"TO HEAR THE MERMAIDS SING": VISUAL FIGURATION, MYTH AND DESIRE IN THE CASE OF THE WATERWOMAN

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[The demon] *Antaura came out from the sea. She shouted aloud like a hind, she cried out like a cow. Artemis of Ephesos comes to meet her. "Antaura, where are you bringing the head-pain...?"*
Against the half-head-ache [or migraine], Greek inscription on thin rolled silver sheet, found in 3C Roman tomb, Carnuntum, Austria[1]

Ic wæs fæmne geong, feaxhar cwene / ond ænlic rinc on ane tid / fleah mid fuglum ond on flode swom / deaf under yþe dead mid fiscum / ond on foldan stop, hæfde ferðe cwicu.
I was a young woman, a gray-haired queen / and a singular warrior – all at once. / I flew with the birds and swam in the sea / dived under the waves dead among the fishes / and stepped on the shore – I held a living spirit.
Riddle 74, *Exeter Book*, 10C[2]

Abstract: The idea of a female spirit attached to a place of water has endured for millennia in literature, folklore and the visual arts. Supernatural aquatic women – mermaids, sirens, nymphs and nereids – attached to sea, shore, spring, river and cave, manifest at the interface between the natural world and the otherworld; they also serve as markers for that boundary. They have been visualised in a remarkable variety of forms, from ideal female nudes to monstrous hybrids. Central also to the mythos of the water-woman is the transformative power of desire; experienced by, or exerted on, either the entity herself or her beholder.

Focussing on traditions involving the Homeric sirens and the aquatic trans-
formations described in Ovid, with excursions into Celtic, Northern European
and folkloric sources, I explore how issues of hybridity and desire are related
in treatments of the water-woman from Classical antiquity through the Middle
Ages and into the Renaissance.

Keywords: mermaid, siren, visual mythology, metamorphosis, history of desire,
hybridity, goddesses

INTRODUCTION

The imagery of the mermaid-siren, part woman, part water-creature, is a "con-
ceptual focus"[3] – a powerful meeting point – for a range of complex folkloric and
mythic traditions about metamorphic and magical waterwomen.[4] We can think
of her hybrid shape as a *figura*, to borrow Auerbach's term (1938: 320–341) for
a rhetorical form which points to transcendental or supernatural reality. As
such, the hybrid waterwoman is constantly mobilised in visual, literary and
oral culture, from antiquity onwards; she evolves and yet stays the "same". The
mermaid-siren is a "figure of speech" – in the widest sense – of the collective
imaginary. And mermaid-siren imagery *en masse* – as a set of variations on
a theme over time and space – itself constitutes a kind of discursive system, with
its own internal rhetoric. I want also to suggest that we can take the operations
of this figuration as a model demonstrating how the Otherworld in general is
conceived of and maintained; essentially as a mirror of the mundane world,
but with its boundaries defined by semiotic paradox and deformation, similar
in kind to the processes of condensation and displacement which characterise
dream-imagery. The present study explores the *figura* in these two senses. As
an Otherworldly image, how and what does the mermaid-siren express? As
a discursive system, to what ends, through what means, does its rhetoric work?

In visual and material culture, hybrid waterwomen constitute an "inter-
artefactual domain" (Gell 1998: 216–219), wherein successive generations of
exemplars reinforce each other, as it were, through line of sight.[5] Thus, a par-
ticular mermaid-siren carved on a wellhead in a town square (e.g. fig. 1a–b)
might stay *in situ* for centuries, a model for straightforward reproduction.
And, as a hybrid too, the form has inbuilt potential for variation: a person
crafting a new woman-fish/waterbird may shrink, grow, double or multiply,
hair, wings, fishtails etc.; in addition, transformative pathways common to all
hybrid-types include change of scale, exaggeration/repression of body-parts,
and/or cross-speciation.[6] All such routes for conserving or changing the shapes
of waterwomen are thus embedded in concrete cultural traditions, which drive
visual evolution over time.[7]

The family-tree of supernatural aquatic women encompasses spring, sea and river nymphs, marine goddesses, sea-monsters and sickness demons. Whether or not a hybrid form is used to represent such entities, and the degree of complexity of the hybrid form chosen, affects the meaning of the representation. More precisely, it changes *how* it means.[8] As Eco (1979: 271) observed:

> *the aesthetic text has a self-focussing quality, so* [its] *structural arrangement becomes one of the contents that it conveys... the way the rules are rearranged on one level will represent the way in which they are rearranged on another.*

Each water-woman representation is, in this sense, a "pre-existing discursive fragment" (Zumthor 1984: 27), like a variant of an oral text. Each (re-)arrangement of the hybrid form is, on some level, a commentary on the pre-existing repertoire. As successive iterations rearrange and twist the hybrid structure, the *figura*'s inter-artefactual domain expands and shifts terrain.

Though the static hybrid form thus has its own domain of visual variation, its first purpose is to represent the time-based shapeshifting aspect of the waterwoman:

> *The accretion of* [elements] *from different species* [is] *a form of condensation... [In] metamorphosis... a creature goes through various transformations over a period of time. If we were to compress the time span, the result would be* [a] *composite creature. [So] a metamorphosis might be seen as displacement of the elements of a composite creature over time.*[9]

And vice-versa: composites condense and make visible the qualities of metamorphic creatures. As folkloric and other evidence demonstrates, hybrid construction in the sign does not necessarily represent the literal visual appearance of a magical creature. In "live" encounters, supernatural waterwomen are rarely said to look like composites; the observer either sees one shifting shape, or apprehends directly the "excess" of a creature outwith nature.[10] Like *Mischbildungen* [composites] in dream-imagery,[11] the hybrid-sign condenses together the creature's simultaneity. In folk lifeworld perceptions, the hybrid is an abstraction; a two- (or three-) dimensional projection of a four-dimensional entity (cf. Küchler 2001: 61). Here is how a Swedish-speaking Finn, Albert Endtbacka (b. 1900) perceived an uncanny bird, at which his gun would not shoot, by a haunted lake:

> *That bird* [behaved] *sometimes as if able to perform all sorts of tricks like in the cinema. It could grow to be so big, so cruel-looking that it was*

> *like nothing on earth. A while after it was only like a little sea bird. And I thought: I'd better leave... it was weird in some way.. somebody in the village also [has] seen that bird... it was that sprite they talk about. Or waternymph or whatever. It's just like that then, when that kind of thing happens.*[12]

In Classical antiquity, the hybrid form was not invariably used to represent waterwomen. The major Classical goddesses with aquatic aspects are characterised as shapeshifters, or capable disguisers: marine Thetis, Aphrodite (born from sea-foam), Artemis (in certain avatars). Lesser exemplars, named and nameless, include nymphs, monsters and ex-mortals.[13] Threatened by death or rape, such women transmutate into water-birds, marine creatures, or the element of water itself.[14] Sometimes their end form is hybrid (e.g. Scylla, the Sirens). But, even when it is not, hybridity enters the picture as code for their metamorphosis/apotheosis.

For his *Metamorphoses*, Ovid (43 BCE-17) selected mythical figures, including many aquatic women, who had – or could be given – metamorphic apotheoses (see Table 1, Ovid's Waterwomen).[15] He represented these as etiological climaxes, all driven in some manner by desire (*eros/imeros*). As a means of studying the *figura* of the mermaid-siren, we can see his great poem as a kind of ark, in which Classical waterwomen travelled through the Middle Ages, progressively encased in commentary.[16] Especially important for later Western waterwoman traditions are the Sirens; descending from Homer, through Ovid to the Renaissance; and with another line of descent, visible in medieval representations, from Celtic, Nordic and Slavic prototypes to modern folk sources. The Sirens were explicitly tied to death and desire, and this aspect of their imagery fuelled visualisations of waterwomen in many ancient and post-Classical contexts. Renaissance artists and writers further reconfigured this complex Classical inheritance (see Epilogue, below).

Both Ovid's metamorphic aquatic women and the Homeric Sirens raise explicitly the issue of desire. To investigate what this has to do with their hybrid representations, I want to bring to bear Weiss's analysis (1998) of Greek and Indo-European (IE) words for *desire*, first on Ovid's waterwoman cohort, then on the Siren-image in particular. I move from this material to discuss the mermaid-siren *figura* as a rhetorical system, which includes and invites commentary; applying here Foucault's remarks on commentary as a discourse characterized by repetition, rarefaction and variation.[17] The intention is to illuminate how and why the hybrid aspect of the waterwoman enables its use, in different contexts, as a kind of "operating system" for the interface between the Otherworld and this one.

Table 1. *Ovid's Waterwomen.*

Io (cow) (I. 637 ff., 728 ff.)	Daughter of river Inachas changed by Jupiter; sees reflected in father's waters that she is cow; "flees in terror from herself" to bank of River Nile; prays to Jupiter, who restores her [*imeros*]
Syrinx (river-reed sleep-making pipes) (I. 689 ff.)	To escape rape by Pan, prays to River Ladon, who makes her a reed in his river; from her is made reed-pipe with which Mercury sends Argus to sleep [*imeros*]
Narcissus (flower) (III. 509-510):	Tiresias prophesises (III, 341 ff.) would live long "if he never knows himself" (III, 348); scorns all suitors; fears & flees from desire of the nymph Echo; sees his reflection in spring; loves it "madly"; cannot touch it; dies from hunger; in Hades, continues to love own reflection in Styx (V. 563) [*imeros* & *eros*]
Salmacis (hermaphrodite; castratory pool) (IV. 328-74)	Desires & is refused by Hermaphroditus; prays to a "goddess", is fused with him in her pool/spring [*eros*]
Cyane (water) (V. 407-464, V. 418-419)	Tries to prevent Proserpina's abduction; Hades cuts her river in half, changes her into mute water [*imeros*]
Nine muses (birds) (V. 289-93)	(Maeonian nymphs) take up wings in rainy weather to escape rape by King Pyreneus (*imeros*); frequent sacred spring of Pegasus (Hippocrene), on Mt. Helicon [cf. Pausanias, 9. 31. 3] [*imeros*]
Arethusa (water) (V. 572 ff)	Spring nymph; bathes in river Alpheus; to escape his rape, prays to Diana, who turns her into water. Alpheus joins his waters with her... [*imeros*]
Sirens (bird-fish women, sea monsters) (V. 551 ff.)	Witness Proserpina's abduction, wish for wings to search for her over sea and air. Wings given, they became sea monsters, retaining faces of maidens & human voice but terminating like fishes (V. 563) [*pothos*?]
Niobe (weeping marble) (VI. 312)	Offends Latona, Apollo & Diana kill her children & husband, turn her into stone [often represented as fountain] [*pothos*?]
Thetis, goddess of waters (shapeshifter) (X. 217 ff.)	Evades rape by Peleus through shapeshifting; Proteus tells how to bind her with cords; Peleus sires Achilles on her. [Discord attends their wedding] [*imeros*]
Alcyone (kingfisher) (XI. 411 ff.)	Juno sends Iris to cave of Somnus god of sleep, bids him send a dream to Alcyone: takes shape of her husband Ceyx, informing her of his death by shipwreck. In the morning, Alcyone finds her drowned husband floating by the shore & hurls herself into the sea. Gods change both into kingfishers, frequent the sea, make nests above the sand... [*eros* & *pathos*]
Liriopê	Boeotian naiad, probably daughter of a river god; raped by river Cephissus, son of Oceanus and Tethys, sires Narcissus [*imeros*]
Scylla (sea monster; or, peril of the sea) (XIV. 18 ff.)	Loved by seagod, Glaucus; rival Circe poisons fountain where she bathes. Dog from the loins down, with barking heads of dogs all around her [*imeros*]

PREHISTORIC, ANCIENT AND FOLKLORIC WATERWOMEN

> *... anthropomorphic thinking about animal behaviour is built into us. We could not abandon it even if we wished to. Besides, we do not wish to.* (Kennedy 1992: 5)

First, let us look briefly at the deeper history of waterwomen. Why women-fish, why water-birds? As with all fauna in the prehistoric lifeworld, birds and aquatic creatures were hunted and observed, dissected and consumed. Their shapes, as well as their skins, scales, bones and feathers, were taken as raw material for both functional and symbolic purposes (Milne 2011: 61–119; 2024: Ch. 4). Birds (and fish) appear in Paleolithic paintings and petroglyphs; on Neolithic amulets, jugs and figurines.[18] Graves carry bird, fish and seal images and seashell ornaments; sometimes, entire wings of swans and other seabirds (Mannermaa 2008b). At Çatalhöyük (c. 7100–6000 BCE), waterbirds appear in murals; crane-wings were pierced and preserved, possibly for use in dance (Russell 2019; Russell & McGowan 2003).

Water-creature associations are tied to the female gender in some Neolithic contexts. On Gotland, the "Woman of the Flutes" was buried (c. 2600 BCE) with 35 small flutes (perhaps decoy whistles, imitating specific bird calls), and a duck figurine by her feet (fig. 2a–b).[19] Among the oldest extant waterwoman images are the Lepenski Vir carved ovoids (c. 6000 BCE) – some combining fish-head with human female genitals (fig. 3) – and beak-faced deities in carts drawn by waterbirds (c. 1500 BCE, fig. 4).[20] Ethnographic evidence also suggests a widespread connection between waterbirds and the Otherworld.[21] In Siberia and northern Asia, waterfowl were commonly used to represent spirit-travel, because they could dive, swim, walk and fly; moving easily through the boundaries of air, land and sea.[22] The interface of water is itself reflective, literally and figuratively; just as pools and lakes are age-old mirrors, any water-surface can serve as a portal to the Otherworld.

In the Mediterranean and Near Eastern Bronze Age, winged (i.e. bird-hybrid) figures of all kinds are ubiquitous (e.g. fig. 5; cf. Pásztor 2017: 213–218). Wings on a humanoid or quadruped may mark their owner as possessing avian speed or powers (like the diving birds); or, as an otherworldly entity, travelling between, worlds; or, as a metamorphic creature in transition between forms. In ancient visual cultures generally, hybrid beings [*Mischwesen*] work as "pre-cooked" formulae, readily copied and adaptable.[23] Frontisi-Ducroux sees an intrinsic affinity between hybrid forms and marine divinities in antiquity.[24] Mer-human and siren-forms emerge in this context, moving with trade west and north.[25]

Turning to folk culture, in Greater Russian folk art, hybrid bird- or fish-women (fig. 6a–d) are used to represent *berenyi* (spirits of rivers, lakes and forests), and, more specifically, *rus(s)alki* (=watermaidens; cf. *vili*, *zhiri*, *rozha-nitsi*; Hilton 1995; Netting 1976).[26] On one level, *rusalki* are a type of Unquiet Dead: transformed souls of young women who die unmarried, for love, or in first childbirth,[27] their rites-of-passage incomplete (Dynda 2017: 92ff). In a tale from Samara region:

> *...Marina drowned in the Volga out of love for [Ivan], and became a rusalka, living in a terrible whirlpool, where water boiled in quiet and stormy weather alike...* [there] *Marina Rusalka would appear* [and] *overturn boats. Fishermen said they sometimes saw her on the sands opposite Simbirsk. It would seem that a swan was swimming along... It would come out onto the sands, flap and strike its wings, turn into a beautiful woman, and tumble down on the sand as if dead. In the evening, she frightened many people....* (adapted from Ivanits 1992: 189)

Barber (1997) compared waterbird forms associated with Slavic *vily* and *rusalki* with Neolithic and Classical prototypes (cf. fig. 4).[28] She argued that their capacity for healing or harm stems from unfulfilled fertility; hence the association with waterbirds and other egg-laying aquatic or amphibious creatures (fish, snakes). Their power can be invoked through custom and ritual (e.g. in seasonal festivals),[29] or triggered through private encounters. In Bulgaria, for example, in the 1930s, incubation in water-meadows on Ascension Day was used to cure diseases attributed to *vily*.[30] There are signs here of an important aspect of the *figura*: its relation to dream-cultures, otherworldly visions, prophecy and healing.

