



Scylla, the Diver's Daughter: Aeschrion, Hedyle, and Ovid

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SCYLLA, THE DIVER'S DAUGHTER: AESCHRION, HEDYLE, AND OVID

Among many mythological reworkings in the *Metamorphoses*, Ovid provides pathetic origin stories for three female monsters whom Homer represented as inhuman and dangerous. The Gorgon Medusa, Ovid claims, was once a beautiful-haired girl raped by Neptune; the Sirens were once beautiful-voiced girls bereaved of Proserpina; Scylla was once a beautiful-limbed nymph poisoned by jealous Circe.¹ The first two origin stories are not attested in earlier literature and are probably invented. Ovid's presentation of Scylla as

1. Ov. *Met.* 4.790–803, 5.551–63, and 14.1–74, respectively. Medusa does not appear in Homer per se, but the ghoulish face of Gorgo in the underworld (*Od.* 11.633) and the use of the gorgoneion as shield blazon (*Il.* 11.33–40) presuppose a terrifying monster like that described in [Hes.] *Sc.* 216–36. According to Hes. *Theog.* 267, Medusa “experienced sufferings” (λυγρὰ παθούσα), but there is no mention of transformation before her beheading by Perseus, and the story is very different. The intercourse with Poseidon is not described as temple desecration, as in Ov. *Met.* 4.798–99, but takes place in a flowery meadow, like the consensual sex between Zeus and Hera at Hom. *Il.* 14.346–51.

wronged nymph (rather than six-headed sea monster) is a more complicated case. I shall argue that it was not, as some have claimed, primarily inspired by the game played by earlier poets, who playfully contaminated the Homeric monster with the patricidal Megarian princess of the same name.² Nor can her virginal character be attributed to the monster's makeover in art from the fifth century onward, although Ovid (like all Roman poets) readily accepts the non-Homeric, iconographic shape.³ Instead we should look to an earlier, but equally deliberate, contamination with a separate legend dating back to the Persian wars.

This story of a sympathetic Scylla is usually considered mostly or entirely original to Ovid.⁴ According to him, Scylla was a sea nymph, first beloved by Glaucus, then horribly transformed by a jealous Circe.⁵ Her story is as plangent as that of her namesake, princess Scylla of Megara, who was equally unlucky in love, betraying her father Nisus for an ungrateful Minos.⁶ Yet we need not seek so far afield for a sympathetic Scylla. Two brief quotations preserved in Book 7 of Athenaeus' *Deipnosophistae* point toward a third Scylla, introduced by Hellenistic poets, who was a sea nymph. These scant lines are enough to indicate that Ovid's sympathetic maiden was in fact invented by a certain Hedyle, a female poet known only from a single fragment.

Moreover, it appears that her inspiration was not the Megarian Scylla, but a far humbler girl, one who supposedly helped to destroy the Persians at Artemisium. The maidenly origin story, aptly enough, had a maidenly origin: according to Aeschryon of Samos, in an *Iamb* probably written in the fourth century B.C.E.,⁷ Glaucus the sea god fell in love with Hydne, daughter of the diver "Scyllus" of Scione.⁸ This is clearly the historical but semilegendary diver Scyllias of Scione, who allegedly swam eighty furlongs underwater from Aphetae to Artemisium in 480 B.C.E. and cut the anchor cables of the storm-tossed Persian ships. Herodotus tells us half a century later that already "many tales are told about him, some implausible and some not."⁹ Half a

2. On the conflation of "Scylla Nisi" with "Scylla monstrum," first reliably attested at Verg. *Ecl.* 6.74–77 but possibly older, see Peirano 2009, with references.

3. The Scylla who appears in art from the early fifth century onward is a canine mermaid, with a girlish upper half, the forequarters of dogs at her waist, and a fish tail; see Jentel 1997. Ovid accounts for this form by partially immersing the nymph in a poisoned pool (*Met.* 14.51–67). Medusa, the Sirens, and Scylla are the only three semi-metamorphoses in the poem, and all three keep their girlish faces.

4. Original to Ovid: Hopkinson 2000, 42–43 ("his is the first extant account. . . . He may owe some details to the Scylla of Hedyle"); Bömer 1986, 20 ("Ovid ist der erste, der von der Verwandlung der Scylla erzählt"). The conflation of Scylla monstrum with "Scylla Nisi" is found first in Virgil's *Eclogue* 6 and subsequently in Propertius and Ovid. All three poets show themselves capable of distinguishing the monster from the Megarian when they choose: for references and citations, see Peirano 2009, esp. 187 and n. 4.

