THE SCYLLA SYMBOL

HOPMAN (M.G.) *Scylla. Myth, Metaphor, Paradox*. Pp. xx + 300, ills. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012. Cased, £60, US$99. ISBN: 978-1-107-02676-6.
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Myths, to quote a well-known definition, are 'traditional tales relevant to society' (J. Bremmer, *Interpretations of Greek Mythology* [1987], p. 7). Stated broadly in this way, few would contest the point. But how does that 'relevance' work? Myths are not exactly, and not even usually, true (or, at least not by most modern conceptions of what we mean by 'true'), but they are not false, or at least not 'wrong', either. They are usually not verifiable. But they do contain and convey content an ancient culture finds important, even crucial, to identity and survival: representations of the natural world, of customs, loves, fears, friends and enemies. The way mythic narratives represent these central aspects of culture is varied, nuanced and sometimes contradictory. And many classicists, anthropologists and other interested observers have presented frameworks for understanding this message of myths, from Xenophanes to Vico to structuralists and their descendants, neo-ritualists, semioticians and more.

H., in this study that grew from a Harvard–Paris dissertation, presents a new approach to understanding the relevance of myth by turning away from narrative and towards mythological symbols. Symbols, she maintains, should not be treated as 'figures' – 'figures' imply a 'biological' approach (p. 3) that undercuts and oversimplifies the symbol. Instead, by recognising that mythological symbols can signify in all their contradictions and complexities independent of particular narratives, she argues, we can recognise where meaning resides within them and understand more of how that meaning – that coveted relevance – operates. Scylla is her chosen target but there could be others.

H. defines the Scylla symbol as a 'combination of metaphorically related conceptual domains' (p. 18), and suggests that the multiple 'figures' that have been associated with the name – namely the Sicilian Scylla of the *Odyssey* and the Megarian Scylla, daughter of Nisus – should be understood as facets of the single symbol. That is, that 'Scylla' as a name encompasses all Scyllae, and that there are ways to understand the name as a symbol that signifies a reasonably cohesive set of meanings. H. sets out three basic concepts coded in the Scylla symbol – *sea*, *dog* and *woman* – and explores these in a generally chronological exposition, beginning with Homer and moving through the Roman period. The discussion is strongest in the first two of three major sections, on archaic and classical literary versions of Scylla and on the monster's tradition in the visual arts, and though Part 3 leaves the reader wanting more of the insights that come so often in the earlier sections, the overall result is a refreshing and enlightening approach to a complex problem. H. admirably and impressively brings new and nuanced understanding to the symbol of Scylla, and forges a methodology that should productively be applied to other symbols.

The first section dwells, as might be expected, on the *Odyssey*. H.'s discussion teases out implications of some of the monster's more perplexing features: the absence of speech in the Scylla episode (pp. 43–4), an implicit denial of Odysseus' primary skill; the sounds that do emanate from the monster, which in the *Odyssey* are a kind of puppy's yelp (pp. 55–6); Scylla's home on a sea cliff (p. 74); the interesting fact that only Circe mentions Scylla and the Sirens, not Teiresias in the *nekuia* (pp. 86–8). The discussion sets the framework for the three spheres of representation (*sea*, *dog*, *woman*) to follow. H.'s treatment is theoretically infused and clever, and this regularly brings insight into these and other odd details. The discussion can at times be intensely theoretical, and occasionally

suffers from repetition, for example in the descriptions of Scylla's body as described in the *Odyssey* (e.g. pp. 72–3, cf. 54–5). But this section covers an impressive range of interpretative and methodological ground and convincingly demonstrates the utility of H.'s model.

Part 2 treats the classical period but also opens a productive discussion of representations of Scylla in the visual arts. H. rightly criticises approaches that attempt to see images as straightforward illustrations of texts (p. 93), instead understanding verbal and visual representations as independently developing interconnected systems of expression. The tripartite symbolic definition of Scylla develops in the visual realm as well, perhaps more robustly than in the literary one in this period, as a bricolage of earlier types of monster images, especially those of a 'merman' type and even Typhon (pp. 106–7). The convincing interpretation of earlier images that are related to those of Scylla in the seventh to fifth centuries alongside the appearance of a particular Scylla-type, related semiotically to Homeric or other literary Scyllae, leads to a discussion of 'minimal units' as building blocks of visual images in these periods. These units are not necessarily to be associated with equivalents in the textual sources, but are related to textual material through semiotic expressions of metaphor and metonym (p. 107). This seems a crux of the monograph's theoretical framework, and the point is convincingly made: we are able to understand how the placid Scyllae of the visual arts can be related to the monstrous man-eater of the *Odyssey*, and how multiple Scyllae with narratives that differ might be understood to fall under the same symbolic rubric, that is, the same name.

