

## Polysomatic Allusion in Stesichorus' Death of Geryon

Since the discovery of the *Geryoneis* fragments, much attention has been paid to the poem's relation to Homer: how does Stesichorus' poem engage with the epic traditions that precede it? Of special importance for this question is his account of Geryon's death at the hands of Heracles, in which he compares the monster's fallen head to a poppy losing its petals. The simile of the poppy, as utilized within the context of death and dying, is not Stesichorus' own invention, but draws on the Homeric passage describing Gorgythion's death in *Iliad* 8. This memorable simile, I argue, can be best understood when read not only as a link between Stesichorus and Homer, but as part of a larger network of allusions that includes Vergil's use of the same poetic image of the poppy, in narrating the death of Euryalus in *Aeneid* 9.

Both Maingon (1980) and Kelly (2015) have acknowledged that the poppy simile in Stesichorus has less in common with its Homeric model than we might expect; the language in the two passages has more divergences than parallels, and the poppy's association with a relatively minor character's death in Homer makes it a puzzling simile to apply to the titular character of Stesichorus' poem. Building off of the notion introduced by Maingon (1980) that a multi-headed creature might have required multiple death scenes that are now lost, I attempt to justify the simile's presence in the *Geryoneis* on the basis of the poem's sequential structure: since Gorgythion can be read as part of a sequence of tragic deaths in the *Iliad*, Stesichorus' allusion to the Homeric scene establishes in the reader the same sense of dread and pity by foreshadowing deaths still to come. This line of argument not only helps to justify Stesichorus' choice of simile here, but also lends support to Franzen's (2009) study of the *Geryoneis* as a colonization narrative, since the Homeric poppy simile foreshadows the eventual fall of Troy.

The second part of my discussion extends my reading of the allusion in the opposite chronological direction, this time connecting Stesichorus' Geryon to Vergil's Euryalus, since he, too, can be read as foreshadowing a sequence of significant deaths in the epic. The connection to Vergil proves additionally useful; on the level of language alone, Vergil's poppy seems to draw as much on Stesichorus' poppy as on Homer's, and thus helps shed light on the ways in which Stesichorus has incorporated additional dimensions into the Homeric image, including the medicinal associations of the poppy flower (see Scarborough 1995), and the poetic trope of the hero's death as defloration (see Fowler 1987). In this way, an analysis of the relationship between these two post-Homeric poems allows for a reading of Stesichorus that insists on his innovations on the epic tradition, rather than his faithfulness to it. Relying on the methodology laid out in Garner's (1990) study of allusion in Greek poetry, I argue that this kind of a bi-lateral (or what I call in my paper "polysomatic") intertextual reading—that is, one that looks at not only a poem's precedents but also its reception—is in the case of the *Geryoneis* crucial to our understanding of the Stesichorus' mastery of allusion and creativity as a poet in his own right.

#### Bibliography

- Fowler, Don. 1987. "Vergil on Killing Virgins." In *Homo Viator: Classical Essays for John Bramble*, eds. Michael Whitby, Philip Hardie, and Mary Whitby. Bristol Classical Press. 185-198.
- Franzen, Christina. 2009. "Sympathizing with the Monster: Making Sense of Colonization in Stesichorus' Geryoneis." *Quaderni Urbinati di Cultura Classica*, vol. 92, no. 2, 51-72.
- Garner, Richard. 1990. *From Homer to Tragedy: the Art of Allusion in Greek Poetry*. Routledge.

Kelly, Adrian. 2015. "Stesichorus' Homer." In *Stesichorus in Context*, eds. P. J. Finglass and Adrian Kelly. Cambridge University Press. 21-44.

Maingon, A. 1980. "Epic Convention in Stesichorus' Geryoneis: SLG S15." *Phoenix*, vol. 34, no. 2, 99-107.

Scarborough, John. 1995. "The Opium Poppy in Hellenistic and Roman Literature," in *Drugs and Narcotics in History*, eds. Roy Porter and Mikuláš Teich. Cambridge University Press. 4-23.