The Case of the Second Sickle: Corcyra, Sicily, and the Evolution of the

Castration Myth in Ancient Greece and Rome

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1) Lycophron’s two sickle stories

a) *Alex.* 761-65 (Castration of Cronus)

νῆσον δ’ **εἰς Κρόνῳ στυγουμένην**

**Ἅρπην περάσας, μεζέων κρεανόμον**,

ἄχλαινος ἵκτης πημάτων λυγρῶν κόπις,

τὸν μυθοπλάστην ἐξυλακτήσει γόον,

ἀρὰς τετικὼς τοῦ τυφλωθέντος δάκους

**Crossing into the island hated by Cronus,**

**Harpe, the cleaver of his genitals,**

as a cloakless supplicant and babbler of baleful woes,

Odysseus will bark out his untrue groaning,

suffering the curse of the blinded beast.

b) *Alex.* 866-70

ἥξει δὲ ταύρου γυμνάδας κακοξένους

πάλης κονίστρας, ὅν τε Κωλῶτις τεκνοῖ,

Ἀλεντία κρείουσα Λογγούρου μυχῶν,

**Ἅρπης Κρόνου πήδημα** Κογχείας θ’ ὕδωρ

κάμψας Γονοῦσάν τ’ ἠδὲ Σικανῶν πλάκας,

He will reach the inhospitable wrestling arena of the bull,

after wrestling in the arena, where the child of Aphrodite,

Alentia, the queen of the innermost parts of Loggouros,

turning **around the edges of Cronus’ sickle** and

the water of Concheia and Gonousa and the shores of the Sicilians…

2) Example of changing canon: The wounding of Achilles (*Iliad* 21.164-67)

καί ῥ᾽ ἑτέρῳ μὲν δουρὶ σάκος βάλεν, οὐδὲ διὰ πρὸ

ῥῆξε σάκος: χρυσὸς γὰρ ἐρύκακε δῶρα θεοῖο:

τῷ δ᾽ ἑτέρῳ μιν πῆχυν ἐπιγράβδην βάλε χειρὸς

δεξιτερῆς, σύτο δ᾽ αἷμα κελαινεφές:

And [Asteropaeus] struck [Achilles’] shield with one spear,

But did not break through the shield, for the gold, gift of the god, held it back

And with the other spear he struck forearm of [Achilles’] right arm

A glancing blow, and dark blood poured forth.

3) Hesiod’s accounts of divine succession

a) Cronus’ overthrow of Zeus: Castration occurs (*Theo.* 178-82)

ὃ δ᾽ ἐκ λοχέοιο πάις ὠρέξατο χειρὶ

σκαιῇ, δεξιτερῇ δὲ πελώριον ἔλλαβεν ἅρπην

μακρὴν καρχαρόδοντα, φίλου δ᾽ ἀπὸ μήδεα πατρὸς

ἐσσυμένως ἤμησε, πάλιν δ᾽ ἔρριψε φέρεσθαι

ἐξοπίσω:

and the son from his place of ambush stretched out

with his left hand, and with his right hand he took

the great mighty sickle with saw-like teeth, and

eagerly reaped the genitals of his own father;

and threw backwards to be borne away.

b) The overthrow of Cronus: Castration does *not* occur

καὶ τοὺς μὲν ὑπὸ χθονὸς εὐρυοδείης

πέμψαν καὶ δεσμοῖσιν ἐν ἀργαλέοισιν ἔδησαν

χερσὶν νικήσαντες ὑπερθύμους περ ἐόντας,

τόσσον ἔνερθ᾽ ὑπὸ γῆς, ὅσον οὐρανός ἐστ᾽ ἀπὸ γαίης:

and [the hundred handed ones] sent [the Titans] under

the broad-pathed earth and bound them with grievous chains

after conquering them with their hands, although [the Titans]

were daring:

4) Evidence for early links between Corcyra and Cronus’ sickle

a) schol. ad. *Argo.* 4.992

Ἀκουσίλαος ἐν τῇ γʹ φησίν, ὅτι ἐκ τῆς ἐκτομῆς τοῦ Οὐρανοῦ ῥανίδας ἐνεχθῆναι συνέπεσεν, τουτέστι σταγόνας, κατὰ τῆς γῆς, ἐξ ὧν γεννηθῆναι τοὺς Φαίακας· οἱ δὲ τοὺς Γίγαντας. καὶ Ἀλκαῖος δὲ λέγει τοὺς Φαίακας ἔχειν τὸ γένος ἐκ τῶν σταγόνων τοῦ Οὐρανοῦ, Ὅμηρος. δὲ οἰκείους τοὺς Φαίακας τοῖς θεοῖς φησι διὰ τὴν ἀπὸ Ποσειδῶνος γένεσιν. Schol*.* ad *Argo.* 4.992.

And in the third book, Acusilaus says that it happened that blood drops came into existence because of the castration of Ouranos, and that these are the drops, [falling] upon the Earth, from which the Phaeacians were created; and some [say this] about the Giants. And Alcaeus also says that the Phaeacians have their origin from the drops of Ouranos, but Homer says that the Phaeacians are close to the gods on account of their birth from Poseidon.

b) Comparative times for the names of Corcyra

Hellanicus fr 1a4f 77:

Φαίαξ ὁ Ποσειδῶνος καὶ Κερκύρας τῆς Ἀσωπίδος, ἀφ’ ἧς ἡ νῆσος Κέρκυρα ἐκλήθη, τὸ πρὶν Δρεπάνη τε καὶ Σχερία κληθεῖσα.

Phaeax, son of Poseidon and Corcyra daughter of Asopus, from whom the island Corcyra is named, which was called Drepane and Scheria before.

