

THE STRAIT OF MESSINA THEN AND NOW

CARBONE (M. B.) *Geographies of Myth and Places of Identity. The Strait of Scylla and Charybdis in the Modern Imagination*. Pp. xvi + 256, ills, map. London and New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2022. Cased, £85, US\$115. ISBN: 978-1-350-11818-8.

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How does classical mythology influence contemporary imagery? This is the central theme of C.'s book, which is very interesting in terms of both content and methodology. The case study is the Strait of Messina, over which loom the mythical names of Scylla and Charybdis. In the local dialect, the names of the *Odyssey's* monsters are merged into one – '*scilleccariddi*' – as if they had a single mysterious identity.

A red thread runs through the book: what is the point of myth today? This is not a matter of searching for a historical truth – the exercise practised by some scholars and scientists to identify the places and wonderful mythological creatures with respect to existing geographical places or fauna. The existence of mythological creatures such as Scylla or the Sirens, with their 'concentration of fascination and repulsion' (p. 51), do not need a positivistic certificate of veracity and reality. The studies of the Homeric Question are also often studded with questionable positivist interpretations: the attempts at mapping the Homeric geography in the Mediterranean or as far as the Baltic (pp. 87ff.). However, it is one thing to investigate mythological toponyms and quite another to seek literal and often linguistically acrobatic confirmations of the 'reality' of literature and myth. To quote the brilliant and amusing image from an ancient source: 'We may hope to discover the whereabouts of Ulysses' wanderings, when we can find the cobbler who sewed up the winds in the leathern sack' (Strabo, *Geography* 1.2.15).

At least since the era of the Grand Tour southern Italy has been perceived as an extension in space and time of ancient Greece – Greater Greece. C.'s book focuses on how the collective consciousness of being heirs to Greekness impacts the current inhabitants' perception of their Self, how 'the literary Strait has actively shaped the real plane' (p. 13).

By and large, the inhabitants, especially those of the shore of Scylla (Calabria), whom C. surveyed in his field research, seem passively accustomed to (and accommodated in) the thought of being 'the heirs of Homer . . . , imagining Greater Greece as a homeland, and even . . . Homer as a fellow citizen' (p. 13). Some even go as far as identifying Homer with a Calabrian poet, whose name would appear in the acrostic ΑΠΠΙΑ derived from the first letters of the first four lines of the *Odyssey* (p. 152).

C., a Calabrian by birth, self-analyses his inner imaginary. From his perspective as 'an estranged native', 'neither a complete insider nor an outsider' (p. 26), he looks at the aesthetics of the myth of the local inhabitants, who are born and live through a sort of mythological full immersion. Myth pervades not only individual places but also the entire territory and its economic activities as an ancient and powerful demon. The locals are, shall we say, warmly 'interested' in believing in the roots of myths. A different attitude is recorded in people who have chosen to return to Calabria, such as former emigrants, after having lived abroad for decades. For them antiquity is also the romantic premise of an escape from modernity (p. 52).

The book's investigation into contemporary culture and ethnography is an excavation inside the minds, bodies, perceptions and languages of the inhabitants of the '*scilleccariddi* Region'. The researcher also becomes an object of study, in a biological as well as an ethnographic sense. To test the genetic traces of the Strait's current inhabitants, C. turns

himself into a guinea pig and undergoes a test that reveals his DNA is 57% 'Greek' (contrary to his expectations and convictions as a scholar).

If the first research stream in the book deals with 'Scylla and Charybdis as a nostalgic chronotope of Hellas' (p. 7), the second stream looks at the Greek past as a 'heterotopia' – an idea for which C. declares his debt to Michel Foucault (pp. 16ff.). The past works in parallel to the linearity of the present in terms of the 'relation between reality, sign, and simulacra' (p. 36).

C.'s book, therefore, should be read not only as a study of social history or ethnography but also as an essay on the classical tradition. Drawing on post-colonial studies, C. reflects on the division between the area's Greek roots and the other cultures that have contributed to it – Messapii, Bruttii, Ostrogoths, Saracens and many others. The strong opposition between the Greeks and the Others is in force more or less consciously. It is declined in a way that brings with it an 'Us' opposed to a 'Them' (p. 152). This division includes on 'our' side only the genealogical branch going back to the ancient Greeks. All the other cultures – the 'Barbarians', the Turks and paradoxically also the Greek-Byzantines – belong to the Others.

This is a very sensitive topic. If, in the imagination of past travellers, southern Italy was also 'a place of radical Otherness and difference' (p. 79), it cannot now be the place where Greek culture appears hegemonic: 'The Hellenic Strait can finally be conceived in terms of a "historical region" ... not ... a "past colony" of the Greeks, but ... a part of a rich tapestry of societies and cultures' (p. 178). As the place par excellence where a complex cultural stratigraphy is perceived and breathed, the Strait of Messina is the epicentre of the Mediterranean Sea. Therefore, institutions, the school system, academia and the media have to work 'to turn political uses of Graeco-Roman antiquity ... into a more complex and nuanced view of our many pasts' (p. 185).

