, 115.

²⁵ On genealogies, Buxton 1994, p. 206s. Metcalf 2015, 115-7 points to the importance of genealogy in Mesopotamian and Greek hymns.

²⁶ Gilis-Verbanck-Piérard 1998, paragr. 6; Slater 1968, 371.

²⁷ New analysis of these feats in Ogden 2021. Each feat has its own chapter and author.

²⁸ *Theogonia* 270-305, though the text leaves uncertain whether Calirrhoe, «daughter of glorious Ocean», was her mother.

²⁹ *FGrHist* 3 F 7.

³⁰ Hesiod *Theogonia* 732-733.

³¹ Boardman 1998, paragr. 13. On Poseidon and the limits of the Earth and dead, see below.

³² Hesiod *Theogonia* 333-335.

³³ Apollodorus *Bibliotheca* II 5, 11.

³⁴ Gantz 1996, 394s.

³⁵ Both records from Apollodorus *Bibliotheca* II 5, 7, who quotes Acusilaus for the first explanation.

- god from the sea when Minos said that he would sacrifice to Poseidon anything that came from the sea. Pausanias³⁶ and Diodorus³⁷ follow the Apollodorus' version.
5. Geryon. Son of Kallirhoe, daughter of the Ocean, and of Chrysaor, in turn son of Gorgo and Poseidon.
 6. The dog Orthrus is the son of Typhon and Echidna, the daughter of Phorcys and Ceto, sons of Pontus and Ge.
 7. Kerberos, son of Echidna and Typhon. Brother of Orthrus, Hydra and the Nemean lion.
 8. During his return trip to Greece Herakles goes through Liguria, where he faces Ligys, eponym of the Ligurians, son of Poseidon³⁸.
 9. In a different version of the previous myth, Alebion and Dercinus, both sons of Poseidon³⁹, also in Liguria, tried to steal from Herakles the oxen of Geryon. He killed the two.
 10. In addition, while in Regio, a bull from the cattle crossed to Sicily, where Herakles faced Eryx, son of Butes and Aphrodite; but son of Poseidon according to Apollodorus⁴⁰.
 11. During the trip, in Illyria, he faced Cynus, son of Ares and Pelopia, granddaughter of Poseidon as daughter of Pelias⁴¹.
 12. Periclymenus, a son of Neleus who was counted among the Argonauts⁴². His grandfather Poseidon granted him the gift of metamorphosis at will. He became a bee and attacked Herakles⁴³.
 13. Neleus, son of Poseidon, suckled by a mare that he sent for this purpose. Multifarm sea god. Herakles fought with him in Messenia.
 14. Antaios in Libya, son of Poseidon and Ge.
 15. Bousiris in Egypt, son of Poseidon and Lysianassa.
 16. In Troy, Herakles kills a being from the Poseidon sphere, a sea monster that he sent to devour Hesione in exchange for peace in the region⁴⁴.
 17. The Cos king Eurypylus⁴⁵, son of Poseidon and Astypalaea, was killed by Herakles because the inhabitants of Cos did not allow him to enter the island⁴⁶.
 18. War between Herakles and Augeias. This son of Poseidon according to some⁴⁷ requests help from his nephews Molionidae, Eurytus and Cteatus irreproachable son of Poseidon⁴⁸, twins. They are also considered a single monstrous being, with two heads, and a single body.
 19. Augeias is usually presented as the son of the Sun, but there are other versions according to which he is the son of Phorbos or Poseidon himself⁴⁹. His mother, on the other hand, is always Hyrmine, daughter of Neleus, son of Poseidon.
 20. In the campaign against the city of Pylos Herakles faces his king, Neleus, son of Poseidon. The hero kills Neleus and ten of his children, leaving only Nestor.
 21. Triton, son of Poseidon and Amphitrite, is another one of his enemies, but this subject only appears, although abundantly, in the ceramics⁵⁰.

Such an abundance of monsters and other beings related to the sea in any of their mythological incarnations, all enemies of Herakles, cannot be a coincidence. In fact, Stafford states⁵¹: «the visual record suggests that Herakles' fight with a sea-god was a favorite theme in the archaic period ... but things are complicated by the changing identity of the deity concerned». We could think of a tendency in mythical traditions: to relate any enemy Herakles fights with to the sea. But we should also think why this could happen. It could be so because of what West says⁵²: that the monsters «are put among the descendants of Pontos not because they have any connection with the sea, but because they could not be put among the descendants of Uranos». And maybe partially right. But Herakles fights monsters, animals, and men, so there must be a reason for the high proportion sea-related creatures among his enemies. I suggest to look for that reason beyond and before the usual texts.

³⁶ I 27, 10.

³⁷ IV 13, 4.

³⁸ Scholiast on Lycophron, *Alexandra* p. 648

³⁹ Apollodorus *Bibliotheca* II 5, 10.

⁴⁰ *Bibliotheca* II 5, 10.

⁴¹ Apollodorus *Bibliotheca* I 9, 10.

⁴² Apollonius Rhodius, 1.156; Valerius Flaccus, 1.388; Hyginus, *Fabulae* 14; *Argonautica* Orphica 155

⁴³ Vicent 2007; Arnould 1994, 22-24.

⁴⁴ Apollodorus *Bibliotheca* II 5, 9.

⁴⁵ Stafford 2012, 185, calls him Eurypolos.

⁴⁶ Apollodorus *Bibliotheca* II 7, 1.

