

HYBRID MONSTERS

IN THE CLASSICAL WORLD

**THE NATURE AND FUNCTION OF HYBRID MONSTERS
IN GREEK MYTHOLOGY, LITERATURE AND ART**

by
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Declaration

By submitting this thesis electronically, I declare that the entirety of the work contained therein is my own, original work, that I am the authorship owner thereof (unless to the extent explicitly otherwise stated) and that I have not previously in its entirety or in part submitted it for obtaining any qualification.

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this thesis is to explore the purpose of monster figures by investigating the relationship between these creatures and the cultures in which they are generated. It focuses specifically on the human-animal hybrid monsters in the mythology, literature and art of ancient Greece. It attempts to answer the question of the purpose of these monsters by looking specifically at the nature of man-horse monsters and the ways in which their dichotomous internal and external composition challenged the cultural taxonomy of ancient Greece. It also looks at the function of monsters in a ritual context and how the Theseus myth, as initiation myth, and the Minotaur, as hybrid monster, conforms to the expectations of ritual monsters.

The investigation starts by considering the history and uses of the term "monster" in an attempt to arrive at a reasonable definition of monstrosity. In aid of this definition, attention is also given to themes that recur when considering monster beings. This provides a basis from which the hybrid monsters of ancient Greece, the centaur and Minotaur in particular, can be considered.

The next section of the thesis looks into the attitudes to animals prevalent in ancient Greece. The cultural value of certain animal types and even certain body parts have to be taken account, and the degree to which these can be traced to the nature and actions of the hybrid monster has to be considered.

The main argument is divided in two sections. The first deals with the centaur as challenger to Greek cultural taxonomy. The centaur serves as an eminent example of how human-animal hybrid monsters combine the familiar and the foreign, the Self and the Other into a single complex being. The nature of this monster is examined with special reference to the ways in which the centaur, as proponent of chaos and wilderness, stands in juxtaposition to the ideals of Greek civilisation. The second section consists of an enquiry into the purpose of the hybrid monster and considers the Minotaur's role as a facilitator of transformation. The focus is directed towards the ritual function of monsters and the ways in which monsters aid change and renewal both in individuals and in communities. By considering the Theseus-myth and the role of the Minotaur in the coming-of-age of the Attic hero as well as the city of Athens itself, the ritual theory is given application in ancient Greece.

The conclusion of this thesis is that hybrid monsters, as manifestations of the internal dichotomy of man and the tenuous relationship between order and chaos, played a critical role in the personal and communal definition of man in ancient Greece.

OPSOMMING

Die doelstelling van hierdie tesis is om die sin van monsters te ondersoek deur te kyk na die verhouding wat bestaan tussen hierdie wesens en die gemeenskappe waarbinne hulle hul ontstaan het. Die tesis fokus spesifiek op die mens-dier hibriede monster in die mitologie, literatuur en kuns van antieke Griekeland. Dit probeer om tot 'n slotsom te kom oor die bestaansrede van monsters deur te kyk na die aard van die man-perd monster. Hierdie wese se tweeledige samestelling – met betrekking tot beide sy interne en eksterne komposisie – het 'n wesenlike bedreiging ingehou vir die kulturele taksonomie van die antieke Grieke. Die tesis kyk ook na die rol, van monsters in die konteks van rituele gebeure. Die mite van Theseus as 'n mite met rituele verbintenisse, en die Minotaurus as hibriede monster, word dan oorweeg om te bepaal wat die ooreenstemming is met die verwagtinge wat daargestel is vir rituele monsters.

Ten einde 'n redelike definisie van monsteragtigheid daar te stel, begin die ondersoek deur oorweging te skenk aan die geskiedenis en die gebruike van die woord "monster". Ter ondersteuning van hierdie definisie word daar ook aandag geskenk aan sekere temas wat herhaaldelik opduik wanneer monsters ter sprake kom. Dit skep 'n basis vir die ondersoek na die hibriede monsters van antieke Griekeland, en meer spesifiek na die kentaurus en die Minotaurus.

Die tesis oorweeg ook die houding van die antieke Griekse beskawing teenoor diere. Die kulturele waarde van sekere soorte diere, en selfs seker ledemate van diere, moet in ag geneem word wanneer die hibriede monsterfiguur behandel word. Aandag moet geskenk word aan die maniere waarop die assosiasies wat die Grieke met diere gehad het, oorgedra word na die aard en handelinge van die monsterfiguur.

Die hoofargument van die tesis word in twee dele uiteengesit. Die eerste gedeelte behandel die kentaurus as uitdager van die kulturele taksonomie van die antieke Grieke. Die kentaurus dien as 'n uitstekende voorbeeld van die manier waarop die mens-dier monster dit wat bekend is en dit wat vreemd is, die Self en die Ander, kombineer in een komplekse wese. Die aard van hierdie wese word ondersoek met spesifieke verwysing na die maniere waarop die kentaurus, as voorstander van die ongetemde en van chaos, in teenstelling staan teenoor die ideale van die Griekse beskawing. Die tweede gedeelte vors die doel van die hibriede monster na en oorweeg die Minotaurus se rol as bevorderaar van transformasie. Hier word gefokus op die rol van die monster in 'n rituele konteks

en die maniere waarop monsters verandering en vernuwing teweegbring in enkelinge sowel as in gemeenskappe. Hierdie teorie word van toepassing gemaak op antieke Griekeland deur die mite van Theseus en die rol van die Minotaurus te oorweeg binne die konteks van die proses van inburgering wat beide die held en sy stad, Athene, ondergaan.

Die gevolgtrekking van hierdie tesis is dat hibriede monsters, as uitbeeldings van die interne tweeledigheid van die mens sowel as van die tenger verband tussen orde en chaos in die wêreld, 'n noodsaaklike rol gespeel het in die persoonlike en sosiale definisie van die individu in antieke Griekeland.

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Introduction

In mythology and folklore, monsters are ubiquitous. They feature in the stories told by peoples from widely disparate cultures, countries and eras and yet they share many common traits: they are generally large, carnivorous, fearsome and treacherous creatures. In appearance and behaviour they confuse and terrify. They haunt inhospitable terrain and have a habit of feeding on humans.

It is accepted that monsters are imagined and that these creatures of folklore are born from the psychological, cultural and religious needs of a society. This thesis intends to explore the purpose of monster figures by investigating the relationship between these creatures and the cultures in which they are generated. Its specific focus will be on the human-animal hybrid monsters found in the mythology, literature and art of ancient Greece. Hybrid monsters, those that combine human and animal elements into a single form, add an interesting angle to the topic of mythological monster figures: these creatures combine the familiar and the foreign, the Self and the Other, into a single complex being. What behaviour can be expected from such a creature? Does the external composition mirror a dichotomous internal composition? If so, does it mean that the creature would display both human and animal characteristics? What are those characteristics? Are there parallels to be drawn between the familiar and that which is good, the foreign and that which is bad and, if so, how do these manifest in the nature and actions of the monster: is it quintessentially bad or good? Are its actions threatening or does it perform a useful – even necessary – role in a cultural context?

In the search for satisfying answers to these questions an in-depth review of two examples of human-animal hybrids – the centaur and the Minotaur – will be conducted. The study has two focus areas. Firstly it looks at the nature of the man-horse monsters and the ways in which their dichotomous appearance and internal composition presented a challenge to the cultural taxonomy of ancient Greece. Secondly it considers the Theseus-myth as an initiation myth, and how the Minotaur, as hybrid monster, conforms to the functional expectations of monsters in a ritual context. However, before addressing the centaur and the Minotaur some groundwork has to be done to establish a point of departure for the investigation.

The first requirement is a clear and concise definition of monstrosity. This, as will become apparent, is no simple task since monsters are notoriously hard to classify. "Monster" as a concept has little

ambiguity: it is an epithet often used for our enemies, for creatures that threaten us and for people whose behaviour elicits strong disapproval. In spite of its clarity of concept it is also a term with a very general application. So general, in fact, that it imparts precious little information about the specific nature and function of the creature to which it is assigned. Indeed, attempts at arriving at a precise definition of the term "monster" compel us to accept that creatures carrying this epithet can be highly disparate. They range from the imaginary bogeymen that scare children at night to inimical foreigners that threaten to invade our land and destroy our people. There are monstrous births that introduce misshapen beings into our community and there are stories and images of strange creatures brought to us from faraway lands. Can there be any justification for the use of a single term, functioning as a kind of collective noun, for creatures that are inherently so dissimilar? As a matter of fact careful consideration of these different types of monsters does reveal a shared source, a common root which lies not in the creature, but can be found in its creator: all monsters are spawned by the human fear of the unknown. It is the feeling of discomfort that is found at the end of knowledge and understanding, beyond which one perceives there to be more than a void. Monsters are an attempt – through the allocation of a physical manifestation, a name and defined characteristics – at bringing the irrational into the realm of the rational where it can be understood and, perhaps, controlled. The most accurate definition of monsters is not, after all, so much a definition as an insight: monsters are the manifestations of man's attempts at gaining understanding, and a modicum of control over, irrational experiences.

If one is to evaluate a creature for monstrosity, and has to be content with a fairly vague definition, one would require defined characteristics shared by the beings grouped under the term "monster". It would be a concern that no such commonality exists between the man-eating Windigo of the Algonquian-speaking Indians of Canada, the Nandi bear of Kenya reputed to eat human brains and the monster masks used in Buddhist rites of exorcism.¹ Though it hardly seems possible that these, along with the aliens and monsters of modern science fiction and horror films, share a similar tradition particularly since geographical and temporal separation precludes any contact between their

¹ See Gilmore 2003:1-4 for more detail on these and other monsters.

originators and, so, any chance of conceptual cross-pollination, they do. In spite of their disparity, monstrous creatures do share areas of congruence.

One of the likenesses, also referred to in the study as "common themes" of monstrosity, shared by even the most dissimilar of monstrous creatures is the relationship of the monster to structure and order. Monsters, being typically averse to regulation and organisation, tend towards the chaotic and the organic instead. They possess no inherent logic and do not obey imposed rules. This makes them entirely unpredictable, explaining why they present a pronounced threat to the structures of order. On the other hand monsters do not exist independently from order – in fact they are a by-product of order: it is only in its opposition to the chaotic that structure gains definition. Furthermore, the monster is not only a creation of civilisation but a *requirement* of it: the monster comes to be all that is rejected by society, all that is contradictory to its principles. In this way society is able to rid itself of the undesirable and able to define itself. The monster becomes a negative imprint, a mirror image of society. It is this very fact, the monster's reflection of an inverted image of society, which provides us with a great deal of insight into its creator.

The fact that monsters thrive in the same conceptual space forms another common theme of monstrosity. Their juxtaposition to order and culture does not require them to be far removed from it. On the contrary, monsters keep close to the periphery of ordered spaces and roam just beyond the borders of land known to man. Their habitats are liminal spaces – spaces that exist between the cosmic spheres, where the rules of neither apply. In this, monsters often act as gate-keepers, monitoring the transition from the outer space to the inner space and vice versa.

The third area of commonality shared by monsters is the tendency to transgress boundaries and invert socially acceptable modes of behaviour. This trait can find expression in several ways – physically, geographically, conceptually, and behaviourally. Monsters in hybrid form can be seen as physical manifestations of this disregard for the boundaries that separate species. These creatures are often seen to exhibit the unique ability of moving out of their liminal space into the mortal or the divine spheres and, through their manifestation in ritual action, they similarly cross the lines of division between the real and the imaginary. In their behaviour monsters have an inherent disregard for the accepted. The threat they pose to people finds its consummate expression in their predisposition to devouring humans. With this single action the boundaries that define man are entirely dissolved.

While the monsters discussed in this study are mythological creatures that populate the literature and art of ancient Greece, consideration of non-mythological areas can prove valuable. For this reason a detour is made to consider the attitudes towards animals prevalent in ancient Greece. Far from a digression, such an investigation provides deeper insight into the cultural values and emotive connotations that accompanied certain animals, or parts of animals, in the ancient Greek mind. When a monster figure contains elements of the horse in its composition, one can only assume that the selection of animal is not accidental or random. An appreciation of the social, cultural and religious associations the Greeks had with horses casts light on both the inherent nature and the behaviour of a horse-hybrid monster.

The consideration of the definition of monsters, common themes of monstrosity and the attitudes held by the ancient Greeks towards animals, prepares the way for the main case of this thesis. In order for this study to be meaningful, two suggestions have to be satisfactorily shown to be true. The first is that hybrid monsters presented a challenge to the cultural taxonomy of ancient Greece. The existence of monsters relies heavily on a clearly defined cultural taxonomy, an accepted system of classification that governs the various spheres of the cosmos and their inhabitants. By their very nature monsters present the counterpoint to this order. They do not, however, play a passive role in their antithesis; they challenge categories and accepted norms and blur the lines of what is known. While on the one hand the dividing lines of cultural categories are compromised, monster figures – through contrast – also bring these lines into clearer focus. These statements will be evaluated by looking in detail at the development and nature of the centaur and the way in which their physical and behavioural dichotomy dovetailed with Greek sensitivities about order, culture and civilisation.

