

CAERULEAN HOUNDS AND PUPPY-LIKE VOICES: THE CANINE ASPECTS OF ANCIENT SEA MONSTERS

ABSTRACT

This article examines the dog-like aspects and associations of two marine monsters of Graeco-Roman antiquity: Scylla and the κῆτος. Both harbour recognizably canine features in their depictions in ancient art, as well as being referenced as dogs or possessing dog-like attributes in ancient texts. The article argues that such distinctly canine elements are related to, and probably an extension of, the conceptualization of certain marine animals, most prominently sharks, as ‘sea dogs’. Accordingly, we should understand these two sea monsters and the sea dogs as being interrelated in the ancient imagination. Such a canine resonance to certain sea creatures offers a valuable insight into the Graeco-Roman imagination of the marine element as being the abode of creatures reminiscent of terrestrial dogs.

Keywords: sea monsters; dogs; sharks; Graeco-Roman mythology; *kêtos*; Scylla; ancient zoology; animal studies

INTRODUCTION

From Odysseus’ faithful pet, Argos, to the triple-headed hound of the underworld, Cerberus, canines are among the most pervasive of animals in the cultural imagination of the Graeco-Roman world. It is no surprise, then, that several articles and book-length studies have been published on various aspects of dogs in the ancient world.¹ While most of this scholarship concerns the furry four-legged terrestrial mammal itself, the ancient conceptions of what was considered to be canine could also extend outward from this animal. A well-known example can be seen with the misogynistic comparisons of women to dogs that pervaded the ancient world.² A canine nature in the Graeco-Roman imagination, rather than being applicable to actual dogs alone, evidently signified more generalizing qualities, pertaining, in this case, to the supposed behavioural qualities of women. A similar (and, in the case of the former, not unrelated) extension of canine associations can be found with two sea monsters: Scylla and the κῆτος. This pair of marine monsters, which we might expect to be purely piscine and scaly in nature, were instead constructed with discernibly canine aspects, both physically and behaviourally. This feature, as with the woman/dog comparison, can be seen from the earliest centuries of Greek culture, continuing well into Late Antiquity and beyond. This article foregrounds these canine aspects within the DNA of ancient sea monsters by first

¹ N.J. Zaganiaris, ‘Le chien dans la mythologie et la littérature gréco-latines’, *Platon* 32 (1980), 52–87; S. Lilja, *Dogs in Ancient Greek Poetry* (Helsinki, 1976); J.M. Blakey, ‘Canine imagery in Greek Poetry’ (Diss., University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, 1972); M. Faust, ‘Die künstlerische Verwendung von κύων ‘Hund’ in den homerischen Epen’, *Glotta* 48 (1970), 8–31; E.E. Burris, ‘The place of the dog in superstition as revealed in Latin literature’, *CPh* 30 (1935), 32–42.

² On this topic, see C. Franco, *Shameless: The Canine and the Feminine in Ancient Greece* (Berkeley, 2014); R. Blondell, ‘“Bitch that I am”: self-blame and self-assertion in the *Iliad*’, *TAPA* 140 (2010), 1–32, at 15 n. 59.

setting forth the evidence for such associations in textual and visual sources. It then argues that the canine qualities of sea monsters in the Graeco-Roman imagination were probably an extension of persistent conceptions of ‘sea dogs’, whose own canine nature seems to derive from perceived similarities in behaviour (general aggressiveness and voraciousness) and physical traits (sharp teeth) to actual dogs. These sea dogs, often interpreted by modern scholars to be straightforward references to sharks, furnish a cultural expectation of dog-like figures lurking within the sea, a commonplace idea that ultimately becomes extrapolated in different ways into the construction of sea monsters with canine elements. Moreover, as we shall see, there was considerable overlap between the semantic fields of both sea dogs and these two sea monsters, a feature that illustrates the centrality of canine elements to the ancient conceptions of voracious marine creatures.

THE CANINE ELEMENTS OF SCYLLA

Scylla’s dog-like nature is widely recognized in modern scholarship, but it is worth enumerating some examples here. Marianne Hopman, in her extensive monograph on this monster, considers Scylla to be the product of three conceptions interrelated in the ancient imagination: the sea, woman and dog,³ going on to also highlight the overlap of the latter two with regard to the ancient woman/dog comparisons.⁴ In the *Odyssey*, Scylla is described as a grotesque monster with twelve feet, six necks and three rows of teeth (*Od.* 12.89–92). There is no hint that the poet intends for these body parts to be canine in form, though Circe, describing her cave, states ‘Inside, dwells Scylla, barking (λελακῦια)⁵ terribly. Her voice is no louder than that of a new-born puppy (σκύλακος νεογιλλῆς), but she herself is a frightful monster’ (*Od.* 12.85–7). These lines are conventionally assumed to be the poet’s etymologization of Scylla’s name, attempting to tacitly explain it as deriving from σκύλαξ.⁶ Thus, for the Homeric Scylla, we may say that she is explicitly canine only with respect to this puppy-like voice (though, perhaps more implicitly, she harbours a similarly voracious nature to wild dogs), while her body is fundamentally that of some multilimbed monster of excess. Following her appearance in the *Odyssey*, her canine nature was generally also recognized by other ancient authors, of which we may note a couple of representative examples. Apollonius of Rhodes mentions the Argonauts’ upcoming encounter with ‘more horrible things’ (κύντερα), with the word κύντερα functioning as a pun that can simultaneously mean ‘more dog-like things’ (Ap. Rhod. *Argon.* 4.921). A pun is also utilized by Heraclitus the Paradoxographer to rationalize her Homeric form, stating that Scylla was actually a prostitute, surrounded by her ‘ravenous’ (κυνώδεις) followers (*De incredibilibus*, 2), thereby explaining her nature as a canine monster as resulting from a linguistic misunderstanding about her ‘dog-like’ followers.

