In Greek mythology, a great hero of many adventures, the son of Aethra by Aegeus, King of Athens, or by the sea god Poseidon. His most famous exploit was the vanquishing of the Minotaur of Crete.

In historical times Theseus was said to have appeared at the Battle of Marathon in 490 BC to assist the Athenians and their allies against the Persians.

**Early life** Theseus was the son of Aegeus, king of Athens, and Aethra, daughter of King Pittheus of Troezen. Having been raised to adulthood by his mother in Troezen, he took his father's sword and sandals, and went to Athens. He performed numerous deeds on the journey, including the slaying of the robber Procrustes and the killing of the Cretan Bull which ravaged the plain of Marathon, and was finally acknowledged by Aegeus as his heir.

**Defeat of the Minotaur** The Athenians were obliged to send an annual tribute of seven youths and seven girls to Crete where they were sacrificed to the bull-headed Minotaur in the Labyrinth, an intricate maze. Theseus offered to join the victims, intending to find an opportunity to destroy the monster, and return under white sails instead of black to signal his success. On his arrival, Ariadne, daughter of King Minos, fell in love with the young hero, and gave him a length of thread to mark his way in and out of the maze, and a sword. Having slain the beast, Theseus escaped by sea with Ariadne, but abandoned her soon afterwards on the island of Naxos.

Approaching Athens, he forgot to hoist the white sail and Aegeus, believing that his son had perished, threw himself into the sea. Theseus now succeeded to the throne.

**Later exploits** In a battle with the Amazons, he carried off their queen, Hippolyta (or in some traditions her sister Antiope), who bore him a son Hippolytus. He joined the Argonauts, took part in Meleager's heroic hunt for the Calydonian boar, and helped Adrastus recover the bodies of those killed in the war of the Seven against Thebes. He also abducted the young Helen from Sparta, hiding her at Aphidnae until she was rescued by her brothers Castor and Pollux (Greek Polydeuces), and led the Lapiths against the centaurs (creatures half man, half horse). Having been confined to Hades, the underworld, with his companion Pirithous for the attempted abduction of the goddess Persephone, he was rescued by Heracles and returned home.

**Death** During Theseus's absence, the Athenians had been roused against him, and he was unable to re-establish his authority. He retired to Scyros, where he was treacherously hurled to his death from a cliff by King Lycomedes.

© RM, 2018. All rights reserved.
APA

Chicago

Harvard

MLA

https://search.credoreference.com/content/topic/theseus