H. is very good on classical literary representations of Scylla as well, which tend to focus on the implications of Scylla's gender, particularly themes of sexuality and virginality (whether threatening and wild or domesticated and tame). She makes the convincing point that the sexualising of the image develops most intensely in the classical period – it is a divergence from the *Odyssey*, where Scylla is feminine only in the grammatical sense – and has much to do with Athenian gynophobia of the sort productively explored by many other critics from differing perspectives (pp. 140–1).

The final section turns to post-classical representations. Scylla in Hellenistic Greece and Rome offers a glimpse at the rationalising tendency of post-classical thinkers and poets. H. offers an impressive taxonomy of strategies of rationalisation in a clever exposition of types of rationalisation organised by the temporality of their referent ('time-bound rationalizations', 'timeless rationalizations' and 'long-term rationalizations'), correlated with genres of writing: history, philosophy and geography or ethnography (pp. 181–2). While not crucial to the book's argument, it is a brilliant set of distinctions, and not the only place in the volume one finds refreshing theoretical observations with serious potential. H. shows an admirable level of theoretical engagement and an ability to marshal that sophistication productively.

The remainder of Part 3, treating Hellenistic and Roman literary representations of the monster, presents readings of many passages in which Scylla plays a part, continuing to trace the tripartite symbolic representation as it is explored in the earlier chapters. Some are productive and interesting, such as the discussion of Juvenal (pp. 226–7, with a clever translation). Others suffer from some repetition or lack the depth of nuance shown in earlier sections. (For instance the discussion of Theocritus and Ovid [pp. 245–53] would have benefited from more engagement with work on the Theocritean Cyclops and Galatea and especially from discussion of the Cyclops poem by Philoxenus, which included a long string of adjectives describing Galatea in the mouth of Polyphemus.)

These are, however, trifling criticisms of a monograph that makes a bold claim and, overall, follows through impressively. After this book, it should be difficult to consider 'characters' from myth, especially monstrous ones, in the traditional genetic or genealogical way, and the particular monster that is 'Scylla' will certainly benefit from H.'s

masterful exploration of her (its) multiplicity of expressions of that crucial 'relevance' critics of myth are so fond of seeking.

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HOMERIC HYMN TO APHRODITE

OLSON (S.D.) (ed., trans.) *The* Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite *and Related Texts. Text, Translation and Commentary*. (Texte und Kommentare 39.) Pp. xiv + 328. Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter, 2012. Cased, €109.95, US$154. ISBN: 978-3-11-026072-4.
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This commentary on the *Hymn to Aphrodite* follows closely upon A. Faulkner's (*The Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite* [2008]). As O. writes in the preface (p. vii), such a pairing can produce a binocular and so more rounded view of a text for future scholars, although it is hard to see how his 'systematic effort not to argue directly with' Faulkner (p. viii) contributes to that. In fact, the overlap in the two scholars' approaches is considerable, though there are certainly areas where they complement each other well.

O.'s introduction is one of the weak parts of his work. The first and fourth sections do contain useful material on mythographical sources about Aeneas and on the presentation of Aphrodite's power respectively, though in both cases I would have liked greater breadth. The latter does little to contextualise the hymn with other representations of Aphrodite in archaic religion, and does not fully work through the nuanced idea that Aphrodite at the end of the narrative retains theoretical power over the gods, but no longer chooses to use it. In the former section, O. gives up quickly on the hymn's possible relationship to aristocrats claiming descent from Aeneas, on the abstemious grounds that we do not *know* that they existed at the hymn's date (pp. 8–9). Section 2 dismisses morphological features as a dating criterion: I would like to see O. (or anyone) argue this important point rigorously, but here in six pages he only takes easy shots at R. Janko's treatment of the evidence in *Homer, Hesiod and the Hymns* (1982). Surprisingly, Section 5 compiles metrical data about the hymns and at various points (e.g. p. 312) O. tentatively uses metre as a dating criterion, though the figures look no better than those for various morphological criteria, and the shared objection that they are subject to multiple complicating factors is this time breezily acknowledged (p. 34). Section 6 repeats material about the stemma available in F. Càssola, *Inni omerici* (1975) and T.W. Allen's seminal articles in *JHS* 1895–7 (not mentioned). O.'s interest in the manuscripts extends only to establishing the text, so that (for example) details about scribes are ignored, as are various members of the *p*-family (p. 48); O. seems unaware of Wilson's demonstration (*Revue d'histoire des textes* 4 [1974], 139–42) that At is a fifteenth-century descendent of D, rather than a (possibly older) sibling. The stemma (p. 49) contains one of the book's few significant typographical errors: B and Q are swapped.

Section 3, about the 'poetic affiliations' of the hymn, raises a more complicated issue: O.'s approach here is to give undigested lists of parallels, dismissing some and endorsing others without explaining his criteria, and so making judgement difficult for readers. Furthermore, the parallels are based on O.'s unusual view of formulaic language: the *Hymn to Aphrodite* can already allude to Homeric and Hesiodic works as to (essentially) fixed texts; the likelihood that many iterata are under-represented formulas (when we have