

CADMUS SLAYS THE SERPENT

PART 1

DISCOVERY OF BRAZIL BY CADMUS



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*I write this paper In Memoriam of Professor José Leite Lopes, brilliant Brazilian physicist, who, as the Director of CBPF (Brazilian Center for Physical Research) and editor of the series of preprints *Ciência e Sociedade* (Science and Society) dared to publish the first version of this work in 1986.*

SUMMARY

In “Journey to the Mythological Inferno,” following **Hesiod’s** Theogony: - *at the foot of the high mountain Atlas, at the western ends of the famous Okeanos* - I identified the remains of the Palace of Hades and Persephone with the archaeological remains of the labyrinthine palace of Chavín de Huántar, located at the foot of the highest peaks of the Peruvian Andes. In this article I try to explain how I found that the famous myth of **Herakles** slaying a hundred-headed **Drako** which guarded the golden apples of the Hesperides, narrated as a stellar myth by **Hyginus**, is related with the stellar myth of “Cadmus slays the serpent” preserved by **Ovid**, and both myths I interpreted as geographical allegories of the heroic conquest of the Amazon River. The garden of Hesperides, with its golden fruits, is related to the garden of Coricancha, preserved and worshiped at Cuzco from ancient times, with plants and fruits made of gold. To confirm this thesis would require archaeologists to conduct comprehensive work on stratigraphic dating at Sacsahuaman cyclopean fortress, which, instead of having only 100 years of antiquity before the Spanish Conquistadores, as assigned by the official story, is more than 3200 years old. The antiquity of this fortress will be discussed in a later part of this paper.

INTRODUCTION

In September 1969, an extensive article published in the Rio de Janeiro newspaper *O Globo*, revived a dormant topic in Brazil: the prehistoric visit of Phoenician navigators to the Brazilian coast.¹ The story quoted Professor **Cyrus Gordon**, of Massachusetts' Brandeis University, who believed in the possibility of these voyages. He visited Rio de Janeiro, interested in the Phoenician inscriptions which had been found in Brazil. Professor Gordon, a recognized Orientalist, had made important contributions to the study of the texts discovered in the royal library of Ugarit. These texts, inscribed on clay tablets, lay buried for more than 3,000 years, until their discovery by **Claude Schaeffer**, in 1929, at Ras Shamra, on the Syrian coast.²

Ancient Ugarit was a cosmopolitan city during the second millennium B.C. It was an important Mediterranean port controlled by the Canaanites, who maintained wide-ranging contacts with the civilized world of the day. The polyglot nature of the community is reflected through the various vocabularies used in the tablets. Scribes translated the Ugaritic vocabulary into Sumerian, Akkadian and Hurrian. Besides these languages, some Cypro-Minoan tablets, as well as Egyptian and Hittite hieroglyphics were discovered. The archaeological discoveries at Ugarit revealed the existence of close contact between the Canaanite, the Creto-Mycenaean and the Peloponnesian civilizations. Ugarit poetry is related to Homeric poetry and Hebrew poetic texts. In the Old Testament, according to Professor Gordon, the Hebrews never called their language "Hebrew" or "Israelite," but quite correctly "the language of Canaan."³

The Ugarit tablets hold priceless information, revealing fragments of the history, religion and customs of the long-dead Canaanite civilization, famous for its maritime skills and whose people were called Phoenicians, derived from the Greek name - **Phoenix** - brother of Cadmus who, in turn, is considered the founder of Thebes.

Soon after the first excavations, the levels at which dwellings were dug up revealed that the city had been repeatedly reduced to ruins. The few Egyptian objects found in the first or topmost layer - corresponding to the final destruction of Ugarit - belong to the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Dynasties, which conventional chronology places in the 14th-13th centuries B.C. Today, this date is contested by some

¹ *O Globo* Newspaper, September 12, 1969, p. 3. Archaeologist state: Brazil is name given by the Phoenicians, 1969.

² Schaeffer, Claude F. A., A new alphabet of the ancients is unearthed; National Geographic Magazine; October 1930.

revisionists³ who take into consideration the interesting synchronism between Egypt and Israel proposed by the author **Immanuel Velikovsky**.⁴ according to this chronology, the destruction of Ugarit occurred in the 9th century B.C., i.e., in **Homer's** time, contemporaneous to the Assyrian king, **Shalmaneser III**, and to **Jehoshaphat**, king of Judah. This chronology also fits in better with the results of radiocarbon dating. But the answers to these questions lie beyond the scope of this book.

In the *O Globo* article, Professor Gordon presented new data favoring an ancient hypothesis that the name “Brazil” is of Phoenician origin. His paleographic studies indicated that this name originated from the vocable *brꜥl*, used by the Canaanites to denote iron. Moreover, he firmly believed that in the land discovered by the Portuguese navigator **Pedro Álvares Cabral**, in 1500, there was archaeological evidence of these transoceanic voyages, on ancient lapidary inscriptions. Perhaps with that newspaper feature Gordon hoped to motivate Brazilian specialists, in order to exchange information. Unfortunately, this did not happen. On the contrary, some days later, **Professor Pedro Calmon**, the then president of the Historical and Geographical Institute of Brazil, published a reply wherein he contested the affirmations made by the illustrious visitor, stating that the name “Brazil” is of German origin.⁵ In his opinion, the inscriptions found in Brazil, and attributed to Phoenician navigators by the archaeologist **Ladislau Netto** (director of the Archaeological Museum of Rio de Janeiro, in 1872), were no more than simple pranks. In fact, the illustrious Orientalist narrowly escaped being called an ass since, according to Professor Calmon, “the truth of such matters already appears in children’s textbooks.”⁶

Professor Calmon’s reply was consistent with the established academic consensus that any pre-Colombian voyages across the Atlantic

³ Down, D.K. *The Chronology of Egypt and Israel*; special edition of “Diggings,” published monthly by D. K. Down, P. O. Box 341, Hornsby, 2077, Australia, 1989.