³ M.G. Hopman, *Scylla: Myth, Metaphor, Paradox* (Cambridge, 2012), 12–13.

⁴ Hopman (n. 3), 128–31.

⁵ Although translated here, and often elsewhere, as signifying a barking sound, in accordance with the following pair of lines, this verb itself is not an explicit element of Scylla’s canine features. The sound connotated seems to be generic in nature, also being used to signify birds screeching and human shouting (LSJ s.v. λάσκω 2, 3). However, the specific sound of dogs barking is associated with the strait in later centuries as Servius rationalizes Scylla by stating that there are ‘sea monsters’ (*monstris marinis*) on cliffs, while the ‘harshness of the rocks’ imitates the ‘barking of dogs’ (*latratus canum*) (on Verg. *Aen.* 3.420).

⁶ Hopman (n. 3), 70.

Aside from generic recognitions of a canine nature, we find also Lycophron referring to Scylla as a ‘half-maiden dog’ (μιξοπάρθενος κύων) (*Alex.* 669).⁷ This phrasing alludes to a more *Mischwesen* form, a monster composed of part-woman and part-dog halves, rather than the multilimbed Lovcraftian-like monster of the *Odyssey*. As stated above, the Homeric Scylla does not seem to possess any canine body parts and she similarly lacks any physical qualities of a woman, both being aspects restricted to the grammatical gender and the etymologization of her name.⁸ By the Hellenistic period, however, literary depictions were becoming influenced by Scylla’s form in ancient art, wherein both woman and canine elements of her body do become physically evident, though a feminine characterization appears already in a fragment of Stesichorus that refers to Scylla as the daughter of Lamia (fr. 182a Finglass). The artistic form of Scylla, extant from the fifth century B.C. onward, is distinct from what is described in the *Odyssey*.⁹ Here Scylla is routinely portrayed with the upper half of a woman down to the waist, from which she has the form of a sea monster with the same type of tail as Tritons and the κῆτος in ancient art. Unique to Scylla, however, are her canine *protomai*, the dog heads and torsos that extend from her waist. An ideal example of this form can be seen with a red-figure Boeotian crater of the fifth century B.C. (Fig. 1), on which she is painted with two dog *protomai*, brandishing a sword in her human hand (*LIMC* s.v. ‘Skylia’ I §69). As foreshadowed by Lycophron’s brief allusion, this radically different form in art provides the impetus for variations on her in Roman poetry, effectively combining her Homeric role with this artistic physical form. Thus Virgil refers to her as a creature that ‘ripped apart the frightened sailors she held with her marine dogs (*canibus ... marinis*)’ (*Ecl.* 6.77).¹⁰ This reference to *canes marini*, a term to which we shall return, seems to be her dogs, which she now deploys to attack sailors instead of her six mouths in the *Odyssey*. In a similar manner, Ovid, whose version of her story functions as an aetiology of her artistic form, describes Scylla immediately after her transformation as standing ‘upon rabid dogs, while her groin and protruding belly are surrounded by the mangled forms of beasts’.¹¹ Thus, while Scylla does have some aspect of canine-ness through her puppy-like voice in her earliest appearance in the *Odyssey*, through the influence of this artistic form, she comes to physically embody aspects of terrestrial canines with these dogs protruding from her body.

⁷ See also Lycophron’s references to her as an ἀγρίαν κύνα (*Alex.* 45) and μιξόθηρος (650). Scylla’s mixed nature is also glimpsed when Lucretius describes her as having ‘a half-marine (*semimarinis*) body, girdled by rabid dogs’ (4.732–3).

⁸ Though Hopman (n. 3), 86–8 shows Scylla to possibly be conceptualized as female thematically within the *Odyssey* by virtue of connections to other famously female Homeric monsters, such as the Sirens.

⁹ The only extant artistic representation of her Homeric form comes from an Etruscan ivory pyxis, dated to between 620 and 570 B.C., portraying a ship being attacked by an octopus-like monster whose tendrils terminate in dog heads. On this, see Hopman (n. 3), 35–7, Fig. 1; M. Aguirre Castro, ‘Scylla: hideous monster or *femme fatale*? A case of contradiction between literary and artistic evidence’, *CFC(G)* 12 (2002), 319–28, at 321 n. 11. While such tendrils with dog heads are not seen elsewhere in ancient art, there are a handful of instances where Scylla’s tail(s) ends with the head of a κῆτος. For examples of this, see *LIMC* s.v. ‘Skylia’ I §§14, 22, 50b, 75. Apollodoros’ version of the myth has her described instead as having ‘twelve feet of dogs’ (*Bibl.* 7.20).

¹⁰ A similar reference occurs at App. Verg. *Ciris* 59–61. See also Virgil’s reference to her ‘azure dogs’ (*caeruleis canibus*, *Aen.* 3.432), where, in a preceding line, her dogs are called wolves (3.428), a unique detail only elsewhere found at *Liber monstrorum* 1.14.

