

## BOOK REVIEW

*The Werewolf in the Ancient World*. By DANIEL OGDEN. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2021. Pp xiv + 261. Hardback, \$32.95. ISBN: 978-0-19-885431-9.

Ogden opens his study of the ancient werewolf with a joke about trying to list all the good werewolf stories, only to find that there's only one: Petronius' *Satyricon* 61. He then modestly hopes that his work will raise the profile of a few more. His study, however, does far more than that. It provides both a wide-ranging and insightful analysis of everything related to the werewolf in Greco-Roman antiquity and a comprehensive sourcebook of the literary sources.

Rather than starting with a modern definition of werewolf and trying to fit ancient stories into it, Ogden begins with the stories and reverse-engineers a definition. He argues that folklore created the werewolf, establishing it as a creature that shifts, wholly or partially, between human and wolf, sometimes at will, sometimes under the compulsion of external forces, and that its origins in folklore give rise to the seeming discrepancies in werewolf stories. He takes a cross-cultural and cross-temporal approach, including forays into medieval and Norse literature, and while this does result in a coherent picture, that coherence may be misleading, and is occasionally unwarranted, when applied to the ancient werewolf. Nonetheless, it's a strong argument.

Studies of ancient werewolves have been dominated by accounts of Arcadian werewolves and associated cannibalism: Lykaon changed or was changed into a wolf for the crime of attempting to feed Zeus human flesh; in the Lykaia ritual, as rite of passage, a youth assumed the persona of a wolf, was excluded from society, and then reintegrated; and at the Lykaia, the victorious boxer Demarchus was transformed into a werewolf through cannibalism. Ogden argues that these stories, with their focus on real or symbolic eating of human flesh, don't reflect the full variety of werewolf lore. According to him, werewolves are better understood as elements of folklore: werewolves were created in, and by, and for Story and they could be deployed to explore the tension between the wilderness and

civilization. Therefore, flesh-eating, absent from many werewolf stories, is not an integral part of werewolf lore. By understanding the origin and purpose of the werewolf, the variety of the stories becomes less problematic.

The first two chapters establish thematic associations for werewolves in ancient thought: witches, often shape-shifters themselves, could change humans into animals/wolves, as could sorcerers (Herodotus' Neuri); the dead, ghosts and graveyards straddle the worlds of the living and the dead and are commonly associated with werewolves, who can cross between animal and human, wilderness and civilization. Chapter 3 expands upon this liminality. Because the werewolf encompasses both human and wolf, it belongs to both the human and the natural worlds.

Chapter 4 explores the werewolf's dual nature—human/animal, civilized/wild—through parallels with soul-projection. Ancient werewolves shed their human clothing before transformation and could return to human form and human society, provided that the clothing had been kept safe. Ogden sees a parallel in medieval werewolves, who would project their soul, in wolf form, from their comatose human bodies, to which they could return, provided the body had been kept safe. He sees a further parallel in the ancient Greek shaman whose soul could be sent from his body and return to it, provided that the body had been kept safe. While these parallels are interesting, the evidence is too thin to support the conclusion that the soul-projection of medieval werewolves was already found with the ancient werewolf. The need to safeguard the human shell for safe re-entry into human form and society is more convincing.

Chapter 5 seeks to identify the hero of Temesa as a werewolf. The hero, one of Odysseus' companions, raped a virgin at Temesa and was stoned to death, only to return as a vengeful ghost; to propitiate him, the townspeople built him a precinct and sacrificed a beautiful virgin to him annually. After several years, the boxer Euthymus arrived, defeated the vengeful Hero, and married that year's virgin. This hero is often depicted wearing a wolfskin. Ogden argues that the ghost who wears a wolfskin is in fact a werewolf, with a ghostly human interior and a wolf exterior, reflecting the werewolf's ability to cross the boundaries between the human and animal worlds.

The final chapter attempts to disentangle the disparate and conflicting threads of the Arkadian werewolves, and once the stories are seen as discrete units, one can see that there is no cohesive (flesh-eating) "werewolf" to be found here, much less one that can explain the complexities found in stories of the ancient werewolf. If the flesh-eating element is no longer seen as the *sine qua non* of the

ancient werewolf, then what is the key to unlocking the stories? For Ogden, that key is folklore: werewolves are the product of Story, and Story in and of itself, explains the seeming discrepancies in werewolf accounts.

Three appendices round out the study. Appendix A examines Circe through the lens of folklore to argue that she is best understood as a witch, rather than a god. Appendix B (Cynocephali) and C (False Werewolves: Dolon and the Luperci), explain Ogden's exclusion of these two groups: the Cynocephali are not shape-shifters and so not werewolves; the cowardly Dolon was a human in wolf's clothing; and it is the goat, not the wolf, that is at the heart of the Lupercalia.

Overall, Ogden's argument is clearly laid out, the bibliography is extensive and the style is engaging. This is an interesting examination of the complexities of the ancient werewolf and makes a strong addition to our understanding of the ancient supernatural world(s).

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