⁴ Velikovsky, Immanuel, *Ages in Chaos*; Vol. 1, *From the Exodus to King Akhnaton*, p. 308, Sidgwick & Jackson, London, 1958.

⁵ The origin of the name BRAZIL is polemic. This name already appeared in ancient maps as an island situated in the Atlantic, always west of the lands inhabited by the Celts. See note 1, p. 20, *História Geral do Brasil*, Vol. I and II, by Francisco Adolfo de Varnhagen; seventh ed. Melhoramentos, São Paulo, 1962.

⁶ *O Globo* Newspaper, September 15, 1969, p. 12, Calmon contests the Phoenician origin of the name Brazil, 1969.

never happened. Despite the opinions of these scholars, there were others in Brazil who believed in the possibility of such voyages, and sought evidence to support their beliefs. Among them was the historiographer **Francisco Adolfo de Varnhagen, Viscount of Porto Seguro** (1816-1878), the aforementioned Ladislau Netto, and the epigraphist and student of Brazilian prehistory, **Bernardo de Azevedo da Silva Ramos** (1858-1931). The latter not only believed that ancient Phoenician and Greek navigators of the Mediterranean had landed on the Brazilian coast but, like **Champollion's** decoding of Egyptian hieroglyphics, claimed to have deciphered all the messages the navigators had left on the *itacoatiaras*, the Tupi name for these ancient Brazilian lapidary inscriptions. Even though his enormous two-volume work of prehistoric Brazilian paleography does not fit in with modern scientific methodology, one must recognize his efforts in compiling hundreds of drawings found on the *itacoatiaras*, where it is often possible to recognize archaic Semitic and proto-Greek characters⁷ (Fig. 1).

The debate between Gordon and Calmon had once again confronted two opposing views: that of the diffusionists who believe the culture of the New World could have derived from the Old World, and that of the isolationists, who believe that the Americas, surrounded by extensive oceans, developed an independent culture. At the same time, a scientist of great imagination and energy, **Dr. Thor Heyerdahl**, pondering that the truth lay between these two extremes, undertook a nautical adventure to demonstrate the possibility of navigating across the Atlantic Ocean, on a primitive papyrus craft, similar to those constructed by the ancient Egyptians. Departing on May 25, 1969, from the coast of Morocco in a vessel called Ra I, and carried by the winds and ocean currents, he sailed 2,662 nautical miles in 55 days, arriving close to the South American coast, 600 miles from Barbados. He repeated the adventure on the Ra II and, after navigating 57 days and traversing 3,270 nautical miles, reached Barbados, on July 12, 1970.^{8, 9} These feats demonstrated that, during proto-historical times, America was far from being an inaccessible continent, as maintained by the isolationists. Heyerdahl demonstrated that with the prevailing westerly ocean currents and winds, this type of craft could reach the Americas a short two-months' sail from the African coast and, even if a primitive papyrus vessel did not

⁷ Azevedo da Silva Ramos, Bernardo de, *Inscrições e Tradições da América Pre-Histórica*, Rio de Janeiro, Vol. I, 1930 and Vol. II, 1939.

⁸ Heyerdahl, Thor, The Voyage of Ra II, *National Geographic*, January 1971.

⁹ Heyerdahl, Thor, *Las Expediciones Ra*, Ed. Juventud, Barcelona, 1980.

have a rudder, it would inexorably drift in the same direction, i.e., toward South America.

STELLAR MYTHS - KEEPERS OF DEEDS

The equinoctial axis is an imaginary line that projects two equinoctial points in the sky, resulting from the intersection of the ecliptic (plane of the apparent path of the sun among the stars) and the celestial equator (equatorial plane, perpendicular to the Earth's axis). The equinoctial axis slides slowly over the "houses" of the zodiac, due to the precession of the Earth's axis, over a cycle of 25,770 years. This phenomenon is called the Precession of the Equinoxes and appears as a slow drift of the equinoctial points among the zodiac, following the sequence Taurus, Aries, Pisces, etc., and taking 2,147.5 years to pass completely from "house" to "house."

The fundamental reason why we have seasons is the obliqueness of the ecliptic, which forms an angle of about 23.5° to the Earth's axis.



Figure 1. The figuration of thought.

Comparison of Semitic inscriptions (a, d) with symbols engraved on Brazilian *itacoatiaras* (b, c)

a) Fragment with inscription found in Israel, at Tell-el-Hesy. Note its similarity to the elements in Illustration (b).

b) Rock inscription on the banks of the Amazon River, in Itacoatiara (near Manaus).

c) Brazilian inscription found in Currães Velhos, on the boundary of Brejo da Cruz, Patu District, Rio Grande do Norte state. The inscription presents symbols with points and traces similar to the Semitic tablet (d).

d) Tablet with proto-Sinaitic inscriptions found in the excavations of Deir-Alla, Jordan.

a and d: Driver, G. R., *Semitic Writing*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1976.

b and c: Ramos, Bernardo A. S., *Inscrições e Tradições da America Pre-Histórica* (vol. I and II), Rio de Janeiro, 1930 and 1939.

The equinox, meaning equal day and night, occurs twice yearly, when the sun crosses the celestial equator, around March 21 (the vernal equinox, when the sun crosses into the northern celestial hemisphere, starting the northern spring) and around September 22 (the autumnal equinox, when it crosses into the southern celestial hemisphere, starting the northern autumn).

Thousands of years ago the annual march of the constellations was utilized as a practical calendar to regulate the planting and harvesting of crops. Once man undertook long voyages he had to depend on the seasons for his survival and, naturally, he also began to observe the regions of the sky where the sun appeared to rest on a particular constellation. The sun's position in regard to the constellation that rose in the east, just before dawn at the vernal equinox, was a very important "pointer" that indicated the "Age" of the precessional cycle.