There is good evidence for the antiquity of this concept. The Greeks and Romans built shrines and dedicated grottos and springs to water-nymphs (cf. figs. 7a–c).[31] Cures, curses and miracles were solicited at such places, from named or unnamed water-goddesses, and at more formal incubation and bath-temple complexes.[32] In Northern England at Hadrian's Wall, in Northern England, with its rotating legions drawn from all over the Empire, Coventina's Well (fig. 7a) is named for its many dedication-stones inscribed to this otherwise unattested deity.[33] The similar "Shrine of the Nymphs" (fig. 7b) nearby has stones carved with triple water-nymphs (Smith 1962; Allason-Jones 1996; May-ers 2017). In both places, simplified draperies begin to read visually as fish-tail shapes (figs. 7a–b). Further south in Roman Britain, Minerva-Sulis (fig. 8a) received hundreds of curse-prayers at her healing pools in Bath. In central Gaul, the river deity Sequana (in her duck-boat, fig. 8b; cf. fig. 4) attracted huge

numbers of votive offerings at her temple and hospital complex at the source of the Seine (Green 1999: 37–40, 69). These include plaques and models of eyes (e.g. fig. 8c), and pleas for help with headaches. The goddess Sirona, depicted holding snake and eggs, presided at healing thermal spring-sanctuaries from Brittany to Hungary (Green 1995a: 90–105).[34]

Water-bird cult imagery had other non-Classical roots.[35] A Gallo-Roman monument unearthed in Paris (figs. 9a–b) bears on one face the image-constellation labelled TARVOSTRIGARANUS (The Bull with Three Cranes); another face shows Esus, a woodcutting deity connected with rune-mastery.[36] On another slab from Trèves (now Trier, Germany), Esus cuts branches from a willow which supports a bull's head and three cranes or egrets (fig. 9c); an abutting (damaged) face carries a female figure.[37]

Later Celtic traditions favoured waterbirds as a form for shapeshifting women. The medieval Irish prose and verse *Dindshenchas*[38] present etiologies of rivers and other bodies of water as aquatic female apotheoses. Thus, the river Boyne is the dismembered arm of the disobedient wife Bóand, whose flooding waters become a source of poetic inspiration (*imbas forosnai*).[39] Other *Dindshenchas* describe recognisable mermaid-siren figures. The maiden Rúad in Donegal travels to Ireland in a bronze boat to meet her betrothed:

> *co cuala dord na samguba isinn mbiur nach cuala nech* [*riam*]
> (in the inver [=estuary] then she heard the lamenting music [*dord*] which none had ever heard)."[40]

In the prose account, this makes her sleep and fall in the water. In the verse equivalent, she seems to both fall asleep (spellbound?) and jump in the sea; the music she hears is described as *síd* (wondrous, enchanting; Darwin 2019: 157). A waterfall bears her name (Ess Rúaid [Rúad's Waterfall]).

In the legend for Inber n-Ailbinne (Meath), nine beautiful marine women hold fast a prince's fleet on the open sea. He sleeps with one, promises to return, fails to do so. She bears his child and throws its head after him (Stokes 1894: 294–95; Gwynn 1903: ii.26–35). In another tale, a prince hears – like Rúad – the *dord* [murmurous wailing] of the *murdúchainn* [sirens] in the sea:

> *This is the form that he beheld, the mermaid with the shape of a grown-up girl. Above the water she was most smooth; but below the water her lower parts were hairy-clawed and bestial. So the monsters devoured him and cast him away in joints. And the sea carried his two thigh-bones to yonder port, and the share of a hundred would fit on the flat of each bone. Hence Port Lairge* [Port of the Thighbone] *is (so) called.*[41]

Aspects of these legends fit Barber's thesis: Rúad is a maiden drowned on the verge of marriage, the mer-woman of Inber n-Ailbinne is an abandoned lover who kills her child.[42]

In *Beowulf* (2002 [8C]: lines 103–104), the monster Grendel is a *border-walker* [*merc-stapa*] who lives in *wastelands, fen and fastness*. His mother, on the other hand, is called a *brim-wylf* [she-wolf of the water; 1506, 1599], a *mere-wīf* [female of the mere; 1519] and a *grund-wyrgenne* (accursed creature of the depths; 1518). She inhabits an uncanny well of *dreadful water* and *cold currents* (1260-1); it takes Beowulf most of the day to reach the bottom. This water then becomes alive with a host of *wundra* (weird creatures; 1509), tusked *sǣ-dēor* (sea beasts; 1510) and *āglǣca(n)* (monsters; 1512); who are all, evidently, the mother's creatures. Her claws, however, are defeated by the hero's armour; he eventually dispatches her with a huge magical sword, part of the heap of her victims' leavings.

As well as hybridity and metamorphosis, the account of Grendel's mother, like the legends of Bóand and Port Lairge, contains oneiric markers: changes of scale (gigantic) and state (dismemberment) (cf. Milne 2008; 2024: Ch. 3). One is reminded of Pausanias (2.10.2), describing the sanctuary of Asklepios at Sikyon (Gulf of Corinth): "In the stoa lies the huge bone of an enormous sea monster, and, behind this, statues of Dream and Sleep lulling a lion…" (Stafford 2003: 92–93).

A spectacular scale transformation occurs in the legend of the Crane-bag, in *Duanaire Finn*. Iuchra turns the maiden Aoife, her rival in love, into a crane:

> *Iuchra, enraged, beguiled Aoife to come swimming, it was no happy visit:*
> *when she drove her fiercely forth in the form of a crane over the moorlands.*
> *Aoife then demanded of the beautiful daughter of Abhartach: 'How long*
> *am I to be in this form, woman, beautiful breast-white Iuchra?'*
> *'The term I will fix will not be short for thee, Aoife of the slow-glancing eyes:*
> *thou shalt be two hundred white years in the noble house of Manannán.*
> *'Thou shalt be always in that house with everyone mocking thee, a crane*
> *that does not visit every land: thou shalt not reach any land…'*[43]

This metamorphosis is not the end; when Aoife dies:

> *'A good vessel of treasures will be made of thy skin… in distant times the*
> *Crane-bag…'*

This Crane-bag [*corrbolg*], infinite in size and capacity, is thus the magical skin of a waterbird-woman. In it, the sea god Manannán keeps mythic and royal possessions.[44] Structurally, then, this inexhaustible bag resembles the

Greek Cornucopia, which also has an aquatic pedigree: it is the horn Herakles tears from Acheloos, shapeshifting river-god (and father of Sirens), in a fight motivated by love-rivalry.

The Crane-bag's impossible topology is tied to the ocean: "When the sea was full, its treasures were visible in its middle: when the fierce sea was in ebb, the Crane-bag in turn was empty."[45] This recalls the Norse legend of the magic drinking-horn, which Thor cannot drain because its (occluded) end draws from the sea.[46] The Crane-bag passes around the heroes (always retrieved by Manannán), until, as Conaire sleeps on Tara, he wakes to find it round his neck.

In the time of Gerald of Wales (1146–1223), it was remembered that crane-flesh had been *tabu* in Ireland. In Scots folklore, the crane [*cor-*; =crane, heron, etc] signified a mean, parsimonious woman, and/or death.[47] In the Scottish Highlands:

> *If a person is thought to be too long alive, and it becomes desirable to get rid of him, his death can be ensured by bawling to him thrice through the key-hole of the room in which he is bedrid[den]:*
> *"Will you come or will you go? / Or will you eat the flesh of cranes?"*
> (Campbell 1900: 240)

European folktales and ballads are, of course, full of enchanted waterbird-women, driven into non-human shapes, like Aoife, by malign intent (desire) on the part of a magic-worker. Swan-maidens (ATU D36.1) form a subgenre here. Merwomen, like seal-women [*selkies*], feature in tales and lore as a type of Animal Bride.[48] As Darwin (2019: 5) argues, ML4080 (*The Seal Woman*) could be more accurately titled, *The Mermaid Legend*: a man takes and hides a watermaid's possession (skin, garment etc), compelling her to be his wife, until the object is found, or some other prohibition broken. Mélusine is a water-bride of this kind, famous in 14C romance for conferring authority and prosperity, and typically represented visually in hybrid form (fig. 10a).[49]

The Irish and Gaelic terminology for *mermaid*, like the 14C English word, consists of compounds of words for women and water: thus *maighdean mhara* [sea-maiden], *maighdean chuain* [bay-maiden], *bean na fairrge* [woman of the sea]; in Danish, *havfru* [sea-woman]; Swedish *havstroll* [sea troll/magical be-ing], *sjöjungfru* [sea-maiden], and *sjörå* [lake-spirit] (Darwin 2019: 35–36). Interestingly, in this last exemplar, the second element *rå* derives from *råda* [to rule, to advise] (Klintberg 2010: 97; Darwin 2019: 36).[50]

In legends concerning more elemental waterwomen figures, such as the (ugly) *vodianikha* of Northern Great Russia (Ivanits 1992: 77; Hilton 2011 [1995]: 143–146), or the Estonian Mistress of Water, the ingredients are arranged

differently. Here is an account of a meeting with the latter, told by 42-year-old Emilie Kruuspak in 1929:

> *My great-grandmother was on her way to the town. Near the bridge of Saula she saw a woman in the river washing her breasts, standing with her back towards her. She had yellow hair and broad hips.* [Though] *she had not seen her before, Great-grandmother shouted: "Good morning, Mistress of Water (*vee-emand*)!" The woman answered through her nose: "Good day to you. Let your grandchildren live a happy life until the fourth and fifth generation; they will not die a watery death!" This happened in summer-time at sunrise. In the evening the grandmother heard that, in the place where the water-spirit (*vee-vaim*) had sat, a girl had drowned while washing the sheep. This unlucky girl also had long yellow hair.*[51]

Key details here include the liminal time/place, and the elements of deflection/duplication, death and prophecy. The Mistress faces backwards, taking the likeness of a particular woman-type, one of which she will kill later on that day. When greeted properly, her power to harm is averted onto this other victim; she grants also a (time-sensitive) boon: grandchildren protected, descendants safe from drowning.

In a mid-19C Gotland story, a boy who plays the flute meets a mermaid at the shore; there they make music together and she sings.[52] After several encounters, he becomes obsessed and tries to seize her. As she turns to flee, he sees her back is hollow; like the *boss-backed* [bow-backed] elves of Scotland and certain kinds of *incubi*.[53]

Issues of scale and shapeshifting are clear in a mid-19C tale collected from a Highland fisherman, near Inverary, Scotland. A princess seeking her lost husband plays her harp on the shore:

> *the sea-maiden came up to listen, for* [they] *are fonder of music than any other creatures, and when* [the princess] *saw the sea-maiden she stopped. The sea-maiden said "Play on", but she said 'No, not till I see my man again'. So the sea-maiden put up his head. (Who do you mean? Out of her mouth, to be sure. She had swallowed him.) She played again, and stopped, and the sea-maiden put him up to the waist. Then she played again and stopped, and the sea-maiden placed him on her palm. Then he thought of the falcon, and became one, and flew on shore. But the sea-maiden took the wife.* (after Campbell 1994 [1860]: I, 98)

This presents a topological transformation and complication of the *figura* (cf. fig. 10b). Bewitching music emanates from the human woman, not the sea-maid. What emerges from the Siren's mouth is not magical song (provoking desire), but her male human victim, himself the object of the beholder's desire. And it is this original victim who then shapeshifts into a bird, by "thought". Subsequently, the man kills the sea-maiden by finding her detached soul, hidden in an egg (ATU 302, E710), but the mortal female harpist dies.

The variable forms of thousands of mermaid-sirens, created during the Middle Ages, parallel and prefigure this capacity for topological diversification (cf. figs. 10b–i).[54] As a hybrid, evidently, the womanfish/bird could "speciate" in many directions, and remain recognisable as a mermaid/siren, as long as a minimal two recognisable referents were conserved. As monastic authors battled to reconcile competing fish-versus-bird accounts in their antique sources, the Romance languages adopted *sirena* – as in the French *sirène-oiseau, sirène-poisson* – to denote all waterwoman exemplars, however visually diverse. Leclercq-Marx (2002b: 64) sees the medieval proliferation as resulting from the collision of two distinct and contradictory traditions. The first is the hugely popular bestiary genre, from the late Classical *Physiologus* to the 14C encyclopedists.[55] Such writers moralised Sirens as emblematic of vice – usually Lust [=appetite, desire] – and tried also to reconcile them with biblical references, guided by St. Jerome's translations of Old Testament monsters (e.g. Isaiah 13:22) as Classical types.[56] New waterwoman-variants combining bird and fish (cf. fig. 10a, g–h) are evidence of cross-stimulation in the interartefactual domains of church sculptural decoration and manuscript illumination. The other tradition motivating this visual radiation Leclercq-Marx (2002: 59–64) calls "Nordic-Germanic": that is, more positive (or at least ambivalent) views of waterwomen as sources of occult power (cf. selkie brides, Mélusine), bringing prosperity, healing, prophecy or help at sea.

Emblematic of this strand, she observes, are medieval innovations such as the lactating *sirène-poisson* (fig. 10c–e). While the medieval motif has an independent evolution, Buschor (1944: 36–37) discusses Classical Siren-types, for example, on the corners of this Lycian tomb (5C BCE, Lycia, Turkey), where flying women-birds each clutch a small human or child to their breasts (fig. 22a).[57] In context, the diminutive humans must stand here for (dead) souls; but visually the arrangement resembles the medieval lactating mermaid-siren. The later child-at-breast variants clearly express – make visible – the raw potential fertility characteristic of folk-waterwoman. The idea resonates with the prominence of midwifery in tales of Basque "sirens" [*laminak*]. Though often indistinguishable from fairies, around the Bay of Biscay, *laminak* may appear as half-woman, half-fish. Some dwell in wells, rivers and caves. They can

change size and shape, and, like Mélusine, they build towers and gift wealth (Echeverria 2016; Williams 1989: 109–125).

THE SIREN

I want now to argue that we can take further the clue that waterwomen power derives from unused fertility, and consider the *figura* as a whole as encoding desire in various ways. In Barber's terms, the potential energy of the water-woman has an inherent charge of desire. Changes in how such creatures are visualised – mentally and in material culture – could then be expected to register changing views about passion and longing, in the framework of gender binaries. Let us start with the evolutionary history of the familiar Classical Siren-image (fig. 11a).

As with medieval mermaid-sirens, the ancient variety came in many shapes. An early depiction of the *Odyssey* episode demonstrates that, like later waterwomen, Sirens could be represented as double in form. On this *aryballos* (fig. 12a–b), along with Odysseus, his ship and companions, the Sirens appear twice: as two hybrids, sitting on the rock at right, and as two huge birds, attacking the boat.[58] The (loan) word, *ΣΙΡΕΝ*, is attached to human-headed bird-figures on two extant 6C BCE vases (e.g. fig. 13a); without these, perhaps, we would not now be referring to every similar hybrid before them as Sirens.[59]

The key context colouring the name is, of course, Homer (c. 200 years before the first labelled vases). His Sirens say to Odysseus:

> *Come here to us…heave your ship so you may hear the song we sing. Never yet has anyone passed by here in his black ship until he has heard the honey-sweet voice from our mouths; instead he goes home filled with delight and knowing much more.* [For] *we have foreknowledge of all that is going to happen on this fruitful earth …* (Odyssey XII.182-91)[60]

Homer's Sirens are plural – minimally two – later turned into the folktale number of three.[61] As often noted, Homer provides few visual details. Apollonius of Rhodes (3C BCE; IV.896-900) is the earliest Greek author to explicitly describe them as hybrid. Homer's Sirens are monsters mainly because of what they do; their "honey-sweet" song is a fatal trap. Odysseus fills his sailors' ears with beeswax – itself "honey-sweet" (sympathetic magic, perhaps, as well as practical) – rendering his men deaf and immune. Otherwise, those who hear the song dive overboard to reach its source; to die, it seems, without gaining

any of the objects of desire promised by the singers. Longing, magical coercion, death, duplicity, prophecy and hallucination are thus built into this passage.

But not sleep. That element emerges in a later era, from the *Physiologus* tradition, supported by Leclercq-Marx's "Nordic-Germanic" ideas. Medieval Irish writers draw on the Homeric episode, adding this further oneiric twist. In the *Lebor Gabála Érenn* (*Book of Invasions of Ireland*, 11C), when an ancestral chieftain and his men encounter the Sirens in the Caspian Sea, they are impelled to sleep, not to dive and die on the rocks:

> *It is Caicher the druid who gave the remedy to them, when the Siren(s?) was/were making melody to them: sleep was overcoming them at the music. This is the remedy Caicher found for them, to melt wax in their ears.*[62]

The idea recurs in other sources from the 12C on. In verses from the *Book of Leinster*, only Odysseus puts wax in his ears to encounter the Sirens.[63] So strong is the association that some manuscript illustrations of Homer depict the Siren episode with sleeping sailors, in direct contradiction to the action in the text (cf. fig. 14a–b).

In a version of the popular *Voyage of St. Brendan*,[64] Brendan and his monks encounter a mermaid who sends them to sleep:

> *...they saw a beast coming towards them with a human body and face, but from the waist downwards it was a fish. It is called a siren, a very lovely creature with a beautiful human shape; it sings so well and its voice is so sweet that whoever hears it cannot resist sleep and does not know what he is doing. When this sea monster approached them, the sailors fell asleep and let the ship drift: the monks too forgot themselves completely because of its voice and did not know where they were* (Middle High German, 14C).[65]

Diverting the direct way desire works in Homer, rather than suicidal action, medieval siren-songs compel loss of consciousness in their listeners, who, like Rúad, are in some sense both entranced and drowned. Indigenous concepts to do with the drone-like "music" of the sea and its power to lull or enchant, supported by the synthetic monastic tradition,[66] seem to inform this perception of the Sirens, creating a more circuitous and complex vector for desire than the original.

From Hellenistic times, around the boot of Italy, death and unrequited love were attached to the Siren-mythos in a different way, through a rearrangement of subjectivity: here, it was the Sirens themselves who felt strong emotion and met with doom. The Sirens' names become (relatively) fixed; one is Parthenope,

represented as suiciding into the sea, motivated by fatal passion for Odysseus himself (e.g. fig. 11a). Greek colonial cities on the coasts of Campania and Calabria sanctified places where Siren-bodies were said to have washed ashore: annual games and a temple on the Sorrentine peninsula; Parthenope's tomb near Naples (Neapolis).[67] Taking the Sirens as founding water-nymphs in this way, they "killed the monster inside the Sirens [and] remade them into useful tools of redemption" (Taylor 2014: 187). This development moved them closer to the *vily/rusalka* template.