¹¹ *Ov. Met.* 14.66–7. A preceding line also refers to them as ‘barking monsters’ (*latrantibus ... monstribus*) (14.60).



FIGURE 1. Red-Figure Boeotian Crater (fifth century B.C.) (*LIMC* s.v. ‘Skylla’ I §69). Public Domain Image.

THE CANINE ELEMENTS OF THE *KĒTOS*

Artistic media further provide a convenient context to introduce the canine aspects of the κήτος (pl. κήτη),¹² the monster most famous as the beast commanded by Poseidon in the myths of Hesione and Andromeda,¹³ though was also seen in other contexts. The κήτη routinely exhibit piscine features (fins, gills and scales), as well as serpentine or draconic aspects (elongated and twisting bodies).¹⁴ While these features are perhaps to be expected for marine beasts and a monster that plays the role of the archetypal dragon-to-be-slain by a hero,¹⁵ recognisably dog-like features are also present, though usually only acknowledged in passing by modern scholars.¹⁶ Boardman has noted

¹² For κήτη, see G.L. Irby, ‘The seas are full of monsters: divine utopia, human catastrophe’, in H. Williams and R. Clare (edd.), *The Ancient Sea: The Utopian and Catastrophic in Classical Narratives and their Reception* (Liverpool, 2022), 123–45; D. Ogden, *The Dragon in the West* (Oxford, 2021), 87–105; D. Ogden, *Drakōn: Dragon Myth and Serpent Cult in the Greek and Roman Worlds* (Oxford, 2013), 116–29; J.K. Papadopoulos and D. Ruscillo, ‘A *ketos* in early Athens: an archaeology of whales and sea monsters in the Greek world’, *AJA* 106 (2002), 187–227; A. Zucker, ‘Étude épistémologique du mot κήτος’, in S. Mellet (ed.), *Les zoonymes* (Nice, 1997), 425–54; J. Boardman, ‘“Very like a whale” – classical sea monsters’, in A.E. Farkas, P.O. Harper, E.B. Harrison (edd.), *Monsters and Demons in the Ancient and Medieval Worlds* (Mainz, 1987), 73–85.

¹³ For the principle ancient accounts of each myth, see D. Ogden, *Dragons, Serpents, & Slayers in the Classical and Early Christian Worlds: A Sourcebook* (Oxford and New York, 2013), 153–78.

¹⁴ These serpentine/draconic aspects of the κήτη are most strongly asserted in the works of Ogden referenced above (n. 12).

¹⁵ The Hesione and Andromeda myths are examples of one narrative tale type classified in H.-J. Uther, *The Types of International Folktales: A Classification and Bibliography, Based on the System of Antti Aarne and Stith Thompson* (Helsinki, 2004), known as the Aarne–Thompson–Uther (ATU) index. This is listed as ATU 300: ‘The Dragon Slayer’.

¹⁶ Ogden (n. 12 [2021]), 88 and (n. 12 [2013]), 118; Papadopoulos and Ruscillo (n. 12), 119, 121;

instances of canine features in regard to some of the earliest depictions of the κήτη from the seventh century B.C. that have a clearly pointed mammalian muzzle as opposed to that of a fish,¹⁷ while from around the fourth century B.C. onward the κήτη begin to be depicted with mammalian forepaws.¹⁸

In addition to these body parts, we may also point to the distinctive ears with which the κήτη are often depicted. Serpents and most marine animals (for example fish, sharks, whales and dolphins) certainly do not have ears protruding from their heads as many terrestrial mammals do. Accordingly, this feature can be regarded as a part of the construction of ancient sea monsters with canine elements. Such ears can be seen on the prominent examples of a sixth-century B.C. hydria, showing the κήτος of the Hesione myth with Heracles (*LIMC* s.v. 'Kētos' §27),¹⁹ and on the Tellus Panel of the Augustan *Ara Pacis* (*LIMC* s.v. 'Aurai' §4). Other examples from late antique art are useful for illustrating this canine feature. Although the creature that swallowed Jonah is commonly known as a whale in the Anglophone imagination, it was rendered as a κήτος by the translators of the Septuagint. Thereafter, it became imagined in the Graeco-Roman world as a κήτος, appearing at times with such canine features. We see this clearly on a second-century A.D. wall painting in the Catacombs of Marcellinus and Peter (Fig. 2), portraying Jonah being cast overboard. A κήτος appears here as a sea-green beast, complete with forepaws, open canine muzzle and floppy ears. A pair of marble figurines in the Cleveland Museum of Art dated to the third century A.D. depict Jonah being both swallowed and disgorged by a κήτος,²⁰ which has features nearly identical to those of this wall painting. Thus, the κήτη in ancient art can be said to represent a monstrous grafting of canine body parts onto a marine creature.

SEA DOGS AND CANINE SEA MONSTERS

With these canine features of our two ancient sea monsters briefly set forth, we may, then, turn to the question of how such marine figures came to take on such traits and associations of a terrestrial mammal. Even if we acknowledge that this could be a deliberate design by ancient artists to connote monstrous beings by representing them with a Frankenstein-like assemblage of body parts, we should also ponder why it was specifically dogs that have been stitched together with these piscine and serpentine/draconic elements. This is a result of the fact that, in the ancient nomenclature of marine animals, it was common practice to refer to some sea-dwelling type of animal as themselves being dogs. A representative example comes from Pliny the Elder, describing some sort of marine creature only as a *canicula* (diminutive for *canis*) and stating that these beasts pose a grave threat to those who dive for sponge along

Zucker (n. 12), 429, 453; J. Fontenrose, *Python: A Study of Delphic Myth and its Origins* (Berkeley, 1959), 289. Irby (n. 12) cites many ancient references to sea dogs, though does not comment upon the significance of the canine nature of the κήτη.