It is most likely that the concept of constellations was developed during the pre-literal age, when the proto-historical astronomer had to create a method of establishing his astronomical observations, so as to correlate the positions of the stars with the seasons of the year. Thus, the group of stars upon which the sun appeared to rest during the vernal equinoxes between 4,000 B.C. and 2,000 B.C. was called the Taurus constellation, because of its resemblance to a pair of horns pointing upwards. It was the "Age of Taurus." The precession caused the vernal equinox to slide toward the Pleiades, one of mythology's most important star groups. Around 1,300 B.C., the vernal equinox, in its continuous slide over the Aries constellation, occurred over the Pleiades, and started to cross in front of the Perseus constellation - high over the northern horizon - represented in the sky by the severed head of the Gorgon.

Chavin de Huantar, identified as the mythical palace of the Gorgon (who, according to Greek myth, was defeated by Perseus), was constructed around this period. Therefore, one should not be amazed to find the complex somehow linked to the myth of **Perseus** and the **Gorgon's** head, considering that, in Peruvian mythology, **Huari** or **Wari** (the principal deity worshipped in Chavin de Huantar) is intimately related with the Pleiades.

Present-day investigations into the myths, as revealed in *Hamlet's Mill*¹⁰ and the surprising star correlation found on the pyramids and the Sphinx,¹¹ allow one to deduce that the precession of the equinoxes was

¹⁰ Santillana, Giorgio de and von Dechend, Hertha, *Hamlet's Mill*, Gambit Inc., Boston, 1969.

¹¹ Bauval, Robert & Gilbert, Adrian, *The Orion Mystery*, Great Britain, 1995.

already known to astronomers prior to **Hipparchus**. According to **Reiche**,¹² **Plato** and probably **Eudoxus** had information on the phenomenon through other sources rather than their own personal observations; he also presumes that the knowledge came from Egyptian “myths,” like the one cited by Plato (*Timaeus*, 22; *Critias*, 112a).

The myth of Cadmus’ contest against the dragon, as well as the boreal constellations which represent the contest between Heracles and Draco, can be classified as myths related to memorable events on earth assigned to constellations.

CADMUS SLAYS THE SERPENT

Agenor, king of Tyre, had a beautiful daughter, **Europa**, whom **Zeus** loved. This Phoenician princess was the mother of **Minos**, the mythological king of Crete, and of **Rhadamanthys**, who some say was the judge of the dead in Hades, while others place him in the Islands of the Blessed or the Elysian Fields.

The legend that links the Cretans and Phoenicians to Hades, relates that Zeus, in the form of a magnificent white bull, had abducted the daughter of Agenor, carrying her to Crete on his back. Cadmus, sent to search for his sister Europa, was forced to traverse the world until he found her.

Told by an oracle to follow the route of the sun, Cadmus discovers an immense serpent, against which he wages a victorious battle. He sows its teeth, from which emerge armed warriors, who fight each other to the death. With the five remaining survivors, he founds a town as ordered by the oracle.

The battle of Cadmus against the serpent is mentioned by **Euripides** (*Phoenissae*, verses 638-675), four hundred years before it was narrated by **Ovid**. **Seneca** also mentions it in verses 709-732 of *Oedipus*. However, the most detailed version of this Theban myth is narrated by

Bauval, Robert & Hancock, Graham, *Keeper of Genesis*, Griffin Paperbacks, Australia, 1996.

¹² Reiche, Harold A. T., *The Language of Archaic Astronomy: A Clue to the Atlantis Myth?* In *Astronomy of the Ancients*, Ed. by Kenneth Brecher and Michael Feirtag, the MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1980.

Ovid, in *Metamorphoses*, Book III, verses 1-130.¹³

1 *The god had already laid aside the deceitful guise of a bull,
and admitted who he was and arrived at the Dictaeon countryside,
while her father, in his ignorance, was ordering Cadmus to seek out
his ravished daughter, adding that he would punish him with exile if he
did not*

5 *find her, being by that same token dutiful and wicked.*

*Agenor's son wandered throughout the world, a fugitive (for who
could discover Jove's thefts?), and avoided both his native land
and his father's anger, and, as a suppliant, consulted Phoebus'
oracle to find out what land he ought to dwell in.*

10 *"You will be met," Phoebus said, "in the lonely fields by a cow
which has never endured the yoke and has been exempt from the curved
plow.*

*Pick your way, with her to lead, and where she rests upon the grass
see that you establish city walls, and call them Boeotian."*

Cadmus had scarcely made good his descent from the Castalian cave,

15 *when he saw, coming slowly, an untended heifer
that bore no mark of servitude upon her neck.*

*He followed after with a deliberate tread, keeping to her tracks
and silently worshipping Phoebus, his journey's guide.*

*By now he had already passed Cephissus' shallows and the fields
of Panope:*

20 *the cow stopped and lifted her lovely forehead with its tall
horns towards the sky and, disturbing the air with her mooing
as she looked back to her companions following on behind,
she sank down, lowering her side onto the soft grass.*

Cadmus gave thanks and planted kisses on this alien

25 *land and greeted the unfamiliar fields and mountains.*

*He was about to sacrifice to Jupiter: he ordered his attendants to go
and get water for libations from a running spring.*

*An ancient wood stood there, defiled by no ax,
and in its midst a grotto, thick with twigs and branches,*

30 *making a low arch with close-fitting stones,*

*a prolific source of water. Concealed there in the cave
was the snake of Mars, distinguished by its golden crest;
its eyes gleamed with fire, all its body swelled with venom,
its three tongues flickered and its teeth stood in triple ranks.*

35 *When the descendants of the Tyriann race had reached
the grove with their unpropitious step, and the pitcher they let down
into the water had made a sound, the blue-green serpent raised its head
from the long cave and gave out a horrible hissing.*

¹³ Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, translated by D. E. Hill, Aris & Phillips, Bolchazy-Carducci Publishers, 1985.