5. Ov. *Met.* 14.1–74. A variant attested later attributes Scylla's transformation to Amphitrite (Tzet. *Ad Lycoph.* 45; Serv. ad *Aen.* 3.420).

6. Aesch. *Cho.* 613–22, Verg. *G.* 1.404–9, Paus. 1.19.4. Scylla of Megara (like Ariadne and Medea) is another famous distressed heroine who appeals to Ovid's neoteric sensibility: her story is treated at *Met.* 8.1–151.

7. It seems likely that the iambist "Aeschryon of Samos" is identical with the epicist "Aeschryon of Mytilene" who studied under Aristotle and accompanied Alexander the Great: see Robbins 2002.

8. Ath. 7.296e: Αἰσχρίων δ' ὁ Σάμιος ἔν τι νι τῶν ἰάμβων "Υδνης φησὶ τῆς Σκύλλου τοῦ Σκιωναίου κατακόλυμβητοῦ θυγατρὸς τὸν θαλάσσιον Γλαῦκον ἐρασθῆναι.

9. λέγεται μὲν νυν καὶ ἄλλα ψευδέσι ἴκελα περὶ τοῦ ἀνδρὸς τούτου, τὰ δὲ μετέξτετα ἀληθέα: Hdt. 8.8. On diving in antiquity, see Frost 1968. Emma Aston has pointed out to me that Scyllias himself may well have begun as a regional marine deity, purported to have intervened in the war by locals claiming credit for the victory, just as the fetching of the Aeacidae asserts Aegina's influence at Salamis (Hdt. 8.65).

millennium after that, Pausanias saw a statue of “Scyllis” of Scione at Delphi, dedicated by the Amphictyons along with that of his daughter and fellow diver Hydne (which was unfortunately looted by Nero).¹⁰ By this time, Scyllias/Scyllus/Scyllis was even more legendary, having reputedly plumbed all the seabeds of the world.¹¹ It was no bold conceit for Aeschryon to associate Glaucus, himself an ex-fisherman, with such a father-daughter team: these legendary feats, and the commemorative statues, suggest heroization. Hydne herself might be a later cultic accessory: there is a suggestive symmetry with Ino and Melicertes, a deified mother-son team who ended their mortal lives by diving into the sea.¹² By making the divine Glaucus lust after a diver’s daughter, Aeschryon created a pathetic and faintly absurd scenario in keeping with Hellenistic and iambic tastes, resembling Polyphemus’ courtship of the sea nymph Galatea in Theocritus’ eleventh *Idyll*. As an underwater daughter with an epithetic name, Hydne herself sounds much like a sea nymph.¹³

Of the elegiac poem *Scylla* by Hedyle of Attica, probably composed in the third century B.C.E., only one fragment survives. Remarkably, it contains evidence for the bold further step of identifying Scyllus’ daughter Hydne (patronymically, “Scyllis”) with the Homeric monster:¹⁴

Glaucus, desiring Scylla, came to her cave

“bearing the love-gift of a shell from an Erythraean rock
and the still-unfledged children of the halcyon
as baubles for the nymph, in vain.

Even the maiden Siren, a neighbour, pitied his tears,
since he swam away to her promontory and the places
around Aetna.”

We cannot know whether Hedyle’s poem involved Scylla’s transformation into a monster. Regardless, the Homeric cues are numerous. Although a “nymph,” this Scylla inhabits a maritime cave off the coast of Sicily in the vicinity of at least one Siren. Yet in this tragicomic, sentimental inversion of Odysseus’ trials, Scylla is charming but reticent, and a Siren is her harm-

10. Why did Nero take only Hydne and not “Scyllus”? Peter Agocs suggests to me that the statues may not have been inscribed, but merely two anonymous old sculptures identified with the famous diver by some inventive cicerone (to explain marine accessories?). I am not aware of any evidence for father-daughter sculptural groups: perhaps the two neighboring statues did not quite match, and the Roman exporters did not consider “Scyllus” worth taking.

11. Paus. 10.19.1–2. The underwater cable cutting by “Scyllus” was also commemorated in a painting by Androbius (Plin. *HN* 35.139) and much later in an epigram by Apollonides (*Anth. Pal.* 9.296).

12. Ov. *Met.* 4.520, 13.919; [Apollod.] *Bibl.* 3.4.3; Hygin. *Fab.* 2. Other authors quoted in Ath. *Deipn.* 296–97 have Melicertes actually become Glaucus, or be his *eromenos*.