¹⁷ Another illustrative example of the canine nature of their muzzles occurs on a terracotta gourd of the fourth century B.C. It features a two-tailed Scylla with each tail terminating in a κήτος head, which are strikingly similar to the heads of her dog *protomai*, sharing the same erect ears and snouts. See *LIMC* s.v. 'Skylla' I §50b.

¹⁸ Boardman (n. 12), 76–9.

¹⁹ Boardman (n. 12), 80, Fig. 14.

²⁰ On these figurines, see Ogdén (n. 12 [2021]), 102–3, Fig. 4.14; Boardman (n. 12), 73, Fig. 1.



FIGURE 2. Wall Painting of Jonah in the Catacombs of Marcellinus and Peter (second century A.D.). Public Domain Image.

coastlines (*HN* 9.70).²¹ Similarly, the late antique *Liber monstrorum* mentions creatures in the Mediterranean Sea that are called ‘caerulean hounds’ (*caeruleos ... canes*),²² a chromatic detail that aligns well with the sea-green colour of Jonah’s κῆτος in the Catacombs of Marcellinus and Peter.

Such references are conventionally interpreted by modern scholars as signifying ordinary sharks, as seen in modern dictionaries of ancient Greek and Latin.²³ Sharks themselves do occasionally appear in ancient art, as on Roman fish mosaics,²⁴ though these are fairly realistic depictions without any visually canine elements. The scholarly interpretation of sea dogs being straightforward references to sharks comes about primarily as a result of much later evidence from similar medieval and early modern realistic depictions of sharks being called dogs. One such example comes from the work of a sixteenth-century naturalist (Fig. 3). Here a drawing of what is manifestly a shark is labelled as a κῶον καρχαρίας (and the Latinized *canis carcharias*), with the second word being identical to the modern Greek word for shark. Sharks may not seem to be canine in the modern imagination, but this depends on what aspects of an animal one considers to be ‘dog-like’. Certainly, they do not possess the furry body

²¹ Cf. Plin. *HN* 9.11. On this term, see also A. Guasparri, ‘The Roman classification and nomenclature of aquatic animals: an annotated checklist (with a focus on ethnobiology)’, *Anthropozoologica* 57 (2022), 19–100, at 50.

²² *Liber monstrorum* 2.19. Other references to sea dogs occur at Epicharmus fr. 61 K.–A.; Cratinus fr. 171 K.–A. Ambrose of Milan mentions *canes maritimos* in his list of sea animals (*Hexaemeron*, 5.2 [PL 14.207]), as does Basil of Caesarea with κύνες in his own list of marine creatures (*Epist.* 188.15).

²³ J. Diggle et al., *Cambridge Greek Lexicon* (Cambridge, 2021), s.v. κῶον 8; LSJ s.v. κῶον 4; Lewis and Short, s.v. *canis* 2B. See also Lewis and Short, s.v. *canicula*; Guasparri (n. 21), 50–1; E. de Saint-Denis, *Le vocabulaire des animaux marins en latin classique* (Paris, 1947), 16–17.

²⁴ On these depictions, see S. Lewis and L. Llewellyn-Jones, *The Culture of Animals in Antiquity: A Sourcebook with Commentaries* (London and New York, 2018), 673. Irby (n. 12), 142 interprets the creatures in the famous depiction of a shipwreck on an eighth-century B.C. geometric crater as sharks, but these better resemble generic depictions of fish, albeit carnivorous ones.

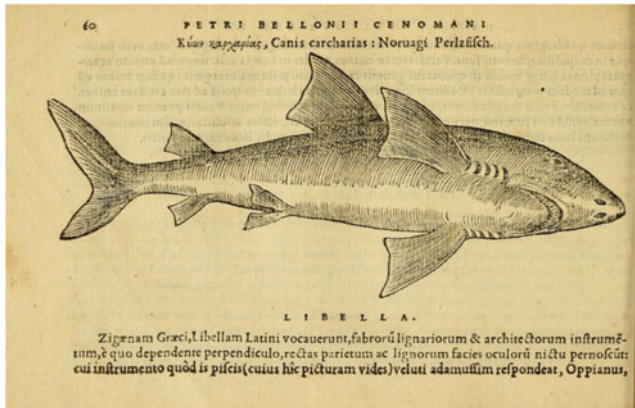


FIGURE 3. Drawing from Pierre Belon's *De Aquatilibus* (1553). Public Domain Image.

nor four legs that we commonly associate with dogs, but, to some, it might seem that there is a resemblance in terms of some underlying common nature with behavioural aspects. There is, for instance, the perception of wild dogs being carrion animals that may devour the unburied corpses of fallen soldiers at Troy (*Il.* 22.42–5), a behaviour that is similarly attributed to fish when Eumaeus fears that Odysseus has been lost at sea and his lifeless body is ignominiously left to be devoured (*Od.* 14.133–6). The common underlying nature between dogs and animals considered to be sea dogs is also explicitly addressed in the unexpected location of the Galenic corpus. In a discussion about why all diseases are called diseases, regardless of their varying effects, Galen raises the example of this shared nomenclature of terrestrial dogs and sea dogs. He states simply that, despite their many differences, they must be united by some underlying canine form (εἶδος), for which reason both called dogs (*Meth. Med.* 2.128–30).