*The pitchers slipped from their hands, the blood left
 40 their bodies and sudden shaking seized their stunned limbs.
 The snake twisted its scaly coils in writhing
 knots and, with a spring, bent itself into immeasurable loops,
 then raised up more than half its length into the air
 and looked down on the whole copse with a body as large as,
 45 were you to see it all, as the one that separates the twin Bears.
 Without delay, the Phoenicians, whether they were preparing arms or
 flight, or whether fear itself was keeping them from either,
 were brought up short: some were killed by its bite, others by a drawn-out
 crushing, others by the corrupting exhalation of its deadly venom.
 50 The sun, now at its highest, had made the shadows very small: Agenor's
 son was wondering what the delay was with his companions and he went
 to track them down. His shield was a skin
 stripped from a lion, his weaponry a lance with a tip shining iron,
 a javelin, and a spirit too surpassing any weaponry.
 55 As he entered the copse and saw the slain bodies
 and, on top, their victorious enemy with vast body
 licking their bitter wounds with its bloody tongue,
 "Either I shall be an avenger of your death, most faithful
 bodies," he said, "or a companion." As he spoke, he picked up in his
 right hand
 60 a massive stone and sent the great thing off with great exertion.
 The blow would have moved high city walls
 with lofty towers: the serpent remained uninjured,
 and was protected by its scales as if by a breastplate, for the hardness of
 its hide repulsed the mighty blows from its skin.
 65 But with that hardness it could not defeat the javelin too,
 which lodged in the middle of its stiffly curving spine
 and stayed there, while the whole iron tip sank down into its guts.
 The snake, maddened with pain, twisted its head round onto its back,
 inspected its injuries and bit into the spear lodged there
 70 and, even when with much force it had loosened it on every side,
 it could hardly wrench it from its back; even so, the iron tip stuck in its
 bones.
 Then indeed, when this fresh grievance had been added to its
 usual anger, its throat swelled up with full veins,
 and a whitish foam flowed round its noxious jaws;
 75 its scales scraped noisily on the Earth, and black breath
 came from its Stygian mouth to infect the corrupted air.
 The snake would at one point curl up with its coils making a vast
 circle, then it would stand up straighter than a length of planking, or
 be carried forward in a mighty rush, like a stream swollen
 80 by rainstorms, and with its breast push aside the woods standing in its
 way.
 Agenor's son withdrew a little and absorbed the onrush*

*with his lion skin, and slowed the jam's assaults
 by thrusting out his spear; it raged and inflicted vain
 injuries on the hard iron by pressing its teeth against the point.*

85 *By now the blood had begun to flow from its venom-bearing
 palate and had bespattered and stained the green grass;
 but its injury was slight, for it was retreating from the blow
 and bringing its hurt neck back and, by withdrawing, keeping
 the stroke from going home and letting it go no further,*

90 *till Agenor's son, following through, pressed in the iron tip
 that he had hurled against its throat, until an oak blocked its
 retreat and its neck and the trunk were pierced together.
 The weight of the serpent bent the tree which groaned out,
 for its trunk was being scourged by the last part of the tail.*

95 *While the victor was gazing at the size of his vanquished enemy,
 a voice was suddenly heard (it was not easy to know
 from where, but it was heard): "Why, son of Agenor, are you looking at
 the serpent you destroyed? You too will be a serpent to be looked at."
 For a long time he was fearful and lost his color together with*

100 *his presence of mind, and his hair began to stand up straight with
 chilling fright;
 but look, his patroness had glided down through the upper air,
 Pallas was there telling him to turn the Earth over and plant
 the viper's teeth, from which his people was to grow.
 He obeyed and, as he drove his plow and exposed a furrow,
 105 he scattered the teeth, the seeds of mortals, as bidden, on the ground.
 And then (it is beyond belief) the plowed field began to be disturbed;
 first to appear from the furrows was a spear tip,
 soon there were head-pieces with dyed plumes nodding,
 there soon emerged shoulders and a breast and arms loaded*

110 *with weapons, and a crop of shield-bearing men began to grow.
 Even so, when the curtains are brought in a theater on a feast day,
 figures rise, showing their faces first,
 and gradually the rest of them, and they are drawn up in a smooth glide
 till fully displayed with their feet set on the bottom edge.*

115 *Cadmus was terrified by this new enemy and was preparing to take up
 his arms;
 "Don't take up," cried out one of the people created
 by the Earth, "and do not plant yourself in our civil war."
 And with that, he struck one of his earth-born brothers
 with his firm sword at close range; and fell himself to a javelin from long
 range.*

120 *And that one too who had sent him to his death did live longer
 than him, but expired on the breath he had just taken in;
 and the whole throng raged in the same fashion, as the sudden
 brothers fell in their own war from mutual injuries.*

*And now these young men, whose lot had been so brief a span of life,
125 were striking their blood-stained mother on her warm breast,
and there were five surviving, of whom one was Ecbion.
He, at Tritonis' behest, threw down his weapons to the ground and
both sought and gave a pledge of peace with his brothers. The
Sidonian exile took them as companions in his task
130 of establishing a city, as ordered by the oracle of Phoebus.*

The real significance of this myth was never understood. **Diodorus the Sicilian** rationalized that Cadmus' battle against the serpent was the saga of the founding of Thebes.^{14, 15} One should not be deluded by the myth's few concrete geographical details. These places merely mean that the hero or his descendants had settled on those lands, conserving their heroic deeds. Modern mythographers, however, were not that far off in supporting **Pausanias'** and Diodorus' versions, including their claims of having discovered that the reptile Cadmus had killed was a horned viper, an Egyptian viper having two scaly horn-like prominences on its back.¹⁶

The Jungians, like their master, believed that the serpent represents the taboo of incest. To them the dragon and the serpent are symbolic representations of anguish arising from the consequences of disobeying the taboo.¹⁷

It would be foolish to think that the Cadmus myth originated from the mere killing of a serpent or from a hidden incestuous impulse. Certainly, the serpent can symbolize an event or a historical fact, yet it was of such extreme importance that it became a stellar allegory and was represented as a constellation.

¹⁴ *Diodorus Siculus*, Vol. II, Book IV, 2.

¹⁵ *Pausanias*, Vol. IV, Book IX, 10.

¹⁶ Note 1, p. 70. Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, Les Belles Lettres, Paris, 1961.