Neapolitan coins carry both the heads of Parthenope (fig. 15a), and of the horned river-god, Sebothos (fig. 15b). South of Campania, on another Siren coast, the head on Terinan coins is that of their patron water-nymph, Terina (fig. 15c). While the Neapolitan Parthenope reverse has a man-headed river-god, other city coins of the region display winged Sirens, seated on flowing jars (fig. 15b–c; cf. 7c). Thus identified as river-nymphs, their recuperation into benevolent waterwomen is complete.[68] Into the 20C, women in Naples and Campania wore *sirena*-charms – stamped from tin or silver – against the Evil Eye (Berry 1968: 252–256). Equipped with bells and crown, the bodies of these twin-tailed *sirene* extend into double-headed hippocampi, or morph into foliate shapes (figs. 15d–e). The stamped charms have identical backs and fronts; in a sense, these too are waterwomen with only one surface.

Effectively, then, it is "invented tradition" (cf. Hobsbawm & Ranger 2012 [1983]) which connects figures such as this bearded human-headed bird (fig. 16a),[69] Homer's Sirens, and the later cascades of fish-tailed and bird-bodied creatures. However, a common association with death – more precisely, with transit to the Otherworld – is contained, as it were, in the DNA of the form. The human-headed bird predates the *Odyssey* by millennia; the word, *siren*, also seems to be a Near-Eastern borrowing (Luján & Vita 2018). Somewhere in the ancestry of this image is the *ba* of the Egyptians (fig. 5), an undying part of the human ghost.[70] The Siren-forms were "selected for" in funerary visual culture over an enormous territory and time period (cf. fig. 17) – appearing on *Totenmahl* cauldrons and tomb cisterns (figs. 18a–c; cf. figs. 22a–b, 23a–b)[71] – maintaining their strong connection with death, that ultimate transformation, into the Classical and later eras.

The ubiquity of Sirens in ancient visual culture demonstrates also their affinity with *paratactic*[72] mythic figuration (cf. figs. 16a–b, 19a–b, 20). Siren-imagery was part of the craft repertoire of "decorative" elements (rosettes, palm-fronds, panthers etc.). In the domain of vase-painting, for instance, such motifs were arranged to create imagistic (paratactic) rather than narrational (syntactic) signifying fields.[73] Thousands of Siren-bearing objects exemplify this associative approach to the mythic. Thus, a jar bearing a bearded Siren (fig. 16a)

between two panthers has on the reverse a bull (fig. 16b) – a common form for water-gods such as Acheloos (cf. fig. 20, 32b–d) – and a common sacrificial animal. Another *aryballos* (fig. 19a-b) presents a Siren on one side, a waterbird on the other. The Siren is also often paired with Eros (fig. 16c). In a complex use of what Sourvinou-Inwood (1990: 396) calls an "iconographic schema without a fixed meaning but with a basic semantic core", consider how the siren-image is placed above the main scene on this South Italian neckamphora (fig. 20). Directly below it, Eros hovers over a fountain, flanked by nymphs bearing jugs; one rides a human-headed bull (=water-god).[74] Above right, a muffled face in a window frame makes the funerary context clear.

From the late 5C BCE on, Greeks, Etruscans and Romans foregrounded Sirens along with waterwomen – and marine imagery generally – in funerary sculpture. There, Nereids on dolphins or hippocamps (fig. 21a) sing for the dead,[75] and the *Odyssey* Siren episode is deployed as a ready-made set-piece, both of song and sea (e.g. fig. 22b). Sophocles (c. 496–406 BCE) has his Odysseus call the Sirens "daughters of Phorkys" (an old sea-god), who "sing the lays of Hades" at the gates to the underworld.[76] As solo statues-in-the-round, siren-forms were placed atop grave monuments (e.g. figs. 23a–b), and inserted into or beside banquet scenes.[77] The same associations which Homer attributed to his Sirens – second sight, extreme emotion – inform the "immanent context"[78] of such funerary imagery; a Siren with a lyre is both psychopomp and mourner.

Both degree and kind of anthropomorphism vary in these depictions. Sirens on Etruscan sarcophagi (e.g. fig. 22b) are typically fully human. The Romans preferred to represent water-deities as humans with standard props – the jar flowing with water (figs. 7c, 15b–c) – or aquatic (often hybrid) steeds: so sea-nymphs ride sea-monsters (figs. 21a–c); Sequana stands in a duck-prowed boat (fig. 8b).

EXCURSUS ON DESIRE

Evidently the corpus of waterwomen considered so far – river-spirits, sea-women, swan-maidens and Sirens – turns on, and so configures, aspects of dangerous, unrequited, wild desire in various ways. Mortals whose fertility is unconsummated (abandoned or ill-fated lovers) may become waterwomen; represented visually as human women, or with one unearthly quality (green hair, hollow back), or as hybrid. The bird-humans used to illustrate Homer's Sirens – usually with woman's head and breasts – make themselves objects of desire through song. Can we then read "selections for" changes in topological complexity – favouring particular forms (or formulae) in our mythos – in relation

to shifting conceptualisations of desire? Is there a discernable relationship between the shapes of the waterwoman and different configurations of desire?

Weiss's analysis of ancient Greek concepts of desire starts with the names of the three *erotes* [ἔρωτες], the gods of desire: Eros [ἔρος], Pothos [Πόθος] and [H]Imeros [ἵμερος]. Visually, the *erotes* seem interchangeable (three winged youths). In vase-painting, they appear among Aphrodite's "train of erotic personifications" (cf. Stafford 2013: 176 n. 6; Breitenberger 2007). Their wings, Shapiro thinks (1993: 110–124), are an "orientalizing" borrowing. When Pausanias (1.43.6) mentions their statues (at Aphrodite's shrine in Megara), he is skeptical that one can distinguish among them.[79] However, in fact, their differences are important. Though he may pull Aphrodite's chariot, Pothos, for instance, never denotes physical desire. He represents longing for an absent object; hence his role in funerary art.[80]

The other two are both attested much earlier. Hesiod places Eros – *limb-melter...who overpowers the mind*[81] – among the four primeval gods; his earliest cult in Athens (c. 540–520 BCE) celebrates this capacity.[82] Older than Aphrodite, whose birth they attend (*Theogony* 201–202), both Eros and Imeros denote aspects of sexual passion. They also share an etymology. According to Weiss (1998: 50), the key distinction between them is this:

> ἔρος *is desire conceived of as subject-internal in its origin and its end.* ἵμερος *on the other hand, is a compulsive desire of external origin.*

It transpires that Indo-European words for *love/desire* (transitive verb) have varied sources. The Greek root *ἔρ(α)- (love) – hence, *eros* and *imeros* – like Latin *delegere* (love/desire) – descends from a PIE root, *h_1erh_2 (take/choose [a]part); (cf. Hittite *arhāŝ* [border], Latin *ōra* [border/divide], Old Irish *or*, Lithuanian *ìrti*).[83] This root carries the idea of division: to divide (a desired object) for one's self. The semantic evolution, then, is: *takes apart* (for oneself) > *enjoys* > *loves*. Verbal roots meaning *divide,* then *cut* (for oneself), develop to mean *enjoy / seek to enjoy*, and finally, *seek to enjoy / love*. So, the sister words ἔρος and ἵμερος came to mean *desire*, *use*, *need*, developing from *have enjoyment of / carry off* (e.g. as booty).[84]

One thing we know about the original Indo-Europeans – because it figures large in both the myths (cf. Dagda's hostel; Odin's Valhalla) and the cultures (Anthony 2007: 160–192, 263–307) of their descendants – is the importance of the feast. From the Bronze Age to the Viking era, chiefs consolidated power by apportioning choice cuts of the meat (cattle) to followers as marks of favour. Greek banqueting nomenclature preserved this sense of *h_1erh_2- [divide]; so ἔρανος is "a meal to which each contributed his share"[85] Consider the cognate

eris (ἔρις [discord]), where a different specialised meaning emerges from *division*: to *quarrel* (cf. ON *deila* [quarrel], from the verb *deila* [divide, deal]; Greek ἔ-ρις [contest, battle], from δέρω [flay]):

> *The antipodal* ἔρος *and* ἔρις *then... share a common root in linguistic prehistory, as they do so often in the human psyche* (Weiss 1998: 47; cf. Haudry 1993: 169–189)

In an otherwise mysterious example, stemming from the same root as *eros*, Latin *ora* [a ship's rope], is the rope that is cut (apart) or untied to release the ship.[86] This usage – possibly originally sailors' slang – conveys ideas of release from tension, along with unstoppable directed movement; helping us to see how the root sense, *divide*, came to mean *long for, yearn, take pleasure in*.

Weiss (1998: 50) explains:

> ἵμερος *is said to be a condition stirred up by someone's words (the verb used is* ὦρσε *Odyssey 4.113, 4.183; Iliad 23.14, 23.108, 23.153) [or] thrown into someone's* θυμός *[thûmos = heart/mind/will], by a god (*Iliad *3.139; Hymn to Aphrodite 45, 53, 73, 143). This is never the case for* ἔρος.

There are important differences, then, in how the two forms of desire are seen as starting, and how they end. The formula for the end of an attack of ἔρος is *to put away* [or *pack up*] *desire*; e.g.:

> αύτὰρ ἐπεὶ πόσιος καὶ ἐδητύος ἐξ ἔρον ἕντο
> [when they had put away their desire ...]
> (*Iliad* 1.469)

But, when ἵμερος ends, it "leaves of its own accord" (Weiss, loc. cit.):

> καί οἱ ἀπὸ πραπίδων ἦλθ' ἵμερος ἠδ' ἀπὸ γυίων
> [and the passion for it had gone from his mind and body ...]
> (*Iliad* 24.514)

The actions of gods clarify this distinction. In the *Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite 5,* the ἔρος-passion grips Anchises at line 5.91, when he sees the goddess [Ἀγχίσην δ' ἔρος εἷλεν]. Aphrodite seduces him with a deceptive speech, then sows ἵμερος in his θυμός [thûmos], at line 5.143:

Ὣς εἰποῦσα θεὰ γλυκὺν ἵμερον ἔμβαλε θυμῷ.
[When she had so spoken, the goddess implanted sweet lust in his bosom]

After this, his desire is imperative:[87]

οὔ τις ἔπειτα θεῶν οὔτε θνητῶν ἀνθρώπων / ἐνθάδε με σχήσει πρὶν σῇ φιλότητι μιγῆναι / αὐτίκα νῦν:
[then neither god nor mortal man shall here restrain me till I have lain with you in love right now] (5.149-51)

Visual conventions support the point. The oldest depictions of the Erotes are on vase paintings, in *Judgements of Paris* and *Abductions of Helen*; in both scenes, their presence became mandatory. In our two examples, the Himeros figure literally grips Paris (figs. 25–26).[88]

Further evidence for the compulsive and external character of ἵμερος comes from sex magic. Aphrodite's girdle, wherein ἵμερος abides (*Iliad* 14.216), works in this way. When Hera binds Zeus with it, Zeus says:

ὡς σέο νῦν ἔραμαι καί με γλυκὺς ἵμερος αἱρεῖ
[never have I loved any woman as I have loved you, and the sweet passion [ἵμερον] has taken over me]
(*Iliad* 14.328)

Plato also chooses ἵμερος as the word to describe love kindled by god-like beauty (Phaedrus 251c & e), "as the effluence of beauty enters… through the eyes" (Phaedrus 251b).

Weiss deduces that an ancestor of ἵμερος must have been "a verbal abstract meaning 'magical binding'" (1998: 53).[89] In this context, ἵμερος has many attestations (and an exact parallel in English: *to spellbind / be spellbound*; cf. Versnel 1998: 217–267). Socrates speaks of the Sirens' song in this sense, calling it an incantation [*epōidē, ἐπ οιδή*].[90] The Nestor Cup inscription (750–700 BCE, figs. 26a–b) takes the form of a spell to create *imeros*:

Νέστορος ἐ[στ]ὶ εὔποτ[ον] ποτέριο[ν].	Nestor's cup, good to drink from.
ἡὸς δ ἂν τõδε π[ίε]σι ποτερί[ο] αὐτίκα	Whoever drinks from this cup, him straightaway
κῆνον Ἱμερ[ος hαιρ] ἑσεὶ καλλιστε	
[φά]νο Ἀφροδίτες.[91]	the desire of beautiful-crowned Aphrodite will seize

(Watkins 1976; West 1994; Faraone 1996; Gaunt 2017).

In *defixiones* or κατάδεσμοι texts (curse tablets < Greek δέω [bind]), κατα δέω [bind down]), *imeros* frequently implies a sex-spell. A 3C magical-aphrodisiac Alexandrian text (*PGM* XV) exemplifies this well-known rhetoric:

> *I will bind you, Nilos, who is also* [called] *Agathos Daimon, whom Demetria bore, with great evils... you will love me, Capitolina whom Pepcrous bore, with a divine passion, and in every way you will be for me an escort, as long as I want...*[92]

Next, the speaker lists and describes specific daimons to help in this task. Their characteristics echo those of the folk-waterwomen spirits in Barber's analysis:

> I also conjure you, daimons, who are in this place, ALYĒAĒL... LIONŌ SOUAPH ALŌ LYBALOLYBĒL OIKALLISSAMAEŌ LYBALALŌNĒ LYLŌĒY LYOTHNOIS ODISSASON ALELADA. I, Capitolina, have the power... *They* [the demons] *are releasing* **all who have drowned, have died unmarried, and have been carried away by the wind**. ... I am conjuring you, daimons, by the force and fate that constrains you. Accomplish everything for me and rush in and take away the mind of Nilos... in order that he might love me, Capitolina... I conjure you... by those carried by the wind, ... the greatest daimon... *who shakes the deep, sending out waters and winds...* Nilos shall love me with an eternal affection; immediately, immediately; quickly [quickly!] [emphasis added].

A charm against migraine from the same period (epigraph, p. 1) presents a similar constellation of elements. The demon Antaura comes from the sea, bearing pain, obliterating thought. Her bovid animal cries constitute a "message" outwith human language. Early *Physiologus* texts characterise the Sirens as shrieking *loudly*, or, in *diverse voices* [*clamitantia uocibus altis*, or, *diuersus*]; thus reversing the polarity of their irresistible song.[93] The charm next invokes Artemis of Ephesos (fig. 27a) to confront Antaura. This is a case of like fighting like; Artemis was, among other things, a Mistress of Animals and patron of fertility, whose cultic animals include snakes and waterbirds.[94] At Artemis Achna, on Cyprus, the statue of the goddess wears a crown of siren-figures (fig. 27b); elsewhere, Artemis carries a mirror and bears two sirens (fig. 27c). At Artemis Orthia, Sparta, among the votive offerings in the archaic style is a limestone fish-tailed female figure (Léger 2015: App.2:11, #17). Pausanias (8.41.6) describes the cult statue of the river goddess Eurynome (another Artemis variant), paraded at her festival: "golden chains bind the wooden image... a woman as far as the hips, but below this a fish..."[95]

Antaura, the charm's sea-demon, seems to arise as a negative avatar of *Aura*. *Aura* (singular) could mean *nymph* or *maiden*; the *aurai* (plural) were wind-nymphs, daughters of Ocean.[96] Aura was also the name given to a Titan-companion of Artemis, whose legend again follows the Barber template: according to a late 4C epic, Dionysius drugs Aura into sleep and impregnates her; she then goes mad, kills their resulting offspring and throws herself into the sea.[97]

It seems, then, that by late antiquity, the mytheme-constituents of our waterwoman *figura* had already linked and coalesced: this is why the spirits invoked for sex-magic include *all who have drowned*, *have died unmarried*, *and have been carried away by the wind.* Later Christian variants of the migraine charm conserve the complex of female sea-demon / animal-noise / head-pain, substituting Mary or a specialist saint as intercessor (Barb 1966: 2–3). Like the voices of *Physiologus*'s Sirens, or spirits roll-called in spells, waterwomen tended to multiply in charms. In a widespread Orthodox icon-type (figs. 28a–b), SS. Sisinnius and Michael repel a crowd of sickness-spirits, depicted as naked women standing in water.[98] For the Southern Italians, we recall, the sirens were recuperated as benign aquatic patrons; singular, named, and silent. In the sheaf of parallel traditions attested in sex-spells and head-pain charms, watery female spirits are malignant, plural, often anonymous, and/or capable of making horrible noises.

LOCATION OF EROS/IMEROS & THE FIGURA

Further implications follow from Weiss's argument (1998: 50) that: "ἔρος is desire conceived of as subject-internal in its origin and its end; ἵμερος is a compulsive desire of external origin." The first is to do with changes in how people conceptualise particular psychological states. The second is to do with what happens when the constellation of signifiers originally used for denoting that state – its rhetoric – is pressed into service for the new conception. This has a relevance for understanding what might drive topological metamorphosis in the evolution of waterwoman *figura* variants.