Such a passage, though furnishing one rationale for the connection between terrestrial and sea dogs, describes the latter only as ‘rapacious sea beasts’ (ἐναλίοις θηρίοις τοῖς ἀρπακτικοῖς). This vague phrasing, seen elsewhere in antiquity with regard to these creatures,²⁵ does not permit them to be securely identified as sharks. It is, then, primarily following the habit of our modern dictionaries (premised upon the medieval/early modern sources), that most scholars have assumed that the ancient mentions of sea dogs are clear references to sharks and accordingly translate them as such. Yet this semantic field of creatures conceptualized as sea dogs in the ancient world likely did include sharks, but was more expansive than a simple one-to-one correlation with the species of animal which we denote by the word ‘shark’ today. (A comparable linguistic example can be found with the well-known phenomenon that ancient colour terms do not neatly correspond to semantic fields of our modern colours.) These ideas of sharks/sea dogs can be demonstrated to also intersect with the semantic field(s) of ancient sea monsters. Voracious sea monsters and sharks, after all, make for a somewhat natural pairing, given the related dangers and the associations of both with canine

²⁵ For instance, Persian soldiers are devoured at sea by creatures referred to only as ‘beasts’ (θηρίων, *Hdt.* 6.44.3). Similarly, Latin *belua* in marine contexts denotes sea monsters (e.g. *Ov. Met.* 5.18; *Plin. HN* 9.11), though the word itself is highly generic (‘beast’).

elements.²⁶ We have already seen one example of this interrelation above with Virgil's reference to Scylla's dogs as *canes marini*. Ancient references to sea dogs should, therefore, be understood as inherently ambiguous as to whether they refer to ordinary sharks or aspects of sea monsters.²⁷ Beyond Galen's Platonic rationale, we can point to two other references that provide hints at more specific lines of reasoning, such as this shared nomenclature being derived from the perception that the teeth of certain marine creatures are dog-like and that they also exhibit canine behaviours. For the former, one late antique physiognomic text considers the κήτη to have 'canine teeth' (κυνόδοντας).²⁸ On the latter, Isidore of Seville states simply that 'there are dogs in the sea, named after terrestrial dogs, because they bite'.²⁹ The noun *καρχαρίας*, commonly translated as 'shark', is derived from the adjective *κάρχαρος*, meaning 'saw-like or jagged',³⁰ likely in reference to the teeth of sea dogs/sea monsters.³¹ Appropriately, then, *καρχαρίας* is a term that is also not distinguishable from the semantic field of κήτος.³²

For further examples of this connection, we may first point to a pair of references that seem to associate sea dogs and sea monsters by placing them in identical contexts. A fragment of Anaxilas lists out several monsters, mentioning, directly after Scylla, a 'sea dog' (ποντία κύων),³³ with the text being ambiguous as to whether this is intended as the next item in the list or an appositive for Scylla.³⁴ Centuries later, a Latin poem by Albinovanus Pedo, preserved by Seneca the Elder, recounts Germanicus' voyage along the Northern European coastline, mentioning sights of 'savage sea monsters (*pistris*)³⁵ and sea dogs (*aequoreosque canes*) on all sides' (*Suas.* 1.15). More revealing references come when terms for sea dogs/sea monsters are utilized interchangeably. Returning to Lycophron's *Alexandra*, the κήτος of the Hesione myth is referred to as a 'sea-green

²⁶ Blakey (n. 1), 193–4 also comments on the (perceived) similarity of canine teeth and those of sharks as well as the fact that the other 'less certain points of comparison between mammal and fish are a predaceous nature and swiftness'.

²⁷ Likewise, swordfish were another creature that seems to have occasionally been associated with the semantic field of sea dogs. Anaxippus, fr. 2 K.–A., for instance, mentions a fish called the 'sword-dog' (ξιφίου κυνός), which Franco (n. 2), 199 interprets as a combined reference to a sea dog and a swordfish. On this, see also Blakey (n. 1), 193.

²⁸ [Polemo], *Physiognomica* 33.5–7.

²⁹ Isid. *Etym.* 12.6.5. Centuries earlier, Varro had observed of the Latin language: 'many names of fish are transferred from terrestrial things that are similar in some regard' (*Ling.* 5.77).

³⁰ R. Beekes, *Etymological Dictionary of Greek* (Leiden, 2010), s.v. *κάρχαρος*; LSJ s.v. *κάρχαρος*.

³¹ As with Pseudo-Polemo's reference to the teeth of the κήτη being dog-like, we can note other references in ancient thought that point to this perceived dental similarity occurring centuries earlier. Aristotle classifies some animals (including dogs) as 'saw-toothed' (*καρχαρόδοντα*), a term he specifies as referring to sharp teeth that interlock (*Hist. an.* 501a). This thought is also seen with Pliny the Elder's categorization of one type of teeth as 'saw-like' (*serrati*), which he states is a feature shared by fish, snakes and dogs (*HN* 11.61).