The second suggestion is that hybrid monsters have a role to play in initiation-type ritual activity or, as is more easily demonstrated in the case of ancient Greece, in myths that appear to have a ritual function. In rituals of Southern European villages, some performed to this day, monsters play a prominent part – at first threatening the villagers but eventually succumbing to their attacks (Gantz 2003:155-173). The monsters – creatures both hated and revered by the villagers – cannot be seen as only antagonistic. For the villagers the function they perform is both destructive and regenerative. In a similar way the monsters found in the initiation rites of primitive societies perform a dual role. The initiate has to undergo a symbolic death at the hand of the threatening creature, and in doing so not only undergoes a psychological transformation but gains acceptance into his community as an adult. The transformation that the monster helps bring about, both in the village

festival and the initiation rite, betrays a cooperative relationship between man and monster. The ritual theory is given application in ancient Greece by considering the Theseus-myth. Theseus as young hero undergoes a transformation in the Cretan labyrinth facilitated by the bull-man monster, itself in appearance not dissimilar to a masked elder in ritual dress. However, the Attic hero's transformation is not only a personal one but extends to that of his city Athens which, as from the defeat of the Minotaur, underwent political and cultural renewal.

The chapters to follow attempt to cast light on the general phenomenon of monsters through the investigation of a small subset of these creatures: the human-animal hybrid of the ancient Greek world. It is through the investigation of the centaur and the Minotaur's inherent natures and their relationship to man that a clearer understanding of not only these specific creatures, but of monsters in general, is sought.

CHAPTER 1: Definition and context

Use the word "monster" in the telling of a story and few people will be left uncertain of the role assigned to the creature in question. The monster is the antagonist, the threat, that which must be overcome. Understanding the *nature* of the monster, however, is not that simple. For this, the audience will rely on the context within which the monster functions, as revealed by the narrative. Indeed, the epithet "monster" is so imprecise and poorly defined that it requires the accompaniment of extensive description of the monster's size, appearance, habits and its actions as an aid to the audience's appreciation of the being.

a. Comments on etymology

How is it that a monster can be such an unmistakable and lucid concept yet at the same time be so undefined as to require extensive description and contextualisation in order to be understood? Most authors on the matter² agree that defining monsters, even as a category, is a particularly difficult endeavour. Murgatroyd (2007:1) points out that in English the very word has become so general in its application that we use it to describe "any person of whom we disapprove". For the purpose of this study, a much more precise definition is required.

Monstra and terata

In the search for a true and concise definition of "monster", a logical place to start is the etymology of the word. This should give insight into, if not contemporary, at least early views on what these beings are. The word owes much to its Latin root *monstrum*, "a significant, supernatural event", which in turn is related to the verb *monstrare* "to point out, teach, inform" (Simpson 1959: 379). As a result, when the word *monstrum* is used in classical texts it is often in relation to an "unnatural phenomenon through which gods warn men" (Lenfant 1999: 198). The Greek equivalent, *teras*, too, carries the meanings both of something unusual or out of the ordinary, and of a portent, again creating a connection between the anomalous thing and the

² See Murgatroyd 2007; Gilmore 2003; Atherton 1998; Cohen 1996; Lada-Richards 1998.

divine. These definitions high-light two pervasive attributes assigned to monsters: firstly that these beings serve as warnings or premonitions, preceding cataclysmic events such as earthquakes or storms. Secondly that they operate outside of the purely physical sphere, that they have a connection with the otherworldly, the divine. *Monstra* were conduits for divine communication, a point of contact with that which is not of this world. The practice of divination, particularly popular in rituals of the Roman Empire, illustrates this interpretation: anomalies or abnormalities in animal behaviour and biology, referred to as *monstra*, were imbued with significance and read as divine guidance.

The term *monstra* was also used to refer to the birth of children that do not resemble their parents. Such an event would be a terrible inversion of the natural order of things. Hesiod uses *teras* in his *Works and Days* (182) to denote such occurrences in the Iron Age, though translators do not always agree on the implications of the word.³ The divine significance of *monstra* as interrupted genealogy due to divine punishment is perhaps more pronouncedly demonstrated by curses contained in oaths. Aeschines (*Ctes. III*) tells of the Amphictyons who cursed perpetrators of sacrilege by wishing upon them the birth of children that do not resemble their parents, but monsters (Lenfant 1999:199). However, in all cases discussed we must remain aware of the material's archaic origin and guard against the assumption that the beliefs canonised in words, texts and oaths were necessarily accurate reflections of those that prevailed in later Classical society.⁴

³ See the different translations of the word *teras* by Lombardo (1993:29): disagreements between father and child, and Tandy (1996:73): physical differences brought on by infidelity.

⁴ Lenfant (1999:200-203) agrees and warns against overestimating the religious significance of *teras* in the Classical Greek world, contending that the view of monstrous births as divine punishment is an Archaic one and one which would have been dated in later times.

Aristotle's pragmatic approach to *teras*

The works of Aristotle would be a case in point: he veers away from the religious, prophetic and punitive connotations of *teras* and uses the word to describe actual cases of deformity or physical anomaly: where progeny do not resemble their parents. He points out that there are degrees of relationship – child to parent, to remote ancestor and to any chance individual - and extends his argument to resemblance to the species: both a child that does not resemble his parents in physical attributes, and a person that does not resemble a human (or bears close resemblance to another species) are *monstra* in the sense that both have departed from the natural type (Aristotle, *Gen. an.* 767a35 – 767b9).

Aristotle applies sober evaluation to the topic of monstrosity and he adheres to strictly biological explanations for the various kinds of *terata*. Besides deviation from type, he also addresses cases where the deviation is extreme: where a child is said to have the head of a ram or a bull (Aristotle, *Gen. an.* 769b12-30) or where more or fewer of the standard number of limbs or organs are apparent. In each case a natural and biological, as opposed to religious or magical, explanation is offered for the deformity. Importantly, cross-species resemblances are seen as resemblances only and not interpreted as *actual* mixing of species. Lenfant (1999:200n22) puts emphasis on the fact that Aristotle saw the monster as being “contrary to the ordinary process of nature, but not contrary to nature in the absolute sense”. In other words, Aristotle’s monstrosity compromises the norm and produces startling deviations, but these remain within the sphere of scientific⁵ explanation.

Yet one can not extrapolate the views of intellectuals such as Aristotle, necessarily a minority, to Greek society in general and there are many sources, literary and visual, that demonstrate a less pragmatic attitude to monstrosity. It is these sources that, precisely because of their unscientific nature, provide us with insight into the societies that created them. It affords us “insights into

⁵ The word “scientific” is used reservedly, and pertains specifically to the rational enquiry practiced by the Greek philosophers and the Hippocratics.

the pictorial imagination of the people, their mode of thought and also into some of their religious beliefs" (Porada 1987:3).

b. Theories on origin

Theories on the origin of monsters abound and while many can be said to be plausible, no single model can hope to account for the whole spectrum of monster figures encountered in Greek mythology. The inherent disparity that is an inalienable trait of the category "monster" precludes a simple answer to the question of origin and requires the consideration and contribution of various approaches. Theories on origin can be loosely divided into two categories: those that look for the physical, natural or scientific roots of monster figures, and those that look to the inner, personal or cultural, psychological cause.

Monstrous births

Aristotle's definition of *teras* deals with monstrosity as a physiological manifestation in humans and animals. He talks not about the supernatural but the non-natural or the biological that veers from the normal course of nature. This "natural monstrosity" – e.g. children born as Siamese twins, with club feet or cleft palates – and the strong emotional reactions these conditions would have elicited in a society where medical science was speculative at best, provides a conceivable explanation for at least the *physical* attributes assigned to mythological monster figures. Aristotle himself acknowledges that the unscientific observations and associations of people assign animal traits to the ugly or deformed, and that those impressions can leave a lasting imprint (Aristotle, *Gen. an.* 769b18-21). So it can be argued that the shape of certain monsters, for instance the one-eyed Cyclops or the bull-man, borrowed their shape from actual deformities witnessed in humans and animals.

Lenfant (1999:197-214), in an insightful study of monsters in Greek society of the 5th and 4th centuries BCE, suggests that the Greek reaction to malformations, particularly amongst humans, indicate a strong emotional response. Rejecting the theories that such births were either seen as so religiously significant as to demand silence, or so insignificant as to deserve it, Lenfant proposes that the Greeks' highly developed sense of proportion and beauty made deviations from the ideal highly offensive and threatening on many levels. Such attacks on normality were seen as just that – attacks – and consequently removed from Greek society, physically and

psychologically. This reminds us of the Spartan practice of tossing weak babies off the cliff of Apothetae, and also explains the assignment of physical deformity to the class of mythological monster – creatures banned to the outskirts of society. This theme will be picked up again in subsequent chapters.

The interpretation of monstrous births as omens or as having some religious significance aligns with the innate connection mythological monster figures have with the divine: monsters traditionally boast divine parentage or find themselves in service of a divinity, making them a kind of vehicle for divine action. In the same way that *monstra* were read as ill omens and the expression of, or precursors to, divine wrath, the mythological monster figure was often a tool in service of the divine. In this way the Minotaur's very existence is attributed either to Poseidon's punishment for Minos' snub (by not sacrificing his favourite bull) or to Aphrodite's reprimand of Pasiphae for neglecting her rites (Gantz 1996:261). It proves even more useful to the gods in providing an enemy for the hero Theseus to slay and so to prove his prowess.

The fact that physical deformity is an anomaly, and one loaded with emotional, spiritual and religious content in an otherwise well-ordered society makes this an appealing theory for the derivation of mythical monster figures. The sense of horror Greeks suffered in the face of deformity transfers smoothly to the mythological monster, as does the sense of divine intervention in the affairs of humans. However, while plausible in the case of certain monsters the theory is less helpful when considering the conceptual origin of others. It is hard to find a physical deformity that could plausibly spark the evolution of the Gorgon Medusa with her serpent hair and gaze that turn men to stone. Hybrid monsters, too, like the Satyr, Centaur, Siren, Sphinx and Echidna seem unlikely to have their roots in biological reality and monstrous births.

Errors of perception, oral tradition and exaggeration

Another approach suggests that ignorance, misinterpretation and exaggeration played a noteworthy role in the origin of the monster figures we learn about from Greek authors. This kind of misinterpretation could occur when people, confronted by exponents of foreign races, unknown animals or events that were alien to them, tried to make sense of their experience by translating it into terms which *were* familiar and that they *could* understand. On a linguistic level

this is illustrated neatly by the *suhurmašû*, a hybrid creature of the Ancient Near East. It is believed that the word *suhurmašû* originally referred to the common seal, but a literal interpretation of the composite Sumerian name (suhur: carp, maš: goat) resulted in depictions of a hybrid monster with both goat and fish attributes (Goodnick Westenholz 2004:13).

The same thing could happen on a conceptual level when what is seen is misinterpreted due to the limitations of the observer's frame of reference. Nash (1984:276) cites this as a hypothesis put forward to explain the Centaur: quoting Bronowski, he describes the impact that riders on horseback would have on people with no experience of such a practice and who did not know domesticated horses. The associated speed and noise of thundering hooves would be bewildering enough, but mounted by skilled riders with hostile intent the sight would be truly terrifying. The consummate horsemanship displayed by the Scythian riders, aided by the disorientation brought on by the fear at the sight of them, is believed to have left the Greeks with the impression that the horse and rider were a single being (Bronowski 1973:80). (Fig.1)

Contact with alien people or animals would have been experienced by only the few merchants or travellers who left the familiar to pass through the unknown. These travellers would return to relate their personal encounters with the people, animals and landscapes of strange places to their own community. But they returned not only with their own impressions. They also picked up stories passed on from traveller to traveller, and from locals with whom they made contact. Language must have been a stumbling block and it is likely that faulty translation, erroneous assumption, embellishment and exaggeration took place in the oral transfer. Even minor idiosyncrasies in the subject, like variation in skin colour or average size, could evolve into monstrosity irreconcilable with nature.

Herodotus' *Histories* quote many such stories, some of which contain – Herodotus admits – incredible elements. He tells about giant furry ants that mine gold in Northern India and that give chase to, and presumably attack, camels (3.102-106). Recent studies (Peissel 1984) explain these monstrous hairy "ants" as the giant marmots found in an isolated region of Pakistan. These marmots burrow in the sandy soil and in the process they work gold nuggets and dust to the surface. It has long been the tradition of local tribes to collect these nuggets. Peissel also suggests that the story of the ants resulted from a mistranslation from Persian, where the word

for "mountain marmot" sounds similar to the Greek for "ant". This seems less plausible since Herodotus specifically likens the *shape* of the "giant ants" to that of the Greek ant (*Hist.* 3.102).

Herodotus briefly mentions the Libyan dog-headed people – a species of interest not only to him but reported by other Classical authors, too. While he describes them only on the say-so of the Libyans, Ctesias seems more convinced and devotes considerable attention to them in his *Indica* (Lenfant 1999:206). These *Kunocephaloi* are usually described as being peaceful and civilized, eating meat that has been dried in the sun and wearing skins for clothing. Yet their appearance and the fact that they cannot speak, along with their canine features, created uncertainty as to whether they were to be regarded as humans with remarkable canine features, or animals with advanced human traits. Murgatroyd (2007:2) puts the *Kunocephaloi* forth as an example of misinterpretation where the baboon – an animal not widely known outside of Africa – was deconstructed to elements familiar to the Greeks: that of human and dog. The elaborate descriptions of lifestyle and habit attributed to these creatures by authors such as Ctesias remind us again of the exaggerations and distortions that can take place in the re-telling of stories and the transfer of information across cultural and linguistic barriers.

