

GORGONS AT DELPHI?

Euripides, Ion 224

Χο. ἄρ' ὄντως μέσον ὀμφαλὸν
γᾶς Φοίβου κατέχει δόμος;

Ιων στέμμασί γ' ἐνδυτόν, ἀμφὶ δὲ Γοργόνες.

(Eur. Ion 223 f.)

The advent of Gorgons at the ὀμφαλός at Delphi has caused some puzzlement in the past, though not perhaps as much as might have been expected. What are they doing in this unlikely context? No-one would have been more surprised than Aeschylus' priestess

(Eum. 34 ff.). On her visit to the temple she finds Orestes at the ὄμφαλος and readily apprehends the reason of it (40: ὄρφ δ' ἐπ' ὄμφαλῳ μὲν ἄνδρα θεομουσῆ). However what sends her from the temple in horror is the aspect of the Eumenides about him, and she speaks of them thus (46 ff.)

πρόσθεν δὲ τάνδρὸς τοῦδε θαυμαστὸς λόχος
εὔδει γυναικῶν ἐν θρόνοισιν ἥμενος –
οὔτοι γυναῖκας ἀλλὰ Γοργόνας λέγω·

However, she goes on to say, they do not precisely resemble her idea of the Gorgons, whom she has seen in pictures, nor the Harpies, for whom her source of information is the same (49–51). Yet here in *Ion*, some forty years later, their presence as part of the mis-en-scène is taken for granted and indeed openly proclaimed by another, and equivalent, temple official.

Nowhere else in literature or art do we learn of Gorgons at the ὄμφαλος. The only such decoration of which we know consisted in the two eagles whose meeting from opposite ends of the world over Delphi caused the site to be established there; according to Strabo (9,3,6), who prefaces his account by giving the story (and another, anonymous, version involving crows)¹ and ascribing it to Pindar (fr. 54 S.-M.; cf. Paus. 10,16,3) δεικνυται δὲ καὶ ὄμφαλος τις ἐν τῷ ναῷ τεταινωμένος καὶ ἐπ' αὐτῷ αἱ δύο εἰκόνες τοῦ μύθου. This serves as a commentary on Pind. Pyth. 4,4 where the prophetess delivers the oracle concerning Battus χρυσέων Διὸς αἰετῶν πάρεδρος, i.e. from the ὄμφαλος itself.

Commentators cannot be said to have helped here. Owen, who starts with a spectacular misunderstanding of Eum. loc. cit. – whereby the priestess endorses the presence of Gorgons in the ἄδυτον as the most natural thing in the world – goes on to speculate “they were no doubt primitive sculpture and, having become much worn, might be described in more than one way, and the ordinary visitor would have to depend upon the account given of them by the Delphians, who alone could enter the ἄδυτον”. Simi-

1) Cf. Plut. de def. or. 1. 409E, Lucian, de salt. 38 with schol. ad loc. (p. 144 Jacobitz), where there is a reference to a mosaic of the eagles in the vicinity of the ὄμφαλος (λέγουσιν ἐν Δελφοῖς ὄμφαλὸν εἶναι ἐπὶ τοῦ ἐδάφους τοῦ νεῶ καὶ περὶ αὐτὸν αἰετὸν γεγράφθαι ἀπὸ συνθέσεως λίθων καὶ τοῦτο ἔφρασκον τὸ μέσον ἀπάσης τῆς γῆς), schol. Pind. Pyth. 4,6 (who tells us that the eagle images were appropriated by the Phocians during the third Sacred War under Philomelus, doubtless to be replaced by the mosaic just mentioned), schol. S. OT 480, schol. Eur. Or. 331.

larly J. G. Frazer², noting the disunity in the sources on the nature of the legendary birds (swans [Plut., loc. cit.] or crows are rival candidates). The Gorgon is relatively distinctive, one might think! Another guess he ventures is that Athenian patriotism would welcome them there because of their importance in the cult of Athena, which is no more plausible. Verrall persuades himself that they are the figures of the Moirai, of whose Delphic role we learn from Pausanias (10,24,4). Though one treats Pausanian topography in a detailed description with caution, the implication from the order of that account is that they are neighbours to the ἑστία – and certainly not in the private ἄδυτον (παρίασί τε ἐς αὐτὸ ὀλίγοι, loc. cit. 5 fin.), where the ὀμφαλός is notionally located in *Ion*, giving this part of the scene its point³.