³² The interrelated nature of the semantic fields of *καρχαρίας* and κήτη/sea dogs can be demonstrated by definitions of the former in ancient dictionaries. Hesychius defines it as a 'sea dog' (θαλάσσιος κύων) (s.v. *καρχαρίας*, κ 944 Latte–Cunningham), while Photius' *Lexicon* even considers this as a creature that has the 'form (εἶδος) of a marine κήτος' (s.v. *καρχαρίας*, κ 214 Theodoridis). The adjectival form used by Lycophron to describe the κήτος of the Hesione myth as *κάρχαρος κύων* (*Alex.* 34) is perhaps intended as an allusion to the word *καρχαρίας* itself.

³³ Anaxilas, fr. 22 K.–A.

³⁴ Blakey (n. 1), 185–6 considers it to be latter, as does Ogden (n. 12 [2013]), 134 n. 86, while the translation of S.D. Olson, *Athenaeus. The Learned Banqueters. Volume I: Books 1–3.106c* (Cambridge, MA, 2007), 237 favours the former by rendering it as a shark.

³⁵ A term used elsewhere by Virgil in reference to Scylla (*Aen.* 3.427).

dog' (γλαυκῶ ... κυνί, 471).³⁶ Aelian, in his third-century A.D. *History of Animals*, records that among his three categorizations of sea dogs, the first category are 'the most daring of the κήτη' (1.55),³⁷ a formulation that implies sea dogs themselves are a subcategory of κήτη. Confirmation of this can be found in the following century with Servius' discussion on the nature of the Greek word κήτος and its Latin transliteration, stating explicitly that the κήτη 'are called sea dogs' (*canes marini*) (on Verg. *Aen.* 5.822.).³⁸ One final example is useful for illustrating such conceptual overlap: Oppian, in a list of types of κήτη (*Hal.* 1.394–408), refers to one apparently amphibious type called the καστορίδες. These creatures, which can be shown to be canine elsewhere in reference to a breed of dog believed to have been domesticated by Castor,³⁹ are described by Oppian (*Hal.* 1.398–403):

... the deadly and woeful καστορίδες, which howl with a grievous ill-omened voice on the shores. For any man, who receives their sorrowful voice into his ears, having heard the shrieking of this wretched shouting, will not be far from death and that horrible voice prophesies doom and fate.⁴⁰

Such mantic ability to foreshadow death is seen nowhere else with the ancient ideas of the κήτη, but is a common folkloric motif associated with canine creatures as with the modern anglophone black dog folklore. It features as an entry recorded in Thompson's motif index as B733.2: 'Dogs howling indicates death'.⁴¹ Thus, the overlapping aspects of dogs with the κήτη are here responsible for importing a canine folkloric trait that was otherwise unheard of with marine creatures.

REINTERPRETING ANCIENT REFERENCES TO SEA DOGS

We may then consider sea dogs in the ancient texts to be references to three possible figures: 1) Scylla or her dog *protomai*, 2) the κήτη, 3) or otherwise generic sea beasts, such as sharks. These three possibilities are, of course, not mutually exclusive as exemplified by the interchangeable uses of the κήτη and sea dogs. Acknowledging such conceptual overlap and ambiguity should prompt us to reinvestigate ancient references to sea dogs. Although many other instances could be brought forth, I give here only two examples to illustrate such reinterpretation, each from opposite ends of Graeco-Roman antiquity and differing genres: Homeric epic and the work of a late antique historian. Returning to the *Odyssey*, we find Circe, describing Scylla's predacious behaviour, stating that she fishes up 'dolphins, dogs and whatever larger κήτος she might seize' (δελφίνιάς τε κύνας τε καὶ εἴ ποθι μείζον ἔλησι | κήτος,

³⁶ On these lines, see S. Hornblower, *Lykophron: Alexandra* (Oxford, 2015), 226–7.

³⁷ A similar tripartite division is found at Opp. *Hal.* 1.373–83. Later in this text, Oppian also mentions sea dogs soon after discussing the κήτη (5.28–9). Although not explicitly equating the two, it may be significant that Aristotle's own section on the sea dogs (*Hist. an.* 566a) immediately precedes a section on the κήτη (566b).

³⁸ The relevant portion of Servius' commentary on the *Eclogues* does not comment on Virgil's reference to Scylla's dogs as *canes marini* (on Verg. *Ecl.* 6.77).

³⁹ Diggle et. al. (n. 23), s.v. καστόρια; LSJ s.v. καστορίδες; Agathias *Anth. Pal.* 6.167; Poll. *Onom.* 5.39.

⁴⁰ On these creatures, see also Ael. *NA* 9.50.

⁴¹ S. Thompson, *Motif-Index of Folk Literature*, vols. I–VI (Bloomington, 1955–8). Burriss (n. 1), 35–7 collects several instances where the howling of dogs forebodes death in ancient literature.

12.95–6). Following modern dictionaries, many *Odyssey* translations have rendered the second item in this sequence as sharks.⁴² Yet, as with Anaxilas' list, this sequence of three creatures may actually refer to interrelated creatures with regard to the final two items. Given the overlap we have witnessed in later texts, it is likely that this is not a case of three distinct animals being named, but rather the second two items in this list allude to the overlapping associations of sea dogs and κήτη. Like Aelian, the poet may have considered sea dogs as a subcategory of κήτη, a feature hinted at with the comparative adjective μεῖζον connecting the two, effectively signifying her snatching up one type of dog-like creature as well as larger varieties of these.⁴³ The canine references of these lines, also coming shortly after the mention of Scylla's own puppy-like voice (*Od.* 12.86–7), give the impression of her as an essentially cannibalistic monster. She is herself dog-like, yet possesses a propensity for consuming other canine creatures. Finally, with regard to the ambiguity of sea dogs/terrestrial dogs both often being referenced as just κύνες, we cannot be certain whether the poet intends Scylla's puppy-like voice to be like that of an ordinary terrestrial puppy, or whatever was considered a 'sea puppy'.⁴⁴