Whether an author like Herodotus as intellectual believed the tales he gathered or not becomes immaterial. The fact is that the stories told either already formed part of the Greek cultural mindset, or in his re-telling *became* part of that collective frame of reference. It provides an interesting demonstration of how information technology of fifth century BCE affected the way in which people understood their world and that which lay beyond.

Monster remains

A final theory that looks for the roots of the mythological in the scientific, falls in the domain of palaeontology. The large fossilised bones of enormous size found in Greece (Mayor 2000, quoted by Gilmore 2003:5) are known today to be the remains of mammoths, mastodons and woolly rhinoceroses that roamed Europe in prehistoric times. For the Greeks of the Archaic and Classical eras, however, these large bones could only be made to fit into their world order by referring back to the foundation myths (Mayor 2000 quoted by Gilmore 2003:5) and the Gigantomachy – the only reference to outsized creatures with which they could make sense of the large skeletons. The well-known theory that the dwarf elephant skull with its single, central

nasal cavity was the origin of the Cyclops-myth is widely acknowledged and needs no further discussion other than to provide further illustration for the hypothesis.

Personification: the naming of fears

The next set of theories focus less on the rational explanation for monster figures, and more on the psychological condition that spawns – even requires – the monster. All children are scared of the dark, and many remain so into adulthood. Even without ever having experienced actual threat, humans carry with them this visceral fear. Adults will recognise that it is not the darkness itself that is fearsome, but the loss of the ability to see and identify that which may threaten us. In essence, what we fear is the unseen and on a psychological level this fear translates into an anxiety about that which is unknown. This fear is as real today as it was three millennia ago, and finds expression in many different ways, from cultural prejudice to an obsession with germs. Even our strategies of addressing these fears remain similar to our predecessors: give the fear a name, and domesticate it (Cohen 1996: viii). In less urban societies removed from modern technologies, the battle against the unknown is fought along the same lines. Porada (1987:1) puts it most eloquently when she says that “one of the important means of influencing inimical powers [is] their representation in a context in which they [can] be manipulated for the benefit of one or more individuals. The first step towards this process must [be] the act of giving visual form to evil powers, which [are] most frightening when they [are] formless and unseen.” And it is a quick progression from assigning a shape to an invisible evil, to the establishment of a standardised set of visual representations of shared fears within a community.

Early Greek society was no different and their animistic world view is well demonstrated in Hesiod’s *Theogony*. Stephens (2005:2276) in a discussion of demons in the Greek world suggests that anthropomorphism is just another way to “tame or domesticate the world”. By “translating” irrational forces of nature into familiar shapes and structures – such as a pantheon of gods - they could be grasped conceptually and by applying anthropomorphic characteristics to them, they were vested with a degree of rationality. The familiar and often human traits assigned to the irrational dispersed the inherent threat that lurked in the mysterious and the unknown. This mitigated the unpredictability and senselessness of calamities like earthquakes and infant death, and introduced the possibility of being able to influence them.

The psychological approach

The anthropomorphism of natural forces and events is borne out in a wide range of divine, demonic and monstrous figures that populated the Greek world. As an example the Lamia can be understood as a monstrous personification of the many mysterious conditions that can kill a young child and its mother. But it has to be acknowledged that the Hydra and Gorgon, the Minotaur and Echidna – many fantastic monsters that populate Greek mythology – do not fit comfortably in the same category as gods and demons, those consummately anthropomorphised natural forces. Typically monsters lack a tangible manifestation; they owe their existence entirely to the imagination. Dowden (1992:133) argues that since mythological monsters have no foothold in reality, their existence “reveal(s) more about what is *inside* man than what is outside”. In other words their significance is a psychological one. This is particularly of interest when considering hybrid monsters where any anthropomorphism resides not so much in the external appearance of the monster, but if anywhere, in the nature of the beast.

Reading myths and considering the creatures that inhabit them as manifestations of a psychological landscape can take two points of view: the approach that sees mythology as the expression of the *personal* and the approach that sees it as an expression of the *communal*. As the fulfilment of a psychological need of the individual, myths can be seen as either an articulation of repressed desires, where an impulse that is threatening to the individual or his community is safely expressed in the form of a myth, or a form of wish-fulfilment, where a certain catharsis is reached through close association with a hero-character (Kirk 1974:69). This kind of statement is often heard in reference to dream interpretation. The fact that myths and dreams tread the same psychological ground, their commonality, has been the concern of intellectuals from Freud to Joseph Campbell.⁶ The hypothesis is that myths, like dreams, have their origin in the subconscious and that they have a similar way of drawing on the suppressed hopes, fears and uncertainties residing there. Freud referenced myths in his *The Interpretation of Dreams*, drawing parallels between the symbols occurring and “recognis[ing] that myths and dreams often work in the same way” (Kirk 1974:71). But Kirk is cautionary about applying

⁶ See Freud's *The Interpretation of Dreams* and Joseph Campbell's *The Power of Myth*.

Freud's analysis of dreams too rigidly to mythology. He grants that the psychoanalyst's theory on the working of the subconscious through condensing experiences, displacing elements and representing them in symbols could be applied to certain kinds of myths, but is sceptical about taking the argument to its extreme. For instance if myths were, like Freud believed dreams to be, concerned with the formative worries of childhood, certain recurring mythical images could be interpreted in the Freudian model: the water that houses the monster could be linked to amniotic fluid, the snake to the penis, the female monster be explained as fears about the nature of the mother, the male monster as the father that has to be defeated (Dowden 1992:134). But such interpretations could only be argued in the case of selected myths, and even then they easily seem forced.

The other approach, supported by the work of psychoanalyst Jung and the anthropologist Levi-Strauss, sees myth as a form of cultural articulation and that its origin and *raison d'être* lies in the fears and conflicts within a society. While not denying the role of the individual psyche, this theory puts it forward that the human mind contains both the highly individualised, personal part that houses the personal experience and which is the source of dreams, and then a larger, generic part that corresponds closely to other members of the same group and indeed with all other members of the species. It is this generic part of the brain that shares patterns or "archetypes" across generations and cross-culturally, resulting in parallel themes in mythology from disparate geographic regions (Stevens 1994:55; Kirk 1971:71-75).

How does this aid us in our understanding of hybrid monster figures? In that it suggests we consider both the individual psyche and the communal consciousness when we think about monsters, where they come from and what they do. Monsters are created within, and transferred between, communities. Their impact is a general one, they appeal to fears and associations shared by groups of people. Yet the response they evoke is undeniably personal, and therein lays their impact. For instance, monsters employed in rituals are in service of the community yet the interaction of the individual with a monster in an initiation rite – while it has considerable communal significance – is also a highly personal experience. The hybrid figures we are to discuss need to be considered as both personal and cultural constructs. They are expressions of a universal archetype, a cultural archetype and, as in Assyrian art, can act to enforce an ideology. At the same time the response to monsters is a personal one – whether it is one of fear, transition or one that provokes introspection and, perhaps, a degree of association.

c. Hybrid monsters in the ancient Near East

In Vernant's *Origins of Greek Thought* (1982) the cultural contact between Hellenistic Greece and the Ancient Near East is put against the backdrop of a shift that occurred when the Dorians invaded Pylos and Mycenae around 1200 BCE⁷. As revealed in Early Linear B texts the Greek civilizations at Knossos, Pylos and Mycenae were politically and culturally very similar to that of the Near Eastern kingdoms of the time. Life in these societies was centered on the palace complex of a divine and omnipotent king, who stood at the top of the classic, triangular hierarchy of power. A strong patriarchal system dictated society and religion, and defined a world-view where man stood at the mercy of powers beyond his understanding and beyond his control. The Dorian invasion caused a collapse of this system on Mainland Greece and Greece entered a period of isolation commonly referred to as a "dark age". When they reappeared on the international radar, a shift had taken place: The autocratic kingdoms had been replaced by democratic city-states, and superstition with rational thought. Even though re-established contact with the Near East in the first century BCE sparked an enthusiastic revival of interest in things Oriental, the perspective of the Greeks had changed. They had discovered a new identity and a new way of understanding the world: the top-down hierarchy of kingship and sovereignty was replaced by a cosmogony of balance and symmetry (Vernant 1982:9-11).

The fall of the Mycenaean order created a political and social but also a psychological shift that permeated all areas of public and personal life, and that gave rise to a New Greek identity, a new view of the world and of man's place in it (Vernant 1982:9-11). Man was no longer at the mercy of the king, human or divine, but could understand and control his world by using his intellect. This does not imply that the legacy of the Myceneans was eradicated. A "corporate memory" (Bianchi 2004:17) allowed Greeks of the Iron Age to recall certain elements of their Bronze Age past. This was, after all, their age of heroes, the roots of their religion which still reflected the king-centered cosmology of old. It has to be considered, however, that the response to mythology and the creatures therein changed. As Bianchi puts it, "...one must always ask whether (the) appearance (of composite beasts in the cultural record of Greeks of the Iron Age)

⁷ Not all scholars are in agreement with the theory of the Dorian invasions. For a contrary view see Baumbach 1980.

is to be attributed to such a corporate memory, to new stimuli, or to that corporate memory reacting to new stimuli.”

It is acknowledged however that both before and after the “dark age” there was extensive contact between the Greeks and the civilizations of the ancient Near East, and cross-pollination of ideas and images can be traced on both sides. Certain figures like the sphinx, for instance, are prevalent in Assyrian, Egyptian and Greek iconography. Composite creatures of the human/animal and animal /animal variety appear in textual and visual form in all the cultures of the ancient Near East, though deciphering their meaning presents a challenge to scholars. Firstly there are few cases where the textual description can be linked to a specific visual specimen. Secondly the meaning of these hybrid creatures seems to be so variable and so reliant on their context, that it is near impossible to canonise them (Goodnick Westenholz 2004:13). What follows are a few key points about hybrid creatures in the ancient Near East, and the place of our Greek specimens amongst them.

i. Composition

The composition of hybrid monsters was generally driven by the fusion of attributes borrowed from dangerous fauna in the geographic area. Animals that could cause serious harm demanded fear and respect. By assigning the most destructive, intimidating features of several of these animals to a single being would have invested it with unnatural and remarkable power: Firstly, its ability to cause harm would be amplified beyond the ability of natural animals. Secondly, by moving outside of the sphere of classifiable, natural animal the composite being attained a special status as a creature that crossed into divine spheres.

In Mesopotamia the head and claws of the lion were frequently used in composite creatures, as were elements of the poisonous serpent. Physical attributes of birds of prey were employed not only because of their stealth and powerful claws and beaks but also because their flight was associated with the devastating storms that swept the Near Eastern landscape (Goodnick Westenholz 1987:13). In Egypt the serpent was also a prominent enemy but the threat of the predators of the Nile was utterly terrifying. So we find the “Devourer”, a frightening monster that combined elements of hippopotamus and the crocodile. The sea-faring Mediterranean civilizations were more concerned with the sea-storms they suffered and

by shipwrecks, so their serpentine water snake, Ketos, gave shape to this constant, lurking threat.

It is not composite arrangement in itself that signifies monstrosity. The Egyptian gods themselves were hybrids of the human / animal kind. But theirs is a hieroglyphic representation and according to Fischer (1987:14) their very elegance is "proof against them being monstrous". Fischer also points out that these depictions possess an inner logic absent in hybrid monsters: In representations of the king, various aspects of his power are displayed by placing the head of the king - a constant feature - on the bodies of various animals like the falcon, snake or lion. This basic arrangement remains regular, but there is variation in degree of human / animal proportions which implies shape-shifting. This, according to Fischer, is entirely appropriate in depicting a king who of all people stands on the edge of divinity as the link between man and god. In the same way it must not be assumed that the elements of composition necessarily carry a standard significance. The serpent for instance does not always represent that which is dangerous: in Iran and Bactria serpents were used to signify death but also *life* because the wave-like motion of their bodies was associated with life-giving water (Porada 1987:2).