This section of the argument has three parts. First, pivoting from our case-history of Eros and Imeros, we can consider this as evidence of how culture can (re-)locate the vector of emotions spatially.[99] Over time, in the IE terminology of desire, the sense of certain roots switches from external to internal.[100] The flip is in the viewpoint; in how the point of origin is ascribed to the emotion (affect), as inside or outside the subjective self. Weiss cites parallels for such changes of direction/viewpoint involving feeling:

> OE *fār* [danger] → modern English *fear*
> Latin *poena* [punishment] → English *pain*
> Latin *odium* [hatred], but originally *disgust, repugnance*[101]

Second, the *imeros*/*eros* distinction is, at its heart, a matter of emphasis: desire is either imposed from without, or wells from within. Only in certain kinds of representation – including mythic discourse – is it necessary to decide which is which. Another way of putting this might be to say that the capacity to inflict desire on humans – effectively against their will – is itself the hallmark of a magical or occult being.[102] But, in visual media, this distinction cannot be made: images must externalise, dramatise, in order to represent inner states at all. So, for example, the lactating mermaid-siren "makes visible" latent beliefs about waterwoman fertility.

More directly, in vase-painting conventions, Erotes-figures were used as "a kind of caption for the desire of others" (Lewis 2002: 143–144);[103] thus they are depicted perched on, or hovering over, the relevant humans (figs. 25a–b; Stafford 2003: 83). The necessary visual bias towards externality is further weighted by equipping them with *iynx* wheels (tools of sex-magic), or weapons. The famous bow-and-arrow of desire, later ascribed to Cupid, is attested first (c. 480 BCE) in this context in the visual arts;[104] more commonly, an Erotes-figure would be shown wielding a whip (e.g. fig. 29a; cf. Faraone 1999: 45–46).

Third, in the modern paradigm, all types of desire can only originate in the subject experiencing the emotion. Over *longue durée* trajectories, the move towards this point of view must have involved shifts in how desire was spatially perceived, accompanying twists in terminology (such as *danger → fear*). What happens, during these long turns, to visual traditions for representing the action of desire? It is not simply that one archaic explanatory paradigm (*imeros*) is eclipsed by, or replaces, another (*eros*); as we have seen, these models originally co-existed.[105] Rather, I suggest, because the imagistic repertoire of *figurae* expresses a model of supernatural intrusion from outside, selective pressure for the re-location of affect in this repertoire would favour the creation of novel or updated variants, with folded or twisted topology.

Such variants generate visibly surreal or oneiric effects, which accompany and (arguably) express shifts and complications in the vector of desire. The substitution of sleep for suicidal action, in medieval encounters with sirens or singing mermaids, amounts to a deflection of desire: the victims fall first into the world of dream, not death. In the case of the Swedish Finn, the lake-spirit bird alters his consciousness (he cannot aim his gun), causing visual perceptual confusion, of the kind associated with dreams, enchantment and fever. The convoluted topology of the Scots 19C tale matches its pattern of desire:

the sea-maiden, desiring the mortal husband, has swallowed him; the mortal wife desiring the return of her man, uses music to compel the waterwoman to disgorge him; in a parallel to these containments, the sea-maid's external soul is retrieved from inside its egg.

Shakespeare stretches the elements of Cupid's arrow through a marvellous interpolation about a magical love elixir, involving dream-like convolutions of space and time (c. 1595; *Midsummer Night's Dream* II.i.165–172). Sometime in the past, Cupid misses with his arrow; it hits a plant, turning it purple; Oberon observes this. Time passes; Oberon now has a use for this plant and directs Puck to collect it by circumnavigating the globe. Puck squeezes its juice and applies it to the mortal lovers' eyes as they sleep, effectively switching their feelings from *eros* to *imeros*. This entire conceit quite literally displaces and rearranges the pattern of Eros's weapon as a *figura*. The elements are radically stretched apart, three or four mediations are introduced, great distances open in time and space; yet the daimon, his power of arousing desire, and his weapon, are all still there in the imagery.[106] In a (much less impressive) but kindred process of repression and substitution, a 19C restorer found the whip of an Eros-figure in a vase-painting too much for current sensibilities; channelling Shakespeare perhaps, he "restored" it into a flower (fig. 29b; Faraone 1999: 45).

OVID & METAMORPHOSIS

With the issue of subjective versus objective desire in mind, and the complications of form that ensue when their vectors are deflected or displaced, we can now return to Ovid and his cohort of aquatic women. In narrating about 250 watery shapechanges (for a selection, see Table 1), Ovid often improved on his late Hellenistic sources, creating metamorphoses where none existed in earlier accounts; he makes Arethusa (V. 527), for example, transformed through jealous desire (cf. Niobe; Iuthra).[107] And he uses the *imeros/eros* distinction to direct his changes of form (see Table 1). Salmacis wants to fuse with Hermaphroditus (driven by ἔρος). Hades turns Cyane into mute water as she tries to prevent Persephone's abduction (a case of ἵμερος). Shape-shifting Thetis is bound and raped by Peleus, on the advice of another shape-shifter, Proteus (ἵμερος) (Forbes-Irving 1990: 181–184). From this violent union comes Achilles. Ovid equally evokes sleep and the underworld in other aquatic stories (Syrinx, Alcyone). His Narcissus (though male) is worth noting as a watery object of desire; even when dead, he continues to see – and long for – his reflection in the river Styx.

Ovid also decides to clarify certain exceptional features in the cases of Scylla and the Sirens. In Homer, Scylla is wholly sea-monster, and malevolent appetite

incarnate. Among her other oneiric qualities, she seems to occupy several places at once. Her multiple appendages move at uncanny speed: six serpentine necks bearing many-toothed heads; twelve feet "waving in the air". Only these append-ages protrude from her cave to hunt;[108] her lower body is hidden and not described.

Ovid instead has Scylla start as a maiden, who metamorphoses as a conse-quence of ἵμερος; this is one of his Hellenistic elevations (Forbes-Irving 1999: 20; Hopman 2013: 91–112, esp. 95; Buitron et al. 1992). He opens the episode – and sets its tone – with an *adynaton*.[109] Scylla has a suitor, the sea-god Glaucus, who is in turn desired by the magic-worker Circe. Glaucus repudiates Circe's advances, declaring, *Sooner shall foliage grow on the sea, and sooner shall sea-weeds spring up on the mountaintops, than shall my love change while Scylla lives* (*Met.* XIV.35; cf. Forbes-Irving 1990: 177). Jealousy then moves Circe (as with Iuthra) to shapeshift her rival, but not directly; she concocts magic herbs to poison a pool where Scylla bathes (*Met.* XIV.55–65; Hopman 2013: 226; Gordon 1987: 59–60, 63–64); submersion in this charged water makes her a monster. Elsewhere in Homer, of course, Circe conducts other human-animal transformations using drugs. But Ovid choreographs the elements of Scylla's transformation quite differently. He stresses the external passion-motive, the mechanism (water on the bathing woman's skin) and its monstrous hybrid outcome, and in so doing, integrates his Scylla into the waterwoman *figura*.

Ovid also takes the details of Scylla's hybrid shape from visual tradition, rather than from Homer. In Classical art, she was usually represented as a kind of mermaid: a beautiful woman above the waist, with serpentine fish-tail and belt of dog-heads (fig. 30a–b). This pattern was followed in medieval illustra-tion, as in this Ovid MS, where the artist poses Scylla like a mermaid, upright in the sea, wearing a skirt of tentacles, with dog-head terminals (fig. 30c). A spectacular Roman table-stand (fig. 31)[110] on the contrary emphasises Scylla's impossible monstrosity through shifts in scale as in a *phantasma* [nightmare]. This Scylla is a gigantic maiden-octopus, dismembering diminutive sailors. At the other end of the table, she is balanced by an equally huge centaur with pan-pipes; a small Eros-figure rides on his back; a bird (eagle?) flies between, holding a snake. The treatment draws together elements from the wider wa-terwoman mythos: music, death, desire, hybridity, change of scale, bird/snake, the sea. The Scylla hybrid form also takes on a meaning separate from the Homeric Scylla: as a type of monster associated with death and dreams, and as an exemplar of all such otherworldly impossibilities. Virgil (70–19 BCE) places "double-shaped Scyllas" [*Scyllae biforme*], along with Gorgons and Harpies, among the pack of monstrous forms stabled by the great tree of false dreams in Hades. To dream of such things as a Scylla, says Artemidorus (2C) signifies false hopes and doomed desires (2012: 230–231).[111]

THE SIRENS

Now to the Sirens. Ovid relates their transformation retrospectively, as a short episode encased in a long song voiced by Calliope, muse of eloquence and epic. He has Jupiter ask about their hybrid appearance, then answers his own question:

> *daughters of Acheloüs, why have you the feathers and feet of birds, though you still have maidens' features? Is it because, when Proserpina was gathering the spring flowers, you were among the number of her companions, ye Sirens, skilled in song? After you had sought in vain for her through all the lands, that the sea also might know your search, you prayed that you might float on beating wings above the waves: you found the gods ready, and suddenly you saw your limbs covered with golden plumage. But, that you might not lose your tuneful voices, so soothing to the ear, and that rich dower of song, maiden features and human voice remained.* (*Metamorphoses* V.552–563) [112]

So, neither *eros* nor *imeros* in Ovid's regular sense is the engine of their transformation. The change is motivated only by their desire to find Proserpina, and to travel between the elements for this purpose. Since this wish remained unfulfilled, it perhaps verges on *Πόθος*. The Sirens are in fact unique in their relations with both *imeros* and hybridity. No account of their genesis attaches ἔρος or ἵμερος directly to their metamorphosis, but the clues to their anomalous status are in their parentage. Ovid calls them daughters of the river god Acheloos. Most ancient authors agree; and most identify the mother as a Muse (Tsiafakis 2003: 92). Greek writers more often credit Acheloos as fathering the water-nymphs; the Romans foreground rather his role as progenitor of Sirens. [113] Instead of descent from a Muse, the Sirens are also described as fully chthonic, springing direct from Mother Earth: impregnated either by Ocean, or by Acheloos's blood, gushing out when Herakles breaks off one of his horns, which becomes the Cornucopia. [114] Relating that story, Ovid has Acheloos's Naiad-daughters retrieve the fallen horn and hallow it. [115] And, as we saw earlier, the Cornucopia and the Irish Crane-bag are *figurae* with parallel attributes. In the manner of dream-distortion, both are complex motifs which decompose, stretch and fold the elements they hold in common: (jealous) desire [ἵμερος], shapeshifting water-creature, body-part repurposed as magical treasure-receptacle.

As a major river and water-deity, Acheloos is a shapeshifter, depicted as a human-headed bull (fig. 32a; cf. figs. 20a & 32c), sometimes as a human-serpentine hybrid (fig. 32b). [116] In his fight with Herakles – impelled by mutual desire for Deinara [="man-destroyer"]) – he loses both horn and blood (figs. 32a–b),

which become magical offspring. The Sirens and the Cornucopia, then, are twin-siblings of a kind, characterised by extremes of lack and plenitude. Ancient mythographers evidently needed to account for the Sirens' power through this kind of mythic parentage. The Muse mother explains the enchanted voice; the shapeshifting river-father informs their boundary-crossing capacity; their alternate origin myths of chthonic birth, sired by Ocean, suggests the same in more primordial terms. Hence their psychopomp role, claims to prophetic omniscience, potent murderous song and winged hybridity.

Homer does not mention wings; Ovid speaks (metonymically) only of feathers and bird feet (*pluma pedesque avium*; *Met.* V.553). But the wings were older than Homer – and remained integral in visual traditions. As we have seen, Classical and medieval illustrators depict Sirens sitting on rocks (figs. 11a, 12, 22b), in or on the sea (figs. 10g, 14b), perching on or hovering over Odysseus' boat (figs. 11a, 12, 14a). Later writers, faced with inconsistencies between textual descriptions and visual depictions, concocted further answers for why the Sirens are winged. Like Ovid, they reached for non-erotic kinds of desire as a mechanism. Ovid's Sirens are said to "wish" or "pray" to receive wings (*Met.* V.558), either on their own account or to seek Persephone/Proserpina. Conversely, the winged form could be glossed rather as a punishment for failing to guard – or find – Persephone (e.g. *Hyginus* l.c). Other accounts bypass the Persephone episode altogether. The Sirens lose their wings in a singing contest with the Muses, or (in late Byzantine commentary) receive wings because they wish to remain virgin, though not under (Ovidian) pressure of desire (threat) from any named entity.[117]

The issue of the Sirens as essentially bird-formed works in relation to their other famous attribute: the power of their song. Rather than being at the centre of a metamorphosis impelled by *eros* or *imeros*, the Sirens, of course, embody desire in themselves: ἵμερος emanates from their interiors through their mouths, from whence comes the honey-sweet call to dream and to death. The BM painter (fig. 11a) names one of his Sirens *Himeropa* (song of desire). And, if we turn the vase around, we see he places on the other side all three Erotes (fig. 11b), naming only one: *Himeros*.

I suggest that it is their anomalous relationship to ἵμερος which makes the Sirens "good to think with" (Lévi-Strauss 1963: 89). Their position as a special case of the waterwoman *figura* stems from their unique articulation of ἵμερος; their song is an inverted Cornucopia-like instrument of desire. This figuration is both stable and dynamic, inviting and enabling millennia of rhetorical variation. John Donne (1572–1631), like Ovid, frames his mermaid-sirens with a string of riddling *adynata* (*Song*, c. 1610):

> *Goe, and catche a falling starre,*
> *Get with child a mandrake roote,*
> *Tell me, where all past yeares are,*
> *Or who cleft the Divels foot,*
> *Teach me to heare Mermaides singing...*[118]

Donne's point is to characterise a faithful woman as an impossibility. He and his readers know that these cosmic impossibilities – catching falling stars, hearing mermaids sing – are metaphors for desire.

DISCOURSE AND COMMENTARY

The generation of variations on, and discussion of, the Sirens are continuous in Western literature, art, and folk culture. Foucauldian concepts of commentary and articulation are useful in understanding this aspect of Siren-imagery – and, by extension, the wider mermaid-siren *figura* – as a *discourse*. Foucault wrote his *Discourse on Language* for his inaugural lecture at the Collège de France. The relevance here for us is how he identifies as central the issue of commentary:

> *the difference between primary texts and secondary texts... permits us to create new discourses ad infinitum: the top-heaviness of the original text, its permanence, its status as discourse ever capable of being brought up to date, the multiple or hidden meanings with which it is credited, the reticence and wealth it is believed to contain, all creates an open possibility for discussion. On the other hand... commentary's only role is to say finally, what has been silently articulated deep down. ... what has already been said... The infinite rippling of commentary is agitated from within by the dream of masked repetition: in the distance there is, perhaps, nothing other than what was there at the point of departure, simple recitation* (Foucault 2010 [1972]: 221).

Siren-representations, as we have seen, do much more than illustrate canonical texts (cf. Milne 2016: 120–121; 2024: Ch. 3). They emanate from, and serve to anchor, a broader visual discourse of uncanny waterwomen; for which, we could say, they work as both commentary and text.

Foucault's formulation, that commentary "must... say, for the first time, what has already been said" (2010 [1972]: 221), illuminates both how such *figurae* work – as "conceptual foci" for mythological traditions – and suggests how best to understand them. The pre-Homeric Sirens already belong to mythic

discourse, as our Neolithic materials make clear; recall the Lepenski Vir ovoids, the murals of Çatalhöyük, the Gotland grave (figs. 2–4). The ongoing "discourse" of the waterwoman is partly imaginary, partly literary, partly material. It is also enmeshed in lifeworld speech and practice, manifesting at non-cognitive levels; recall the Finnish-Swede unable to aim at the uncanny lake-bird. And, as we have seen, this discourse is equally a visual complex, an accumulative inter-artefactual domain. For people born into, and charged with expressing mythic systems, the inheritance is open and polyvalent. The three generations of the living access mythic discourses through inherited exemplars; the oldest of which, as with ritual and customary practices, must always appear as enigmatic. The visual traditions which represent these discourses, and make them capable of variation, can be viewed as a kind of operating system for the wider mythos; a toolkit for syntactic and paratactic manipulation.

Foucault sees the (re-)construction of discourse (by historians) as completely artificial: "the world [does not] present us with a legible face... merely to [be] decipher[ed]". Discourse, he continues, is "a violence that we do to things"; where we "think we recognise the source of discourse... we must rather recognise... [our own principles] of cutting out and rarefaction...".[119] "Rarefaction" is a term he borrows from science, meaning the process of rendering a substance less dense. While Foucault couches this activity in negative terms, his description of discourse-construction as "violence to things" illuminates how successive generations (re)visualise the waterwoman *figura*: in all our examples, we can see principles of "cutting out and rarefaction" at work.

Taking the waterwoman *figura* as both "text and commentary" helps us to think of its history in terms of a constant redeployment. Though I have, in a sense, conjured up an ur-mermaid-siren, by starting with her Neolithic roots and *loci classici*, this phantasmatic ancestor, already multi-variant, is only a placeholder for the umbilicus of the tradition, vanishing into prehistory. The *figura* of the mermaid-siren is rather constituted by its entire repertoire, comprising tens of thousands of images and texts from all levels of society. Each new visual iteration expresses a contemporary interest in this repertoire, and intervenes in its legacy of (already thoroughly) mediated forms; bringing some elements to the front and pushing others to the rear, and so changing the face of the repertoire in ways which can be paratactic or syntactic or both (with a leaning to the former).[120] We have traced some of these transformatory changes of emphasis. Thus, the Siren-song in Classical antiquity exerts *imeros* on its listeners; in the Middle Ages, it is more likely to send them to sleep. Such a shift could be likened to a kind of *rarefaction*, wherein *imeros* is, so to speak, increasingly repressed – deflected, folded in – screened and muted. This is expressed also in moves in the visual sphere towards topological complexity;

notably, when medieval artists and artisans transmutate the mermaid-siren into *sirène-oiseau/poisson*. The more visually knotted and contorted the forms are made (e.g. figs. 10b, 10c, 10f, 10i), the more dissipated their charge of desire, and (arguably) the more "illegible" they become as signifiers of the Otherworld. These are effectively "endpoints" in the discourse of waterwoman variations. Equivalent "endpoints" in literary texts could involve stretching out topological transformations through time; as in Shakespeare's distillation of *imeros* in the arrow-hit plant. Ovid himself encases the Sirens and their song inside another song, that of Calliope, placing the Sirens' transformation and its motivation, as it were, off-stage. Folk traditions meantime express and maintain both folded and basic hybrid forms. The Scots and Irish legends we have seen play with scale and topology, while Slavic folk art conserves *rusalka*-as-woman-fish and *priti-siriny* as apotropaic forms, on doorways, lintels, oars (figs. 6a–d).