The second example of reinterpreting a sea dog reference comes from an extended digression by Procopius of Caesarea in the sixth century A.D. concerning the origins of a precious pearl among the Persians. In the tale, a local fisherman in Persia one day spotted a particularly large pearl in the shallows, but could not obtain it as it was being guarded by a 'sea dog' (κύνα θαλάσσιον). The fisherman makes a deal with the Persian king, an apparent collector of precious items, that he will retrieve the pearl for the king at the cost of his own life by throwing it ashore just before the sea dog devours him. In exchange, the fisherman makes the king swear an oath to take care of his family, elevating them out of poverty, after his own demise (*Pers.* 1.4.17–31).⁴⁵ For this story, the Loeb translation renders the phrase κύνα θαλάσσιον (and each subsequent mention of it as a κύων) as 'shark'.⁴⁶ This, again, is a habit premised primarily upon the conventional dictionary entries as Procopius does not provide any descriptive details that would allow the certain identification of this creature as a shark. Just as Lycophron could refer to the κήτος of the Hesione myth as a 'sea-green dog', so too could this text be deploying the term for a sea monster. We see a narrative

⁴² E.g. the translation by W. Shewring, *Homer. The Odyssey* (Oxford, 1980). Though probably following the *Odyssey* use of κήτος interchangeably with seals in reference to Proteus' herds (4.438–53), the translation by E. Wilson, *The Odyssey. Homer* (New York, 2018) renders this as seals, an interpretation also favoured by A. Heubeck and A. Hoekstra, *A Commentary on Homer's Odyssey. Volume II: Books IX–XVI* (Oxford, 1989), at 124. Seals sometimes overlap with conceptions of the κήτη (e.g. Hsch. φ 1087 Hansen–Cunningham, s.v. φῶκος defines a seal as a κήτος similar to a dolphin) and are, therefore, sometimes confusingly intermixed among the sea dog/sea monster associations in antiquity. This, in turn, probably influenced references to κήτη crawling upon shorelines, such as Oppian's καστοριδεσ. Aristotle also refers to one type of seal as a κάστωρ (*Hist. an.* 594a).

⁴³ Polyb. 34.2.12–15 seems to also interpret these lines in this way, rephrasing this as 'dolphins, dogs and other κήτος-like creatures' (δελφίνων καὶ κυνῶν καὶ ἄλλων κητωδῶν).

⁴⁴ Accordingly, J. Neils, 'Les femmes fatales: Skylla and the Sirens in Greek art', in B. Cohen (ed.), *The Distaff Side: Representing the Female in Homer's Odyssey* (New York and Oxford, 1995), 175–84, at 176 considers the voice of Scylla to be like that of a barking seal, an interpretation perhaps partially supported by the adolescent quality ascribed to Proteus' seals as animals that are νέποδες (*Od.* 4.404).

⁴⁵ Procopius elsewhere shows an awareness of the overlap between canine figures of the marine world. He rationalizes the place name for where Scylla inhabits as based on types of fish with the canine names of σκύλαξ and κυνίσκος (*Goth.* 7.27.17–19).

⁴⁶ H.B. Dewing, *Procopius. History of the Wars. Books 1-2* (Cambridge, MA, 1914), 26–31.

element of this sea dog harbouring associations worthy of a serpentine/draconic sea monster, like the κήτος. The creature's penchant for protecting some valuable item is another folkloric motif recorded in Thompson's motif index as B11.6.2: 'Dragon guards treasure'.⁴⁷ Thus, again, the inherent ambiguity between sea dogs and sea monsters in the Graeco-Roman imagination results in the importation of features and narrative patterns that would otherwise not be apparent, if such phrases were references to ordinary animals like sharks alone.⁴⁸

CONCLUSION

This infusion of sea monsters with canine aspects and associations neither develops nor diminishes over the course of Graeco-Roman antiquity. It is likely to have been an ancient idea by the dawn of these cultures as we may even note one depiction of a dog-like sea monster on a Minoan clay seal.⁴⁹ With the influence of the κήτη extending into the medieval period, this also provided one vector for the continuity of canine sea monsters centuries after Graeco-Roman antiquity.⁵⁰ We may only speculate as to how such a pervasive association first arose. As I have suggested here, though, the one possible scenario is that it results from conceptual overlap between these sea monsters and marine creatures perceived as canine. Yet the precise origins of how this overlap itself came to be as well as the more general notion that certain marine creatures should be conceptualized as sea dogs is lost to time. But it perhaps arose in some earlier culture, Minoan or otherwise, derived from the pervasive logic that the marine world is reflective of the terrestrial world.⁵¹ It may be that these canine sea monsters and sea dogs were not originally distinct figures that gravitated closer towards each other and became intertwined, but rather common descendants of a cultural expectation there should be

⁴⁷ On the motif of monsters guarding valuable objects, see also F. Mitchell, *Monsters in Greek Literature: Aberrant Bodies in Ancient Greek Cosmogony, Ethnography, and Biology* (Abingdon and New York, 2021), 103–5.