The appearance of monsters could also be influenced by the media in which they appear. In a story that is told or written, monsters could have any number of heads, hands or feet. But when that figure has to be represented in a visual medium, some rationalising has to take place. As an example, Hesiod (*Theogony* 830-835) describes Typhon as a massive creature with a hundred snake heads. The visual representation of such a creature would present a challenge to the artist. The seven heads of the serpent Ninurta battles with in the Sumerian and Ugaritic myth already proved problematic. So instead we find that the features are switched, and Typhon became a more easily drawn creature with the upper-body of a man and the lower-half of one or two snake bodies. This representation of Typhon became quite accepted in Greek iconography (Fig.2, Fig.3).

ii. Nature

As with appearance, the nature of hybrid monsters is ambiguous. They seem not to be inherently good or evil, but fulfill these roles as required by context. Their natures also tend

to develop and morph, so that a being that starts out with a close association with a deity or as a protector of man, could in a different era or locus be seen in opposition to that deity or threatening man. In Mesopotamian art there is a glut of both human/animal hybrids and animal/animal hybrid figures. Those human/animal hybrids that walk upright on two legs are referred to as "Demons", while those that walk on four and seem more animal-like are called "Monsters" – a distinction in terminology that is unique to this area (Porada 1987:1). But the general gist is true in a wider context: that a closer resemblance to humans seems to imply a sympathetic attitude to man. Hostile monsters tended towards the animal and the implication was a greater propensity for threatening man (Goodnick Westenholz 2004:11). This may be a simplistic view of a complex subject, but it will serve as a point of reference. What can be added is that – if it is accepted that in Greek Mythology the relationship between god, man and animal forms a linear arrangement with man positioned mid-way between god and animal, as proposed by Vernant (1974:177) – the human/animal hybrid moves along this line, away from the divine and closer to the bestial.

iii. Function

The functions of hybrid monsters are as changeable as their natures and their appearance. Again, the ancient Near Eastern figures rely heavily on context for clarity and this makes interpretation difficult when only fragments of depictions survive. But from what is available to us it is apparent that the role of monsters is not clearly, or only, defined by its physical attributes. Monsters with bared fangs and claws can be fearsome and dangerous attackers, but equally effective protectors (Porada 1987:2). In Mesopotamia in the third millennium BCE a Sumerian temple was guarded from evil spirits by hybrid monsters, amongst others bull-men, and in Assyria and Babylonia inscribed images or carved figures of hybrids were found at the entrance ways to temples and homes (Goodnick Westenholz 1987:15). Childs (2003:49-50) argues that this apotropaic function of composite creatures precedes their mythological function, though in both contexts they patrolled the perimeter of good and evil and helped maintain the order of the universe.

iv. Influence: sharing of ideas

Trade links during the Bronze and Iron Ages ensured that there was cross-pollination of mythology as well as iconography between Greece and the ancient Near East. The Early Dynastic period in Mesopotamia preceding the Mycenaean Age by more than a millennium means that more established ideologies and iconographies of the East would have served as a rich source for the Greeks. It is interesting to note that the earlier periods, on both sides of the Mediterranean, tended towards experimentation in the composition and use of hybrid monster figures, as demonstrated by the varied and anonymous creatures of the Early Dynastic Period in Sumer, and the Urartian kingdom in Eastern Anatolia (Fig.4) and the rich variety of monsters, many of them nameless, described by Hesiod's *Theogony*. Later monsters started conforming to "types" and it is possible to trace certain attributes between the city states and the East. This does not imply that the hybrid figures became standardised. The many different cultures of the Near East, the Neo-Hittites, Aramaeans, Phoenicians, Assyrians and Mesopotamians all had their own iconographic styles (Childs 2003:50), as did the various city-states of Greece. De-centralised contact between these regions also caused various versions of motifs to be transmitted, and these motifs underwent changes in the process too, so that many unique variations can be found even within Greece (Goodnick Westenholz 2004:14).

Boardman (1987:73-84) offers an illustration of the transfer of visual representation between Iran, Greece and Egypt in his essay "Very like a Whale". Using the example of the *ketos*, he demonstrates how the Greek sea-monster started out with a leonine profile in the 7th century, and posits that that profile changed during the course of the 6th century. Contact with depictions of Marduk's snake dragon lent it its later furrowed snout and upturned nose, and its elongated nose and sharp teeth recalls the Egyptian crocodile.

This brief overview of where monsters come from, etymologically, psychologically, functionally and geographically, is aimed at establishing a basis and a context within which to conduct further investigation into the nature and function of hybrid monsters in Greek mythology, literature and art. Elements introduced fleetingly will recur as we continue, to be explored more fully in the context of specific examples of hybrid monsters.

CHAPTER 2: Common themes

In his contribution to a recent collection of essays primarily concerned with modern era monstrosity, J.J. Cohen identifies seven traits of monstrous creatures and in doing so manages to highlight the common ground – limited as it is – shared by monsters. His views are shod on the Hollywood creatures of modern times, but they are as relevant to monsters of ancient times and as such they warrant a mention here. In brief, his seven theses are as follows: (1) Monsters are cultural constructs, (2) they are often killed but not entirely destroyed and (3) they habitually challenge categorisation; (4) monsters represent that which is different, externalised and banished; (5) monsters patrol the boundaries of what is allowed; (6) they are simultaneously feared and envied; and finally, (7) monsters are not from an external source but are generated within man (Cohen 1996:3-21). Without being guided by Cohen's theses, the discussion that follows will revisit many of the points he raises and discuss their relevance in the context of Greek mythological hybrids.

a. Order and chaos: creation myths

In the beginning, according to creation myths of various and disparate communities, there was chaos. This original state of the world is often anthropomorphised or at least given a name: in Egypt that name was Nun, the Greeks called it Chaos and in Assyro-Babylonian mythology this primal disorder was called Tiamat. Creation took place when this state of chaos was suppressed, overcome by a force that established its antithesis: order. The Babylonian Festival of the New Year ritually celebrated the victory of Order over Chaos. During these celebrations the king fought a dragon in re-enactment of the struggle of the god Marduk, the creator, with Tiamat often represented as a monster (Penglase 1994:103). With his victory, the god brought about cosmic, seasonal and social order (Vernant 1982:111) and by means of the annual re-enactment the king – as divine representative – reaffirmed this status.

Hesiod's *Theogony* (115) tells us that in the beginning of the Greek world there was only Chaos. The author describes how from this nothingness and Gaia, earth, an almost endless range of life – nymphs, demons, giants, rivers, mountains, monsters good and bad - were brought forth. This rich effluence of life replaced absence with a chaotic disorder of existence. The author's attempts at grouping and classifying the various forms of beings based on sequence of creation, nature, type and relationship is only partially successful. The reader is left with an overwhelming

sense of confusion. This era precedes Order and the clear demarcation of boundaries between god, man and beast (Strauss Clay 2003:159). It is here, in this state of turmoil, that we are introduced to the monster figures that populate Greek mythology. Chaos is the “natural habitat” of the monster, and this brings us to one of the few shared characteristics of monster figures: that they defy order.

A fundamental change occurs in the cosmic structure when Zeus defeats his father, Ouranos, and rises to power as father of the Olympians (*Theog.* 490-500). At this point a clear distinction is made between order, which is considered to be good, and chaos, which is considered to be bad. His first challenge as king of the gods is to replace chaos with order. This meant defeating the race of Titans, and sealing his victory with the defeat of Gaia’s last born, the arch-monster Typhoeus (*Theog.* 621-885). Zeus banishes the elements of chaos (the Titans and Typhoeus) to the depths of the earth and establishes a hierarchic rule of order on Olympus ensuring his position at the pinnacle of power. Just like their patron Zeus, the heroes of Greek mythology have to overcome monsters in order to establish or preserve order. The Stoics saw Heracles – arguably the über-hero – as the civilizer of the world, whose assignment it was, through his twelve tasks, to clear out the “primeval jungle” (Dowden 1992:138) and establish order.

There is a subtext here of male versus female power, into which we will not go into detail but it is worth mentioning: In the Mesopotamian creation myth *Enuma Elish* Tiamat, associated with water, monstrosity and chaos, is distinctly feminine (Penglase 1994:103). Hesiod describes Gaia, earth, also as female and as the progenitor of monsters. The earth and the female are frequently associated with chaos and with that which is threatening, while the sky and the masculine are associated with order and righteousness. As an example Zeus, who becomes the male sky-god of the Olympians, can do so only once he has defeated the progeny of the female earth. This theme extends deeper into Greek mythology: Zeus is seen as the nurturer of heroes, warriors who fight for order and civilization. Hera, his female counterpart, is seen to nurture the monsters that threaten Zeus’s line (*Theog.* 315-331; Strauss Clay 2003:156; Dowden 1992:135; Gantz 1993:383) and provides antagonists for his heroes.

The Babylonians regarded order and sovereignty as closely related: The king was in charge not only of running human affairs, but of maintaining all of nature. The ordering of space, creation of time and seasonal cycles all formed part of his portfolio. The implication is that these elements

of nature were not autonomous, but that they *required* governance. Natural order could not exist by itself. It relied on a governing agent, such as the king who necessarily had to be invested with supernatural powers, to maintain it (Vernant 1982:111-112). This world view was echoed in the palace-kingdoms of Mycenaean Greece: The universe was seen as a complex and ordered network of relationships and hierarchies. This order was not natural but was established and required maintenance by a powerful agency (Vernant 1982:115-116). The Greeks appear to have been very aware of the precarious balance on which their world was based, and that the threat of the irrational, the chaotic, was ever present. Their art, literature and religion all bear testimony to the combination of "sublimation and repression" that formed their strategy for constantly curbing the irrational (Lloyd Jones 1980:8).

b. The relationship between monsters and culture

At the root of culture lies the notion of "Us" and "Them", the differentiation between that which is part of the Self, and that which is Other. In the "Us" is contained that which is known and familiar, and that with which the individual or the group identifies. It encompasses the physical, political, social and religious aspects of a society and affords a group with a sense of identity and cohesion. Culture also provides the rules of conduct, a framework that regulates interactions within a community. These rules provide members of the group with security, and they imbue life with a degree of predictability. As such, culture is an ordering agent, the counterpoint of which is wildness. And this is what the term "Them" represents: "They" are those which exist beyond the perimeter of a community and beyond the reach of its regulations and conventions. "They" are not understood to be legitimate alternatives. To the subjective individual there is no legitimate alternative to his or her cultural paradigm: Order, culture and civilization become inalienable from each other and associated with the Self, and with righteousness. That which falls beyond the city walls is wild and chaotic and above all, inimical.

This helps us gain some understanding of the suspicion with which the Greeks regarded foreigners: other cultures were not recognised as legitimate but seen only in terms of contrast to Greek society. Differences in appearance, language, lifestyle and religion were seen as grotesque abnormality existing in a world deprived of structure and logic. Above all, these things were threatening the stability and continuity of the Greek world. So it is entirely apt that monsters, which we already know thrive on disorder, were believed to exist *there*, in distant and

strange lands. The chaos beyond the periphery of civilization is the ideal breeding ground for these beings. To this effect Cohen (1992:15) states that monsters are "expedient representations of other cultures, generalised and demonised to enforce a strict notion of group sameness." The threat of the monster lies in the potential loss of identity implied by their very existence.

This leads us to two conclusions: Firstly, monsters exist in opposition to structure but not independent from it. They *require* the definition of a society so that they can exist as the antithesis to that order. Secondly, it stands to reason that monsters are unique to the society in which they function. Atherton draws attention to the role of a culture's taxonomy as a system for assigning significance and status to persons, animals or objects. This system also allows for the evaluation of people or events as either normal and natural, or not (Atherton 1998:xii). That which fails to be evaluated effectively by the taxonomy of a culture is typically regarded as anomalous, as monstrous. Monsters present a negative template, an inverted pattern of ordered society. Their "otherness" is defined by the "norm" as defined by society, and as such monsters become culture-specific products (Lada-Richards 1998:46). The monstrosity of a being is entirely relative to the standards of the community that defines it (Atherton 1998: viii-x), so that what is monstrous to one group of people could be entirely normal – or at least not repulsive – to others. Consequently, in order to truly understand a monster it is advisable that they "be examined within the intricate matrix of relations (social, cultural, and literary-historical) that generate them" (Cohen 1996:5).

From an ideological point of view, culture is a useful tool in the hands of the ruling party: cultural elements can be used to great effect in supporting its ideology and strengthening its position. This is demonstrated when a king claims to be divine, or of divine descent, or when a leader is believed to be a special "envoy" of the gods. Politics and religion are easily – and frequently – intertwined, with the ruler's power becoming embedded in the culture of his people. A very effective ideological device with which to unite a group of people and ensure reliance on the ruling party is to make that which is different, monstrous. Assigning monstrous attributes (both

in appearance and in habits) to a person or people, imply moral degeneration and threat⁸ to the status quo. This threat encourages people to huddle around that which is familiar, and reject that which is threatening, i.e. the vilified stranger(s). By holding up “degraded” outsiders as exemplars of what is inevitable without the defined cultural – and political – borders of society, people are encouraged to operate within the structures put in place by their ideological leaders.

As borne out in their art and architecture, the ancient Greeks were very concerned with beauty, proportion, harmony and perfection. This particularly applied to the human body. They steered away from depicting the grotesque and the anomalous, and in their art strove to preserve the integrity of the human form (Lenfant 1999:208)⁹. It is telling, as Lenfant points out, that physical anomalies – oversized or undersized bodies and exaggerated features – are rarely observed locally but frequently attributed to those living in far off countries. He also notices that infringements on the integrity of the body, for instance through torture, is freely discussed in a Persian context but not owned as a Greek practice (Lenfant 1999:209).

For the Greeks the epitomic achievement of civilization, the ideal of *sophrosyne*, extended to the physical. Abnormality and mutilation existed beyond the perimeter of Greek control, and represented the opposite of “restraint, moderation and sober self-control” (Padgett 2003:27). Greek discomfort with physical imperfection is often illustrated with reference to the well-known Spartan practice of killing weak or deformed infants. The point is that the Greeks removed from their society, both physically and symbolically, that which they regarded as deviations from normality, and in doing so assigned it to the sphere of the “Other”. Monsters, whether physical or imaginary, were assigned to a realm that is at arm's length. They can tell us much about that which the Greeks wanted to exclude from their world.

⁸ See Cohen 1996:7-8, Thesis IV: The Monster Dwells at the Gates of Difference for modern but pertinent examples.

⁹ In the Hellenistic period a counter-movement to this preoccupation with perfection can be seen in artists choice of subject matter such as old age, drunkenness and deformity.

c. Here be monsters: locality and liminality

The old cartographer's practice of, having reached the limits of a known geographic area, proclaiming that "here be monsters" is an effective and apt one. This is exactly where monsters are found: at the edge of the known world. To the Greek mind knowledge was the primary definition of man (Dodds 1951:16-17). What man knew and understood staked out his world and his position within it. On the flipside, that which was unknown, could not be assimilated and was banished to the outskirts. By believing the outside world to be inhabited by beings that are physically and morally corrupted, the Greeks emphasised their own cultural identity (Lenfant 1999:210).