⁴⁷ Apollodorus *Bibliotheca* II 5, 5

⁴⁸ Pindar *Olympian* X 27

⁴⁹ Apollodorus *Bibliotheca* II 5, 5, 1.

⁵⁰ Stafford 2012, 73.

⁵¹ Stafford 2012, 73.

⁵² West 1966, 244.

If we look again at Ninurta and Marduk, there is a clear notion that the sea is the chaos which should not be allowed to invade the order represented by the separation of Earth, Ether and Sea⁵³. The sea, in fact, was a continuous source of negative ideas. In Greek mentality⁵⁴ (and Sumerian, Akkadian or Canaanite if we think of Ninurta, Marduk, Baal and Tiamat, Yam), the great cetaceans always marked the Greek poetry and art in a bad way⁵⁵ and Papadopoulos-Ruscillo⁵⁶ confirm that the cetaceans and their mythology are very present in the archaeological record of classical Greece.

But this material should not be considered in isolation, so I will postpone its analysis and take a moment to review enemies and feats of Herakles considering worthy again the comparison with Ninurta and Marduk.

3. The mountains

There is a number of adventures of Herakles that take place in mountains⁵⁷. The link with Mesopotamian mythology seems diffuse, but Ninurta and Marduk have strong connections with mountains. The former fights against the mountain in the composition known as *An.gim* or the *Return of Ninurta to Nippur*⁵⁸. Lines 16 to 29 describe the battle of this god with the Mountain, in Akkadian *kur*, a word that designates both the mountain and the underworld⁵⁹, although Cooper indicates⁶⁰: «Nothing in *An.gim* suggests interpreting *kur* as netherworld ... and the use of *ki.bal* «rebellious land» as a synonym of *kur* ensure our interpretation». The text is generally understood as a mythological-poetic reflection on geopolitical issues associated with the enemies that resided in the mountains located east of Mesopotamia.

Nonetheless, in some myths the mountains (*kur*) are treated as a location of a separate world (a separate world in the same sense that the underworld (*kur*) is in other myths a world apart, a world that the gods try to visit or dominate⁶¹). Thus, similarities with Mesopotamian mythology can be found in the exploits that Herakles carried out in a mountainous setting:

1. The Nemean lion: Nemea, with its Zeus' sanctuary, is located in the mountains between Argos and Corinth;
2. The Lion from mount Cithaeron⁶²;
3. The wild boar of Erymanthos, where the river Erymanthos is born;
4. The Keryneian Hind: Euripides⁶³ calls her «plunderer of the fields»: δόρκαν συλήτειραν ἀγρωστῶν. As Artemis's animal it should live in the mountains; Euripides would call her «plunderer of the fields» for going down the mountain to the cultivated fields to graze.
5. The Stymphalian lake is only one valley away from another feat of Herakles, the preparation of a channel to drive the river in Pheneus⁶⁴. Stafford⁶⁵ relates to this point a coin from the city of Stymphalos that presents Herakles associated with the legend: saviour of the Stymphalians.
6. Atlas, which gave his name to a mountain range in Morocco.
7. Centaurs from Mount Pholoe, near Erymanthos.
8. Lernaian Hydra: since it is a fountain that gives water to a lake, it must be at least under a mountain or hill⁶⁶.

These characters and scenarios vaguely remind us of some *An.gim* data, such as the remains that Ninurta took from the battle against the mountain: line 38 mentions the seven-headed serpent; l. 53, uros; l. 57, giant bison; l. 79 mentions the lion of the Apsu. Nonetheless, these references do not seem to indicate a direct dependence between the myths of Herakles and those of Ninurta in the full sense. However, it is worth remem-

⁵³ In the Bible there is also some kind of primordial fight between Yahweh and Yamm, the sea, and sea monsters: Isaiah 51, 9; Job 7, 12; 9, 9-13. Furthermore, Psalms 74, 12-17 describes this fight as previous to the creation of the world. On this topic, Day 1985, 4: "All those passages in the Old Testament which speak about God's control of the sea at the time of creation naturally presuppose the archaic world view shared by the ancient Israelites along with other peoples of the ancient Near East that both above the domed firmament of heaven and below the earth there is a cosmic sea".

⁵⁴ Observe the marine metaphor used by Pindar to refer to Hades: κοινὸν γὰρ ἔρχεται κῦμ' Ἀϊδῶ (Pindar *Nemean* VII 31) as recorded by Vermeule 1984, 179.

⁵⁵ Vermeule 1984, 179-196.

⁵⁶ Papadopoulos-Ruscillo 2002. There was also a good feeling for the sea: Somville 2003 on the good and bad, as Buxton 1994, 97-104.

⁵⁷ On the mountains as a mythological scenario of the struggle between chaos and order, Buxton 1994, 81-95. A mountain (ὄρος) is not a plain, a city, neither the acropolis: «a ὄρος is a height outside inhabited and cultivated space» (Buxton 1994, 83).

⁵⁸ Bottéro-Krammer 1993, 377-389.

⁵⁹ Cooper 1978, 106.

⁶⁰ Cooper 1978, 8 n.1.

⁶¹ Black-Green 1992, 104 s.v.

⁶² Apollodorus *Bibliotheca* II 4, 9-10. See Schnapp-Gourbeillon 1998, note 3 on lions and mountains in Homer; and specifically, García Yebra 1966.

⁶³ *Hercules Furens* 376.

⁶⁴ Catullus (LXVIII 109-114) unites both feats.