Wilamowitz at least acknowledges the oddity and considers that their Gorgon-function was that of guardians of the sacred ὀμφαλός; translating ἀμφί as not ‘upon’ but ‘about’ he suggests “daß der Erdnabel vor profanen Blicken durch γοργόνες geschützt war, oder vielmehr, daß man sich auch dies erzählte”⁴. J. E. Harrison⁵ suggests that the reference is to γοργονεῖα hanging from the ἀγορνόν which draped the ὀμφαλός – this depends very much on her arguments *ibid.* concerning the presence of that controversial accoutrement at Delphi; slightly

2) J. G. Frazer, Pausanias’s Description of Greece, New York 1898, V 314 f.

3) Notionally; we are dealing with a mythical temple imagined for the purposes of this play, not a guide-book to the Delphi of Euripides’ own day, nor is the position of the ὀμφαλός in Classical times of relevance to this enquiry. (See recently Pierre Amandry, ‘Où était l’omphalos?’, in: J.-F. Bommelaer (ed.), Delphes: centenaire de la «Grande fouille». Actes du colloque Paul Perdrizet. Université des sciences humaines de Strasbourg XII, Leiden 1992, 177 f.)

4) Cf. U. v. Wilamowitz-Moellendorff, Pindaros, Berlin 1922, 79 n. 1.

5) J. E. Harrison, Aegis – ἀγορνόν, BCH 24 (1900) 261 f. (cf. *id.*, Themis, Cambridge ²1927, 396 f.). As Wilamowitz (above, n. 4) notes, the various glossographic notices which allege that an αἰγίς is a form of net constructed from στέμματα are irrelevant, though they have played a long and confusing part in the discussion (other sources: Hes. and the Suda s.v. αἰγίς, Harpocration s.v. αἰγίδας, Aelius Dionysius ap. Eust. ad Il. 603.15 – who only tells us, correctly, that Gorgons are associated with the αἰγίς). The reason they have been adduced derives from Hesychius 845 b Latte s.v. γοργόνες· αἰγίδες· οἱ δὲ τὰ ἐπὶ τῶν αἰγίδων πρόσωπα, which is almost certainly corrupt. What he intends to tell us, I imagine, is that Gorgons appear upon Athena’s Panathenaic peplos – cf. *id.* supra γόργεα· πρόσωπεῖα – and perhaps he wrote γόργεα· αἰγίδος (ἀνημμένα)· οἱ δὲ τὰ ἐπὶ τῶν αἰγίδων πρόσωπα. That is – “These are attached to the aegis. Some people go so far as to call these ornaments Gorgons (<as against πρόσωπεῖα>”).

differently, E. Bourguet⁶ contemplates metal reproductions in a similar setting.

However, it is also from archaeologists rather than philologists that the idea that the text is corrupt here has been forthcoming.

W. H. Roscher⁷ wished to emend to ἀμφὶ δὲ γνώμονες, referring especially to Ion 414 f. on the ὄσιοι, if indeed it is they οἱ πλησίον θάσσοι τριπόδος.

Studniczka⁸ has made the only suggestion that has stood the test of time (if inclusion in Gilbert Murray's apparatus criticus is a sign of that). Having pointed out that there is no room in any Classical account (one might add, or iconography) for Gorgons in the ἄδυτον, he suggests that an anapaest has dropped out of the text and, relying upon the evidence for eagles quoted above, and upon examples from art⁹, wrote

στέμμασί γ' ἐνδυτόν, ἀμφὶ δὲ γοργῶ
 (χρυσοφαέννω Διὸς οἰωνώ.)

While approving Studniczka's objections, I would like to suggest another possibility, which involves less surgery.

P.Oxy. XV 1791 has fragments of Pindar, Paean 8, and among them (fr. 52i,70 f. S.-M.) in the midst of an account of the third temple at Delphi, we have the verses quoted in a corrupt form by Pausanias 10,5,12, and by Galen, de artic. 18,1 p. 519 Kühn in a discussion of the appearance and derivation of the term αἰετός¹⁰.

68 f. χάλκιοι μὲν τοῖχοι χάλκ[εαί] | θ' ὑπὸ κίονες ἔστασαν |
 χρύσεια δ' ἔξ ὑπὲρ αἰετοῦ | ἄειδον Κηληδόνες.

6) E. Bourguet, Ruines de Delphes, Paris 1914, 248 and n. 1 ("probablement les têtes de Meduse en métal qui étaient fixés à l'intersection des mailles de réseau"). See too F. Courby, Fouilles de Delphes II, Paris 1927, 69 f., 70 n. 2.