Ethnographic monsters

On a psychological level, this meant a disassociation with things anomalous: Practices, people and things that were not understood or did not conform to the Greek concept of normality, were denied existence in Greek society and attributed to foreign lands. It is there, in lands distant from Greece, where Ktesias's Pygmies, Sciapodes, *Kunocephaloi*, Argippeans and people with no heads but faces between their shoulders, were to be found. There lived the men and animals of gigantic size, men with tails, with ears so large they cover the backs of their owners. There lived those scorched black by the sun, those with one eye, men born bald and those born with grey hair. There fabulous animals like horses with horns and composite beasts like the *martikhora* – composed of elements of lion, man and scorpion – were to be found (Wittkower 1942:159-161, Lenfant 1999:206-209). Ethnographic monstrosity existed on the outskirts of the Greek world, in far-removed India, Scythia, Libya and Ethiopia, lands the normal citizen would never see. Peoples who lived closer, with whom there was more contact, were generally described in more empathetic terms. For instance the Persians, while their actions were deemed monstrous, were not themselves regarded as monstrous and there seems to have been a greater generosity shown towards the Egyptians too – whose gods may have been viewed as monstrous but not they themselves.

Mythological monsters

Non-ethnographic monsters, those imaginary creatures that exist in myth, follow a similar pattern: their natural environment implies the peripheral. They are typically found at the very edges of the civilized world, beyond the reach of man's rules. For this reason their peripheral locus suggests disorder and lawlessness and, by extension, the antithesis of civilisation. For Near Eastern societies the outer reaches of civilization was understandably associated with the inhospitable desert, making this the natural habitat for their monsters (Fischer 1987:16). For the Egyptians the edge of civilization was demarcated by either the desert or the river Nile so this is where we find the Devourer. The Greeks were more familiar with sea-boundaries and accordingly we find the serpentine sea monsters like Ketos, the Sirens and Scylla and Charybdis who live not in the sea but on its very edge, in caves and crags. When the hero Perseus sets out to rescue Andromeda from Ketos, he travels all the way to Joppa. Bellerophon confronts the Chimaera in far-off Lykia. The Sirens and Scylla and Charybdis are encountered by Odysseus on his epic journey far away from home and the Gorgons live in the "nocturnal far West" (Strauss-Clay 2003:153). The heroes had to travel far beyond the boundaries of their homelands to confront these evil beings. Interestingly the monstrous beings Heracles encounters, while they still inhabit liminal spaces, are geographically closer to home. Cleonae and Lerna, the respective loci of the Nemean Lion and the Lernaian Hydra, are quite close to Corinth while the Stymphalian birds and the Erymanthian Boar roamed in the vicinity of the Peloponnese. The fact that these monsters lived almost amongst man confirms the need for Heracles to drive them out so that men could inhabit Greece and its surrounds (Dowden 1992:137-138).

Besides its inherent liminality, there is another reason why monsters favour water as a habitat. As discussed, creation myths deal with the establishment of order. Part of this process involves the separation of land and sea, where land becomes the domain of order and civilization and the sea is assigned to chaos. Land can be explored, claimed and civilised but the sea remains largely unknown and unmapped. It can never be fully owned or controlled, and hence it can be described as the "antithesis to civilisation" (Dowden 1992:146). This makes the ocean exceedingly suited to creatures that also represent the antithesis to civilization. So there is both a physical separation of man and monster illustrated by distance – monsters living in lands across the seas or in the seas - and a conceptual separation illustrated by the symbolic content of the monsters' habitat that helps accentuate inherent differences between man and monster. Water

is representative of the primordial, the chaotic. Charles Penglase elaborates on this in his discussion of the influence of Mesopotamian mythology on that of Greece¹⁰. He points out that water and snake imagery seems at times interchangeable as representations of the chthonic, as illustrated by the strong parallels drawn between Tiamat, the Mesopotamian water monster or deity, and the serpentine Pythian monster (Penglase 1994:103-104).

Other spaces favoured by monsters represent the antithesis to civilization in different ways. The Minotaur lives not in the sea or the desert, but in a labyrinth. This in itself is a locus that removes it from the rule and order of society. The labyrinth with its limited visibility and repeated turns that disorientate and trick, is deceptive. Its logic is its own, and its aim is to strip away the normal points of navigation in order to confuse. Without the ability to navigate or plan, the labyrinth is a dangerous setting for man. Satyrs again live in the woodlands where human society has no influence. Centaurs, like Scylla and the Cyclopes, live in caves. This along with a tendency to eat raw meat and to live alone serves to accentuate the separation between monster and man. The monster is primitive and his living arrangements are in sharp contrast to the houses and ordered communities of civilized humans.

But for all the distance – psychological and geographic – put between monsters and civilized man, these creatures do not keep to themselves nor do they obediently stay in their demarcated spaces. Instead of roaming in the distant beyond, their territory is liminal. It hugs the perimeters of society and the monsters wander close to the edges of civilization, like policemen patrolling the cultural borders (Cohen 1996:15). And at times they cross over.

d. Transgression and inversion

As much as monsters are defined in terms of categories – albeit categories into which they fail to fall – they share a tendency to ignore those very boundaries of categorization and wander across borders. Thinking back to their genesis early in the creation process, before the basic categories of god, man and beast were firmly bedded down (Strauss Clay 2003:159), it makes sense that monsters do not neatly fit into types. How is it that these creatures were born from, and

¹⁰ For the full discussion, see Penglase 1994:76-125.

survived in, the minds and myths of a Greek society that *depended* on order and structure? For the Greeks the order of the cosmos relied on a functioning "system of classification, of categories and hierarchies" (Strauss Clay 2003:150). Monsters, and especially hybrids through their bold transgressions, challenged the taxonomies accepted by Greek society as incontrovertible. It is this, more than any other trait of the monster being, that causes it to be seen as dangerous. "Transcending normal limits and domains, the monster-figure appears to be invincible or unstoppable; embodied as a giant beast, it becomes a perfect metaphor...for dissolving of the boundaries that separate us from chaos" (Gilmore 2003:19 quoting Fernandez 1986).

The tendency to transgress is expressed in various ways. Where hybrid monsters are concerned the most obvious transgression is that of the human-animal boundary. The physical amalgamation of human and animal traits ignores the accepted boundaries between species. Returning briefly to ethnographic monsters, Lenfant calls attention to the difference in approach of Herodotus and Ctesias by asserting that the former never accepts the biological intermingling of humans and animals. The only incorporation he allows is at a behavioural level, i.e. where humans *act* like animals. Ctesias on the other hand has no qualms about "question[ing] the human model known to the Greeks" (Lenfant 2003:212) by portraying interspecies hybrids as real. With this discussion Lenfant raises a key point that transfers seamlessly to the mythological hybrid: the monster's transgression of boundaries invites careful consideration of the true nature of those boundaries and the categories they separate. Herodotus refuses to question accepted taxonomies while Ctesias allows himself and his audience to consider alternative realities and their implications.

What is the true separator of man and beast? Does the ultimate definition of man reside in physical qualities, nature or behaviour? Physical abnormality carries with it the stigma of moral deviance; hence the behaviour expected of the externally monstrous is threatening and destructive. But monsters do not always comply: Ctesias' dog-headed people, while looking monstrous and of unrefined habits, are paragons of a just society (Lenfant 2003:212). This dilemma of external versus internal is brought to crisis in the centaur Cheiron. Cheiron is monstrous both physically, as human-animal hybrid, and as member of a group notorious for drunken brawls and counter-civilized behaviour. Yet Cheiron's actions are the epitome of cultured refinement, discipline and skill, those traits highly appreciated by the Greeks. Not only does Cheiron not conduct himself like the biological monster he is, his character and intellect elevates

him above even that of man, making him eligible as mentor of heroes – themselves a special class of god-human hybrid. The complexity of this figure's crossing and re-crossing of categories will be discussed more fully in chapter four.

Monsters do not only transgress on the human and animal categories, but also blur the lines of distinction from divinity. In the Ancient Near East the relationship between monster and god was a close, if changeable, one. Certain composite monsters were the initial representations of deities, pre-dating their anthropomorphic versions. When the gods took on a human shape, the monster-types split off to become separate beings. They served as the attendant of the god or, at times, became his enemy. These monsters or demons could retain certain divine traits such as immortality and control – both positive and negative – over natural phenomena (Goodnick Westenholz 2004:14). Mythologically this relationship is presented as a purposeful creation by the gods, or as the giving birth to monsters. *Enuma elish* (1 133-144) describes Tiamat growing her army by doing just this. We find similar descriptions of deities giving birth to monsters in Hesiod's *Theogony* where the water deities Phorkys and Keto were particularly productive: their descendents boast monsters like the Gorgones, Echidna, Hydra, Kerberos, Chimaera and the Sphinx. Even without such close familial bonds, monsters consorted with gods and we often find them – directly or indirectly – in the service of deities. Having overcome the children of Gaia through his final defeat of Typhoeus, Zeus nevertheless welcomes the Hundred-handers into his service. The Cyclopes, too, were tasked with forging Zeus's lighting bolts (Dowden 1992:135; *Theog.* 139-147). We find that Cerberus is an effective guard at the gates of Tartarus, helping to maintain Zeus' world order by ensuring that no soul can cross back into the land of the living, while Hydra performs a similar function at Lerna. These examples of monsters, the embodiment of threat to order, being put in charge of *maintaining* order turns transgression into an overturning of the accepted status or belief structure. Similarly we find that the Nemean lion's conduct is an "inversion of the proper relations between men and beasts through his 'ruling over' men." (Strauss Clay 2003:158). Cheiron's role as mentor to heroes is certainly a form of inversion since monsters normally stand either in opposition to or in service of gods, and certainly in opposition to man. As such, a monster should not be in a position to nurture heroes. One of Cohen's theories on monsters hinges on the belief that the monster operates as a kind of alter ego, containing all the unsafe desires of man that cannot be expressed in his social context (Cohen 1996:16-17). In this way the monster is in itself an inverted version of man.

A final form of transgression is manifested in the consumption of humans. The fear of being eaten is inalienable from the threat of monsters. Some monsters overtly set out to eat humans, like the Sirens that lure their prey, Scylla that ambushes hers, the Minotaur that demands his tribute and the Sphinx that poses riddles. In others the threat is implied, for instance, by a multitude of heads and prominent teeth. Here we think again of Cerberus who does not actively set out to devour humans, but seems entirely capable of doing so. We have to differentiate here between the fear of death, which is universal and understood, and the fear of being ingested. Cohen (1996:14) puts forward that this particular sensation has to do with the symbolic "incorporation [of the victim] into the wrong cultural body". Against the background of the pronounced Greek cultural identity and the high degree of dissociation from, even rejection of, that which is "Other", the concept of being removed from your cultural sphere and integrated into that which is the opposite, chaotic and irrational, this is the culmination of the threat of monsters.

Monsters transgress the boundaries of that which is real, and that which is imaginary. It is accepted that mythological monsters are invented creatures with only tenuous links to the biological world. This positions them in the realm of the fictitious. Yet we also know that these creatures are generated as a result of the psychological, cultural and religious needs of a society. As symbols that represent very real fears and conflicts, both on a personal and a cultural level, monsters enter the sphere of reality. Where monsters form part of a ritual, they – or representations of them – interact physically and psychologically with a community, facilitating a very real transition. In this, monsters show a capacity of crossing over from the world of fable, engaging with a community and leaving very real tracks. Cohen's assertion "the monster's very existence is a rebuke to boundary and enclosure" (1993:7) summarises their inherent rejection of a simplistic, binary world view.

This section briefly looked at the most prominent aspects that come into play when considering monster figures. These aspects will be revisited again and again as the discussion develops, and in chapters four and five the Centaur and the Minotaur will be evaluated closely at the hand of these common themes. Of importance at this stage is the acknowledgment that, even though common themes can be identified and some generalisations can be made, the monster remains a being that is wont to cross over any clearly defined line. We can do no better than agree that the monster is most accurately defined by what it stands in opposition to.

CHAPTER 3: Greeks and animals

The distinctive peculiarity of animals is that, being at once close to man and strange to him, both akin to him and unalterably not-man, they are able to alternate, as objects of human thought, between the contiguity of the metonymic mode and the distanced, analogical mode of the metaphor.

Willis 1974:28 quoted by Dowden 1998:114

When considering monster figures, and in particular human/animal hybrids, a detour past the prevalent attitudes of humans towards animals would prove rewarding. For us to understand the implications of a bull's head being assigned to a monster figure with a human body, we need to gain an appreciation of the cultural, moral, social, cosmological and religious value of the bull to the specific society that gave birth to the bull-headed creature. When a monster is composed of both human and animal elements, it must be assumed that certain specific attributes come with those animal elements. What these attributes are can not be taken for granted since they do not necessarily correspond with modern views. Animal attributes are assigned by society and representations of animals in art, drama and myth have less to do with the biological creature than with the associations a society has with that animal. Did certain animal types and body parts have a specific cultural value in the Greek world? If so, can these be traced in the nature and actions of the hybrid monster? These are the questions to be considered in this chapter.