⁶⁵ Stafford 2012, 38.

⁶⁶ Apollodorus, *Bibliotheca* II, 5, 2: τὴν δὲ ὕδραν εὐρὸν ἔν τι νι λόφῳ παρὰ τὰς πηγὰς τῆς Ἀμμώνης.

bering that the only mortal who fought against the Giants was precisely Herakles, whose bow and arrows were essential to win the war.

In this sense, it must be remembered that in an analysis of the Homeric *Hymn to Apollo* with its antecedent in Marduk, Penglase⁶⁷ comments: «the controlling of waters by a mountain follows the combat against the monsters. This is a major cosmological motif and represents the god's formation of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers to irrigate Mesopotamia». Penglase goes on to say that there is no apparent cosmological motive in Apollo's struggle against Pytho, considering the Mesopotamian motif a mere basis for demonstrating the establishment of the Apollo cult in Telphousa. Now, if we look carefully at the exploits of Herakles, the relationship between Mountains-Herakles is important. Thus, the idea that dominating the mountain implies dominating the water does open a new clue, that of the fresh waters referring to Herakles.

4. Sweet waters

It can be at least proposed that Herakles protected the fresh waters supplies or sources⁶⁸. Not only because of his fights in the mountains, where fountains well up, but because of episodes that point to that specific mission: to safeguard the places where those sources were. In fact, and perhaps not by chance, Ninurta, in *An.Gim*⁶⁹ asks his father Enlil that, after the victory over the mountains, Nippur, the city to which he has taken the spoils of his victims, becomes «Puits-d'eau-douce»⁷⁰.

1. The first case that can be adduced is the Lernaian Hydra: according to the texts, a fountain raised in the Amymone source⁷¹, which should be related to the Amymone from Argos who joined Poseidon. The fact is that the Hydra was considered a source of the Lerna reservoir. Pausanias even points out that its waters did not dry during the summer⁷², a fact that, we could suppose, would start happening after the Hydra was defeated by Herakles.
2. A similar case is that of the birds of the Stymphalian lake: Pausanias⁷³ tells that there was a source that fed the lake by a river that did not get bogged down in summer (ἐν θέρει δὲ προλιμνάζει μὲν οὐδὲν ἔτι, πόταμος δὲ αὐτίκα ἀπὸ τῆς πηγῆς).
3. In Erymanthos, where the wild boar was hunted, a river of the same name flowed from the mountain⁷⁴.

It could be argued that, in reality, Herakles, while protecting mountains, he also protected the flow of fresh water. He would do this in two ways:

- a) Either by cleaning the sources in general and protecting the fresh water sites or sources thereof from dangerous or harmful beings;
- b) Or by expelling the descendants of Poseidon⁷⁵ or Pontus from their immediate surroundings.

Regarding this second method, Pausanias says that the rivers of the Argolid were drying up because Poseidon, angered at having also lost the patronage of Argos, dried up their sources⁷⁶. Moreover, regarding the first method, Pausanias tells that the Arcadians believed that the Gigantomachy, in which Herakles fought, took place along the river Alpheus in Arcadia⁷⁷. In any case, if the battle was fought on Mount Olympus, the great mountain, there is no doubt that Herakles also helped his father Zeus with his mountainous home, where springs well up. The passage, it has already been said, recalls certain *Enuma Elish* tones as Marduk became the defender of the other gods, the generation of his father Ea / Enki.

In addition, there is another series of encounters with seawater or its descendants that are very significant.

⁶⁷ Penglase 1994, 105.

⁶⁸ On fountains as mythical space, see Buxton 1994, 109-113.

⁶⁹ Line 173.

⁷⁰ Translated by Bottéro-Krammer 1993, 396 *ad. loc.*

⁷¹ Apollodorus *Bibliotheca* II, 5, 2.

⁷² Pausanias II 15, 5.

⁷³ VIII 22, 3.

⁷⁴ Pausanias V, 26, 7.

⁷⁵ It is curious that the mythology keeps episodes that illustrate the theme of the sons of Poseidon troubling the life of sources or even nymphs: Halirrhothius violated Aglauro, daughter of Aglauro and Ares, next to the source of Asclepius in the Acropolis (Pausanias I 21, 4). Also, Polydeuces, besides an ever-flowing fountain, fought against Amycus, another son of Poseidon and king of the Bebrykes, (Theocritus XXII 37, 44).

⁷⁶ Pausanias II 15, 5. Taking advantage of this mythological anecdote BURKERT 1985, 138 affirms that Poseidon can make sprout sources. Faced with this idea, it seems better to attend that he did it after drying the sources out of spite.

⁷⁷ Pausanias VIII 28, 7.

5. The coasts, the deltas

The descendants of salty water not only went inland and forced Herakles to fight them in the interior. It is necessary to examine if the coasts were also the scene of combats between the hero and the offshoots of the sea. The background for this analysis are mythological texts; see, for example, the case of Cercyon, son of Poseidon, who terrorized the coast of Eleusis⁷⁸, a character that Plutarch⁷⁹ uses in the *Life of Theseus* as an example hinting that this one used the same expeditious method that Herakles with Termerus, Antaeus, and Bousiris. On Termerus there are two versions: that by Plutarch and a second one in the Scholia to Euripides *Rhesus* 509, where it is said that Termerus was a pirate that arrived from Lycia and Caria to Cos (again the troubling sea).