7) W. H. Roscher, Omphalos. Eine philologisch-archäologisch-volkskundliche Abhandlung, Leipzig 1913, 61 and n. 172. Cf. id., Neue Omphalosstudien. Ein archäologischer Beitrag zur vergleichenden Religionswissenschaft, Leipzig 1915, 41 n. 73. His successor in this field, H. V. Herrmann (Omphalos, Orbis Antiquus 13, 1959), offers no discussion of the problem, in keeping with his usual disregard of the evidence from *Ion*.

8) F. Studniczka, Eine Corruptel im Ion des Euripides, Hermes 37 (1902) 258 f. (where both γ' ὄρνεις and τόγγω – vultures, apparently – are thankfully rejected).

9) E.g. C. H. E. Haspels, Attic Black-figured Lekythoi, Paris 1936, app. XIII (Haemon Painter), p. 242 no. 37; a Spartan grave relief (Herrmann [above, n. 7] Taf. II 1).

10) Quoting from Pindar ἐν ταῖς Πλειάσιν, a corruption of ἐν τοῖς Παιᾶσιν.

Pausanias' interpretation of the mysterious Κηληδόνες is important – τὰ ἐς τὰς ᾠδοὺς τὰς χρυσαῖς ἃ δὴ Πίνδαρος ἤσεν ἐπ' ἐκείνῳ τῷ ναῷ . . . οὗτος μὲν δὴ ταῦτα ἐς μίμησιν, ἐμοὶ δοκεῖν, τῶν παρ' Ὀμήρῳ Σειρήνων ἐποίησε. That some creatures of the Siren type are in question is further indicated by Philostratus, vit. Ap. 6,11, also in a discussion of Apollo's construction of the early temples at Delphi – ἐνὸς δ' αὐτῶν καὶ χρυσαῖς ἕγγας ἀνάσαι λέγεται Σειρήνων τινὰ ἐπεχούσας πειθῶ. The reference to 'wrynecks' may be semi-metaphorical for magical, bird-like images. There is also an interesting, if cryptic, mention in Iamblichus, vit. Pyth. 18,82¹¹ – τί ἐστι τὸ ἐν Δελφοῖς μαντεῖον; τετρακτύς· ὅπερ ἐστὶν ἡ ἀρμονία, ἐν ἣ αἱ Σειρήνες¹².

From this we learn that creatures of the polymorphous Siren type were associated with the third temple at Delphi, and there is no reason not to identify them with the Κηληδόνες of Pindar, who also gives us their location, as acroteria¹³.

We then turn to three glossographic notices, which now assume considerable significance.

Hesychius 843 Latte s.v. Γοργάδων· ἀλιάδων· Δαιδάλω

Σοφοκλής (fr. 163 Radt)

Id. 845a Latte s.v. Γοργίδες· αἱ Ὠκεανίδες

Zonaras 448 Tittmann s.v. Γοργάδες· αἱ δέσποιναί

The glossographic notices are curious and suggestive. If the intent was merely to gloss an unusual form of Γοργῶν then we would not have this curious variety of apparent synonyms – 'sea nymphs', 'Oceanids', 'the Great Goddesses'¹⁴. When a compiler in the *Suda* desired to tell us what Gorgons are, he gave an account that would

11) I am indebted to Dr. I. C. Rutherford for pointing this out to me.

12) Iamblichus is commenting upon Pl. Rep. 617B f. where the Sirens have a comparable role in the cosmogony of the Myth of Er, as is Plut. de an. procr. in Tim. 1029C. Cf. A. Delatte, Études sur la littérature pythagoricienne, Genève 1974, 260 f.

13) The identification with Sirens was made by Furtwängler (Arch. Zeit. 40 [1882] 383), with comparative evidence. Important too is the evidence from vit. Soph. 15 (test. A 1 Radt) (a description of the tomb of Sophocles): φασὶ δ' ὅτι καὶ τῷ μνήματι αὐτοῦ σειρήνα ἐπέστησαν, οἱ δὲ κηληδόνα χαλκῆν. Athenaeus (290E) compares Pindar's Κηληδόνες with the Sirens even more explicitly, though he may well have been unaware of the context – as now we know it.