What makes the mermaid-siren particularly "good to think with" is this open-ended potential: its variants are capable of speaking simultaneously of excess and lack, inside/outside, water-animal/woman. We can consider the entire *figura*, and the rhetoric of hybridity which maintains it, as a dynamic system; a carrying wave; capable of articulating a range of difficult dyads: about women who die without fruition, about the conservation of energy/desire, about the duality of desire imposed from without or welling from within. In the cohort of Ovid's metamorphic waterwomen, the Siren is therefore both an outlier and a paradigmatic template. Mysterious, condensed and oneiric in form, Sirens are always, *in potentio*, an invitation to commentary.

EPILOGUE: RENAISSANCE WATERWOMEN

A final(?) set of variations, stemming from the Renaissance revival of Classical antiquity, illuminates this sense of *figura* as discourse which is also commentary. It is the case of the sleeping nymph by her fountain. In a design by Lucas Cranach the Elder (1472–1553), extant in many versions,[121] a water-nymph reclines by her fountain. Cranach depicts her as a beautiful nude, eyes closed in sleep or slit open (figs. 33a–h). A panoramic landscape unfolds behind her. The inscription on the fountain reads:

> *FONTIS NYMPHA SACRI SOMNVM NERVMPE QVIESCO*
> [I am the nymph of the spring, do not disturb my sleep, I am resting]
> (Scalabrini & Stimilli 2009: 54)

This arrangement of by-now-familiar elements has an interesting back-story. Late in the 15C, an Italian Humanist scholar, compiling a catalogue of antique epigrams, wrote this note in the margin of his manuscript:

> *On the banks of the Danube* [there is] *a sculpture of a sleeping nymph in a beautiful fountain. Under the figure is this epigram.*[122]

He writes in the verse:

> *Huius nympha loci, sacri custodia fontis / Dormio dum blandae sentio murmur aquae. / Parce meum quisquis tangis cava marmora somnum / Rumpere; sive bibas sive lavere tace.*
> I am the nymph of this sacred place, keeper of the spring, sleeping and listening to the endearing murmur of the water. Take care, whoever approaches this marmoreal cave, not to disturb my sleep; whether you drink or bathe, keep silent![123]

The idea struck an extraordinary chord.[124] First in Italy, then across Europe, Humanists created grottos for recently-unearthed Classical statues that could be made to fit the theme (figs. 34a–c). New water-nymph statues for gardens and fountains were commissioned (e.g. fig. 34c). Having constructed his own water-nymph grotto, King Matthias Corvinus of Hungary (1443–1490) is credited with giving Cranach the shortened form of the epigram used in the fountain-nymph paintings.[125] There were even quests to find the original monument (Baert 2018: 153 n.6).

In fact, the scholar fabricated the story and the epigram: there was no such sculpture by the Danube. But, clearly, the consensus was that there *should* have been. The responses – in the visual arts, horticulture and literature, including the initial fabrication – both accept and announce the whole idea *as commentary*. The collective post-Ovidian, post-moralisation, understanding of the waterwoman mythos found a focus in this confection of a waterwoman goddess, explicitly framed in terms of sleep and desire.

The new package was realised in through further extrapolations, notably at Bomarzo, where Duke Vicino Orsini (1523–1583) created his sculpture garden-wilderness. Using only paratactical principles, the works arranged here include a huge sleeping nymph (35a), the Muses as Graces, and a nymphaeum (fig. 35b; cf. 7b), equipped, naturally, with fountains. Two vast hybrid waterwomen (figs. 35c–d) sit at a corner where two avenues meet. One avenue leads to Ceres on her throne, on the back of which, two mermaid-sirens hold a diminutive male figure upside down (fig. 35e). The other leads to Persephone herself,

positioned near Cerberus and the Hellmouth (fig. 35f).[126] In this way, Orsini and his team deployed our *figura* as part of a concrete fantasy, explicitly designed to evoke its associations with dreams, hybridity and the Otherworld. In this place of monstrous aquatic women, Orsini had inscribed on his Hellmouth a play on Dante's words: *lasciate ogni pensiero o voi ch'entrate* [Let all thoughts fly away, you who enter here]. The phrase resonates with the older mermaid-sirens we have visited; evoking Himeros and Eros, overpowering minds, and Brendan's sailors, spellbound by a mermaid, so they "forgot themselves completely [and] did not know where they were".

FIGURES

All figures available at https://folklore.ee/folklore/vol95/gallery/.

NOTES

[1] Object given to and described by Barb (1966: 2, no. 14).

[2] Transl. by Overing, in Lees & Overing (2017: 19–20); Krapp & Dobbie 1936: 234; cf. Niles 1998. Note: the number given to this riddle can be 73; see Niles (1998: 169–170, nn. 1 & 5). Suggestions for the answer include: *siren* (Tupper 1910: 214), *water* (Trautmann 1915: 128; Klein 2015: 1B19), *barnacle goose* (Donoghue 1998); *siren* is widely accepted.

[3] As Robert Mondi (1990: 145) observed, "a mythological system might better be seen not as a collection of discrete narratives but as a structured array of conceptual foci (god names, for instance) around each of which cluster various ideas, images, and narrative motifs." So, the hybrid waterwoman can be thought of in this way as a focus – a magnet – drawing together many visual and narrative concepts in myth and folklore.

[4] For qualitative data on folkloric mermaid-sirens, I draw on Eastern/Central European (Ivantis 1989; Hilton 2011 [1995]), and Celtic/Nordic (Darwin 2015, 2019; Lysaght et al. 1999) ethnographic studies. For Classical traditions, Larson 2001; Kosso & Scott 2009; Stafford 2003, 2013; Hopman 2013; Forbes-Irving 1999; Faraone 1995, 1999; Tsiafakis 2003. The literature on medieval mermaid-sirens, including its complex MSS materials, is not cited in similar depth here; for entry points, Rachewiltz 1983;

Krohn (1999: 545–546); Leclercq-Marx 2002a [1999], 2002b; Holford-Strevens 2006; Joyce 2015. Methodologically, I take as my starting points for this post-structuralist and inter-disciplinary approach: Foley's definition of "immanent context" (1992) for oral "texts" (see n. 78 below); Mondi (1990), Ginzburg (2002: 31–40, 65–78) and Frog (2014) for parallel theorising about myth. For theoretical parameters, I start from Vološinov (1986 [1929]: 22–23; cf. Moxey [1994: 423, 1145], Shelton [1978: 191–196]): "different social classes use one and the same language... differently oriented accents intersect in [every] sign [and so each] sign becomes an arena [of] struggle"; i.e. there are competing interpretations of the same sign active in every era (such as, in the present case, monastic versus folk), but they are all still using the same *langue*, differently inflected. I take each artwork (including folk art) as a "theoretical object" wherein "the reflexivity internal to the work determines its theoretical dimension" (cf. Marin 1993, 2006: 17). Foundational here also is Sourvinou-Inwood (e.g. 1990: 396–399, 401, 427) on protocols of image-making in mythological systems; Mason (1991: 14–15), "the imaginary element in mythology provides a meaning which can only be re-presented"; and Magaña (1988: 22): imaginary beings "form a different intellectual reality because they are... independent of empirical points of reference and [thus] represent mental operations" (transl. Mason 1991: 15). Aspects of theory and methodology relating to specific locales, periods, disciplines and media are dealt with in notes as they arise.

5 As Garrow and Gosden (2012: 26ff) summarise: "The inter-artefactual domain concerns links of style and form between objects so that they come together to form an meta-domain having influence over human actions, perceptions and modes of value creation." Part of my intention here, however, is to interpret this concept rather in the light of Davis (2007: 200); so the "meta-domain" of the mermaid-siren should be seen as a resource produced by, and under the control of, generations of human creative agency.

6 Efforts to analyse the "rhetoric" of human hybrids often start from Pliny's Monstrous Races; e.g. Kappler (1980: 120–183), Lecouteux (1982, 1: 5), or medieval manuscript illumination, e.g. Freeman Sandler (1981) on the 14C Luttrell Psalter (BL Add MS 42130). As Mason (1991: 19) points out, the first analysis may well be that of Denis Diderot, in his *Dream of D'Alembert* (1951 [1769]), who identified "suppression, duplication, and combination" as "mutations in the bundle of threads" which constitute a human form. I have argued previously for the visual evolution of particular *figurae* as prescribed by vectors inherent in a given image-constellation (Milne 2016, 2024: Intro., Ch.2–3).

7 Waterwomen are, of course, not the only kind of water-spirit; nor are they the only hybrid woman-animal type. But, in the European arena at least, the waterwoman outperforms other major hybrid-types (e.g. the centaur) in terms of longevity, geographical range and vitality as a visual idea. On mermaids and folkloric waterwomen: Parsons 1933; Burnell 1949; Puhvel 1963; Barb 1966; Almqvist 1991; Palmenfelt (1999: 261–268); Valk (1999: 337–348); Travis 2002; García & Colomer 2012; Darwin 2015. For the Renaissance, e.g. Enenkel & Traninger 2018.

8 The issue of in what sense "images" in narrative (descriptions, transformations, impossibilities, *figurae* in Auerbach's sense) relate semiotically to visual representations (whose form is fixed) is complex; the same word, *image* (in English and other languages) may refer to mental image, image in a text, and image in a visual medium. Mental images are in feedback with visual and linguistic media. In myth, otherwise "un-visualisable" tropes are typically represented visually through paradox and impossibility; as in the hybrid form of the mermaidsiren, whose history, as we will see, demonstrates how a visual "solution" becomes foundational for mental, oral and literary

subsequent representations. On this see e.g. Milne 2007, 2011, 2016, 2024; Mundkur 1984; Abrahamian et al. 1985; Bremmer 2002.

[9] Mason (1991: 28); cf. Ginzburg (2002: 31–34) on Aristotle's example (*Physics* 208a. 29–31; *On Interpretation* 16a.9–18) of a non-existent hybrid, the *tragelaphos* [goat-stag], and Boethius's 6C commentary regarding this, which "adds the element of time", by referring to "chimeras and centaurs that the poets *finxerunt*" (i.e. fix [in time]); text and transl. Ginzburg op. cit, 32, 189 n. 18.

[10] As Valentsova (2019) commented, in legends, ballads and sagas, human protagonists recognise a dual-natured creature by its presence. In *Kormák's saga* (1997 [9–10C]: Ch. 18), when a walrus rises beside the ship: "the men aboard *thought that they knew its eyes* for the eyes of Thórveig the witch" (transl. McTurk; emphasis added; cf. Schlauch 1934: 5–33); Milne (2008: 77f.; 2024: Ch. 3 & 5).

[11] Freud (1953 [1900]: 436) makes the comparison: "The psychic process which occurs in the creation of composite formations [*Mischbildungen*] in dreams is... the same as that which we employ in conceiving or figuring a dragon or a centaur in our waking senses." [*Der psychische Vorgang bei der Mischbildung im Traume ist offenbar der nämliche, wie wenn wir im Wachen einen Zentauren oder Drachen uns vorstellen oder nachbilden.*]

[12] Contracted slightly from Häggman (1999: 83, nn. 5–7). The incident happened, c. 1950, to Albert Endtbacka (b. 1900); told to Häggman first by Albert's sister in 1971, then by Albert in the first person in 1973; Albert expanded details when relating the story on camera in 1974. Each redaction tied the anecdote of the non-shooting gun and the weird bird more openly to local beliefs about water-nymphs or "sea-sprites" – living around Finnsjon ("Finn Lake"). Albert, his brothers and neighbours, saw the water-nymphs' black laundry drying there on several occasions. The family lived near Hepovattnet ("Horse Water"), in the Swedish-speaking parish of Esse, west-coast Finland. Häggman (1999: 85–86) correlates these sightings with the hunters' awareness of breaking the Sabbath on these occasions.

[13] On Greek river and water hybrid deities, male and female, Aston (2017 [2011]: 55–89). On nymphs, Larson 2001. On aquatic apotheoses, Forbes-Irving (1990: 299–307), Taylor 2009. For the vast literature on Sirens: see e.g. Buitron et al. (1992: 110–153), Tsiafakis (2003: 284–303). Among the Classical kin of the mermaid-siren are Muses (often associated with springs), Gorgons (on occasion represented as mer-creatures; e.g. Vermeule (1979: 195, fig. 19), and Harpies. Harpies are storm-personifications, born in the ocean, to sea-deities Taumas and Elektra; on their medieval representations, Hartmann (1999: 287–318). Visually at least, the distinction between Sirens and Harpies is often blurred, especially in "decorative" contexts (see below on the issue of "decorative" or paratactic mythic motifs). On "nameless gods" in antiquity, see e.g. Bowden (2015: 31–42).

[14] On specific metamorphoses, Larson 2001; Taylor 2009; Forbes-Irving (1999: 299–307). Cf. Aston (2017 [2011]: 269): Greek hybrid deities, "have a particular relationship with metamorphosis, in which there is an unusual emphasis on questions of genealogy and lineage".

[15] On Ovid's sources, and his ability to construct full-blown metamorphoses where none had previously existed, see Forbes-Irving (1999: 19–24), and discussion below.

[16] On the transmission and interpretation of Ovid in the Middle Ages, see e.g.: Joyce 2015; Poiret (2011: 83–107); Boyd 2002; Hexter (2002: 413–442); Richmond (2002: 443–459, 469-474); Milne (2007: 88–100); Barkan 1986; Reynolds 1971.

[17] Inaugural lecture, Collège de France, 2nd December 1970 (Foucault 1971a, 1971b); hereafter Foucault 2010 [1972].

[18] Pásztor 2017; Mannermaa 2003, 2008b. For Çatalhöyük, e.g. Hodder & Meskell (2010: 49; 2011: 246) discusses uses and representations of waterbirds. On deposits of crane wings, and their possible ritual uses, Russell & McGowan 2003; on bird remains generally, Hodder 2014, *passim*.

[19] "Young woman, buried in pit lined with red ochre, accompanied by 35 bone flutes and pipes, a fine comb with carved seal heads, mother-of-pearl lamellae, and a clay duck (seal?) at her feet," Gotland Historical Museum, Visby, Gotland, Sweden; http://samlingarna.gotlandsmuseum.se/index.php/Detail/objects/123509. See Mannermaa (2008a: 219–220) for summary of bird symbolism in N. European prehistory.

[20] The figure in the cart wears a long skirt, underneath which are male genitals, hidden from view (fig. 4). Gimbutas (1956, 1974, 1991, 1999) interpreted a range of Neolithic figurines as representing a widespread "bird-headed" goddess; the heads of these figures are now often rather seen as representing masks, their "beaks" as stylized noses. However, the archaeologist Ochsenschlager (2002: 155, n.1) observed at the site of ancient Lagash (c. 2900–2350 BCE, al-Hiba, Iraq), in 1968, local children making "toys out of mud [including] human figurines [with] schematic, bird-like heads almost identical to those found in the excavations..." (cited Pásztor 2017: 198). On prehistoric female figurines generally, see e.g. Bailey 2005.

[21] Kristensen & Holly (2013: 41–53); Mannermaa (2008a: 201–225). On the issue of gender, Bergerbrant 2007.

[22] In these traditions, "Birds became... metaphors for crossing various cosmic spheres... water birds could visit each of the three basic realms, the underworld, the earth and the upper world," Pásztor (2017: 199); cf. Rozwadowski (2014: 108), Vinogradov (2004: 13).

[23] Hopman (2013: 106–107): "the visual type of a monster is fashioned through a creative bricolage of earlier types known to the artists", using visual [units of signification] (tails, horns etc) which "often have no literal or immediate equivalent in the textual sources"; "template" rather than "type" would perhaps work better here. Cf. Tsiafakis (2003: 97–98); Amyx (1988: ii, 661–662). My focus here, however, will be on more internal – or topological – evolution in *waterwoman* "templates". On *Mischwesen* as "bundles of conceptual domains", Hopman (2013: 259–262).

[24] Frontisi-Ducroux (2003: 40): "L'hybridité est inhérente au monde des divinités marines au même titre que la polymorphie. Ces deux notions sont en fait deux modalités, l'une spatiale, l'autre temporelle, d'une même réalité: la nature polyvalente et mouvante des créatures marines, fluides comme l'eau, changeantes comme la mer, se renouvellent sans cesse comme les vagues."

[25] The earliest mer-humans are male or indeterminate in gender. For their transmission into the Hellenic cultural sphere as "oriental" imports, Shepard 2011 [1940]; Barnett 1956; Vermeule 1979; Papalexandrou 2010. See also nn. 69–71 below.