But perhaps the best motive is the myth of the Aloadae, Otos and Ephialtes, sons of Poseidon and giants⁸⁰: their mother Iphimedeia conceived them by the sea, and the point is that they dared, like the previous Giants, to challenge the power of the gods⁸¹ causing a cosmic chaos. In fact, they dislocated the mountains Pelion, Olympus and Ossa in order to, piling them one on another, ascend to the skies. They even attacked Artemis, the goddess of the mountains. We could conceive them as sons of the seawater trying to control mountains.

1. The main evidence that Herakles protected the coasts and the fields may be the defense of Hesione, daughter of Laomedon king of Troy⁸². When Laomedon refused to pay Apollo and Poseidon his stipend to help him build the walls of Troy, both gods took revenge by disposing of their own domains: Apollo, a plague; Poseidon, a sea monster, who devoured the inhabitants of the area, and could only be placated by handing Hesione. Herakles, of course, won.

In order to conclude the commentary on this adventure, we should not forget to add the verses Homer dedicated to a dike to contain the sea⁸³, as can be read⁸⁴: «So saying, the dark-haired god went to the heaped-up wall of divine Heracles, the high wall that the Trojans and Pallas Athene had made for him, to the end that he might flee thither and escape from the monster of the deep, whenso the monster drove him from the seashore to the plain». It is noteworthy that Troy dominated the mouth of the Scamander, a fact that seems to open a new way of interpretation of some myths. The Homeric image seems to confirm the idea that there was a struggle between the water that would rise from the sea and the water that would fall from the interior (see later).

With this model in mind, the presence of Herakles can be seen in the vicinity of some of the great estuaries of the Mediterranean⁸⁵. His exploits may include fighting and defeating descendants of salty water, mainly Poseidon. It also entails the civilization of the area through Heraklean offspring. Here is a recount⁸⁶:

2. During his return trip to Greece carrying the oxen of Geryon, Herakles passes through Liguria, where he confronts Ligys, eponym of the Ligurians, son of Poseidon⁸⁷. One can speculate with the location of Genoa, an important port since ancient times involved in the tin transport route and a point coveted by Etruscans, Greeks and Carthaginians⁸⁸. But, in any case, Strabo describes the area of combat as close to Marseille and says⁸⁹:

Between Marseilles and the outlets of the Rhone there is a plain, circular in shape, which is as far distance from the sea as a hundred stadia, and is also as much as that in diameter. It is called Stony Plain from the fact it is full of stones as large as you can hold in your hand, although from beneath the stones there is a growth of wild herbage which affords abundant pasturage for the cattle. In the middle of the plain stand water and salty springs, and also lumps of salt.

It is about the plain of the Crau. Regarding the location of Liguria far from present-day Italy⁹⁰, Stephanus Byzantius⁹¹ writes of Marseille: πόλις τῆς Λιγυστικῆς κατὰ τὴν Κελτικὴν.

⁷⁸ Pausanias I 39, 2.

⁷⁹ Plutarch *Theseus*. 11.

⁸⁰ Known to us since Homer: *Iliad* 5.385, *Odyssey* 11.305-8.

⁸¹ Apollodorus *Bibliotheca* I 7, 4.

⁸² Apollodorus *Bibliotheca* II 5, 9.

⁸³ Luce 2006.

⁸⁴ *Iliad* XX 144-150. Translated by Murray 1925.

⁸⁵ On the signification of Herakles as a spatial hero, Molina Marín 2021. The author stresses the fact that some feats of Herakles appear in the Mediterranean Sea as the Greeks travel.

⁸⁶ There was the vague idea that the Greeks would have of the western Mediterranean in the 6th and 5th centuries BC (van der Valk 1958, 124).

⁸⁷ Apollodorus *Bibliotheca* II 5, 10.

⁸⁸ de Palma 1986.

⁸⁹ Strabo IV 1, 7. English translation by Jones, 1923.

⁹⁰ On the obscure data available to the first Greek historians, see Pearson 1934. The case is equally blurred even in the time of Apollonius of Rhodes, who seems to have confused news about three rivers (Rhône, Po, Rhine) that would be born, it is his opinion, in a single alpine lake (Bridgeman 2000/2001, 216).

⁹¹ *Etymologiae* 435.18

3. Perhaps the clearest evidence of the relationship between the rivers and the sea is the feat of Bousiris, the Egyptian king who forced the Nile to break into branches and surround the land and sacrificed a foreigner every year to quell a famine⁹². He was Poseidon's son. The knowledge that the Greeks had of the geography of Egypt was very restricted until the fourth century. Specifically on the Delta there were several theories up to, at least, Dionysius Periegetes⁹³.
4. Finally, the ancients also thought that Herakles protected the entire Mediterranean from the presence in it of monsters coming from the Ocean. So writes Diodorus Siculus (IV 18, 4-5) on the Pillars of Hercules: what had been a much larger step was shortened by Herakles: συναγαγεῖν τὸν πόρον εἰς στενόν, ὅπως ἀλιτενοῦς καὶ στενοῦ γενομένου κωλύηται τὰ μεγάλα κήτη διεκπίπτειν ἐκ τοῦ Ὠκεανοῦ πρὸς τὴν ἐντὸς θάλατταν.

The idea that seems to be behind these feats of Herakles would have to do both with the rejection of the sea inland and with the importance of freeing the land from evil. Burkert speaks⁹⁴ of the habit of throwing humans to remove evil, to expel them from the city or to throw them into the sea. There are two examples that he quotes on this subject, the first one refers to a criminal thrown from the sanctuary of Apollo Leukatas in Leucade; the second a young man who, in honor of Poseidon, is expelled under the idea «become our offscourings».