13. Zwicker (1969) calls her a sea nymph. The name may be formed from Ἀλοσύδνη, “Child of the Sea,” an epithet of Amphitrite and Thetis in Homer, and of all the sea nymphs in Apollonius and Callimachus (Jessen 1936): Hesychius attests the noun ὤδνης, “nursling”). The Pausanias MS reading Κυάνη probably garbles καὶ Ὑδναν, but if accepted as a variant name would make perfect sense, being synonymous with Γλαυκός (Hauvette 1886, 140–41). We do not know the fate of Hydne in Aeschryon’s poem, but the god seems to have been unsuccessful, since there is no mention of offspring.

14. τὸν Γλαῦκον ἐρασθέντα Σκύλλης ἔλθεῖν αὐτῆς εἰς τὸ ἄντρον ἢ κόγχου δωρήματα φέροντ’ Ἐρυθραίης ἀπὸ πέτρης, ἢ τοὺς ἀλκυόνων παῖδας ἐτ’ ἀπερῦγους, τῇ νόμφῃ δόσιςτος ἀθώρματα. δάκρυ δ’ ἐκείνου καὶ Σειρὴν γείτων παρθένος οἰκτίσας· ἀκτὴν γὰρ κείνην ἀπενήχετο καὶ τὰ σύγγενος Αἴτηνης (*Suppl. Hell.* 456 = Ath. 7.297a–b). Plant (2004, 53) claims a fourth-century date, Bowie (2005) and Gow-Page (1965, 2: 289) early third century. That Hedyle knew Aeschryon’s poem is not unlikely, since (as we learn in the same passage) her own mother Moschine was an iambic poet.

less but soft-hearted neighbor. The parallels in technique with Theocritus' Polyphemus are striking, and help to explain why Ovid combines the two narratives within the "trio of love triangles" in *Metamorphoses* 13 and 14.¹⁵ Quintus Cornificius, enemy of the triumvirate and author of "light" neoteric verse, is a likely intermediary between Hedyle and Ovid, since he (like the young Cicero) wrote a poem called *Glaucus*.¹⁶

Athenaeus' two quotations about Glaucus, though brief, reveal Ovid's inspiration for his nymph-turned-monster Scylla. The iambic fragment shows that Aeschrion first turned Scyllus of Scione's daughter, a human (or possibly nymph) war hero, into the sea god's beloved. Playing etymologically upon the resemblance between their names, Hedyle subsequently conflated the diver's daughter with the Homeric monster, a daring move that Ovid later replicated, enhancing it with graphic details. We may conclude that the sympathetic, maidenly Scylla did not originate in *Eclogue* 6 through confusion with Scylla of Megara. Instead, that honor belongs ultimately to a third party—Hydne, daughter of Scyllus the diver—whom Aeschrion and Hedyle transformed into the new figure "Scylla the nymph." This new narrative arose independently of Scylla's altered shape in art, although both transformations reflect the same Hellenistic taste for humanizing and sentimentalizing fearsome monsters.

In *Metamorphoses* 14, Ovid combined two preexisting traditions: his Scylla begins as the girlish nymph and ends as the part-girl monster. The list of works consulted for the *Metamorphoses* cannot be known, although it certainly included more Greek and Latin texts than we now possess. According to my creative reconstruction, Ovid's tale of a metamorphosed Scylla was not inspired by her namesake, Scylla of Megara. The episode may have been borrowed whole from an earlier Hellenistic or Roman sentimental treatment of the Glaucus myth. However, it is more likely that Ovid introduced the element of metamorphosis to reconcile two well-established versions of Scylla belonging in different genres. One was the epic monster of Homer and Virgil, which suited his project of retelling epic narratives. The other was the nymph of iambic and elegy (ultimately inspired by Scyllus' daughter Hydne), which suited Ovid's taste for grotesque love affairs and pathetic heroines. His Scylla is a generic composite, in whom the Homeric model is juxtaposed with playful reworkings of Homer. She therefore resembles the other Odyssean monster with whom she dominates Books 13 and 14 of the *Metamorphoses*: Polyphemus.¹⁷

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15. See Nagle 1988.

16. *leve Cornifici . . . opus* (Ov. Tr. 2.435–36); Cornificius in *Glaucio* "Centauros foedare bimembris" (Macr. Sat. 6.5.13); on Cicero's *Glaucus Pontius*, see Plut. Cic. 2. Cornificius may have shared the neoteric admiration of female poets (compare Catullus' use of Sappho); his sister was probably Cornificia the epigrammatist (Jer. Chron. 184.4).

17. Scylla: *Met.* 13.730–49; Polyphemus: 13.750–899; Scylla: 13.900–14.74; Polyphemus: 14.167–220.

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