[26] Ivanits (1992: 77) says that the name is not attested in Russian before the 18C; Dynda (2017: 86) has it as 17C, citing the accepted etymology (via medieval Greek) from the Spring Festival of *rusallii* (=Pentecost, "Easter of the Roses"); cf. Juric 2010, for distinctions among N. & S. Slav versions of *vily*.

[27] The narratives collected by Zelenin (1995 [1916]: 1–100) from which he deduced the connection with the "unclean dead" – stress the identity of such spirits as drowned maidens/unbaptised children, though many do not mention the resulting *rusalki* as young or beautiful (e.g. Narratives 72 & 73); cf. Ivanits 1992: 76–77; Juric 2010; Dynda 2017.

[28] The starting point for my earlier work on mermaids and dreams, expanded and now revised as Milne (2024: Ch. 3).

[29] On medieval documents about these festivals (*rusalii*), see Mansikka (1922: 96-7, 106, 254-8); on the 18C as first reference to modern names for these, Ivanits (1992: 79-81); for the 19C, Zelenin (1995[1916]: 127, 217-82); for modern festivals, Dynda 2017.

[30] Described by Kemp (1935: 94–95): "In Srem, on Ascension Day, the sick slept in a field where dittany (*jasenak*) grew, bread, water and wine... placed beside them... In Bulgaria at the feast of the *Rusalje* or *Samovile*, *Vile* [dates vary] ... on the eve of the feast a person suffering from a *vila* disease went to a field near water where the *Vila*'s plant Rosen, Dittany – grew, with someone of the opposite sex [to act as ritual-] brother or sister. [They] offer[ed] food and wine [and a *vila*] flower... balanced over a new vessel of unbroken water, beside which the sick person lay down and slept while the other watched..." And, "In Bosnia and Hercegovina lakes are avoided on Saturday because then they seek life, [and] where there exists a *vila* cult, each spring has its day and its prescribed offerings" (ibid, 98; cf. Barber 1997: 25, n. 14).

[31] Håland (2009: 119–131) lists Classical authorities for the perception of springs as female and discusses ancient and modern Greek female water rituals; cf. Larson (2001), ch. 3 & 4, for Greek water-nymph sites and customs; Taylor (2009, 2014), on the Romans and South Italy.

[32] For incubation sites and practices, Renberg (2017: 656–657, nn. 10–11); Sherwin-White (1978: 328–329) and Van Straten (1976); on curses and dreams, Milne (2024: Ch. 6–7); for *defixiones*, Tomlin 1993, and http://curses.csad.ox.ac.uk/sites/. On Gallo-Roman and Celtic curses related to water, Mees (2009: 29–41, 47–49). Mees (2011: 87–108) discusses the strength of the language involved as expressing overwhelming desires; cf. Faraone 1991, 1996.

[33] In fact, not a well as such, but a rectangular reservoir enclosing several small springs, itself enclosed in a rectangular building, probably open to the sky; Allason-Jones (1996: 107–108).

[34] On the "Shrine of the Nymphs", Smith 1962, Allason-Jones 1996, Mayers 2017. On Minerva-Sulis, Cunliffe et al. 1985; Cunliffe 1995. On the excavations at Fons Sequana, Green (1999: 37–40, 69). Sirona's main sanctuaries include Corseul (Brittany), Hochscheid (Moselle valley), Bamburg, Noricum (Austria) and Brigetio (Hungary); at these, Sirona was worshipped alone; elsewhere she appears as a couple with a Celticised Apollo; Green (1995a: 102–104).

[35] According to Ross (1992: 351), "Long-legged marsh birds figure with other aquatic birds on cult objects dating from the Urnfield period onwards... this cult of water birds [was] associated [with] gods of healing... [And] during the Gallo-Roman and Romano-British period... the crane and related species continue to be represented... evidence for a continuity in the cult importance of these marsh birds." On Celtic gods, water and crane-symbolism, cf. Ó Cuív (1963: 338), Bernhardt-House (2009: 9–10, 15, n. 26); on Celtic water-goddesses and their symbolism, Green (1995a: 90–105).

[36] Discovered in 1711 in the choir of the church of Notre Dame, Paris (Ross 1992: 351, n. 148); now part of the reconstructed Pillar of Nautes. According to the Musée Cluny, "Dating from the 1C, the Pillar of Nautes... is an offering to the boatmen [*nautes*] of the Seine, from the Roman emperor Tiberius, ruler of the province of Gaul. Their allegiance is ambiguous: the pillar, or dedication stone, represents both the Celtic pantheon and that of the new governing Romans. The [Celtic figures on the] fragments of the pillar of Saint-Landry, discovered in 1829 during works on the Île de la Cité,

appear only among the Roman gods" (transl. after: https://www.musee-moyenage.fr/collection/oeuvre/pilier-des-nautes.html). The word *Esus* may mean *Master*; so not a name but a title (Green 1995b: 473; 1992: 93–94), though this is disputed (Duval 1989: 464–46).

[37] Four-sided block carved in relief on three sides (fourth damaged), discovered at Trèves in 1895: side 1, Mercury wearing a torc, with his consort Rosmerta & and his cockeral; side 2, Esus with willowtree, bull-head and three wading birds; side 3, damaged female figure (Ross 1992: 351–352, nn. 149). Another crane appears by a female head on a relief from Narbonne (Ross 1992: 353, fig. 166). On Esus, see n. 36.

[38] *Dindshenchas Érenn* [*The Lore of Places of Ireland*], c. 12C, collects c. 200 legends of significant Irish placenames.

[39] On Bóand, Carey 1983, Theuerkauf (2017: 49–97). Cf. the early 11C (cf. Thurneysen 1921: 520; Gwynn 1903–1935: 10.480; MacNeill 1908: 10.440) poem, *Sid Nechtain sund forsin tsléib* (Gwynn 1903–1935: 10.26–32): "The well of Segais is in a fairy mound, guarded by Nechtan and his three cupbearers. The eyes of whoever gazes into it burst. Nechtan's wife Bóand... defies the well's power by walking around it three times... three waves spring from it, tearing away one of her feet, a hand and an eye. She flees; the water pursues her as far as the sea; thus the river Boyne [*Bóand*] is formed... two of the reaches of the Boyne are called 'the arm and calf of Nuadu's wife' (*rig mná Nuadat 's a colptha*)" (adapted from Carey (1983: 215, nn. 13–15)); the phrase, *rig mná Nuadat*, re the Boyne appears in the 9C *Immacaldam in Dá Thúarad* (LL [Dublin ed.] lines 24340-2). On *imbas forosnai*, water and magical waterwomen, Bernhardt-House (2009: 7–11, 15); Carey (1991: 165–172; 2004: 13–15).

[40] Stokes (1895: 31–32), translates *dord na samguba* as "mermaid's melody" but, as Darwin (2019: 157) observes, neither word can mean "mermaid": "*Samguba* is a compound noun formed from *sam* 'joint, united, whole', and *guba* 'mourning, sighing, lamenting',and therefore indicates some sort of mournful sound... *dord* 'buzzing, droning, intoning' is used [for] the song of the *murdúchann* in *Lebor Gabála Érenn*, it can also indicate natural sounds such as the bellowing of stags or bulls." The earliest attestation of the Middle Irish term, *murdúchann*, is 12C; the word is used to translate (Classical) Siren; cf. Bowen (1978: 142–148).

[41] Nagy (1986: 161–182); Gwynn 1903; Stokes (1892: 489–490): *Is ed in fuath atconnairc i. in murduchund fo deilb ingine mac[d]acta. Is blaithem [u]as lind 7 ichtar brotharluibnech biastaide fothi fo lind. Co n[d]uadar na biasda he, co ndaralsat he ina aigib, co ruige in fairge a da lairg cosin port hut, 7 no[t]hallad da[il] ced for mael gach cnama. Unde Port Lairge dicitur.*

[42] For analogous legends concerning women who drown their babies in streams, rivers or lakes, then haunt these places, e.g. "La Llorona" in Spain/Mexico, see Leavy (1994: 140, 186–188, 198, 326–327, nn. 134–135).

[43] Transl. here and in successive quotes, MacNeill (1908: 16–27), Aodh Ó Dochartaigh: *Cealguis Iúchra chum snámha Aíffe nocar chuairt ágha / dar cuir hí tré luinne amoigh a riocht cuirre fo chuirrchib. / Fíefraighis Aoíffe íer sin d'ingin áluinn Ábhartaigh / ga fad bhíad sa riocht so a bhen a Iuchra áloinn uichtgheal // An críoch chuirfet ní ba gerr ort a Aoíffe na rosc ró-mhall / beir-si da ched blíadhuin bán a tigh mhíadhaigh Mhanannán / Bíaidh tú sa tigh sin do gnáth ag fanamhat fút do chách / ad chuirr nach dtaistil gach tír noch attacfainn tú entír...*

[44] Viz: his shirt and knife, Goibhne's girdle, a smith's hook from the "fierce man": *Léine Mhanannáin sa sgien is crios Goibhnionn / ...duphán gabhann ón fhior bhorb / .... Crios do dhruimnibh an mhíl mhóir do bhoí sa Chorrbholg chóir...*

[45] Transl. MacNeill (1908: 118–120): *In tan do bhíodh in muir lán ba follus a hseóid ar a lár / inuair fa tráigh in muir borb folamh fo deóidh in Corrbholg…*

[46] In Snorri Sturluson (1923 [13C]: 63–64), *Gylfaginning* XLVI.

[47] To eat crane-flesh was to invite death (Ross 1992: 355). Campbell (1902: 113) tells of a "parsimonious, disagreeable daughter of MacDougall of Lome [with] three nick-names: *Corra thón dubh* [the Black-bottomed Crane], *Gortag, an droch chorra dhubh* [Parsimony, the evil black Crane] and *Corra Dhughaill* [the MacDougal Crane]." It seems women were more likely to be disparaged as crane-like.

[48] For (watery) animal brides: ATU B650; T16; K1335.1; D721; D361.1; D361.1.1; ML4080; for swan-maidens acting as sirens in Spain and Portugal, Leavy (1994: 198, 327, n. 11); on selkies [seal-maidens], Puhvel 1963; Bruford (1974: 63 [F75]); Klintberg (2010: 117 [F51]).

[49] On Mélusine variants, Wood 1992; Almqvist 1999; Darwin 2015, 2019; Urban 2017; Soverino 2020. Marriage to Mélusine (in France especially) brings prosperity. She builds castles and founds churches. Her "horrible" sons include one with three horns. The 14C Lusignan rulers commissioned Jean d'Arras to write his *Mélusine* about their mythical great-grandmother; his romance is extant in many copies (e.g. fig. 10a); a stream of printed editions and translations followed.

[50] The second branch of nomenclature compounds "woman" and "seal" – hence *maighdean ron* [seal-maiden] etc. – legends rooted in regions (NW Atlantic seaboard) where seals have an economic and cultural importance; cf. n. 48 above. Seals were also Poseidon's flocks, kept by his son, the shapechanger Proteus (e.g. *Odyssey* 4. 365ff.).

[51] Emilie Kruuspak, recorded by Rudolf Põldmäe, Harju-Jaani parish, N. Estonia, 1929. I ERA 18, 481/2 (1) (1929); cited in Valk (1999: 337).

[52] Palmenfelt (1999: 264); first published in Gustavson & Nyman (1959: 165–166).

[53] Re the incubus, Caesarius of Heisterbach (VI.132; cited in Milne (2017: 94; 2024: 73); re the elves: on trial for witchcraft (Scotland 1662), the Highlander Issobel Goudie said that, on her night-travels, in the "house of the elves" she saw "little ones, hollow, and boss-backed" [=concave or hollow backs]; cf. Hall 2004: 182–183; Pitcairn 1833: III, 607.

[54] My earlier study of waterwomen (Milne 2008; rev. as Milne 2024: Ch. 3) focused on the enormous medieval visual repertoire of mermaid-sirens as a barometer of changing dream-cultures. For paths of diversification in hybrid templates, see e.g. Milne (2016: 159; 2024).

[55] Very briefly: both moralising (*Physiologus* [="Naturalist"], in Greek by 2C, Latin, c. 600), and rationalising (e.g. Servius, *Commentary on Vergil*, after 400), interpretations of Sirens emerge in late antiquity, setting the pattern for medieval writers. Key authorities include: Isidore of Seville (d. 636; *Etymologiae* 11.3.301, 12.4.29), Fulgentius (late 5C; *Mythologies* 2.8 [1971: 73–74]), the three "Vatican Mythographers" (c. 875–1075, late 11c, mid-12C). On this complex tradition re Sirens, see Pakis 2010 (on *Physiologus*), Leclercq-Marx (2002 [1997]: Part 1), Travis (2002: 35–36); on its literature, e.g. Holford-Strevens (2006: 23–51), Barkan (1986: 94–136), Rachewiltz (1983: 67–69), Müller & Wunderlich 1999.

[56] E.g. the Middle English *Mirroure of the Worlde* (Bodley MS 283; lines 5920–5924): *wee fynde in thee Booke of Bestes that ther be a maner of beestes in the see that men calle meremaydynes the whiche hatthe bodye of a womman and tayle of a fisshe and cleys liche an egle, and theye synge soo swetely that theye make marynerys for too sleepe and [then] devoureth theyme* (2015: 197–198); cf. Holford-Strevens 2006; Joyce 2015. Old

High German versions of *Physiologus* translated Jerome's *Sirenae* (at Isaiah 13:22), as *mermaid*: *merimenni*, *meriminni*, *meriminnun*, *meriminna*, *merminno* etc.; cf. Pakis (2010: 126), Krohn (1999: 545–546). Yet the effort to see Homer's island-dwelling monsters as Harpies and Sirens, inhabiting a Biblical desert, had lasting impact; Blanchot (2003: 4) appears to have this in mind when he characterises the desire compelled by the Sirens as sterile and contradictory: "hope and desire for a wonderful beyond… [but] this beyond [is] represented [as] a desert, as if the motherland of music were [a] place completely deprived of music, a place of aridity and dryness…"

[57] Buschor (1944: 36–37, Abb. 26–28); these creatures were previously identified as Harpies rather than Sirens, hence its common name, the "Harpy Tomb" (BM 1848,1020.1).

[58] This *aryballos* has some other peculiar features, discussed by Pollard (1949: 357–359; 1965: 138): notably the female figure behind the Sirens on the rock, and the chequerboard at right (probably, respectively, Circe and her palace). As far as I know, no one has identified the birds as Siren-avatars; though Harrison (1957 [1908]: 200) intuits that they "in a sense, duplicate the Sirens". There is a certain reluctance to connect Sirens and their bird-forms with marine or aquatic contexts; see discussion below on later accretions of meaning due to legends of their parentage, deaths, and use in post-mortem cultic practices.

[59] On the inscribed vases, Tsiafakis (2003: 75, 99 n. 25). Attic vases have the variant *σιρην*, Homer uses *σειρήν*. The history and etymology of the word is obscure. Luján & Vita (2018: 234–240) derive it from Ugaritic *šrm*, a dual or plural of the word *šr*>singer, and support the argument that Linear B inventory entries from the Mycenaean Palace of Pylos (destroyed c. 1200 BCE) refer to furniture adorned with siren-heads (*seremokaraore* [PY Ta 707.2; 714.2], *seremokaraapi* [PY Ta 707.2]). If so, these would be the earliest attestations of a link between word and image; but, since the artefacts are not extant, their visual form is unknown. For alternative translations, Hart (1990), Tsagraki (2012: 326).

[60] *δεῦρ᾽ ἄγ᾽ ἰών, πολύαιν᾽ Ὀδυσεῦ, μέγα κῦδος Ἀχαιῶν / νῆα κατάστησον, ἵνα νωιτέρην ὄπ ἀκούσῃς. / οὐ γάρ πώ τις τῇδε παρήλασε νηὶ μελαίνῃ / πρίν γ᾽ ἡμέων μελίγηρυν ἀπὸ στομάτων ὄπ᾽ ἀκοῦσαι / ἀλλ᾽ ὅ γε τερψάμενος νεῖται καὶ πλείονα εἰδώς. / ἴδμεν γάρ τοι πάνθ᾽ ὅσ᾽ ἐνὶ Τροίῃ εὐρείῃ / Ἀργεῖοι Τρῶές τε θεῶν ἰότητι μόγησαν / ἴδμεν δ᾽, ὅσσα γένηται ἐπὶ χθονὶ πουλυβοτείρῃ.*

[61] Plural is "indicated twice with the genitive dual *Σειρήνοιιν* (v.167), 'of the two Sirens,' once with *Σειρήνων* (v.158), 'of us two'" Holford-Strevens (2006: 40 n. 6); Neils (1995: 179).

[62] *Is é in Cacher drui dorat in leges dóib, dia mboí in murdúchand oca medrad, .i. bói in cotlud oca forrach frisin ceól. Is é in leiges fuair Caicher dóib, .i. céir do legad na clúasaib*; first recension of *Lebor gabála Érenn* (Macalister 2010 [1939]: ii. 201); related texts include versions where the *murdúchainn* hold the ship, and the crew hit on the wax remedy before the druid arrives (cf. ibid.: ii. 6871, 1001).