¹⁷ Jung, C. G., *Metamorphoses de L'âme et ses Symboles*, p. 435, Librairie de l'Université, Georg & Cie., Geneva, 1953.

GEOGRAPHIC INTERPRETATION OF THE CADMUS MYTH

The legendary battle of Cadmus against the serpent can be compared to a slightly out-of-focus image, where the capricious play of light and shadow creates such bizarre configurations that not even the greatest exercise of the imagination could make out its true meaning. When, after successive attempts, one can “focus” the reality from which originated this myth, the previously unrecognizable image loses its ambiguousness, and finally reveals its significance.

If the serpent Cadmus fought is not a reptile, then, what is hidden behind the allegory? Is it a river? Are there other battles against rivers in mythological literature? Not only do they exist, but this poorly understood allegory brought criticism to Homer: **Philostratus** reproached him for the implausible battle of **Achilles** against the river Scamander, accusing Homer of being an impostor.¹⁸

Another memorable battle was that of Heracles against **Achelous**. This river quoted in Book 21 of the *Iliad*, could not necessarily refer to the largest river in Greece, as generally presumed, but to a big river, comparable to the ocean. Pausanias quotes Achelous as the judge of all rivers.¹⁹ Where could the “greatest of rivers,” the “Father of Waters” be located?

An echo of the battle between Oceanus and Heracles can be noted in a story, where Oceanus agitates the solar embarkation transporting Heracles to the Hesperides, ceasing to do so when the hero threatens it with his spear.²⁰ The Achelous River was represented in many forms; according to **Sophocles**, it adopted the forms of a bull, a dragon and a man with the head of a bull.²¹ Fig. 2 shows Heracles in battle against Achelous. In Aetolia, on the Greek mainland, according to **Lucian**, Heracles’ battle against the river was represented

¹⁸ Philostratus, *Heroique*, cited by A. Chassang in *Histoire du Roman*, p. 353, Didier, Paris, 1862.

¹⁹ Cited by Joseph Fontenrose, *Python*, p. 233, University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, California, 1980.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Sophocles, *Trachiniae*, 9-14.

by a dance.²²

Another mythological creature that is mistaken for the monster defeated by Cadmus is the **Hydra** of Lerna, whose name means water serpent. Represented with numerous heads, its number varies from five to one hundred²³ (Fig. 3). Furthermore, some authors say that, as soon as one head was severed, one or two others would sprout in its place. **Hesiod**, the geographer of mythology, indicates that this creature was located in the far land of the Arimasian, below the earth.²⁴

There was always a suspicion that actual events were behind the legend of Heracles' battle against the Hydra and the Achelous River. Yet, even if it were possible to prove the existence of these events, according to **Moreau de Jonnes**,²⁵ the myth cannot be fully explained; one would still need to know why reality was hidden behind such allegory. Perhaps there will never be a complete explanation for these legends; nevertheless, starting from Ovid's version, an effort will be made to lift the veil that has concealed the truth of Cadmus' myth for so many millennia.

²² Lucien *De la Danse*; Oeuvres Complètes de Lucien, Vol. 1, p. 551, Garnier Frères, Paris, 1896.

²³ Rose, H. J., *A Handbook of Greek Mythology*, p. 212, Mathuen & Co., London, 1974.

²⁴ Hesiod, *Theogony* 314-318.

²⁵ Moreau de Jonnés *Los Tiempos Mitológicos*, p. 25, Daniel Jorro, Editor, Madrid, 1910.

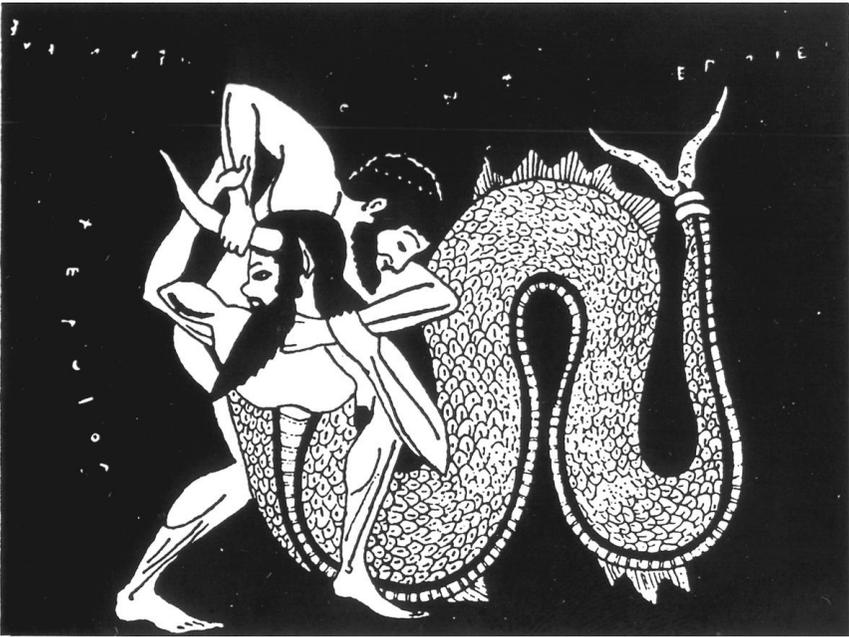


Figure 2 . Allegorical battle of Heracles against the Achelous River.