Returning to the mouths, it seems that the underlying idea would be that the sea could want to penetrate inland, as in an estuary, turning salty the water of its final area⁹⁵. Herakles, as the guardian of fresh water, would not only guard fountains in the mountains; he would also protect the final course of the rivers.

There is a passage from the *Iliad* in which Poseidon threatens to destroy the separation between the kingdom of Hades and the «healthy» zone, the area inhabited by mortals and gods⁹⁶:

ἔδεισεν δ' ὑπένερθεν ἄναξ ἐνέρων Αἰδωνεύς,
 δείσας δ' ἐκ θρόνου ἄλτο καὶ ἴαχε, μὴ οἱ ὑπερθε
 γαῖαν ἀναρρήξειε Ποσειδάων ἐνοσίχθων,
 οἰκία δὲ θνητοῖσι καὶ ἀθανάτοισι φανείη
 σμερδαλέ' εὐρώεντα, τά τε στυγέουσι θεοὶ περ
 τόσσοι ἄρα κτύπος ὄρτο θεῶν ἔριδι ζυνιόντων·

[And seized with fear in the world below was Aidoneus, lord of the shades, and in fear leapt he from his throne and cried aloud, lest above him the earth be cloven by Poseidon, the Shaker of Earth, and his abode be made plain to view for mortals and immortals—the dread and dank abode, wherefor the very gods have loathing so great was the din that arose when the gods clashed the strife.]

The passage is very interesting because it seems that Poseidon is going to break the established limits and recreate the original chaos. In fact, the above passage quoted when talking about Tartarus⁹⁷ comes to mind.

This notion of rejection of the sea, therefore, would have enough presence to support this interpretation of the exploits of Herakles. In fact, this proposal could have a strong Mesopotamian background. *An.Gim* says⁹⁸: «Et, tandis que s'avancait le Seigneur, pareil à un Cataclysme –Que pareil a un Cataclysme s'avancait Ninurta, Démolisseur des places-fortes de la contrée rebelle, Il mugissait comme la tempête, du bout de l'horizon».

Kirk⁹⁹ also notes that Ninurta builds a wall to stop the waters that run up from Kur. But this idea is not present only here. It is time to return to a point we have dealt with before regarding the use by Marduk of a flood to fight Tiamat. After preparing the bow, arrows and mace, surrounded himself with winds and ready to ride his car, it is said of Marduk¹⁰⁰: «Puis le Seigneur leva Déluge, sa Grand-Arme, et monta le terrifique Char «Tempête irrépressible»... Mais le Seigneur, ayant [levé] Déluge, sa Grand-Arme».

It seems that the flash flood, the flood, drags the evil that represented the sea penetrating inland and provoking the cosmic disaster. And with respect to what was previously said about uncleanness and evil, there is a good and ancient illustration of this idea in *Iliad*¹⁰¹:

λαοὺς δ' Ἀτρεΐδης ἀπολυμαίνεσθαι ἄνωγεν·
 οἷδ' ἀπελυμαίνοντο καὶ εἰς ἅλα λύματα βάλλον...

This seems important because it is a matter of eliminating the filth, λῦμα, and of carrying out this work along the edge of the untiring sea / sterile / powerful roar.

⁹² Isocrates XI, 31.

⁹³ Lítinas 2015.

⁹⁴ Burkert 1985, 82-83.

⁹⁵ Cf. *Iliad* XVII 263-264: ὣς δ' ὄτ' ἐπὶ προχοῇσι διυπετέος ποταμοῖο βέβρυχεν μέγα κῦμα ποτὶ ρόον...

⁹⁶ *Iliad* XX 61-66. English translation by Murray 1925.

⁹⁷ Hesiod *Theogony* 821-822.

⁹⁸ Lines 73-75. Translation Bottéro-Krammer 1993. Jacobsen 1968 interpreted Ninurta as god of the storm.

⁹⁹ Kirk 1973, 90.

¹⁰⁰ *Enuma Elish* IV 49-50 and 75. Translation Bottéro-Krammer 1993.

¹⁰¹ I 313-314.

Also in the *Iliad*, Fenno¹⁰² has analyzed the Homeric similes of the sea and rivers and concludes that in many cases those of the sea are used to describe the Greeks who attack interior territory, while the river usually serves to illustrate the Trojans that defend that inland¹⁰³. And he even comments¹⁰⁴ that Poseidon fights for the Greeks while Zeus fights for the Trojans (albeit for more glory of Achilles). This struggle between both types of water can be clearly seen in a passage from the *Odyssey*. This is the scene in which Homer comments on how Tyro became pregnant with Pelias and Neleus¹⁰⁵, which we have already seen as enemies (and fathers of enemies) of Herakles: the young Tyro fell in love with the river Enipeus, and approached every day to its beautiful currents until Poseidon, precisely at the mouth of the river, took the figure of the river and joined the young woman. The chaos managed to get into the inland.

In this last section we must highlight one fact: the river served in antiquity to get rid of garbage and rubbish. The story about Augeias' stables allows us to delve into this concept. In fact, there are several fragments of Greek literature that allows us to complete this idea. In Homer¹⁰⁶ we find the instructions that Zeus gives to Apollo to prepare Sarpedon's corpse. Among them, v. 669: λοῦσον ποταμοῖο ῥοῆσι, «wash it in the currents of a river».

