

The Case of the Second Sickle: Corcyra, Sicily, and the Evolution of the Castration Myth in Ancient Greece and Rome

The literary accounts of Cronus' castration of Uranus differ from text to text, and can place Cronus' weapon in Corcyra, Sicily, and (occasionally) other locales. However, when we place these texts in their proper chronological context, we see that these differences are not mere variation but more the gradual alteration of the canonical version of the myth. Over time, the canonical location of Cronus' sickle moved from Corcyra to Sicily. This transition occurred during the Hellenistic period, which was marked by an explosion of "sickle stories" which worked to simultaneously explain away the weapon's original placement and establish its new association with Sicily. This paper will track the evolution of this myth, focusing on the texts and times that provide the strongest evidence of this phenomenon. In so doing, I hope to provide a better context for references to the castration tale and a potential model for identifying changes in canonical elements of Greco-Roman myth and the process by which they occur.

In the Archaic and Classical periods, Corcyra is linked to Cronus' sickle both through association with the name Drepane (*Δρεπανή*, "sickle"), and mythic tales that identify the Phaeacians as being borne from Uranus' castration; information of this type appears in a variety of authors, such as Acusilaus, Alcaeus, and Hellanicus (West (1983) 134-5), suggesting a consistent narrative. However, during the Hellenistic era, these stories are joined by texts which place Cronus' sickle in Sicily, such as Lycophron's *Alexandra* and Callimachus' fragmentary *De Siciliae Urbibus* (Fusillo et. al (1991) 260; Nappa (2004) 644). Simultaneously, and in the case of the *Alexandra* in the same text, new myths appeared that placed other sickles in Corcyra. The variety of these tales, as well as their short lifespan in Greco-Roman literature, suggests that their existence was not a series of independent stories trying to gain hold. Rather, they were part of a

single phenomenon; by providing alternate explanations for Corcyra's original mythic name, these new tales smooth the relocation of Cronus' weapon to Sicily, creating a transitional narrative where the Greek island still holds *a* divine sickle, just not *the* divine sickle used by the Titan King.

By the start of the Roman period, the new version of the myth, which places Cronus' sickle in Sicily, has fully taken hold. All references to Cronus' sickle place it in Sicily, albeit in various cities in Sicily, until the 4th century CE. Furthermore, not only does Corcyra lose Cronus' sickle, but it also loses all of the mythic stories that connect it to the blade, including the name Drepane, which is only mentioned when describing the words of earlier Greek writers. All of the other sickles connected to Corcyra also vanish, further indicating that they were part of the transitional period of this myth, not independent tales.

By following the chronology of the story of Cronus' sickle, we can see that it follows three distinct phases: an initial period with a single consistent story, a transitional period when both the number of versions of the myth and tales referring to it dramatically increase, and then a new normal wherein a single new alternate tale has taken hold, leaving all others, including the original, fall by the wayside. More importantly, the schematic it creates is generic, not specific to the myth, and does not require intentional intervention or innovation by a single author or society. It may therefore be possible to utilize this structure to plot out the evolution of other mythical tales, both big and small, and identify if and when they make structural changes.

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