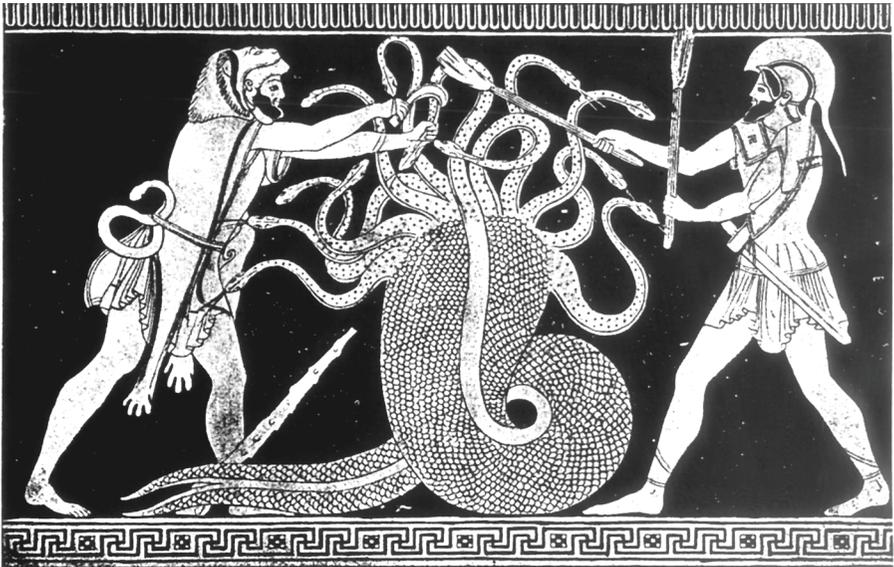


Figure 3. Heracles wrestling with the Hydra of Lerna.

Cadmus, whose Semitic name means “East,” is related to the vigorous killer of the Hydra, Heracles, classically identified as **Melkart**, the Canaanite “Lord of the Town.”²⁶ Considered a civilizing hero, who traveled the world, colonizing and civilizing humanity, and overcoming ferocious animals, Melkart is also considered the protector of navigation, the principal activity of the Phoenicians.

Some gods are frequently confused with this hero: **Hermes Psychopompos**,²⁷ or Hermes the conductor, as he was called by the Greeks, because he led souls to Hell; and **Apollo**, the killer of the monstrous snake **Python**. The multitude of heroes and gods involved in battles against serpents and dragons makes one realize that it would be pointless to tackle this myth from the heroes’ side. One has no choice except to face the dragon.

Cadmus perhaps had killed several snakes, of various sizes. The snake, however, that immortalized him had nothing to do with reptiles, except for its appearance. To confirm this, one must pay attention to the enormous size of the creature, declared in verses 44-45: *...and looked down on the whole copse with a body as large as, were you to see it all, as the one that separated the twin Bears*. That is to say, comparable to Draco, the boreal constellation located between the Great Bear and Little Bear. This is not a literary hyperbole; rather, it is a mythological allegory, which could hide reality.²⁸

²⁶ Called hero of Tyre; See note 1, p. 35. *La Déesse Syrienne* de Lucien de Samosate; Trad. Mario Meunier; Guy Tredaniel; Ed. de la Maisnie, Paris, 1980.

²⁷ Eschyle, *Les Euménides*, 90.

²⁸ a) Referring to the significance of the allegory, Pausanias says the following (Book VIII, VIII, 3-5): “When I began to write my history I was inclined to count these legends as foolishness, but on getting as far as Arcadia I grew to hold a more thoughtful view of them, which is this. In the days of old those Greeks who were considered wise spoke their sayings not straight out but in riddles.” Hence Pausanias relates that, in those times - obeying an oracle - the river Ophis of Arcadia received the homonymous name of a dragon or a snake (Ophis means “snake”).

b) The word *αλληγορία* (allegory) was used by Cicero for the first time (*Oratory*, 27) and by Plutarch (*De la lecture des Poètes*). Before these authors, the symbolic or allegoric meaning was called *υποουια*, supposition or conjecture.

c) “Those reflexive minds and critics who tried to penetrate the significance of the myths,” said Paul Decharmes, “were convinced that besides its

This reality appears if one takes these verses literally.

In astronomy one knows that the distances between stars are comparable to geographical distances on the earth, if their respective arcs are projected over a sphere. The polar projection of the arc between Tanin, the star of the head of Draco, and Giansar, at the extreme end of the tail - when superimposed on the polar projection of South America - shows the Draco constellation coinciding with the length of the Amazon River (Fig. 4). The exact fit of the stellar and terrestrial arc segments, here, is a favorable coincidence, since the arcs suffer some distortion. The larger segment near the polar region appears contracted, while the smaller segment near the equator expands.

A detailed trigonometric calculation shows that the Draco constellation exceeds the geodesic arc between the headwaters and the mouth of the Amazon River by 15°. This discrepancy does not disqualify the interpretation, since the allegory only deals with a comparison of arcs rather than their exact measure. The present interpretation, which identifies the epic battle of Cadmus and Heracles against an immense snake (sometimes explicitly located in the Underworld) as an allegory representing the conquest of the Amazon River, allows one to comprehend the significance of the hydra's heads. These heads would likely represent the principal tributaries of the Amazon which, likewise, could be two, five, or more than one hundred. One need only look at a map to see the intricate water network of the Amazon Basin (Fig. II-2, Chap.II "Journey to the Mythological Inferno"). If one were to "cut across" this network in a straight line, by clearing a path through the forest, then for every river that one would "cut across," there would be one or more ahead, giving the explorer/adventurer the impression that the number of rivers increase in arithmetic progression the nearer one approaches their headwaters.

To locate the land in which Cadmus will have to establish a city, one must decipher the oracle of **Phoebus** (verses.10-18). Phoebus (φαιβος) means "The Bright One." This is a two-fold myth, since this is one of Apollo's names, who was given the power to emit oracles, as well as the name of the sun. In verses 20-21 - *The cow stopped and lifted her lovely forehead with its tall horns toward the sky* - there is an allusion to the constellation of Taurus, where the vernal equinox remained during the fourth and third millennia, and was considered the beginning of the year

apparent external significance, the myths had a hidden internal one." "By its nature all poetry is enigmatic," said Socrates in *Ila. Alcibiades*. Paul Decharmes *La Critique des Traditions Religieuses chez les Grecs*, p. 272, Alphonse Picard et Fils, Paris, 1904.

in archaic astronomy.