We could then have a very interesting parallel between the Zeus-Poseidon struggle and the one we see between Herakles-Poseidon. It would be a fight in which the fresh water would not only benefit from Herakles, but would, at the time, serve as a counterpart relief for him, as Herodotus tells us¹⁰⁷:

Ἀπὸ δὲ τούτου διὰ εἴκοσὶ κου σταδίων ἄλλος ποταμὸς τῷ οὔνομα κεῖται Δύρας, τὸν βοηθέοντα τῷ Ἡρακλεῖ καιομένῳ λόγος ἐστὶ ἀναφανῆναι.

Finally, it should be observed that Herakles, according to Bacchylides¹⁰⁸ defended «le pays florissant de Zeus Néméen»¹⁰⁹, the mountain as fertile land of Zeus, where rivers are born and promise wealth and abundance for agricultural areas. And maybe this is another task for Herakles.

6. The dominion over the currents: fords, channels, prosperity

The data presented up to now would allow understanding a complete dominion of the fluvial means by securing the sources, cleaning the mountains, defending the river mouths, using the waters of the rivers as weapons. The mere possibility that Herakles also acts as an organizer of fresh water forces a new review of his mythology¹¹⁰. And it is not unsuccessful, because there is a mythical set that could serve to illustrate several points explained so far¹¹¹.

1. Deianeira, Herakles' future wife, was claimed by the river Achelous, who in some variants was the son of Poseidon¹¹². As Herakles fought with him, this mention of Poseidon opens two ways to understand the scene: a) if Achelous was a descendant of the sea Herakles fought against salty waters; b) if Achelous is a river, Herakles would impose his dominion over one of his subjects.
2. Diodorus Siculus¹¹³ rethinks the fight between Achelous and Herakles and says that in reality Herakles deviated the river and so created a fertile area of land.
3. The idea of imposing his dominion on Achelous could be in another adventure: during the search of the oxen for Thrace, the river Strymon is cursed by Herakles¹¹⁴, who fills it with rocks at a point making it impassable for ships. This would be a demonstration of his lordship over the rivers.
4. Once Herakles had defeated Achelous and he married Deianeira, the couple were about to cross the river Euenos. The centaur¹¹⁵ Nessos, in charge of the ford, tried to rape Deianeira while Herakles was

¹⁰² Fenno 2005.

¹⁰³ Herakles' presence in Marathon could be thought of as fighting the incoming tide of Persians from sea.

¹⁰⁴ Fenno 2005, 492.

¹⁰⁵ *Odyssey* XI 235-254.

¹⁰⁶ *Iliad* XVI 667-684.

¹⁰⁷ Hdt. VII 198, 10. Diodorus Siculus (IV 23, 1; V 3, 4) records two cases that would show that the Nymphs welled up springs in order to help Herakles while wandering. Cf. Aristophanes *Nubes* 1051.

¹⁰⁸ IX 5.

¹⁰⁹ Translation by Schnapp-Gourbeillon 1998 paragr. 6. Also Euripides says Διὸς ἄλσος (*Hercules Furens* 359).

¹¹⁰ L'Allier 2015, 51-52, dedicates some space to this topic, but its approach is too confusing and light.

¹¹¹ Luce 2006 deals with the subject of the Heraklean works of hydraulics beginning with the myth of Hesione and *Il.* XX 144-150, already mentioned. Unfortunately, his good ideas only apply in the article to the construction of the dike for the Scamander next to Troy, and do not offer any clue about any fight between the sea and the river.

¹¹² Hesiod's *Theogony* (340) assigns Achelous among the sons of Tethys and Oceanus. It is very intriguing that the Sirens were born of Achelous (Apollodorus *Bibliotheca* I 3, 4 and 7, 10). Maybe Poseidon's offspring variant is very relevant in the case of Achelous. On the other hand, Sineux 2006 points to the relationship between Nymphs and Achelous.

¹¹³ IV 35, 3.

¹¹⁴ Apollodorus *Bibliotheca* II 5, 10.

¹¹⁵ On centaurs: with respect to their origin and arrival in Greek mythology, Scobie 1978, Nash 1984, Mylonas Shear 2002 and 2004 and against this one, Pilañidis-Williams 2004. On their general meaning in Greek mythology, Buxton 1994, 88.

on the opposite bank. Herakles killed the centaur with a crush poisoned with the blood of Hydra and solved the problem at the ford. It is not to despise this adventure because the centaurs were ambivalent beings in the Greek mythology. The fact is that the Centaur Nessos could be considered a symbol of the misuse of a ford¹¹⁶, and Herakles would have to protect it.

5. When fighting to the Lernaian Hydra, a crab sent by Hera came to help the monster. It could have been a marine one or a river one (*Potamon fluviatile*), as both are similar in Greece. In the first case, this could be a new sea-waters enemy. In the second one, it could be interpreted as a marine-like creature disturbing the rivers and fountains.