E schol. ad. *Od.* 5.34:

 ἡ Σχερία πρῶτον ἐκαλεῖτο Δρεπάνη διὰ τὸ ἐκεῖ φυλλάτεσθαι τὴν δρεπάνην τὴν τμητικήν τῶν τοῦ Κρόνου αἰδοίων.

Scheria was first named Drepane because the sickle that cut off [Cronus’] private parts was protected there.

5) Hellenistic fragments placing Cronus’ sickle in Sicily

a) schol. ad. *Lyc.* 762

ἥρπην τὴν Κέρκυράν φησὶν ἤτοι τὴν Φαικίαν ἔχειν κεχωσμένον τὸ δρέπανον ἐν ὧ ὁ Ζεὺς τὸν Κρόνον ἐξέτεμε ἠ ὁτι ἐκεῖ ἔκειτο τὸ δρέπανον, ὁ Δημήτηρ ἔλαβε παρ’ Ἡφαίστου τέμνειν τοῦς στάτυας. καὶ οὕτω μὲν ἡ Κέρκυρα Δρέπανον λέγεται. ἕστι δὲ καὶ Σικελικὸν χωρίον Δρέπανον καλούμενον ἄπο τοῦ κεκρῦσθαι ἐκεῖ τὸ δρέπανον, μεθ’ οὕ ὁ Κρόνος ἀπέτεμεν Οὐρανοῦ τὰ παιδόνα μορία.

Harpe: He (Lycophron) says that Corcyra the Phaeacian has the buried sickle, with which Zeus castrated Cronus, and that the sickle is laid there which Demeter took from Hephaestus to cut grain. And thus Corcyra is called “Drepanon.” There is also a Sicilian land named “Drepanon” under which was laid a sickle, with which Cronus cut off the child-bearing parts of Uranus.

b) fragment from Callimachus’ *De Siciliae Urbibus*

οἱ κτίσται δρέπανον θέντο πε[ρὶ Κρόνιο]ν, 70—κεῖθι γὰρ ᾧ τὰ γονῆος ἀπέθρισε μήδε᾿ ἐκεῖνος κέκρυπιται γύπῃ ζάγκλον ὑπὸ χθονίῃ,—ε[]τισαν ἀμφὶ πόληος·

But when the builders made strong the wooden towers with battlements, and placed them around the sickle of Cronusa—for there in a cave is hidden under the earth the sickle with which he cut off his father’s genitals—they quarrelled (?) about the city. (trans. Trypanis, Gelzer, and Whitman)

6) Alternative reasons why Corcyra was named “Drepane”

a) schol. ad *Argo.* 4.982-992

Τίμαιος δέ φησιν ὧ ἐξέτεμεν τοῦ Κρόνου τὰ αἰδοῖα ὁ Ζεῦς, τοῦτο κεκρῦσθαι

Zeus cut off the private parts of Cronus with it (the sickle), which was hidden (in Corcyra).

b) *Argo.* 4.992-1000

῎Εστι δέ τις πορθμοῖο παροιτέρη ᾿Ιονίοιο

ἀμφιλαφὴς πίειρα Κεραυνίῃ εἰν ἁλὶ νῆσος,

ᾗ ὕπο δὴ κεῖσθαι δρέπανον φάτις (ἵλατε Μοῦσαι,

οὐκ ἐθέλων ἐνέπω προτέρων ἔπος) ᾧ ἀπὸ πατρός

μήδεα νηλειῶς ἔταμε Κρόνος (οἱ δέ ἑ Δηοῦς

κλείουσι χθονίης καλαμητόμον ἔμμεναι ἅρπην·

Δηὼ γὰρ κείνῃ ἐνὶ δή ποτε νάσσατο γαίῃ,

Τιτῆνας δ' ἔδαε στάχυν ὄμπνιον ἀμήσασθαι,

Μάκριδα φιλαμένη)· Δρεπάνη τόθεν ἐκλήισται

οὔνομα Φαιήκων ἱερὴ τροφός· ὧς δὲ καὶ αὐτοί

αἵματος Οὐρανίοιο γένος Φαίηκες ἔασιν. 4.992-1000

There is a vast, fertile island in front of the

Ionian strait in the Keraunian Sea,

under which, according to the story, is laid a sickle

(forgive me Muses, I tell the old story again

unwillingly) with which Cronus pitilessly

cut the private parts off of his father (although

some argue that it is the reaping sickle

of the Chthonian Demeter; for Demeter once

lived in that land, and she taught the Titans

to harvest the nourishing ears of grain,

(because of) loving Macris. Hence the holy

nourisher of the Phaeacians is named Drepane.

But the Phaeacians themselves claim their origin

from the blood of Uranus.

7) Servius commentary on *Aen.* 3.708

Drepanum civitas est non longe a monte Eryce, trans Lilybaeum, dicta vel propter curvaturam litoris, in quo sita est, vel quod Saturnus post amputata virilia Caelo patri illuc falcem proiecit, quae Graece δρεπάνος dicitur.

Drepanum is a town not far from Mount Eryx, across Lilybaeus, named either because of the curving of the shore, in which it is placed, or because Saturn after amputating the gentials from his father the sky threw his scythe, which is called *Drepanos* by the Greeks, there.

8) Pliny *NH.* 4.52

Homero dicta Scheria et Phaeacia, Callimacho etiam Drepane.

[Corcyra] was called Scheria and Phaeacia by Homer, and also Drepane by Callimachus.

9) Proposed method of “Canon Change”

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| Phase One:Single, stable version of myth | Phase Two:Stable element becomes destabilized by *multiple* versions of the myth | Phase Three:Myth restabilizes, into a single version that differs from phase one. |

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