[63] "Achilochus [=Acheloos] and Tribonna long ago / Were father and mother of the sirens. Odysseus put wax in his ears…" [*Achilochus Tribonna tall / athair mathair murduchand. / Ulixes tuc céir na chlúais*…], attr. to 12C poet, *Book of Leinster*; Best et al. (1954: II, 17813–17818); cf. Bowen (1978: 143).

[64] Available in many vernaculars from 12C; Barron & Burgess (2005: 103–106) argue convincing this 13C Middle Dutch version reflects a lost 12C German original.

[65] Transl. W. P. Gerritsen & C. Strijbosch, in Barron & Burgess (2005: 141). Cf. The Middle Dutch 13C version, where Brendan and his monks meet "a fearful monster, coming towards the ship as if to capsize it. 'There is no need to be afraid' said Brendan, 'we have done nothing to harm it…' The monster was half-fish, half-woman with a hir-

sute body, [it] kept circling the ship. [They] fell to their knees... until God heard their prayer [the] fearful monster dived down next to the ship; all day long they heard it gurgling on the sea bed." (op. cit, 110).

[66] See n. 56 above.

[67] Lycophron (*Alexandra* 71229) names the Sirens as he gives the landing places of their bodies, specifying that rivers and streams wash each resting spot; e.g. Ligeia on the Tyrrhenian shore, south of Naples: "her shall sailormen bury on the stony beach nigh to the eddies of Ocinarus; and an oxhorned Aresi shall lave her tomb with his streams, cleansing with his waters the foundation of her whose children were turned into birds" (ibid.: 725–730); cf. Taylor (2009: 25–27). For attestations of their names, e.g. Smith (1870: III, 840). On Parthenope's tomb, Pliny (*Nat. Hist.* III.62), Strabo (*Geog.* V.4.7).

[68] The winged female figures vary on different coins – some hold birds, some lack the urn B but, as Taylor (2014: 185) notes, the sideways urn flowing with water "is not a generically interchangeable attribute: it bears a single, unmistakable association with flowing water". Another Terinan coin, whose obverse is the nymph Terina, has a reverse wherein a winged female fills an urn with water from a fountain, on which swims a swan (http://www.magnagraecia.nl/coins/Bruttium_map/Terina_map/descrTer_HJ038.html) On Campanian hybrid male gods on coins, Taylor (2009: 26). Parthenope appears also on the 19C coinage of the first modern republic of Naples.

[69] Holford-Strevens (2006: 39, n. 5) points out that a "silver Siren dedicated to Hera at Samos," c. 58–70 BCE is referred to with the masculine gender (*Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum* 12: 391). Pollard (1965: 137) notes that the absence or presence of a beard is not an infallible mark of gender (e.g. Pedasian priestesses could wear beards). By the 5C BCE, "only female sirens were... represented, and the bearded males... disappeared", according to Tsifiakis (2003: 75).

[70] Weicker (1902) made this connection, to lasting general assent. Pollard (1965: 141–144) summarises that debate; cf. Holford-Strevens (2006: 41, n. 18), who sees the idea as out of fashion. Vermeule (1979: 75–76) found "little doubt that the Egyptian *ba*-soul was the model for the Greek soul-bird [and] its mythological offshoots the Siren and the Harpy, both of whom had intense... relations with the dead" (cf. ibid.: 230–231, n. 69). For Greek depictions of the *eidolon* [soul image] as a small winged human, see e.g. Stafford (2003: 77–80, fig. 2).

[71] Woman-headed birds as attachments [*Henkelattaschen*], for cauldrons and cisterns, apparently often of Near Eastern manufacture, are "found in all the principal sanctuaries of Greece and in some burials in distant Etruria" (Barnett 1956: 231); also bearded human- and demon-headed examples (see also n. 25 above). On "siren"-attachments as evidence of interchange with the Near East, Muscarella (1962, 2013); Romano & Pigott (1983); Papalexandrou (2010: 31–48). On their possible use at Mycenaean Pylos, see n. 59 above.

[72] Cf. *parataxis* in grammar: "the placing of propositions or clauses one after another, without indicating by connecting words the relation (of coordination or subordination)" (Oxford English Dictionary).

[73] Cf. Shanks (1999: 73–76); Milne (2016: 121–122). Lyric poets similarly juxtapose images to evoke a mythic ambience, often with explicit reference to the world of sleep and dreams; thus, for Sappho (*Fragments* 2, c. 630–570 BCE), apple grove, altars, cold running water, sleep, breezes, roses, are felt to belong together: *.ρανοθεν κατιου[σ-/ δευρυμ†μεκρητασ.π [   ] ναῦον / ἄγνον ὄππ[αι   ] χάριεν μὲν ἄλσος / μαλί[αν], βῶμοι †δεμιθυμιάμε-νοι [λι]βανώτωι· / ἐν δ' ὕδωρ ψῦχρον κελάδει δι' ὕσδων / μαλίνων, βρόδοισι δὲ*

παῖς ὁ χῶρος / ἐσκίαστ᾽, αἰθυσσομένων δὲ φύλλων / κῶμα †καταγριον· / ἐν δὲ λείμων ἱππόβοτος / τέθαλε / †τωτ... ιριννοις† ἄνθεσιν, αἱ δ᾽ ἄηται / μέλλιχα πνέοισιν...; [Come] to me from Crete to this holy temple, where is your delightful grove of apple trees, and altars smoking with incense; therein cold water babbles through apple branches, and the whole place is shadowed by roses, and from the shimmering leaves the sleep of enchantment comes down; therein too a meadow, where horses graze, blossoms with spring flowers, and the winds blow gently... (*Fragments* 2.1–13), transl. McEvilley (2008: 28–29).

[74] Beazley (1945: 75), BM 1867,0508.1311; the first BM curator to discuss the imagery identified the man-bull as an incarnation of Dionysius; the current BM view cites both this and the water-god identification. On visualisations of Acheloos, Secci 2009; Clarke 2004; Tsiafakis (2003: 92). For other ox-horned river-gods, cf. n. 67 above and our figs. 20, 32a.

[75] This is a revival of Homeric imagery; on 5C *lekythos* paintings, for instance, Nereids on dolphins attend Thetis, to mourn Achilles (*Iliad* 18. 37ff.; Vermeule (1979: 22–23, fig. 18)).

[76] Sophocles (*Fragments* 861); cf. Plutarch (*Symposiacs* 9.14), cited in Holford-Strevens (2006: 40, n. 12). Buschor (1944) argued that Sirens were "infernal counterparts of the heavenly Muses", charming dead souls and escorting them between worlds; though probably mistaken on the relationship with Muses – cf. Pollard (1952: 60; 1965: 141–143) – this is effectively their role in Greek and Italian funerary art. See also nn. 70–71 above. On Phorkys (shapeshifting Old Man of the Sea, father of Gorgons and monsters) as an archaic power, Forbes-Irving (1999: 174–179).

[77] See n. 63 above. Pavlou (2012: 404), commenting on Louvre E667 (blackfigure Laconian cylix, attr. Naucratis Painter c. 565 BCE) – wherein Sirens carry garlands at a feast – summarises theories on the Sirens' connections with death. Cf. Vermeule (1979).

[78] Foley (1992: 276ff): "oral traditional forms are situated... within a set of associations and expectations formally extrinsic but metonymically intrinsic to their experience as works [of] art... [each] traditional [referent has] an indexical meaning vis-à-vis the immanent tradition; each integer reaches beyond the confines of the individual performance [or] text to a set of traditional ideas much larger and richer than any single performance or text."

[79] Cf. Chamoux on Pausanius (1992: 267): *entre lesquelles Pausanias doute qu'on puisse distinguer vraiment*.

[80] Vermeule (1979: 154f.) explains the connection: Pothos is "a feeling of longing in the nighttime for someone... not there [such as] the absent dead" e.g. what Achilles feels for the dead Patroklos (*Iliad* 24.3). On Pothos in monumental sculpture, Lattimore 1987; Palagia 2000; in drama, Sfyroeras 2008.

[81] ἤτοι μὲν πρώτιστα Χάος γένετ᾽· αὐτὰρ ἔπειτα / Γαῖ᾽ εὐρύστερνος, πάντων ἕδος ἀσφαλὲς αἰεὶ / ἀθανάτων οἳ ἔχουσι κάρη νιφόεντος Ὀλύμπου / Τάρταρά τ᾽ ἠερόεντα μυχῷ χθονὸς εὐρυοδείης / ἠδ᾽ Ἔρος, ὃς κάλλιστος ἐν ἀθανάτοισι θεοῖσι / λυσιμελής, πάντων τε θεῶν πάντων τ᾽ ἀνθρώπ ων / δάμναται ἐν στήθεσσι νόον καὶ ἐπίφρονα βουλήν... [In truth, first of all Chasm came to be, and then broad breasted Earth, the ever immovable seat of all the immortals who possess snowy Olympus' peak and murky Tartarus in the depths of the broad pathed earth, and Eros, who is the most beautiful among the immortal gods, the limb melter C he overpowers the mind and the thoughtful counsel of all the gods and of all human beings in their breasts...] *Theogony* 116–122; transl. Most (2013: 164).

[82] Eros had two altars in Athens: the earlier (from c. 540–520 BCE) associated with the Academy, Athena (Pausanias, 1.30.1) and homoeroticism (understood as primeval power); the later (from c. 420 BCE) associated with Aphrodite's festival and fertility; Eros imagery shifts correspondingly over this period from homoerotic to nuptial contexts; Stafford (2013: 179–201).

[83] Weiss (1998: 40): "Latin *diligo*, according to Cicero (*Ad Brut*. 1.1.1), expresses a milder emotion than *amo*... [still] this word often occurs simply in the sense 'love,' e.g. (Plautus, *Amphitryon* 509 [Juppiter to Alcumena]): *Satin habes, si feminarum nulla est quam aeque diligam? Diligo* [as a compound of the preverb *dis-* and *lego*, *legere* [should] mean as the sum of its parts 'to take or choose apart.' ... [cf. passage quoted in] Nonius 290: Plautus, *Curculio* 424: *clupeatus elephantum machaera diligit* ... Compare [English] colloquial 'to take someone apart,' meaning 'to tear to pieces.'" Cf. "the active of the root aorist **(é-)h₁erh₂t / (é-)h₁r̥h₂-ent* is probably inferable from Lithuanian *ìrti, iriù* (to tear open) (said of an anchor tearing the ground, and of a mole)" (ibid.: 41, n.17).

[84] Weiss (1998: 41); "Greek *ἀπολαύω* (have enjoyment of) is related to *ληΐζομαι* (carry off as booty) and Old Church Slavonic *loviti* (capture)"; to describe Odysseus, *yearning for his wife and home* (*νόστου κεχρημένον ἠδὲ γυναικός*, *Odyssey* 1.13), Homer uses the verb *χράομαι* in the perfect, with a genitive, to mean *desires* (cf. *πατρίδος ἥραν*, Euripides, *Phaedra* 359); the same word with a dative means *enjoy the use of*: cf. *οὐδὲ συβώτης / λήθετ' ἄρ' ἀθανάτων · φρεσὶ γὰρ κέχρητ' ἀγαθῇσιν* (*Odyssey* 14.420-1)."

[85] As Weiss (1998: 46) points out, another Greek banquet name, *δάϊς*, comes from root *δαίομαι* [divide, distribute, feast on]; so, an *ἔρανος* is the reciprocal mirror image of a *δάϊς*: "In the former everyone gives his share, in the latter everyone gets his share."

[86] Weiss (1998: 44, n. 28): on the "derivation of Latin *ōra* 'border' (& therefore Hittite *arhās)* from verbal root meaning 'divide' ... the word *ora₂* [is] traditionally glossed as *rope*... [probably] Celtic preserves a member of the family of **h₁erh₂-* in Old Irish *or* m. -'border' Welsh *or* f. 'border' *eirion-yn*, Old Breton *orion*, Mod. Bret. *erien*..."

[87] In relation to the *Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite*, Van der Ben (1986: 10–11) argues "*ἵμερος* differs from *ἔρος* in that the former ... requires immediate satisfaction and cannot be refused"; Weiss (1998: 50, n. 45).

[88] See Shapiro (1993: 186–207); illustrated in Rosenzweig (2004: 20–21, fig. 7), Stafford (2012: 198–200, fig 9).

[89] Weiss (1998: 53): "the -r/-n-stem ancestor of *ἵμερος* must have looked like this: nom. acc. *séh₂i-mr̥*, gen. *sih₂-mén-s55* – and would have been a verbal abstract meaning 'magical binding.'"

[90] Xenophon (*Memorabilia* 2.6.11-12): *Ἃ μὲν αἱ Σειρῆνες ἐπῇδον τῷ Ὀδυσσεῖ ἤκουσας Ὁμήρου, / ὧν ἐστιν ἀρχὴ τοιάδε τις ·/*
Δεῦρ' ἄγε δή, πολύαιν' Ὀδυσεῦ, μέγα κῦδος Ἀχαιῶν. / Ταύτην οὖν, ἔφη, τὴν ἐπῳδήν, ὦ Σώκρατες, καὶ τοῖς ἄλλοις / ἀνθρώποις αἱ Σειρῆνες ἐπάδουσαι κατεῖχον, ὥστε μὴ ἀπιέναι / ἀπ' αὐτῶν τοὺς ἐπασθέντας; Οὐκ ἀλλὰ τοῖς ἐπ' ἀρετῇ/φιλοτιμουμένοις οὕτως ἐπῇδον ["You have heard from Homer the spell that the Sirens put on Odysseus. It begins like this: 'This way, come this way, renowned Odysseus, great glory of the Achaeans.'" "Then did the Sirens chant this spell for other people too, Socrates, so as to keep the spellbound from leaving them?" "No, only for those who yearned for the fame that virtue gives"]; Faraone (1999: 6, n. 15). Gordon (1999: 220–221) discusses references to the Sirens' song as examples of how 5C Greeks perceived inspired rhetoric as incantatory, mind-changing "brilliant deception."

[91] *ΝΕΣΤΟΡΟΣ:....:ΕΥΠΟΤΟΝ:ΠΟΤΕΡΙΟΝ / ΗΟΣΔΑΤΟΔΕΠΙΕΣΙ:ΠΟΤΕΡΙ..: ΑΥΤΙΚΑΚΕΝΟΝ / ΗΙΜΕΡΟΣΗΑΙΡΕΣΕΙ : ΚΑΛΛΙΣΤΕΦΑΝΟ : ΑΦΡΟΔΙΤΕΣ* (Archaeological Museum of Pithecusae, Ischia, Naples, Italy: http://www.pithecusae.it/)

[92] Emphasis added. Transl. by R. F. Hock, in Betz (1985: PGM XV 1–21, 251); cf. Faraone (1995: 10–11; 10, n. 33); Pachoumi (2013: 322). Greeks and Romans shared beliefs prevalent in later cultures about types of restless dead (e.g. suicides): unburied dead, including the lost drowned, cannot enter Hades; Forbes-Irving (1990: 123–125; citing *Iliad* 23.71; Lucian, *Philops.* 29; Achilles Tatius 5.16, *Anthologia Palatina* 7.285, 374). Though only a few sections, whose meaning is clear, concern us here, PGM XV as a whole is so obscure that it seems best to give it in full from Preisendanz (1931: 133–134):

...ἵνα κατα] δήσωσι Νῖ λον [τόν] καὶ Ἀγαθὸν Δαίμον[α],ὃν ἔτεκε Δημητρία, κακοῖς μεγάλοις, οὐδὲ θεῶν | οὐδὲ ἀνθρώπων εὑρήσω καθαρὰν λύσιν, ἀλλὰ

φιλήσῃ ἐμέ, Καπιτωλίνα[ν, ἣν] ἔτεκε Πεπεροῦς, | θεῖον ἔρωτα καὶ ἔσῃ μοι κατὰ πάντα ἀκόλουθος, ἕως ἂν ἔτι βούλωμαι ἵνα μοι ποιήσῃ ,[ἃ] ἐγὼ θέλω, | καὶ μηδενί ἄλλῃ, καὶ μηδενὸς ἀκούσῃ, εἰ μὴ ἐ[μο] ῦ μόν[ης], Καπιτωλίνς, ἐπιλήσῃ γονέων, || τέκνων, φίλων. π[ρος]εξορκίζω ὑμᾶς, δαίμονες, τοὺς ἐν τὲ τόπῳ [5] τούτῳ, λυηαηλ |..... σου αφαλω λυβαλο λυβαλ[α], καὶ λίσσομαι λυβαλα τωνη [.] πυ-λ[υ]νυλυ, ὁ ἑνοῖς, | ὁ διςςᾱς οναλελα καὶ παραιτῶ τ] ἣν εὔροιαν καὶ [τάς ἔρτός μου] ἀποδόσεις τὰς | Χάριτας. πάντας ἐσῆτε ἄπαιδας, ἀγάμους, καὶ ἀνεμοφορήτους ἀφ[ῆ]τε, ὡς ἂν θῶ τὴν παρακατα |θήκην αὐτήν, ἵνα μοι τελέσητε πάντα ταἐν τῷ πιττακίῳ γεγραμμένα, δι' ἃ ὁρκίζω || ὑμ□ς, δαίμονες, τὴν συνέχουσαν ὑμᾶς Βίαν [10] καὶ Ἀ[νά]νκην· τελέσατέ μοι πάντα |κ]αὶ εἰσπηδήσατε καὶ περιέλετε Νίλου, οὗ ἐστιν ἡ οὐσία [ἐκεί] νου, ἵνα μου ἐρᾷ, Καπιτωλίνα[ς,| κ]αὶ ἀσάλευτός μου ἣν Νῖλος, ὃν ἔτεκε Δημητρία πάσῃ ὥρᾳ καί πάσῃ ἡμέρᾳ. | διορκίζω ὑμᾶς, δαίμονες, κατά τῶν πικρῶν Ἀναγκῶν, τῶν ἐχουσῶν | ὑμᾶς, καί ἀνεμοφορήτων ιω ιωε,

Φθούθι, εω Φρῆ, ὁ μέγιστος δαίμων Ἰάω, Σαβαὼ[θ || Βαρβαρεθιωθ Λαιλαμψ [15] Ὀσορνωφρι, Ἔμφερα, ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ θεὸς ὁ μονο[γ]ενής, | ὁ ἐκαλεύων τὸν βυθόν, ἐξαποστέλλων ὕδατα καί ἀνέμους· ἔξαφες τὰ πνεύμα τα τῶν δαιμόνων τούτων, ὅπου μοῦ ἐστιν ᵒ πυξίς, ἵνα μοι τελέσωσι τὰ ἐν τῷ | πυξιδίῳ ὄντα, ἤτε ἄρσενες ἤτε θήλιαι, ἤτε μεικροὶ ἤτε μεγάλοι, ἵνα ἐλθόν|τες τελέσωσι τὰ ἐν τῷ πυξιδίῳ τούτῳ καὶ καταδήσωσι Νῖλον τὸν καὶ || Ἀγαθὸν Δαίμονα, ὃν ἔτεκε Δημητρία, ἐμοὶ Καπιτω-λίνιᾳ, [20] [ἣ]ν ἔτεκε Πεπεροῦς, | ὅλο]ν τῆς ζωῆς α<ύ>τοῦ χρόνον φιλῆ με Νῖλος φίλτρον αἰώνιον. ἤδη, ἤδη, τα[χύ, ταχύ. Faraone (1995: 10) gives an emended Greek opening and translation. Many thanks to Steve Farmer and Veronica Capriotti for their help with this text.

