BOOK REVIEW

The Sea in the Greek Imagination. By MARIE-CLAIRE BEAULIEU. University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016. Pp. ix + 267. Hardcover, $79.95. ISBN 978-0-8122-4765-7.

Despite its title, Marie-Claire Beaulieu's *The Sea in the Greek Imagination* is not, properly speaking, an inquiry into the many ways in which ancient Greeks thought about and through the sea. Rather its more circumscribed aims are better expressed by the title of the dissertation out of which it developed: *Hades and Oceanus: Immersion into the Sea as a Metaphor for Death and Rebirth in Greek Mythology*. It contains little or no discussion of many topics one might expect to find in a book on ancient Greek ideas about the sea: the widespread use of nautical metaphors for sympotic revels, as explored by William Slater and François Lissarrague;[1] the powerful musical and ritual connotations of the marine space that Eric Csapo has brought to light;[2] the complex networks of maritime trade that find their way into the Greek literary sea, as Barbara Kowalzig has so elegantly elucidated.[3] For Beaulieu, the sea is above all a "mediating space in Greek mythology" which "separates the visible and the invisible worlds and marks the difference between men, gods, and the dead" (16). And, after a few false starts—a brief discussion of the history of Atlantic exploration in the Introduction, a survey of the vast range of attributes and meanings assigned to the sea in the Homeric epics—she sets out to demonstrate the mediating character of the sea to the exclusion of all else. Homer may sing of the boundless sea, but Beaulieu's interests are decidedly circumscribed.

[1] W. J. Slater, "Symposium at Sea," *HSCP*, 80 (1976), 161-70; F. Lissarrague, *Un flot d'images: une esthétique du banquet grec* (Paris: A. Biro, 1987).

[2] Eric Csapo, "Dolphins of Dionysus", in Eric Csapo and Margaret C. Miller (eds.), *Poetry, Theory, Praxis: The Social Life of Myth, Word and Image in Ancient Greece* (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2003), 69-98.

[3] Barbara Kowalzig, "Musical Merchandise 'on Every Vessel': Religion and Trade on the Island of Aigina", in David Fearn (ed.), *Aigina: Contexts for Choral Lyric Poetry. Myth, History, and Identity in the Fifth Century BC* (Oxford, 2010), 129–171; Barbara Kowalzig, "Dancing Dolphins on the Wine-Dark Sea: Dithyramb and Social Change in the Archaic Mediterranean," in Barbara Kowalzig and Peter Wilson (eds.), *Dithyramb in Context* (Oxford, 2013), 30–58.

Though the scope of the work is narrow, Beaulieu's treatment of the sea as a transitional space is loosely structured. The book is divided into six chapters, each intended to address a different facet of the sea's mediating nature. The material often blends together, however, leaving it difficult at times to distinguish the focus of one chapter from another.

The opening chapter on "the paths of the sea" examines sea travel, especially that of Odysseus, as a type of *katabasis*. The argumentation is primarily based on a detailed analysis of the mythical geography—by far the best part of the work—that connects the sea, the ocean, and the underworld through what Beaulieu dubs the "mythical hydrological network" (26–36). Here Beaulieu begins to sketch out the complex relationship between different types of water: Ocean and sea, freshwater springs and saltwater depths, the rivers of the underworld and those above the earth. But the suggestive connections of this early discussion are not cashed out. Instead, mythical geography is flattened into an indeterminately-formed marine sphere with surprisingly capacious boundaries, one that even seems to extend onto dry land, as in the discussion of the final books of the *Odyssey*.

The comparison of three fifth-century accounts of mythical sea crossings in chapter two epitomizes the interpretive imprecision. Here Beaulieu sets Pindar's accounts of the exploits of Perseus (*P.*10) and Jason (*P.*4) alongside Bacchylides' narrative of Theseus' journey to Crete (B.17). There is little acknowledgement of the strikingly different ways in which each hero's encounter with the sea is recounted in these poems: Perseus' is hardly recounted at all; Jason's is an extended, albeit fantastical, voyage aboard ship; and Theseus' is a descent into the glorious underwater home of Poseidon himself. The distinctive texture and specific geographic imaginary of the individual poems are subsumed into a generalized pattern: sea voyages allow young men to prove their worth and to establish themselves as "heroes and political leaders" (87), a conclusion that might have been more robust had the bibliographic foundations been stronger. Thomas Hubbard's elegant meditation on geographic polarities in Pindar is entirely absent; Leslie Kurke's seminal work on the social function of epinician is cited only once and in the most general of terms.[4]

Chapter three shifts focus from the male to the female sphere with an examination of maidens set afloat against their will. The tale of Danae takes center stage,

[4] Thomas K. Hubbard, *The Pindaric Mind: A Study of Logical Structure in Early Greek Poetry* (Leiden: Brill, 1985), esp. 11–60; Leslie Kurke, *The Traffic in Praise: Pindar and the Poetics of Social Economy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991).

flanked by the similar narratives of Auge and Rhoeo. The discussion ranges from Simonides to Apollonius of Rhodes to Ovid, though much of the narrative detail (here as elsewhere) is supplied from late mythographers such as Apollodorus and Hyginus, largely without comment (indeed, chronology and historical context are rarely acknowledged throughout the book). Beaulieu points to these floating chest narratives as proof of the "ambiguous significance" of marriageable girls crossing the sea—an intermediate space that is potentially deadly but can also effect positive transformation. That may well be true, but such ambiguity is hardly unique to the marine sphere when it comes to the perilous position of girls on the verge of marriage, a fact well underlined by the fate of Antigone, mentioned repeatedly as a parallel to Danae throughout the chapter. Beaulieu never articulates how the specifically marine context of these narratives, or those explored in other chapters, might differ from similar stories that take place on dry land.

The final three chapters offer more examples of mythical figures who enter the sea and face death (or something like it) and find themselves transformed, whether literally or figuratively. The consistent focus on the boundary between life and death leads to a certain homogeneity from one chapter to the next, but at the same time important connections are curiously neglected. Chapter four, which focuses on dolphins, hardly mentions Dionysus, whose special dolphins must wait to make their appearance in chapter six. The catalogue of mad "leaps of faith" in chapter five does not return to Theseus' bold plunge, even in passing, though it does devote space to Theocritus 11 despite the fact that Polyphemus never enters the water. There is much in these chapters that is of interest, such as the discussion of Hesiod's Arion-like escape from death at sea (124–129) or of the marine-themed funerary imagery of sixth- and fifth-century Magna Graeca (183–187). The catalogues of similarly structured marine narratives are likewise valuable, but the imprecise and generalizing analysis prevents any single moment from coming into sharp focus. While no one can be faulted for failing to contain the fullness of the sea, the virtue of a small stream lies in the clarity of its waters.

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