⁴⁸ A further hint at the underlying serpentine/draconic nature of this sea dog, comes from a strikingly similar reference to Procopius' story that occurs among the witch Erictho's list of magical ingredients in Lucan. One of these is a 'serpent (*serpens*) born in the Red Sea as the guardian (*custos*) of a valuable pearl' (6.677–8). For the context of this reference among other ideas of ancient dragons, see Ogden (n. 12 [2013]), 176–7.

⁴⁹ On this depiction, see Hopman (n. 3), 58, Figs. 2a–b; K. Shepard, *The Fish-Tailed Monster in Greek and Etruscan Art* (New York, 1940, repr. 2011), 28, Fig. 39. Perhaps also derived from a similar canine milieu, a series of Mycenaean and Minoan representations of humanoid figures regarded as 'demons' bear distinctly dog-like features. On these, see D. Sansone, 'The survival of the bronze-age demon', *JCS* 13 (1988), 1–17, at 7–10.

⁵⁰ The Old English *nicoras*, the sea monsters of *Beowulf*, may have been influenced by the Graeco-Roman κήτη (R. Denson, 'Ancient sea monsters and a medieval hero: the *nicoras* of *Beowulf*', *Shima* 16 [2022], 113–26). Although the *nicoras* themselves do not bear discernibly canine qualities, Grendel's mother, a creature dwelling in an underwater abode, is twice referred to as a *brimwylf*—'sea wolf' (1506, 1599).

⁵¹ Such a pattern of thought in the ancient and medieval worlds is surveyed by J. Leclercq-Marx, 'L'idée d'un monde marin parallèle du monde terrestre: émergence et développements', in C. Connochie-Bourgne (ed.), *Mondes marins du Moyen Âge* (Aix-en-Provence, 2006), 259–71. An illustrative example of this idea in antiquity can be seen with Pliny the Elder's extensive list of marine creatures, many of which have names identical to those of terrestrial animals (*HN* 32.54). See also R. Denson, 'Divine nature and the natural divine: the marine folklore of Pliny the Elder', *Green Letters* 25 (2021), 143–54, at 147 n. 5; A. Guasparri, 'Varrone linguista: *impositio nominum* e creatività linguistica in una tassonomia esemplare', *BStudLat* 28 (1998), 408–14, at 411–13.

canine-like creatures within the sea. The inherent ambiguity, then, results from the fact that there was never any clear delineation between them to begin with. An alternative, though not mutually exclusive, possibility is that the semantic field represented by words like κύων might also harbour a generic meaning to signify a 'beast', rather than only referencing the species of animal as we know them today.⁵² We can, after all, note occasional uses of κύων for other supernatural creatures, such as the eagle of Zeus being called a dog in *Prometheus Bound* (1021–3), or the Harpies being referred to as dogs in Apollonius' *Argonautica* (2.288–90).⁵³ These avian creatures, however, do not contain any traces of canine-like features, yet bear the name of dog all the same. This perhaps hints at κύων being a more flexible word in antiquity than we usually understand it, sometimes serving a secondary function as a generic appellation for any figure perceived as bestial, a function that is, then, not dissimilar to its use in the ancient misogynistic comparisons to women.⁵⁴ The difference is that, with regard to these sea monsters, this secondary function results in the importation of canine features and associations from its more primary meaning of 'dog', while such a process does not occur for other supernatural creatures, such as the Harpies.

Whatever the ultimate origin, these canine aspects and associations of Scylla and the κήτη were evidently no small part of the DNA of Graeco-Roman sea monsters, which afforded them a unique set of attributes. This canine affinity distinguishes them from the sea monsters of other cultures, such as the cephalopodic Kraken or the purely draconic Leviathan, neither of which harbours distinctly canine elements. Moreover, within studies of ancient zoology and ancient perceptions of the natural world, this feature offers a key insight in understanding such systems of cultural knowledge. That Graeco-Roman sea monsters were recognizably canine reveals much about the manner in which these cultures conceptualized the animals of the marine environment. Sharks (nor any other animal) were never perceived in a purely empirical manner the way that modern marine biologists would, considering them as a relatively distinct species of cartilaginous fish. Rather, they were overlaid with pre-existing cultural conceptions, such as the expectation that there should be 'sea versions' of terrestrial animals. The resulting sea dogs, through one process or another, were, then, intimately bound up with the related ideas of these voracious sea monsters, creating the perception that the waters of the Mediterranean Sea, home to ancient Greeks and Romans, also swarmed with dog-like beasts.

Trent University

RYAN DENSON
ryandenson455@gmail.com

⁵² Blakey (n. 1) investigates figurative uses of κύων in classical Greek poetry, surveying how 'particular poets utilized the image of the dog to enhance their depiction of gods, heroes, men, even of inanimate objects and abstract ideas' (ii). Faust (n. 1), 9 attributes much of the wider uses of κύων to a 'poetic function' of the word stemming from Homer. Yet, given the frequent appearance of such ideas in the works of ancient naturalists and prose texts as well, it is more plausible that this was a widespread cultural association, rather than being a mere poetic habit.

⁵³ See also Diggle et al. (n. 23), s.v. κύων 4; LSJ s.v. κύων III. In a similar vein, Ogden (n. 12 [2013]), 118 n. 13–14 notes references to δράκοντες as dogs, and Sansone (n. 49), 11 n. 54 collects a series of canine references to the Erinyes.

⁵⁴ Zaganaris (n. 1), 85 speculates that such references are essentially an extension of the pejorative uses of canine associations.