What did the Greeks think of animals? Various sources offer us insights: In Greek comedy and tragedy animals feature in choruses, as characters, in similes and metaphors and in recurring animal motifs. In mythology animals are abundant as familiars to gods, as quarry for the hunter and as metamorphosed representations of nymphs and deities. Greek authors published treatises on farming¹¹, hunting and animal husbandry¹², studies of animal nature and habit¹³ and Aesop's fables

¹¹ See Hesiod's *Works and Days*.

¹² See Xenophon's *Cynegeticus*.

¹³ See Aelian's *De Animalium*.

have anthropomorphised animal characters act out moral lessons in human nature and conduct. All of these show that the Greeks had a lively interaction with fauna, and these sources all have a contribution to make to our understanding of the role animals played not only in everyday life, but in the psyche of ancient Greece. The aim of the following section is not to provide an exhaustive discussion of the roles of animals in the various genres within ancient Greek society, but to achieve an understanding of the values Greek society conferred on animals.

a. Man and other animals

In his works on natural history, Aristotle provides us with an intellectual's view of the animal world. While his deep interest in, and understanding of, animal life may not be representative of the attitudes prevalent in ancient Greek society his writings provide us with a counterpoint to the less scientific views that dominate other sources. Aristotle's works are interesting because of his attempts at systematic division and classification of animals. *Historia animalium*, *De partibus animalium* and *De generatione animalium* steer clear of popular perceptions regarding animals, and maintain the logical approach of scientific enquiry. He categorises animals based on their physical attributes and habits, and is guided in his analysis by the points of differentiation between animals or groups of animals¹⁴. Aristotle's meticulous scientific categorisation delivers conundrums too: there are animals that do not conform. For example in *De partibus animalium* (3.668b.33) lungs are assigned to animals that live on land based on the fact that they are hot and blooded and use the air they breathe to cool their blood. Fish on the other hand, living in water, are cooled by the water and do not need the cooling mechanism of lungs and blood. What then about the dolphin? It lives exclusively in water yet it is both hot and furnished with lungs. Rather than writing dolphins and whales off as unnatural anomalies, they are declared ambivalent in nature (*Part. an.* 3.669a.9). Such duality is accepted by Aristotle without alarm. His method is not to reject certain creatures as monstrous anomalies, but to look for a logical explanation for the variance – in this case further defining the definition of "hot" (Balme 1975:190). For Aristotle no natural occurrence is counter to nature, and he persists in finding

¹⁴ Balme (1975:183) professes *Historia Animalium* to be primarily a "collection and analysis of animal differentiae". See Balme 1979:183-193 for a detailed discussion of Aristotle's *differentiae*.

scientific explanations even for, as discussed in chapter one, gross deformity. Aristotle does not change his style or treatment of his subject matter when his attention turns to humans, and the impression created is that humans are accepted as part of the animal realm. On a biological level Aristotle discusses the differences between animals, and humans and animals, as creatures on the same plane of being and without making a value judgment about their intrinsic worth.

Moving on from biology to philosophy, in his discussions of the soul Aristotle differentiates between animal and man, yet his differentiation does not introduce an absolute separation. Instead he assigns beings to a scale of values with man at the top end and plants at the bottom end. The soul of man has a rational, calculative element which is distinctly human, but the other elements – the irrational appetitive and vegetative - are shared with plants and animals (*Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy* 2005).

	Element	Virtue
	Calculative	Intellectual
Rational		
	Appetitive	Moral
Irrational		
	Vegetative	Nutritional

Plato (*Republic* 9.588-589) draws an interesting picture of man as composite creature. His nature is described as made up of human, animal and also monstrous attributes. The animal aspect is that of the lion while the monster aspect is described to be a combination of animals, both wild and domesticated.¹⁵ The ideal relationship between these various aspects are described as harmonious and symbiotic (Plato, *Republic* 9.589b), and this requires the human portion of the soul to use its unique attributes to establish balance between the three parties. Note that the ideal is not annihilation of the lion or monster and absolute governance by the human aspect, but

¹⁵ It is not clear what the difference is between the lion's and the monster's contributions to the make-up of man as Plato tends to assign the same traits to both. Apparently the monster is unique in being composite itself, and in being able to generate limbs at will. See Plat. *Rep.* 9.588c.

a balanced symbiosis. There is an acknowledgement of the positive contributions to be made to the whole also by the non-human facets. Heath (2005:27) posits that consideration of both the contrasts and the similarities between man and animal was central to the Greeks' concept of Self. Aristotle declares that which is animal to be the most universal part of all creatures (*Gen. an.* 769b.1), and that the same characteristics are to be found in the natures of humans and animals, with only a difference of degree or quantity (*Hist. an.* 588a.16-24). He puts an even stronger accent on this by saying that "in children may be observed the traces and seeds of what will one day be settled habits, though psychologically a child hardly differs...from an animal" (*Hist. an.* 588a.27-588b.1). In conclusion then, Aristotle's view is that part of man is, in fact, irrational, appetitive animal and in this lies the key to understanding human nature (Clayton 2008:190). Both Aristotle and Plato see man as sharing a great number of physical and physiological attributes with beasts. This acknowledgment engenders a certain respect for animals as in some way part of – or at least not wholly removed from – man. It follows that they are deserving of moral and respectful treatment.¹⁶

If humans and animals are similar in so many ways what are the elements that introduce differentiation? According to Hesiod (*Op.* 274-280) the big distinction is justice: wild animals set upon and eat each other but humans do not, and the proposed reason for this is that man has justice. Justice regulates the actions of man and allows rule of law and societal structures, the basis of culture and civilization, to be established. Xenophon (*Apol.* 12; *Mem.* 1.1.3-5.3.3) singled out man's ability to reason, his speech and capacity for religious awe as elements differentiating him from the beast (Lonsdale 1979:156). This reminds us of Plato's elements of the soul and the rational element that is assigned exclusively to man. The lion and the monster have to be, not exterminated, but tamed and brought under control of the man through the cultivation of man's unique capacity for logic, contemplation and formulation of ideas. In the case of the child this process of taming the internal animal is exaggerated: the wild animal-child has to undergo a form of "humanification". This happens with the help of two uniquely human institutions: the household and the city (Aristotle as cited by Clayton 2008:191).

¹⁶ See Plat. *Laws* 7.824a for his views on hunting techniques deemed acceptable, and not acceptable.

Heath puts forward that speech was, for the early Greeks, a more critical difference between man and animal, than reason (Heath 2005:1-35). It is credible that such a view would be prevalent amongst the general populace since lack of speech in animals is easily proven. But more than just the ability to talk, speech is intrinsically connected to status. It implies the ability to negotiate your position socially and politically. The consequences are illustrated by the social structures in the Greek polis: The Greek male was allowed expression and his voice granted authority in the public forum, while women, slaves and non-Greeks were denied this right. As a result these groups had very little control over their social and political positions. Animals, with no ability to speak, were even worse off (Heath 2005:171-212). There is a degree of dehumanisation that takes place when speech is denied or absent, and this is illustrated by the way the Greeks treated women, slaves, foreign peoples or barbarians, and also animals. "The classical Other...is bestial in its silence" (Heath 2005:212).

At the core of man, then, lies that which he has in common with animals: that which is wild and irrational. However this distinction between man and animal, in the Greek world, is not entirely automatic. It is only through the cultivation of those traits that *separate* man and beast, that this distinction can be maintained. In the *Illiad* we see Achilles, on the death of Patroklos, slip into his wild nature uttering cries so terrible and wild that they caused the same terror in man and horse that would the roar of a wild beast (Homer, *Il.* 18.213-234). Ovid also warns of this thin line dividing human and animal: the king of Lycaon, known for his beastly behaviour, is metamorphosed into a wolf so that his outside appearance matches his inner nature (Ovid *Met.* 1.217-233). The division between culture and wildness, man and animal is not absolute, and it is the crossing over from one to the other that has to be guarded against.

When one understands that for Greek man, the city-state and Greek culture was an embankment that kept him from slipping back to the wilderness of his animal foundations, the fierce Greek defense of the polis, of civilization and culture takes on a new significance. Man had a great deal of affinity with animals but this biological connection caused discomfort: while sharing a degree of kinship with them, animals also represented the Other, a threatening and omnipresent reminder of what man could be, or is, without his fortifications of culture. A reminder that the Other is not so foreign after all. This explains the ambivalent feelings harboured by the Greeks towards animals.

b. Animals in everyday life

i. Domesticated animals

What relationship did the average Greek citizen have with animals and what value did he assign to animals? In his essay on attitudes towards animals in ancient Greece, Steven Lonsdale (1979) provides a broad, if cursory, view of the various areas of interaction between man and beast. He suggests that at the core of the relationship between man and beast ran the pastoral backbone of Greek society. The shepherd tending his flocks, as a practical reality and a romantic ideal, lay close to the heart of Greek man and this fact is supported by abundant pastoral imagery in myth and literature (Lonsdale 1979:148). So ingrained was this way of life that it was even conceivable that a monster like Polyphemus, could be a devoted shepherd (Homer, *Od.* 9.215-250; Lonsdale 1979:148).¹⁷

The tending of livestock not only ensured survival by providing essentials like meat and milk, but dictated a way of life for the shepherd who roamed the outskirts of civilization in isolation with his flocks. The shared benefits of the shepherd/flock-relationship engendered a symbiotic relationship of mutual dependence (Lonsdale 1979:149). The shepherd provided protection, while the livestock afforded various benefits in return: they provided food, acted as a form of currency and served as sacrificial victims (Lonsdale 1979:147). In this way domesticated animals ensured the survival of man on a practical, economic and on a religious level. Other than small livestock and cattle, domesticated dogs were common in Greece. Here, too, a symbiotic relationship developed. The dog received food and shelter in return for services in hunting, herding or scavenging (Lonsdale 1979:149). Whether the Greeks had emotional relationships with their animals can only be guessed at. Lonsdale cites Polyphemus' monologue addressed to his ram (Homer, *Od.* 9.447-457) as some indication of a closer connection than the purely practical existing between shepherd and flock (Lonsdale 1979:149) but the speech seems more like a dramatic device. More telling are cases of eulogies written for deceased pets, and proof of burial of such animals. Domesticated dogs were commonly

¹⁷ It has to be considered as a device of Homer, to draw particular attention to the reader's definition of monstrosity by blending abhorrent traits, like eating raw human flesh, with admirable and cultured habits.

used for herding and for hunting, but beyond the practical there is little to indicate a widespread emotional bond with these animals. We do know that the Greeks named their hunting and herding dogs. The name chosen for an animal – and the very fact that it is named – can provide insight into the relationship with that animal. Lonsdale (1979:149) observes that the names for working dogs tended to be practical for calling, i.e. bi-syllabic, and that the meaning tended towards abstractions, like “Psyche”, or referred to the appearance of the animal. Dogs were not given human names. In spite of the interdependence that existed between dog and shepherd or hunter and the intimacy generated by their working-relationship, the dog does not seem to have been regarded as “a creature possessing a complete, quasi-human personality...” (Lonsdale 1979:150).

ii. Wild animals

Wild animals were regarded as more Other to man than domesticated animals (Dowden 1998:114) and they instilled both fear and fascination in the Greeks. Their considerable strength, speed, viciousness, keen senses and instincts in many cases presented a threat but were also admired and envied. The Greeks were fascinated with those qualities furthest removed from humanity – qualities lacking or deficient in man – and the desire was to harness, to appropriate it. Aristotle tells of attempts at breeding domesticated dogs with wild animals (Lonsdale 1979:151 quoting Aristotle) in an effort to increase their abilities as hunting dogs, and we know that the Egyptians domesticated the cat to assist them in the fight against snakes and scorpions in the house. But the attributes of wild animals had more than practical use – they contained a symbolic value. It was believed that assuming some part of the animal, like a tusk, hair or skin, could impart man with attributes of that animal (Lonsdale 1979:155). On an ideological level wild animals are saturated with impact: they represent power, ruthlessness and superiority which is why rulers like to nurture an association. The keeping of wild and exotic animals was common amongst the kings of the ancient Near East, and the use of animal skins in clothing and motifs on heraldry imparted royalty with uncontested status. Herodotus (1.50) tells about the Lydian royal house who fostered a close association with the lion. The Lydian royal name was *Kandaules*, or “strangler of dogs” – also a name for the lion (Krappe 1944:49) – and they went as far as referring to the royal children as “cubs”. Representations of Alexander the Great often show him wearing a lion mask or a

head-dress made of the scalp of an elephant, or a helmet with a bull's ears and horns (Cook 1894:167).

Dowden (1998:115) points out a fact that seems obvious, yet it underlines the marked difference in values assigned to beasts and to domesticated animals: that leaders would call on the metaphoric value of wolves, lions, bears, eagles, but not of goats or sheep. The wild animal is seen to be more Other to man, than their tame cousins (Dowden 1998:115), and this otherness made them at the same time feared and admired. While bestial traits in man could be seen as human malfunction and the failure of reason to triumph over the internal animal, the qualities of a beast could also enhance man and impart him with superhuman qualities.

iii. Areas of interaction

Human/animal interactions frequently carry significance beyond the purely mundane. Herding flocks was a rite of passage for young men, a form of paying your dues on the outskirts of civilization, removed from the security of civilization (Dowden 1992:137). Hunting was also tied up with more than mere necessity of food and leather: for the Greeks it was a form of entertainment but also, on a less flippant note, of education and transition to acceptance or heightened status (Lonsdale 1979:153, 155). The exertion of power over a wild animal defines the man as a distinct and superior being. Heracles' tasks, seven of which can be classified as hunting and two as herding, certainly defined his superiority and not only earned him his freedom but a reputation that culminated in his apotheosis. Odysseus took part in a boar hunt before leaving for Troy as if in preparation for the battles and monsters he was about to face (Lonsdale 1979:153), and during this hunt he earns the scar that will later be instrumental in his being recognized on his return home. The hunt of the Calydonian boar pitted the strength of many heroes against the boar and a large part of Cheiron's mentorship of heroes was the cultivation of hunting skills.