14) That they could be classified as sea-nymphs, among so many other different types, by their birth from Phorkys and Keto, is beside the point; that is not their primary attribute in the Greek world. No-one (except a historian of Greek religion) would gloss them as such, any more than one would 'Harpies' with 'Keres'.

fit well in any elementary classical dictionary (Γοργόνες· τρεῖς γυναῖκες, αἱ τοσοῦτον εἶχον φοβερά τὰ πρόσωπα ὡς τοὺς ὄρωντας θνήσκειν· ὧν μίαν ἀνελεῖν λογχοδροπέαν τὸν Περσέα). It is at least evident that Sophocles (the two Hesychian notices may be identical in reference and the form with iota an error) had some more general application in mind in the *Daedalus* from the following train of reasoning: Had the glossographer merely intended to convey the information that Sophocles in the *Daedalus* introduced an unusual form of the name Γοργών, the notice might have been expected to read Γοργάδες· Γοργόνες. Δαιδάλῳ Σοφοκλῆς. However to adduce both the aberrant definition ἀλιάδες and give a specific reference indicates that the point of the notice is not the form but the unusual meaning there attached to it, which goes beyond the norm. Had he not given the reference it would still be possible, though surprising (see n. 10), to minimize the significance of this evidence and to argue that, for Hesychius, Gorgon = Gorgas = sea-nymph¹⁵.

There is no recorded instance of Γοργώ(ν) used merely in accord with its root meaning – the ‘Terrible Ones’. Γοργάς however is – most importantly for our purpose at Eur. Hyps. fr. 64, 77 p. 47 Bond (of the Lemniae)

οἷά τε Γοργάδες ἐν λέκτροις | ἔκανον εὐνέτας

This, I suggest, cannot be and would not be interpreted as a reference to the three Gorgons, who, undesirable though they may be in themselves, are not associated with any such deeds. The context suggests that the comparison is between the Lemniae and daemones who lure men to their death – and that, taken in conjunction with the evidence quoted here, implies that the Sirens are in question. Nor should the equation of Siren and death-bringing Ker in literature and art be ignored¹⁶.

Even if this were not so, Zonaras’ remarkable gloss αἱ δέσποιναι evidently refers to some quite different personages.

I suggest that the Sirens are called Γοργάδες both in the glossographic tradition¹⁷ and in the *Hypsipyle*-fragment discussed.

15) Ziegler, Gorgo, RE VII 2 (1912) 1634, fails to see this point.

16) J. E. Harrison, *Prolegomena to the Study of Greek Religion*, New York 1903, 197 f. Lycophron offers a further example of the metaphorical Γοργάς at Alex. 1349 – ἡ παλίμφορον Γοργάς, on which schol. vet. comment ἡ ἐμπουητικὴ φόβου Ἦρα ἢ Ἀθηναῖα, Tzetzes adding διὰ τὴν γοργότητα.

17) In regard to Zonaras’ evidence, it should be observed that the appellation

From the Pindar fragment and probably from the reference in Philostratus we learn that the Sirens were in some way thought to be acroteria of the third temple at Delphi. They are however the most obvious companions of Apolline cult, with their musical and prophetic associations¹⁸, and in a mythicized account of the temple involving various traditions such as Euripides is composing here, there is no reason why their location could not be altered, or a further one invented, in order to suit his requirements.

Therefore I would propose in Ion 224

στέμμασί γ' ἔνδυτόν, ἀμφὶ δὲ Γοργάδες.

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he gives them has the air of a cult-title, manifestly inappropriate to the Gorgons, but not so to the Sirens, on whose worship as sea-goddesses in S. Italy see Strabo 5,4,7; 1,2,12–13, Steph. Byz. s.v. Σειθηνοῦσσαι (cf. Zwicker, Sirenen, RE III A 1 [1927] 296, C. G. Pugliese, Sul culto delle Sirene nel golfo di Napoli, PP 7 [1952] 420 f.).

18) Homer cast them in this role (from their invitation to Odysseus at Od. 12,184 ff.), and it is not surprising that Porphyry (qu. ad Hom. Od. pert. sect. 184, p. 112 Schrader) interprets μαντικάι τινες αἱ Σειθῆνες, ὅθεν γνωρίζουσι τοῦνομα. For more ambitious connections, cf. E. Buschor, Die Musen des Jenseits, München 1944 with the review by J. R. T. Pollard, CR n.s. 2 (1952) 60 f. A Siren and Apollo are conjoined in C.V.A. London B.M. no.3 pl.38 1a though iconography, as against literature, is so far of less help than we might think. This may be a matter of pure accident.