



*Silver Tetradrachm, minted in Babylon, Mesopotamia in the 4<sup>th</sup> century BCE (between 323BC and 317BC). Obverse depicts the head of Heracles, wearing the lion-skin head-dress. Reverse depicts the Olympian deity Zeus, seated on a stool-throne, an eagle resting in the palm of his right hand and a sceptre in his left.*

In Greek Mythology, Heracles (or Herakles, in Latin; 'Hercules') was a demi-god, born the son of Zeus, the King of the Olympian Gods, and the mortal woman Alcmene, the granddaughter of the hero Perseus.

Upon learning of the boy's birth, Hera, the immortal wife of Zeus and Goddess of marriage, women and family was enraged, as to her, Heracles was a product of her husband's extra-marital affair. So, according to the myth, she sent two serpents to kill the boy. However, as an infant, Heracles was unusually strong and fearless and managed to strangle the snakes before they could do him harm.

Heracles grew into a young man, and soon took a wife by the name of Megara. The pair had several children together, however Hera's desire to punish her husband for his infidelity remained an ever present threat. She, in some form, seized control of Heracles, and drove him to murder his wife and their children. Upon realising what he had done, Heracles was burdened by immense guilt, and decided to seek the god Apollo, where he begged to be punished for his horrendous misdeeds.

Thus, Apollo ordered Heracles to perform a series of great acts, which would become known as his Twelve Labours. Upon completing each task, the demi-god would be absolved of his guilt and achieve immortality. His Labours included;

1. Killing the Nemean Lion
2. Slaying the Lernaean Hydra
3. The Capture of Artemis' Sacred Golden Hind
4. The Capture of the Erymanthian Boar
5. The Cleaning of the Augean Stables
6. The Scaring of the Stymphalian Birds
7. The Capture of the Cretan Bull
8. The Capture of the Horses of Diomedes
9. Stealing Hippolyte's Belt
10. The Capture of the Cattle of Geryon
11. Stealing the Apples of Hesperides
12. The Kidnapping of Cerberus

## Key Questions

1. Brainstorm: From the passage above and your own knowledge, what attributes did Heracles seem to possess? For example; tenacity.
2. Do you think these attributes are predominantly positive in nature, or negative?
3. Alexander the Great regularly alluded to the attributes of Heracles in the coinage of his Empire. Suggest a possible reason for this.
4. Brainstorm: What do you know about the Olympian deity Zeus?
5. Explain why you think Alexander the Great would choose to portray the King of the Gods on the Reverse of his Silver Tetradrachm?
6. Philip III Arrhidaeus, upon his accession, issued his coinage in the Alexander-type, with identical imagery apart from his name down the side. Suggest a possible reason why he did this.
7. Do you think this choice would have benefitted him? Explain.