

Sea Monsters: tempest-bearing, tsunami-born

Sailing is a dangerous profession, and tales of ship-wrecking whales, sailor-strangling octopods, and sailor-eating sharks circulated the Mediterranean and beyond. Sea monsters (here defined as very large marine creatures) dwell in the unknown, unknowable catastrophic sphere of the deep ocean, storm-tossed rivers, and unplumbable lochs. Our monsters often represent disaster and death (as does water). And, in many cultures the deceased must cross a body of water—the Greek river Styx, the Egyptian River of the Dead—before they can enter the world of the dead.

The evidence is both literary and historical. In 16 CE, the Roman fleet, campaigning in Germany under the command of Tiberius' nephew Germanicus, was caught in the powerful southerly winds on the Amisia River (Ems). Two accounts survive, including a “technical” account of unfolding weather conditions in Tacitus, *Annals* 2.23 and a rather more imaginative version by Albinovanus Pedo, preserved by Seneca the Elder, *Suasoria* 1.15, which links the storm with *marinis feris*. Pedo focuses as much on the terrors of the huge sea-monsters that he imagined would savage the boats as on the storm. In Pedo's imagination, the storm and predatory sea creatures are inextricable, and together they pose hazards greater than their combined intensities.

While not all storms at sea involve *kete*, squalls on the water are made all the more harrowing by the real or imagined presence of monsters in the depths: a common motif on sarcophagi, underscoring the horrors of travel by water, where sea dragons threaten ships. The terrors of sea travel are shown, for example, on a child's sarcophagus where two symmetrical sea-dragons swim in rough waters (Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek Copenhagen; third century CE,

ROME). The *kete* have opportunistically come upon a fleet caught up in a gale, and they find the conditions ideal for hunting. The squall and the *kete* together threaten the fleet. The *kete* have been summoned from their deep lair by the roiling, stormy waters. Did the child buried in this sarcophagus die during a storm at sea?

Here we shall focus on two passages wherein mythical sea monsters, and the efforts to combat them, are described in stormy terms: the monster sent by Neptune to destroy Troy for King Laomedon's petulance and the sea bull sent by Neptune to Troezen.

Valerius Flaccus, *Argonautica* 2.497-508 treats the battle between Hercules and the Trojan sea monster. The sea monster dashes against the shore, and it thrashes the sea with its tail. (Valerius Flaccus). It is a weather event more violent than windstorms. Hercules fights not a monster but a storm, the sea that had been moved from its foundation together with the "ample coils of the lofty beast" (there were a thousand of them). Sea, monster, and storm are one. Hercules must then fight the storm with a storm, the "entire cloud of his quiver" (*totaque pharetrae nube*: 521-522), but to no avail. Hercules must abandon his arrows for the rocks that had been loosened by the storm-tossed sea until the beast is laid low in the shoals. In the end, the sea monster is defeated by the very storm that it had created.

Seneca the Younger provides an equally stunning description of the sea bull sent by Neptune when his son Theseus requested terminal vengeance against his son Hippolytus, wrongly accused of making lewd advances towards Theseus' new bride. Neptune complies with a monster, a taurus (sea-bull) that emerges from the surf and terrifies Hippolytus' horses. Hippolytus is caught up in the tack and dragged to his death. The sea-bull, born from a tidal wave, is another storm (*Phaedra* 1000-1113). In Seneca, the sea swells enormously, and its huge mass of water threatens the land. The surge rolls forth, pregnant (*gravis*) with the bull in its fold.

The sea resounds, and the cliffs boom, as the sea-bull emerges from the roiling waves, dripping brine from its crest as it foams and spews water (like a spouting whale). The bull that destroys Hippolytus is literally a child of the sea, emerging from the depths, born from the sea's swells.

Flaccus' sea monster creates a storm, as does Seneca's. Large marine animals are also envisioned in stormy terms in the historical record. In 325 BCE, in the Persian Gulf, the crew of Alexander's admiral Nearchus encountered very large marine animals (25 *orguiae*) whose spray generated "great streams and a large body of mist from their eruptions, so that they could not see the area in front of them." The crew were handicapped as if in a storm, and they were blinded by the spouting whales as they displaced water. Nearchus and his crew created their own storm through noise and the violent displacement of water in order to repel the *kete*. They shouted, splashed their oars, and raised a clangor with their war trumpets, thus sending the pod back to the depths (Strabo 15.2.12; Arrian, *Indika* 30; Pliny 2.5; cf., Strabo 3.2.7). Their victory, like mythical and historical hunts of large sea-creatures, was deemed heroic (cf., Pliny 9.93; Aelian *NA* 13.6; Llewellyn-Jones and Lewis 2018: 678-679).

Sea monsters are born from storms, they create storms, and they utilize the cover of storms to hunt. Biological and mythical *kete* are the materialized violence and dangers that lurk beneath the surface of calm and choppy waters. *Kete*, in fact, actualize the human fear of the unknown and unknowable depths which are made all the less comprehensible during storms.