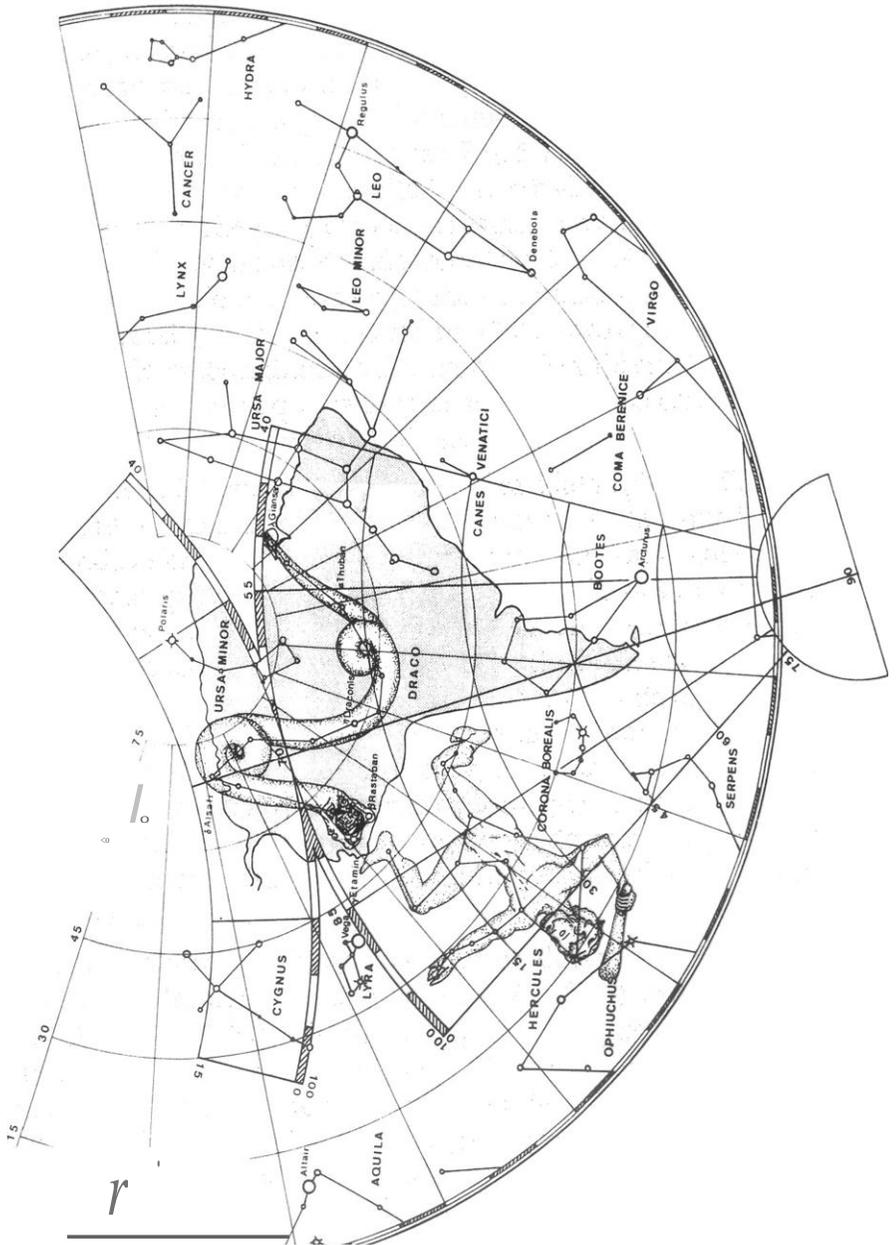


Figure 4. Projection of polar coordinates of the Boreal Constellations. (sector of 210 deg.) over South America (sector of 60 deg.), which allows to visualize the apparent dimension of Draco over the earth's surface.

Ancient mythologists identified the constellation of Taurus as the celestial representation of the metamorphosed god that had abducted Europa. Through this association the constellation was called *Portitor* (boatman), *Europae* or *Agenoreus*, by Ovid, referring to the abducted and her father, respectively. **Martial** even named it *Tyrinus*, referring to Tyre, the country of Cadmus.²⁹ According to the myth, Europa had been abducted by the god and transported over the sea by the bull swimming in the waters; hence, the constellation was represented accordingly, showing only the top side. This is, precisely, the impression produced by the constellation of Taurus, when it sets toward the western horizon. According to our thesis this myth refers to an oceanic voyage. Arriving on the Brazilian coast after crossing the Atlantic Ocean, guided only by the sun and the stars, the Tyrian navigators looked at the constellation and listened to the waves breaking on the shore, observing the episode immortalized in verses 20-23: *the cow stopped and lifted her lovely forehead with its tall horns towards the sky and, disturbing the air with her mooing as she looked back to her companions following on behind, she sank down, lowering her side onto the soft grass.*

Guided by Phoebus (i.e., the oracle and the sun), and the constellation of Taurus, Cadmus reaches an unknown land, verses 24-25: *Cadmus gave thanks and planted kisses on this alien land and greeted the unfamiliar fields and mountains.* According to verse 28, he disembarks in a virgin forest: *An ancient wood stood there, defiled by no ax.*

In the present geographical interpretation, the beginning of the battle against the “snake” corresponds to the discovery of the Amazon River and of Brazil. The geographical position of the mouth of the river seems to be in verse 50: *The sun, now at its highest, had made the shadows very small...* Despite the position of the sun denoting midday, it is improbable that time has any importance in the discovery of a continent. This verse contains “encapsulated” information on where the Tyrians battled the enormous aquatic “snake.” This corresponds to the equator where, on the average, midday shadows are shorter than at any other latitude.

In subsequent verses, Ovid poetically describes the battle against an immense and fierce “serpent,” which curves and twists unto itself, forming immense coils. It is not difficult to interpret this as allegorical descriptions of the innumerable islands and the winding course of the Amazon River. Anyone familiar with the majestic river recognizes, in these poetic descriptions, the impression which the monster of nature

²⁹ According to Virgil, *Portitor* means “boatman” and, according to Stace, he is someone who takes or brings something. For more information on this constellation, consult *Star Names: Their Lore and Meaning* by Richard Hinckley Allen; Dover, New York, 1963.

causes on the soul. “The Amazon is, without a doubt, the greatest of rivers,” declared **Father João Daniel** in his pre-scientific description of the Amazon,³⁰ calling it “Paraná Petinga” (White Sea), even though its most common name in Tupi³¹ was “Paraná Uasú” (Large Sea). Without making the slightest allusion to the myth of Cadmus, he imagined the Amazon River to be an uncommon dragon.