Being nursed by an animal is another kind of recurring interaction between man and beast. The frequent exposure of illegitimate or unwanted children provided ample opportunity for adoption by animals, and this is typically told of persons who later gained special significance or who were blessed with special abilities (Cook 1894:385). Extraordinary achievements were

usually attributed to having being suckled by a wild beast. Zeus himself was nursed by Amalthea when his mother hid him on the slopes of mount Dicte while Melampous the seer is said to have been suckled by a goat. Melampous' special powers of communication with animals were attributed to this fact, as was his ability to cure madness. More than being blessed with special talents, Melampous was invested with the ability to facilitate the transition between human and animal contexts, as his ability to bring an afflicted person back from a state of animal mania to rational human behaviour attests. He himself could also perform that transition by being able to assume various animal shapes along with his human shape. Another example of a mortal being elevated beyond the limits of ordinary humans is Atalanta. Apollodorus (3.9.2) tells us that she, too, was nursed by a bear and acquired her considerable skills that way. Atalanta killed two centaurs, traditionally the quarry of heroes, beat Peleus in a wrestling match and was amongst the heroes that hunted the Calydonian boar. Cyrus the Great of Persia was reputed to have been nursed by a dog, which seems to have provided sufficient justification for his temperament. The act of nursing implies osmosis, a way in which animal attributes are transferred from animal to human in a supplementary and often enhancing manner. In the case of Atalanta the crossing of the line between human and animal seems to have allowed other transgressions too, like her participation in the traditionally masculine world of hunting, racing and fighting.

The opposite of being nursed by an animal would be to be consumed by one and this is an interaction that did not have any positive implications. We mentioned before that being consumed by an agency of the Other is the epitomic form of dislocation and estrangement of one's Self. The Greeks found the image of animals, especially scavenger dogs and birds, eating cadavers abhorrent. Its recurrence in literature and drama betrays a deep seated fear (Thumiger 2008:7). In the *Illiad* there are no less than eleven references to the horror of dying and being left to be devoured by scavengers,¹⁸ not least of all Priam's moving entreaty to his son Hektor in book 22 where he combines the indignities of being old and being mutilated by your own dogs (Homer, *Il.* 22.38-75).

¹⁸ Homer, *Il.* 2.390-395; 11.395; 11.450-455; 13.830-835; 17.240-244; 22.350-355; 24.410; 11.815-820; 18.270-280; 22.38-75; 24.405-410.

iv. The implications of names

Much has been written about the use of names, alternative names and euphemistic appellations for animals in primitive societies,¹⁹ and one point in particular bears relevance – perhaps contested – to our discussion. Besides the purely descriptive and often regionalised colloquial appellations used as alternatives to the accepted animal name, for instance “clod-digger” used for sow, and “chatterer” for grasshopper (Cook 1894:382), animals in primitive societies are frequently addressed with euphemistic nicknames. One theory is that these nicknames are used of wild animals by hunter communities. Emeneau (1948:57) calls this the “hunters’ taboo”, and it means that the hunted animal is referred to with an appellation that circumvents the pronunciation of its real name. The supposition is that if the animal heard his name being spoken, he would be forewarned of the hunt and either escape or turn the tables on the hunter. Another theory explains the phenomenon as deference shown to the wild animal. Certain animals are feared and respected, an offending them by using their names would be either perilous or inauspicious. These animals are then assigned pseudonyms to allow interaction without retribution (Hill 1895:12). As Hill points out, however, while these tendencies are well observed in early or “primitive” civilizations, there is no conclusive proof of this as a tendency in Greece. Before moving on, then, one last point made by Emeneau about a study on bear ceremonialism: it was found that where animals are given euphemistic names, they are often seen as sacred and linked to a religious cult (Emeneau 1948:58). And this point brings us back to ancient Greece.

c. Animals in religion

The link between gods and animals is a prominent feature of Greek religion. Most deities have specific animals or animal types associated with them and their cults, and this association is expressed in visuals, narratives and rituals. There are arguments for the belief that in the Mycenaean age a totemistic model of religion created an inextricable connection between god and animal so that Artemis, for instance, was conceived of as *being* a stag, and also given the epithet

¹⁹ See M.B. Emeneau’s *Taboos on Animal Names* (1948).

"deer-hunting" or "deer-killing", believed to indicate unity with the animal (Cook 1894:135). However, the theriolatric model – which presents animals *as* gods rather than *associated with* gods – was not very common in post-Mycenean Greece (Dowden 1998: 118). Indeed Egypt's theriolatric deities were, to the Greeks and Romans who veered towards a strong anthropomorphic view of gods, damning in their evidence of the degraded humanity of the Egyptians (Dowden 1998: 118). Whether residue from earlier totemistic or theriolatric times or not, the Greeks in ancient and classical times were clearly more comfortable with gods in human form and with animal associations. In mythology these associations take different forms and they range from animal companions or animals considered to have special significance, like Athena's owl or Artemis' stag, to metamorphosed presentations of a god, like Zeus as a bull or swan and descriptive epithets, like cow-eyed Hera. We find that the animal elements of deities come to the fore particularly when interaction with humans is required. When Zeus wants to carry Europa to Crete, he turns into a bull and he does the same when he wants to seduce Io. He assumes the shape of a swan to seduce Leto, and that of a snake to approach Persephone. Poseidon uses the bull as an agency with which to answer Theseus' prayers, sending it up from the sea to get rid of Hippolytus, and he answers Minos' prayers in the same way. So in mythology the gods made extensive use of animals, or their shapes, to interact with humans.

On a practical level, too, animals provided a conduit for divine consultation. Through observation of the flight patterns of birds the will of the gods could be made known to man and the entrails of sacrificial victims could be inspected for divine revelations. Augury was a well established tradition in Greece, to the extent that there was a class of professional practitioners as well as documented laws governing its practices (Lonsdale 1979:152). The proposition is that the Greeks assumed a close connection to exist between the divine and the animal, and that the animal form presented a medium through which the divide between the realms of god and man could be crossed. The animal served as an intermediary, an element of sufficient ambiguity to function in the spheres of humans and deities.

Animals were not only in service of the divine but also presented man with the ability to communicate back to the gods, through sacrifice. More than mere expression of need or gratitude, regular and proper sacrifice could create an obligation with the gods. This means that sacrifice was not merely an act of piety, but a very real way of exerting influence over the gods and, as a result, over your life (Bremmer 2007:15). However this act was fraught with difficulty.

Firstly the close connection between god and animal meant that very specific stipulations governed the types of animals to be offered. There was a balance to be maintained between honouring the god through sacrifice, and offending the god by murdering a kin. To add to the discomfort of ritual killing, most often the victims were domestic animals and as such shared some kind of relationship with man. These facts motivated the Greeks to go to great lengths to differentiate sacrificial killing from murder. One way was to insist that the sacrificial victim was a willing participant in the ceremony. This is a similar strategy to that used by early hunters who believed the animals presented themselves as quarry (Bremmer 2007:6,18). Euphemistic terms were employed to refer to the act of sacrifice and violent blows and noise were banned from the ceremony (Bremmer 2007:20). The use of the sacrificial mask, too, indicates a degree of anxiety about the culpability of the sacrificer and an attempt at creating a distinction between the act and the individual who performs it (Lonsdale 1997:153). The *Bouphonia* that formed part of the festival of Zeus illustrates that certain discomfort with sacrifice very clearly: the sacrificial ox was led up to an altar on which barley was put. Once the ox ate of the barley, he could be killed as punishment for his "sacrilegious" behaviour. The priest who performed the sacrifice would, afterwards, flee and the axe he left behind would be tried and found guilty of murdering the ox. Only when the skin of the ox had been stuffed and arranged in front of a plough, as if the sacrifice never happened, would the priest return (Kirk 1974:233).

Animals could also serve, not only as representations of deities but also as substitute humans: in his discussion of animal worship in the Mycenaean age, Cook (1894:106) addresses the attire of performers in rituals with the accent on the implicit meaning of the wearing of skins. In some cases human agents wear animal skins, and in others animals wear skins of the same species. Cook's interpretation of this phenomenon is that this double representation refers to the later age replacement of "a man called a sheep and dressed in a sheepskin" (Cook 1894:106). The supposed sacrificial human of earlier times is here being substituted by an animal victim, as mythologised by Artemis substituting a deer for Iphigeneia. Cook's interpretations are founded on his theories on animal worship in the Mycenaean age, and the supposition that animal cults preceded those of the later anthropomorphic gods. His discussion of the cults of the ass, bull, goat, horse, pig and lion raises interesting points about the values attached to these animals and the transference of these values to later gods. The horse cult is seen to be the origin of the cults of Demeter and Poseidon, but also of several lesser divinities such as the Centaur, the Minotaur,

the Dioscuri, the Harpies, the Gorgons, Satyrs, Sileni, Erinyes, Pegasus, Areion and Iris (Cook 1894:141-150). The horse was seen as chthonic, a force that carried souls to the underworld (Cook 1894:142), and was also associated with the winds as an unseen force on earth (Cook 1894:144, 145). It makes sense then that the Harpies, raptors of souls, are said to have looked like horses before this imagery was replaced by that of birds. Equine imagery lived on in the cult of horse-headed Demeter who was worshipped in a cave (Cook 1894:142) and pictured holding torches. The symbolic value of the cave and the torches, as well as her black robes, indicates that Demeter was worshipped as a chthonic deity in at least some areas of Greece.

The cult of the bull, while prominent given that large number of artifacts depicting this animal, is not as explicit as to the cultural values assigned to this animal (Cook 1894:124). What is apparent is that the bull was closely associated with fertility, as such it was associated with Demeter, Dionysos and Zeus (Cook 1894:130). It also bore close connections with water and the sea. Many river gods took on a bull shape, and Poseidon had a kinship with the bull which was also the victim of choice in sacrifices to him (Cook 1894:124; 130). It is noted that the head of the bull was a common feature in cult ritual depictions. The Greeks habitually hung up the head of the sacrificed bull, and Cook (1894:122) believes that bull-head masks such as one found in a Mycenaen shaft grave may have formed part of the ritual sacrifice costume. Imagery accompanying the ox includes the double axe and a rosette between horns, possibly denoting the forelock which was regarded as sacred and which was cut off and burned during the sacrificial ritual (Bremmer 2007:2).

d. Figurative animals

It has been proposed that Greek tragedy has its roots in sacrificial rites, and that the masks and the name, "goat song", points to "the dramatic ritual involve[ing] the sacrifice of a goat" (Lonsdale 1979:153). But even after theatre became popular entertainment rather than cultic rite animals played an important role, whether in character as actual animals or figuratively in dialogue. Thumiger (2008:2) puts forward that animals play an integral part in Greek tragedy, and that their main contribution lies in the definition of the human characters. They achieve this through being a reminder to the audience of what animal nature is (or is assumed to be), and in this way they high-light, mirror or play up the contrasts to typically human attributes. As an example, when an animal attribute is assigned to a person it invites the audience to consider the

person in a new, often more objective, manner. The character's actions are re-evaluated in the light of the animal description, with a necessary comparison of the similarities and dissimilarities. Depending on the situation, the audience will probably make a value judgment about the character, and this decision will hinge on the values assigned to the animal they have been encouraged to consider. In this way animals in tragedy, while they often appear in strongly humanised contexts, create an emotional separation between the audience and the human character (Thumiger 2008:6). Generally, Thumiger observes, this happens at points of crisis. When animals enter the plot, they force a new perspective of proceedings, "offer[ing] a paradigm and a counterpoint to the human story" (Thumiger 2008:6).

Aesop's fables present animals in wholly different manner, but as we shall see the basic premise is the same: animals serve to define human nature and behaviour. These short, moralising tales about talking animals in quasi-human situations is a strong departure from the other extant forms of ancient Greek storytelling. For one, animals play the leading roles. Clayton (2008:179-200) offers two readings of fables. The one focuses on the use of fables as an ideological tool: the stories affirm the dynamics of submission, frequently showing the strong triumphing over the weak. Fables seem to justify the balance of power that existed in the Greek polis: to the lower classes, slaves, foreigners and women the experience of living at the receiving end of policy generated by male Greek citizens was a daily reality. When reading the fable of the lamb and the wolf,²⁰ they would be able to identify deeply with the lamb who has no power to control his fate. The ruling party on the other hand would identify with the wolf who, being in a position of power, could act as he wishes and choose to justify (or refrain to justify) his actions. But for both sets of readers, the fable would affirm an existing situation (Clayton 2008:181-182). Another reading, however, calls on an ability only man is believed to be equipped with: reason. The premise is that the scenes acted out by the animal characters, and their typically fatalistic outcomes, are governed by the character's lack of reason. The animal characters do not have

²⁰ Refer to Aesop's tale of the lamb and the wolf, Perry index number 155 (Gibbs 2002:130). Summary: The wolf, upon meeting a young lamb decides to make a supper of him. He tries to justify his plans by accusing the lamb of a number of crimes the lamb could not possibly be guilty of. Even though the lamb provides proof of his innocence on every count, the wolf kills him anyway.

the ability to review a given situation, identify a desirable outcome and tailor their actions to bring about a beneficial conclusion. They act strictly within their respective animal characteristics and are guided only by their animal instincts. Drawing on Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* and *Politics*, Clayton points out that the qualities of reason enables humans to "redefine their environment and themselves" (Clayton 2008:195). So humans are not forced to endure the same conclusion as the animal characters in a given story, because unlike animals they can review the situation, imagine a desirable outcome and tailor their actions to achieve that outcome. Fables then become truly moralising in that it reminds man of the saving grace of reason, and encourages man to put this quality to use lest his fate be that of animals.