This power over the rivers can be seen in another way, similar to Mesopotamian sources as well: the construction of canals. Ninurta, for example, in another version of the fight against the mountain, the well-known poem *Lugal.e*, or *Ninurta and the stones*¹¹⁷, is said to have done as follows:

En la Montagne, il amoncela donc les pierres, et, déployant ses bras tel un nuage épais qui traverse le ciel, il verrouilla le front du pays, comme d'une altièrre muraille :
au bout de l'horizon, il installa un barrage. Avec l'habileté la plus grande, il endigua pareillement toutes les villes, bloquant de parois en rochers les eaux puissantes : désormais, elles ne monteraient plus du plat-pays sur les hauteurs! Il rassembla ce qui se trouvait dispersé : les eaux disséminées en lacs, dans la Montagne, il les mêla toutes ensemble, les abouchant au Tigre, pour arroser, en inondations printanières,

And line 706 of the same poem says: «les eaux dont il avait, en personne, tracé la route, du haut en bas». Likewise, *Enuma Elish*¹¹⁸ recognizes Marduk, among his fifty names, as:

En.bi.lu.lu: c'est le Seigneur Munificent par-nature! Le puissant Pasteur des dieux, qui institua leurs offrandes, qui fonda et fit prospérer, sur la terre, pacages et aiguades, qui creusa les rivières et en distribua l'eau fertilisatrice! Qu'on le dénomme encoré *E.bi.lu.lu.e.pa.dun*: Le seigneur du plat-pays et du flot (?), le Fontainier de l'Univers, le Fondateur des sillons! Celui qui établit, en plein désert, la sainte Agriculture, qui aligna levées-de-terre et canaux et dessina les raies des labours! Troisièmement qu'on le célèbre comme *En.bi.lu.lugú.gal*: le Fontainier des cours-d'eau divins...

Having said that, and after noting that Herakles could be guarding the fords of the rivers, it is time to list his hydraulic works¹¹⁹:

1. Diodorus Siculus¹²⁰ explains (following sources that he does not specify) that the columns of Herakles would be in fact a channel that Herakles excavated, as already mentioned.
2. The same Diodorus Siculus refers next¹²¹ two other works of Herakles, one fortunate, the other one unfortunate: the first, the excavation of the Peneus river valley in Tempe, Thessaly, a work that Apollodorus¹²² attributes to Zeus, which is not surprising either; the second, harmful, the creation of Lake Copais to dam a river and cause the ruin of the area (τὸ περὶ τὸν Μινύειον Ὀρχομενὸν ῥεῖθρον ἐποίησε λιμνάζειν τὴν χώραν καὶ φθαρῆναι τὰ κατ' αὐτὴν ἅπαντα).
3. He diverted the course of Achelous, making the land fertile¹²³.
4. According to Pausanias¹²⁴ the inhabitants of Pheneus said that the two gorges at the foot of the mountains Oryxis and Sciathis that gave way to the waters of the plain of Pheneus had been prepared by Herakles. Pausanias adds that Herakles also excavated in the middle of that plain a channel of fifty stadia for the river Olbius. And again Pausanias assures that the waters of river Ladon, welled up in mount Orixys near Pheneus, are the best of Greece¹²⁵.
5. According to Diodorus Siculus¹²⁶ he would have excavated a lake of four stadia perimeter next to the city of Agyrium.
6. The use of channels was needed to complete, as the last work of Herakles, the cleaning of the Augeias stables. In that case the hero diverted the river Alpheus.

¹¹⁶ And even be considered some kind of problem in itself, as long as Apollodorus (*Bibliotheca* II 5, 4) says that Nessos came to Euenus River from Pholoe, where Herakles had fought against Centaurs, and that some of the surviving ones in Pholoe were welcomed and hidden by Poseidon himself in Eleusis, again besides the sea. This leads one to quote the relationship between Poseidon and horses and mares, perhaps a hidden motive behind the Diomedes' mares adventure. Maybe there would be a new perspective to study Herakles and horses, on which Bader (1998). On Poseidon and horses related to salty waters, cf. Vicent 2007. Kirk 1973, 165 writes on centaurs and waters and relates them with Poseidon.

¹¹⁷ Lines 349-362. Bottéro-Krammer 1993, 339-377. I quote their translation.

¹¹⁸ VII 57-63. Translated by Bottéro-Kramer 1993,

¹¹⁹ On this question, Luce 2006.

¹²⁰ IV 18, 5.

¹²¹ IV 18, 6-7.

¹²² *Bibliotheca* I 7.2.

¹²³ Diodorus Siculus IV 35, 3.

¹²⁴ VIII 14, 1-3.

¹²⁵ Pausanias VIII 20, 1.

¹²⁶ IV 24, 3.

7. It must be mentioned the late writer Oppianus Apamensis¹²⁷, who, in the time of Caracalla, wrote a text that told the story of the foundation of Apamea on the Orontes: Herakles, for helping an unknown to us Archippus, diverted the course of the Orontes to liberate a fertile plain on which to refound the city¹²⁸.

Furthermore, if this mythological feature is correct, there could be an explanation for the existence in the River Nile of two sites known as Herakleopolis: Magna¹²⁹, in the middle course and with a lake besides it; Parva¹³⁰, in the Tanis area of the Delta, surrounded by the channels of Pelusion.

7. Conclusions

The documentation presented thus far leaves many secondary issues unresolved. However, it is possible to suggest some reflections.

Undoubtedly, some of the Herakles' feats with animals have to be associated with the oldest culture of the hunters, with their rites of passage towards maturity¹³¹. But it is also necessary to fit these ancient traditions into more modern schemes over time, more embedded in the cultural advances that the Greeks lived throughout their historical journey: the external contacts that during the Late Bronze Age and the Submycenaean and Geometric period Greece maintained with the Orient could turn Herakles into something more complex than a prototype of a young hunter who shows his skill. That said, it seems inevitable to consider that it is not easy to find a hero who does more than reject monsters or characters, and whose remaining adventures, if any, also have a strong relationship with the sweet water-salty water dichotomy.