The Theban allegory of the “snake” is a masterpiece of poetic creativity. Nevertheless, it was not able to transfigure completely the true nature of the “aquatic monster,” as revealed in verses 77-80: *The snake would at one point curl up within its coils making a vast circle, then it would stand up straighter than a length of planking, or be carried forward in a mighty rush, like a stream swollen by rainstorms, and with its breast push aside the woods standing in its way.*

The poisoned breath of the serpent, quoted in verse 49: “*killing (the Tyrian navigators) with the putrid breath of its deadly venom,*” recalls the Styx, the greatest river of Hades, described by Hesiod as “*an unpleasant and moldy place which even the gods loathe.*” In verses 32-33 there is an allusion to gold, which is particularly abundant in the Peruvian Andes (the snake’s crest): *distinguished by its golden crest, the eyes of the snake gleamed with fire, and all its body swelled with venom.* In this allegory the shiny metal, which incited men to undertake the most perilous nautical endeavors, appears to be associated with volcanoes. In fact, history reports a dozen active volcanoes in the Andes, which poetically could have been described as eyes of fire. In particular, there are several volcanoes in Ecuador’s eastern Andes, from which slopes a number of rivers spill their waters into the Napo, Pastaza and Santiago, important tributaries of the Amazon River.

The existence of extensive volcanic activity in the Andes, which the geographical interpretation of the Cadmus myth appears to suggest, allows one to understand the meaning of verses 72-76: *Then indeed, when this fresh grievance has been added to its usual anger, (that is, the river which, at this point in the battle, corresponds to its headwaters), its throat swelled up with full veins, and a whitish foam round its noxious jaws; its scales scraped noisily on the earth, and black breath came from its Stygian mouth to infect the corrupted air.* The foam that dribbled from the pestilent lips of the serpent, i.e., from the river, is a poetic description of the very light and porous volcanic matter, which is less dense than water. When it condenses, after flowing through the fissures and volcanic vents, it is called pumice. Pumice

³⁰ Father João Daniel, *Tesouro Descoberto no Rio Amazonas* (most of his work was written in jail, in 1758-1762, at Forte de Almeida), *Anais de Biblioteca Nacional*, Vol. 95, Tome I, Chap. I, p. 27, Rio de Janeiro, 1975.

³¹ Levy Cardoso, Armando, *Toponímia Brasileira* p. 185, Rio de Janeiro, 1961.

fragments were frequently seen floating on the waters of the Amazon. According to **Raimondi**, the pumice came from a volcanic region located in Ecuador, through which the Pastaza River passes, carried by it to the Amazon River.³²

The association of volcanic activity with the Hydra of Lerna can be easily identified in Greek literature. When referring to the fetid smell of the Anigrus River, which originates from a mountain in Arcadia, Pausanias writes that the unpleasant exhalation was due to the Hydra's venom.³³ The exhalations alluded by Pausanias are none other than the usual gases emitted by sulfurous hot springs and active volcanoes.

The topography of the "snake" leads to unexpected results, which appear spontaneously. It is not easy to interpret the meaning of verse 34: *Its three tongues flickered*. But the following verse, *and its teeth stood in triple ranks*, which describes the fauces of the snake, is very significant. The mythographers of antiquity, including **Apollonius Rhodius**, narrate the sowing of the Dragon's teeth in an obvious sense, be it real or symbolic; no one made the slightest insinuation that they could be mountains, which in fact are odontoid (from the Greek, οδοντοειδής), i.e., toothlike. This interpretation leads one to consider the topography of the Andes. The Andean range is formed by high snowcapped mountains, running along the western side of South America. Starting from the Collao Plateau, where Lake Titicaca is located, the mountain chain splits into three principal branches, which are then rejoined further North in Pasco, Peru, and in Loja, Ecuador. Therefore, if the snake which Cadmus conquered is an allegory of the Amazon River, then the triple row of teeth is an allegory of the triple row of mountains, where the headwaters are situated. In this light, Cadmus' sowing of the teeth would mean that he, the civilizer, cultivates or introduces the teaching of agriculture, the manipulation of seed and the implements required for cultivation in these "teeth," interpreted, here, as the Andean range.

The incredible event described by Ovid, *the miraculous harvest of the dragon's teeth*, allows one to deduce that Cadmus, on arriving in the Peruvian Andes, encountered a multitude of armed warriors, fighting an obstinate fratricidal battle, i.e., a nation "civilized" to the point of killing one another in a fatal civil war; with arrows, spears and everything that the

³² "Concerning the tranquil waters of the abundant Amazon, one sees descending many pieces of pumice-stone, that comes from the center of the Republic of Ecuador, through the province of Pastaza." Raimondi, A., *Minerales del Peru*, p. 283, Lima, 1878.

³³ *Pausanias* Vol. II, Book V, V.10.

deadly god of war - called Aucayoc by the Peruvians³⁴ - put in their hands.

Strange coincidence that nearly 3,000 years later, the Spanish conquistadors, called “viracochas” by the native Peruvians, saw the same barbarous scenes of a fratricidal battle. On that occasion, the warriors were fighting over a decadent empire, divided between Cuzco’s legitimate heir, **Huáscar**, and his brother, **Atahualpa**, thus facilitating the Spanish conquest.

(To be continued)

³⁴ Name of Mars, god of war in Quechuan mythology, according to Blas Valera, *Las Costumbres Antigas del Peru*, transcribed by Francisco A. Loayza in *Los Pequeños Grandes Libros de Historia da America*, Series I, Volume VIII, Lima, 1945.