[93] Holford-Strevens (2006: 27, 45, nn. 76–77) on MSS of these short versions of *Physiologus* (=Version Y or A).

[94] On Artemis as a patron of fertility, Barb (1966); Léger (2015: 213–214); hence the famous statue at Ephesos (modern Selçuk, Turkey), festooned with breast-like shapes, which in fact represent bull's testicles.

[95] Pausanius (1971, II, 473), transl. Levi.

[96] The Sirens, according to Hesiod (frag. 28; Vermeule 1979: 137), could charm the winds. To the main sense of *aura* as *breeze*, there are further connotations: "αὔρα (Ion.) αὔρη, breeze, esp. a cool breeze from water (Aristotle, *On the Cosmos* 394b13), the fresh air of morning (*Odyssey* 5.469, αὔρη δ' ἐκ ποταμοῦ ψυχρὴ πνέειέ; cf. Hesiod, *Works & Days* 670, etc.); used metaphorically, *aura* can refer to the attractive influence of the female (αὔρη φιλοτησίη; Oppian. *Halieutica* 4.114); or to a changeful course of events, bodily thrill, guileless movements of soul, even the epileptic *aura* (Galen *De locis affectis* (*Opera omnia* VIII (1821: 194)). For Αὖραι personified (*Argonautica Orphica,* 340.5)" (expanded from Liddell & Scott (2011 [1843], with thanks to Vaclav Blazek).

[97] For Aura the Titan, Nonnus, *Dionysiaca* 48.240–260 (late 4C–early 5C); for the name Antaura, *ant(i)* (=contra-/against)+*aura* (=wind/breeze/steam), Barb (1966: 3); cf. n. 95 above.

[98] On the huge international and geographical range of the St. Sisinnius type, see Toporkov 2011, 2019. Proliferation of supernatural entities – both malignant and protective – seems to be a feature of charm discourse generally. For an account of the tendency for illness demons, such as fever-demons, to move from solo to multiple before dispersal, Milne (2019: 6–8). The multiplication of antagonists is a notable element, linked in complex ways, perhaps, with the shift from positive to negative in a particular topos or *figura*, as in the Antaura tradition sketched here. Leavy (1994: 159, 322, n. 17) cites a Georgian legend wherein a multitude of evil shapeshifting swans trample a sleeping princess; a multiple swan-maiden performing the typical action of the nightmare-demon.

[99] Relevant scholarship includes histories of sexuality, gender and the emotions generally; too extensive to summarise here: a key landmark is Foucault (1976–2018); for the Classical world, Winkler (1990: 17-44, 71-98); Faraone 1999; for entry-points by period, e.g. Peakman (2010–2011: I–III).

[100] Weiss (1998: 54, n. 58): the "semantic change from 'external attraction' to 'internal desire'...one can observe taking place within the documented history of Greek".

[101] On *odium*, Skutsch (1914: 389–404); Sturtevant (1913: 29) comments: "In only 3 of the 37 attestations in Plautus can *odium* naturally be translated by 'hate'. It means rather "disgust" [as in Plautus, *Curculio* 501]... *Odium* was always associated with odor..."; i.e. a response to external stimulus.

[102] Metaphorically, by extension, it can always be claimed that it is a quality in X (beauty, preciousness etc.) that is the cause of arousing desire in Y; however, this is really a way of claiming mythic or occult status for X.

[103] Visually, Eros-figures may merge into a crowd of personified emotions [*pâthemata*]. Despite the use of labels, where several Erotes are depicted, Imeros may be the only one named (see e.g. our figs. 24–25). In her survey of visual Erotes, Stafford (2013: 199) notes distinguishing labels as they occur, but considers them all as "Eros-figures". Faraone (1999: 43–46), similarly, in his account of ἔρως the disease, cites among evidence for the power of Eros the god a passage (*Iliad* 14.217, discussed above), which in fact names Imeros. On the issue of personifications as gods, Stafford (2003: 90–91); cf. Plutarch (*Kleomenes* 9.1): the Spartans "have shrines to Fear, Death, Laughter and other states (*pâthemata*) of the sort."

[104] Fifty years before the first literary reference (Euripides, *Medea* 529–531; Stafford 2013: 179, n.19); bow-and-arrow became the standard prop in Greek art from the 4C BCE.

[105] Templates for, and exemplars of, desire-related *figurae* do not merely fall out of use; they are supplemented rather than supplanted by topologically complex exemplars. Cupids continue to shoot arrows directly at lovers, half-and-half mermaid-sirens continue to be represented in visual culture, especially folk-culture. These are conserved through inter-artefactual domains; reified in popular media such as prints and chapbooks.

[106] We see aspects of this process in action e.g. in 16C debates about the causes of witchcraft (satanic others v. hallucinations; for summary, Milne (2007: 182–203, 303–304), and in the history of theorising about the causes of dreams; e.g. Schmitt (1999: 274–275), for examples, Milne (2007: 120–132). As a general observation, this can be couched in different terms, e.g. Ginzburg (2002 [1998]: 37): "in our intellectual tradition, a consciousness of the mendacious nature of myths... has accompanied, like a shadow, the conviction that they contain a hidden truth."

[107] Forbes-Irving (1990: 7–17) points out that earlier sources, from Hesiod to 5C drama, relate only about 35 transformation stories; he goes on to suggest (ibid.: 19–24, 305–307) that Ovid elevates certain water-women legends into transformations episodes following Hellenic enthusiasm for etiology, and resulting expansion of narratives featuring metamorphosis. On Ovid's sources, e.g. Herter (1980: 185–228); Barkan 1986.

[108] *τῆς ἦ τοι πόδες εἰσὶ δυώδεκα πάντες ἄωροι, / ἐξ δέ τέ οἱ δειραὶ περιμήκεες, ἐν δὲ ἑκάστῃ / σμερδαλέη κεφαλή, ἐν δὲ τρίστοιχοι ὀδόντες / πυκνοὶ καὶ θαμέες, πλεῖοι μέλανος θανάτοιο. / μέσση μέν τε κατὰ σπείους κοίλοιο δέδυκεν, / ἔξω δ' ἐξίσχει κεφαλὰς δεινοῖο βερέθρου, / αὐτοῦ δ' ἰχθυάᾳ, σκόπελον περιμαιμώωσα, / δελφῖνάς τε κύνας τε, καὶ εἴ ποθι μεῖζον ἕλῃσι / κῆτος, ἃ μυρία βόσκει ἀγάστονος Ἀμφιτρίτη.* [She has twelve feet, all of which wave in the air / and six necks, extremely long, on each of which / is a horrible head; in it are teeth in two triple rows / crowded closely together, full of the blackness of death. / To her middle she is buried inside her hollow cave. / Outside, she puts forth her heads from the terrible cavern. / There she does her fishing, peering all round her crag / for dolphins or dogfish or what bigger creature she may catch / of those roaring Amphitrite nourishes in such numbers]. *Odyssey* XII.89–97; transl. in Buitron & Cohen (1992: 13).

[109] Curtius (1967 [1953]: 94–104) cites Archilochus, 648 BCE, as the earliest example of *adynaton* use in the Western tradition.

[110] Villing et al. (2019: 118–119, fig. 101). This object is probably a copy after a Hellenistic original; the restorer Carlo Albacini (1734–1813) reconstructed parts of the centaur, and for the scylla, her missing nose, an arm, and one of her dog-heads.

[111] The *phantasma* [nightmare] is defined by Macrobius (1952 [c. 400–430]: I.3) as: *forms, distorted in appearance and out of all natural proportions in size... kaleidoscopically changing things*. Cf. Milne (2014: 168; 2007: Intro. & Ch. 2; 2024). For Artemidorus (2C; 2.44): *[To dream of] what is monstrous and not possible [such as a] Scylla and the like, means one's hopes will be false and unfulfilled* (2012: 230–231). Cf. Virgil (70–19 BCE) Aeneid VI.282–291: *In medio ramos annosaque bracchia pandit / ulmus opaca, ingens, quam sedem Somnia vulgo / ...multaque praeterea variarum monstra ferarum / Centauri in foribus stabulant Scyllaeque biformes / ...Gorgones Harpyiaeque...* [In the midst [of Hades] an elm, shadowy and vast, spreads her boughs and aged arms, the home [of] false Dreams... And many monstrous forms [are there] Centaurs and double-shaped Scyllas / ...Gorgons and Harpies... .

[112] *vobis, Acheloides, unde / pluma pedesque avium, cum virginis ora geratis? / an quia, cum legeret vernos Proserpina flores / in comitum numero, doctae Sirenes, eratis? / quam postquam toto frustra quaesistis in orbe / protinus, et vestram sentirent aequora curam / posse super fluctus alarum insistere remis / optastis facilesque deos habuistis et artus / vidistis vestros subitis flavescere pennis. / ne tamen ille canor mulcendas natus ad aures / tantaque dos oris linguae deperderet usum / virginei vultus et vox humana remansit.*

[113] For Phorkys as father of the Sirens, see above n. 76. For Acheloos as father: Apollonius Rhodius 4.896; Ovid *Met.* V.552-3, XIV.87.88; Silius Italicus 12.33-36; Lucian, *The Dance* 50; Libanius (2008 [late 4C]: 10–11). For Acheloos as father of nymphs: Plato *Phaedrus* 263d; Euripides *Bacchae* 519–520; Virgil *Copa* 15; Columella *De re rustica* 10.263-74. For the greater prominence in Roman times of Archeloos as father of Sirens, Taylor (2009: 26, n. 19).

[114] For Earth and Ocean as parents, Fowler (2000: I.96, frag. #8); see also Lycophron (as in n. 67 above). Born of Earth: Euripides calls them *winged maidens, virgin daughters of Gaia* (*Helen* 167–168); *progeny of Earth and Acheloos's horn-wound* (Libanius (2008 [late 4C]: 10–11); Holford-Strevens 2006: 40, n. 12). Muses named as mother:

Melpomene (Apollodorus 1.18, 1.63: Lycophron 712 ff.; Hyginus *Fabulae* 141), Calliope (e.g. Servius), Terpsicore (Apollonius Rhodius 4.896; Nonnus *Dionysiaca* 13.313), Sterope (Hesiod *Cat. of Women* 38; Apollodorus 1.63), unnamed Muse (Ovid, *Met*. V. 552; Apollodorus I. 7. 10); cf. Pollard (1952: 60); Tsiafakis (2003: 92).

[115] The Naiads then give it to Demeter [Ceres]: *naides hoc, pomis et odoro flore repletum / sacrarunt; divesque meo Bona Copia cornu est* (*Met*. IX.87–88). Elsewhere, Ovid (*Fasti* 5.115-24) and others derive the Cornucopia from Amalthea (either a Naiad with a magical goat, or the goat itself), who suckled Zeus (cf. PseudoApollodorus *Bibliotheca* 2.148; Strabo *Geog*. 10. 2.19; Aratus *Phaenomena* 161–165; Callimachus *Hymn 1 to Zeus* 47–48).

[116] On his shapeshifting and man-faced bull form, Sophocles, *Trachiniae* 94; Ovid *Met*. XIV.85–87; Forbes-Irving (1990: 172–173); Clarke 2004. The three female faces on our stele (fig. 32c) may represent his Nereid daughters.

[117] Eustathius of Thessalonica (12C) refers to Sirens in various incommensurable ways: Homer's Sirens have the "nature of birds" [*ὀρνιθοφυεῖς*]; so they have wings; but also they must have been wingless, "otherwise they would have pursued Odysseus"; and they forfeit their wings as punishment after singing in competition with the Muses (in Cesaretti 2015: 255, n. 11); he mentions the motif of them wanting to remain virgin as well, though this must be a Christian era addition to the story (*Ep*. 45; ibid.: 264, n. 51). Pausanias (9.34.3) describes a statue of Hera carrying Sirens in her hand, and relates the contest story, adding that the Muses make themselves crowns from the feathers of the Sirens. On this, see our fig. 27b (Artemis crowned in sirens).

[118] Donne (1977: 77–78) concludes: *If thou beest borne to strange sights... when thou retorn'st, wilt ... sweare / No where / Lives a woman true, and faire... .*

[119] Foucault (2010 [1972]: 229). He recommends that we attend, rather, to principles of reversal and discontinuity; this means also attending to exteriority (i.e. context in the real world). Since we cannot "burrow to the hidden core of discourse... [to] the thought or meaning manifested in it; instead we should look for its external conditions of existence, for that which gives rise to the chance series of these events and fixes their limits" (loc. cit).

[120] Cf. Eliot (1950 [1919]: 4–6): "what happens when a new work of art is created happens simultaneously to all the works of art which preceded it. The existing monuments form [an] order among themselves, which is modified by the introduction of the new... work of art among them. [Their] order is complete before the new work arrives; [after the] novelty, the whole existing order must [be] altered; [and] the relations, proportions, values of each work of art toward the whole are readjusted...the mind of Europe [rather] than [the] private mind [of the artist] is a mind which changes [and] abandons nothing en route. [Any new] development [is] complication certainly [but] not... improvement... perhaps only in the end based upon a complication in economics and machinery." For our purposes, we can take Eliot's *mind of Europe* to be synonymous with *discourse/commentary* or *collective corpus*.

[121] Matsche (2007: 160) describes fourteen extant versions. Sometimes a pair of partridges, alluding to lovers, are included at lower right (cf. Liebmann 1968: 437). For entry-points to the substantial literature on the design: MacDougall 1975; Bober 1977; Barkan 1999; Scalabrini & Stimilli 2009; Baert 2018.

[122] MS, c. 1477–1484, probably by Michael Fabricius Ferrarinus (Kurz 1953: 171; MacDougall 1975: 356, n. 4, 357–358; Baert 2018: 152–153); other candidates include

Michele Ferrarini, Giovanni Campani, or the Veronese antiquarian, Felice Feliciani (Ritoók-Szalay 1983: 67–74).

[123] Transl. Barkan (1999: 242). More briefly: *I am the custodian of the sacred spring… do not disturb my sleep, if you drink or bathe keep silent*; MacDougall (1975: 357, n. 4): "Paris, Bibi. nat. lat. 6128, fol. 114r and Reggio, Bibi. comm. cod. C. 398, fol. 28r. The Paris manuscript is after 1477, the Reggio is dated 1486. The epigram appears in *Corpus inscriptionum latinarum…* I. 5, 3e."

[124] Resonating with interest in recently-discovered Classical sculpture, notably the reclining female nude then identified as Cleopatra, currently as Ariadne. On the vogue for installing this and other Classical figures as fountains in gardens, Kurz (1953: 171–177); Bober 1977; Godwin 2005; Baert 2018.

[125] Scalabrini & Stimilli (2009: 53, n. 72); Ritoók-Szalay (1983); Ricci (2002: 131–138). Matsche (2007: 1823) suggests Cranach modelled his nymph on a relief (now lost) he saw in Buda. On the spread of the motif, MacDougall (1975: 357–365); Bober (1977: 223–239); Baert 2018.

[126] Pier Francesco Orsini, also called Vicino Orsini; on Bomarzo, Godwin (2005: 169–172); Darnall & Weil (1984: 194); De Mandiargues 1969; on Hellmouths as dream-imagery, Milne (2007: 235–253, 305–315; Ch. 2).

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