In short, the present study of Herakles as a possible figure of the protector of fresh waters can be summarized in the following points:

1. Herakles would be the lord / prince who protects the destinies of his father's kingdom: the god of the rain, generator of fresh water thanks to the rain, would have in his son Herakles his defender, as in the case of the Zeus' sanctuary in Nemea. The Homeric formula διυπετέος ποταμοῖο seems to refer to a river that "falls from the sky" in allusion to the rain or that "runs through the sky" related then to the world of Zeus¹³². It also seems worthy to quote Euripides¹³³: κρήναι τ' ἀμβρόσια χέονται Ζηνὸς μελάθρων παρὰ κοίταις, Ἴν' ἀβιόδωρος αὔξει ζαθέα χθῶν εὐδαιμονίαν θεοῖς, «immortal springs run alongside the nuptial beds of Zeus, so that the fertile and most sacred Land will increase happiness to the gods».
2. This mythical figure could have some antecedents in the East, specifically the gods Ninurta first and then Marduk, without looking for further developments of the latter in the late Babylonian or Persian world. In any case, some considerable number of texts come from Hellenistic times, and this could mean that the whole idea of Heracles defending fresh water is a late one.
3. Nonetheless, these similarities could just be a mental paradigm, that is to say, some kind of usual conception of the sea and the rivers that in the Greek case was personified in Heracles.
4. The guardian-defender of fresh water would face a series of descendants of another of the great gods of the Greek cosmos, Poseidon or, in general, the salty water. This idea could possibly clarify Boardman's statements about Herakles and the sea¹³⁴.
5. As in Mesopotamian mythology, it would be a cosmic struggle in the double sense of the word, universal and protective of the constituted order: the sea, symbol of the imprecise, of the mutable (Nereus, Proteus, etc.) versus the diaphanous, concrete. The sea would be the representative of the struggle between primitive forces (Tiamat in Mesopotamia; Yam in Canaan) prior to the ordination of the world sanctioned by the Olympian gods. Fighting against their descendants or products would avoid returning to chaos¹³⁵.

¹²⁷ *Cynegetica* II 100-148. Cf. L'Allier 2015.

¹²⁸ On the civilizing use of Herakles in later times, both to serve as a model of Roman military and political behavior and to argue the present by rewriting the past, see Stafford 2012, 150-156, and Connors 2015. Pausanias (VIII 29, 5) attributes to a Roman emperor, perhaps Tiberius, the construction of a channel in this same river.

¹²⁹ Gamal Mokhtar 1983.

¹³⁰ Fontaine 1949, Spencer 2002. Cf. Josephus, *Bellum Judaicum* IV 660.

¹³¹ On bird hunting along rivers, for example, Alison 1978. For Greece, Vidal-Naquet 2005, 151-176. On the setting of Herakles in the Greek society, Burkert 1998.

¹³² Griffith 1997. Cf. note 97.

¹³³ *Hippolytus* 748-750.

¹³⁴ Boardman 1998, paragr. 17: «It is perhaps surprising that Herakles dealing with sea monsters, *kete*, was not admitted as a major labour, although Euripides (*Hercules Furens* 400-402) comes close to doing so by listing it with eleven others, most of them canonical (except for Kyknos and Centaurs) and Pindarus (*Nemean* 3, 20-26; *Isthmian*. 4, 73-79) says he cleared the seas of monsters, which seems a very proper task for a culture hero doing similar deeds on land».

¹³⁵ It should be remembered that the Titans were surrounded by walls built by Poseidon; and that Poseidon was mentioned causing the appearance of dead on the surface of the earth.

6. The combat between the representatives of both sides would take place in several locations, all symbolic: the mountains, the place of origin of the rivers; the sources, that origin; the mouth, place of contact between both types of water.
7. Likewise, the guardian of fresh water, as in Mesopotamian mythology, would be careful to fix the rivers by opening gorges or passes for them, preparing fords.
8. Finally, the dominion over the fresh water would allow channeling the currents, also to dam them, in order to provide prosperity for humanity.
9. The similarities between Mesopotamian mythology and the figure of Herakles point to an influence, not so suggested up to now, in the Marduk-Herakles direction, which would complete the already recognized line from Ninurta to Herakles.
10. The association of fresh water-salty water ideas would be support of the role of Herakles in his complex mythological profile and seems at least as stable and entrenched as the study of the character in his double condition of protector-destroyer.
11. In this sense, it is worth pointing out that the role developed by Heracles as a civilizer of the Mediterranean following in the footsteps of the Greek knowledge of that sea could be subject to his role as defender of the coasts, estuaries, mouths, of the rivers that flow into the Mare Nostrum.
12. The conjunction of ancient and modern texts of the Greek tradition on Heracles would thus serve to understand the initial role of the hero and its confirmation over the centuries.

These ideas should be considered as a starting point for a new analysis, both of themselves and of the path that, from them, seems to open up. It could be considered a chance to overcome Burkert's statement¹³⁶: «The hypothesis of borrowing, however, does not explain why Greek mythology locates the dragon fight at Lerna, a place of springs where the dragon developed into a water snake, *hydra*, or the details of the crab's and Iolaus participation in the combat, or why the lion was transferred to Nemea».

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¹³⁶ Burkert 1987, 18.

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