Within this framework, nothing should be absolutised and monumentalised in exclusive hierarchies. At the same time, nothing should be demonised, as tourism often is. The fact that a cafe is called 'Calipso' and a water park is named 'Odissea' shows that the classical tradition enacts a survival strategy. C. recalls the impact on the Calabrian economy of the transfer, in 2013, of the Riace bronze warriors to the Archaeological Museum of the city of Reggio Calabria. Beyond the commodification of ancient images, tourism 'has embodied the mantra of antiquity'; it is 'a way of materializing tradition and heritage' and a vehicle for the classical tradition as an updated form of the 'reception of antiquity' (pp. 36–7). If anything, we should ask why the Calabrian playground inspired by the *Odyssey*, the boat tour through the rocks with models dressed as Sirens or the exhibition of the Riace bronzes (which in Florence had attracted millions of visitors) are less efficient as tourist attractions than the druids of Stonehenge (pp. 114ff.).

Thanks to its vital momentum, the classical tradition finds new ways to emerge and can survive even in the mythological names of the ferries that transport vehicles and people across the Strait (p. 64). The ferries' mythical names lead me to my only criticism of C.'s book. C. mentions the *Horcynus Orca* Center, a deserving civic group whose name is 'inspired by Italian modernist writer Stefano D'Arrigo's 1975 titular novel' (p. 108). However, it is worth remembering that *Horcynus Orca* is a dizzying and immense novel, which, unfortunately, is little known to non-Italian-speaking readers. Indeed, the protagonists of *Horcynus Orca* are the mythological creatures of the Strait: the killer whales, the dolphins, the Circes, the mermaids and even the mythical animated '*ferribò*' (as the ferries are called in the novel). I think that D'Arrigo's novel should have deserved more space in C.'s brilliant work. *Horcynus Orca* would make a great 'facing text' for the volume because it is the

last epic fresco of the history of the Messina Strait, the final instalment of the millennia-old *scilleccariddi* saga.

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SCHOLARSHIP ON MYTH

REINHARDT (U.) *Hundert Jahre Forschungen zum antiken Mythos (1918/20–2018/20). Ein selektiver Überblick (Altertum – Rezeption – Narratologie)*. (Mythological Studies 5.) Pp. xii+375. Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter, 2022. Cased, £103, €113.95, US\$130.99. ISBN: 978-3-11-078634-7.

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To review a work that itself undertakes to review the literature on a particular aspect of antiquity – a sort of research *au deuxième degré* – may seem superfluous. In the wake of the development of digital humanities, in the last decades scholarship has developed strategies to find and retrieve information easily (search engines, databases), which are instrumental in coping with the enormous amount of data at our disposal. However, conceived within the German tradition of *Jahresberichte*, R.'s report is not a mere list of publications concerning research on Greek myth. Rather, R. attempts to offer a critical and descriptive account of many of the titles. More to the point: a list is never a neutral enumeration of elements. On the contrary, a seemingly rigid and simple form, it is a sophisticated cultural practice that foregrounds the principles of selection and combination. As important as what you find in a list is what is left out or how it is arranged.

As for what is left out, the (sub)title already puts forward an *anteoccupatio*: this *Forschungsbericht* is necessarily a selective ('selektiver') survey that does not aspire to completeness (see also p. vii). The focus of this selection is Germanocentric. By this, I do not simply mean that German and German-speaking scholarship is massively represented. R. often marks off those titles produced by German (or German-speaking) scholars as being apart from what is produced abroad ('im Ausland': p. 33) or by international research (see p. 97: 'in der deutschsprachigen und internationalen Mythosforschung'; cf. also pp. 35, 37, 169, 319–20). What is more unfortunate, at certain points (not in a consistent way and without an identifiable purpose) some scholars are identified as Jews (Paula Philippson; p. 23: 'jüdische[n] Religionswissenschaftlerin'). The study of antiquity, as J. Bromberg reminds us (*Global Classics* [2021]), has not yet disentangled itself from national and ethnic borders in a satisfying way, and scholars are often subject to the limitations of a state-centred perspective that has come to be known as 'methodological nationalism'.

As a result of this bias, a number of researchers and some relevant theoretical schools are left out. Most blatantly, French scholarship is strongly underrepresented. In my opinion, a book covering research on ancient myth over the period from 1920 to 2020 is expected to devote more than half a page to the *École de Paris* (see pp. 66–7). Scholars like Gernet, Loraux, Hartog, Svenbro, Frontisi, Schnapp, Borgeaud, Georgoudi or Durand are not even mentioned. H. Jeanmaire's *Couroi et Courètes* (1939), the only