In conclusion it is now clear to us that the relationship between man and animal in the Greek world was a complex one, and that various facets of this interrelationship become apparent in different contexts or genres. The underlying trend, however, is one of duality: man can acknowledge and accept that he shares many inherent characteristics and qualities with animals, yet he resists a full embrace of animals as equal beings. Instead a great deal of attention is paid to a number of uniquely human traits – speech, religion, reason – and to those animal characteristics that identify beasts as Other: they are wild, lawless and irrational. The fear of the Other creates an impulse to distance and to differentiate, and as a result man's relationship with animals is governed by the desire to accentuate the contrasts rather than the similarities. Even in fables where the proximity between animal and man is crucial to the relevance of the tale the ultimate result is that of differentiation.

CHAPTER 4: Transgressors: Hybrid monsters as challengers to cultural taxonomy

a. Introduction to man-horse hybrids: centaurs, sileni and satyrs

The horse was a powerful figure in Greek life and imagination. Greek religion, whether totemistic or theriolatric in origin, retained a strong connection with animals right up to Classical times. Early worship of Poseidon, or Hippios, amongst the early Hellenes cemented the place of the horse in the Greek mythological structure, and associations with "moisture, subterranean waters, the underworld, fertility, wind, storm and tempest" (Vernant 1962:17) remained. Horses were believed to escort souls to the underworld (Cook 1894:141-146), so they tended to be tied up with the imagery of chthonic gods. This can be seen in the cave cult of the horse-headed Demeter. In myth horses are to gods much like what they are to man: they provide company, transport and impart status to their owners. Zeus had winged horses and exceptional specimens drew Helios' chariot, to name but a few examples.

But the horses we encounter in myth frequently possess qualities that extend beyond their nature as equines and which lend them a quasi-monstrous element. In two cases we hear of horses eating meat – a grotesque inversion of the horse's herbivorous nature. To make matters worse the meat they feed on is that of man. So not only do they have the capacity to contravene nature by eating meat, but by eating *human* meat they challenge the cosmic order on multiple levels. In doing so the horse enters the realm of the monster. The mares of Glaukos, son of Sisyphos, were according to Apollodorus fed human flesh in an attempt to improve their competitiveness. This practice had an unfortunate outcome when, having eaten an intoxicating herb, the horses turned on and devoured their master. The horses of Diomedes exhibited similar appetites and also killed and ate their master. The idea of man being eaten by an animal was utterly repellent to the Greeks for whom both bodily integrity and distinction from animals were of consummate importance. On a socio-psychological level being eaten by an animal implies incorporation into the beast. On a personal level this affects the individual's identity as human, but it also affects his community: being consumed by an animal compromises the cultural autonomy of man (Cohen 1996:14, Thumiger 2008:7). Apart from this, the inversion of roles where man normally acts as the predator and the animal takes the role of the quarry is uncomfortable. Man toppled from the summit of the food chain turned the Greek view of the hierarchy of beings upside down and must have caused discomfort and anxiety to a Greek

audience. It must also be considered that, in real life when man found himself on the wrong side of an animal's appetite, that animal was invariably carnivorous by nature: wild beasts, wolves, dogs, vultures and other scavengers were particularly feared. But the horse, while possessing its own set of powers that could threaten man, is neither a hunter nor a carnivore. These inversions draw attention both to the unnatural nature of certain horses in Greek myth, but it also references a tradition of horses as beings imbued with paranormal potentiality.

A theme that recurs frequently in Greek myth is the transfer of ownership of horse from deity to man. Horses are often described as being associated with or belonging to deities, and occasionally these animals were sent as gifts to mortals. In this way Ares gave horses to Oinomaos, Zeus gave horses to Ganymede's father (Apollodorus, 2.5.9) and Poseidon made Peleus a wedding gift of horses (Apollodorus, 3.13.5). These animals sent to the realm of man were not "normal", earthly horses but ones that shared their former master's immortality. Peleus' horses also exhibited curiously human emotions when Achilles was killed in battle (*Il.* 17.426-450). In these horses, in their crossing of the boundaries between the mortal and immortal worlds and their compromise of the line of division between the natural and the supernatural, we see signs of transgression. But it is in the characters of Areion and Pegasus that the dual natures we have started to recognise in monster figures become more pronounced. In Areion this duality is expressed in the fact that he inherited the regular shape of a horse in spite of (or because of?) being born of Demeter and Poseidon, both of whom were in the shape of horses when he was conceived (Apollodorus, 3.6.7). Little else is told about him. Pegasus, also sired by the god Poseidon and also primarily horse-shaped, is born outrageously, and fittingly for a monster, from the severed neck of Medusa (Apollodorus, 2.3.2; 2.4.2). His mother's mortality – unique for a Gorgon – and fearsome monstrosity stands in juxtaposition to the immortal divinity of his father Poseidon, from whom Pegasus would have inherited his dominant equine element. While Pegasus's graceful appearance does not betray his unnatural parentage, it is the addition of wings that serves as a reminder of his true nature. In ancient Near Eastern imagery wings signaled dominance and were assigned to supernatural beings (Goodnick Westenholz 2004:36), while in Greek mythology it is not uncommon for a non-monstrous creatures to be transformed into beings heterogeneous and frightening by the addition of wings (Lada-Richards 1998:76). Pegasus' wings echoes this heritage, and identifies their owner as a being that operates beyond the mortal sphere.

So while modern society may perceive of the horse as a docile, elegant and beautiful animal, the Greeks had a less comfortable relationship with this animal. It could have something to do with the fact that it came from far-off Scythia and was used effectively in battle by fearsome barbarous tribes (Bronowski 1973:80), or it may be due to remnants of a horse cult that associated the horse with the underworld and instilled fear and respect for the animal. The result is that the horse carried with it associations of duality, unbridled force, danger and death. Its internal nature having been established as dualistic and it was a short step for the horse to full-blown mythological monstrosity.

b. Centaurs in Greek literature

i. Mythological origins

The centaur is arguably the most prominent horse-monster to populate Greek mythology. Its hybrid form draws on the uncomfortable associations with the horse, dramatically combining an equine body with the torso of a human. In literature and in art this creature recurs both as decorative and as narrative motif, appearing in anonymous groups and as unique individuals. At first the true nature of the centaur is uncertain. It is not clear from early literary accounts whether centaurs were wild and dangerous foes to man, or whether they were allies who possessed healing powers to the benefit of man. These extremes seem irreconcilable within a single monster type. It is only in the 5th century that this conundrum is resolved through the formulation of "good" and "bad" centaurs, supported by separate myths of origin.

The first centaurs we meet in literature are not described as monsters or even as horse-man hybrids, but are merely referred to as "hairy" and as "beasts" and we learn no more than that they live in the mountains (*I.* 1.267-269; *I.* 2.738). Their appearance is not discussed and the reader is left with nothing more than a vague reference to a formidable foe that needed to be driven out of civilisation. One would expect an enemy of such unusual appearance to receive at least a brief description. But Robert Graves, whose historic reading of myth provides alternative perspectives on recurring themes and their symbolism, posits that the centaurs Homer referred to may not have been the half-man, half-horse hybrids we know at all. He is of the opinion that Homer's centaurs could have been an actual group of people, remnants of the Pelasgians, and that the name centaur could be related to the Latin "centuria" or "war-

band of one hundred" (Graves 1992:43). Other scholars do not agree and attribute the vagueness with which centaurs are treated in the *Iliad* to Homer's insistence on keeping implausible elements to a minimum in the epic (Gantz 1996:144). In the *Odyssey* Homer is more forthcoming and we learn both of the centaur Eurytion's counter-cultural behaviour and the ensuing enmity between man and centaur (Homer, *Od.* 21.285-305), but the juxtaposition of centaur and humankind tells us only that the centaurs were different to man. We still have no confirmation of the horse-man hybrid shape of these beings.

The works of both Homer and Hesiod, believed to have been composed at around the same time, mention a certain Cheiron. Homer refers to Cheiron's passing on of medical skills to Asclepios and his line (Homer, *Il.* 4.215-220), while Hesiod briefly mentions a Cheiron of divine birth, living in the mountains and to whom a child was entrusted (Hesiod, *Th.* 999-1002). Neither author mentions specifically that Cheiron is a centaur, nor do they comment on his physical appearance. So whether Cheiron was considered a centaur from the very early days, and whether centaurs were considered to be human-horse hybrids from the very beginning, is hard to verify. The writings of Homer and Hesiod certainly do not make it clear. According to Gantz (1996:145) early literary accounts fail to correspond clearly with one another. This, and the many variations of myths surrounding centaurs, creates the impression that there were different views on and that it took a while for this hybrid figure to develop and settle down in the Greek imagination (Gantz 1996:145).

In the fifth century BCE Pindar (Pindar, *Pyth.* 3) tells us more about Cheiron's origin by explaining that he was born from the union of Kronos and Philyra, where Kronos took the form of a horse during the act of seduction. As a result Cheiron inherited both his mother's human shape and his father's assumed equine one. Presumably the watery association of his maternal grandfather, Okeanos, also contributed to Cheiron's equine features. His divine provenance would account for his immortality and, along with the influence of Apollo and Artemis in his upbringing, for his wisdom. Yet Cheiron is a solitary figure and he is not described as the father of a race of hybrid beings. Hesiod and Pindar's accounts create the impression of him as unique of his kind. In Pindar's *Fourth Pythian Ode* Cheiron is married to Chariklo who is entirely human in shape. Their children do not share their father's hybrid appearance, and are called not centaurs but *kourai*. This reinforces the impression of Cheiron

as a one-off monster, representing neither his parents nor able to replicate his shape in his progeny (Gantz 1996: 146).

If Cheiron was not the ancestral father of the centaurs, how did the Greeks account for existence of an entire race of centaurs populating the wild mountains of Pelion and Pholoe? This required a new mythological event and we learn of it from Pindar's *Second Pythian Ode*. He tells the story of Ixion, a man with reckless disregard for the moral boundaries set by civilised society. Not only did Ixion murder his father-in-law, he also tried to force himself on the wife of his benefactor, his host at the time, and the king of the Olympians: Zeus. In doing so Ixion contravened every moral and religious code upheld by Greek society. When he was tricked by Zeus into having intercourse with Nephele, as a cloud in the shape of Hera, the result was Kentauros. Kentauros himself was not shaped like a horse, but it is said that he mated with the Magnesians who lived at the foot of Mount Pelion and that this was how the race of human-horse hybrids had its origins. Pindar makes it clear that this race both suffered for and shared the sins of their ancestor Ixion: they were born without the blessing of the Graces, lived without justice and they inherited from their paternal grandfather a disregard of codes of conduct of civilised society.

The dichotomy between the "good" and the "bad" potentiality of the centaur monster seems to have been bedded down in the fifth century by the introduction of separate myths of origin for Cheiron and for the wild hordes on Mount Pelion. Pindar made it clear that the good centaur Cheiron descended from noble, divine stock while the bad proponents of this hybrid type descended from Ixion. Three or four centuries later Apollodorus used the same reasoning to account for the amicable relationship between Pholos and Herakles: Pholos was descended not from Ixion's line but was born of Silenos, a pre-existing human-horse hybrid, and a Melian nymph (Apollodorus, 2.5.4). It has to be noted that not all authors agreed with Pindar's explanation of Cheiron's provenance and the Thessalian Soudas (602F1 Jacoby) make him, too, one of Ixion's descendants (Gantz 1996:146).

ii. Centaurs as transgressors

Of all hybrid monsters none embodies the principle of transgression quite as comprehensively as the centaur. In their parentage, their physical appearance, their nature and their behaviour

the lines of normalcy are crossed and re-crossed. In this case the repeated transgression does not have the effect of blurring the lines of division, but instead serves to emphasise the opposites separated by that dividing line. Instead of introducing confusion, the centaur brings these opposites into clearer focus. Through juxtaposition and transgression it introduces greater definition.

Both "good" and "bad" centaurs combine the enigmatic horse with some degree of divinity. As psychopomp the horse is a symbol of transgression, both the irreversible crossing over of the soul to the land of the dead and the counter-natural crossing back into the land of the living. The centaur Nessos presents us with another kind of disregard for the separation of the spheres of life and death: By manipulating Heracles' wife the centaur manages to murder the hero, reaching from beyond the grave years after his own death to affect the demise of Heracles (Sophocles, *Trach.* 559). The centaur's mixed parentage, in all its mythological variants, is an unnatural combination of human, god and animal. Necessarily the external appearance of the centaur serves as a reminder of these transgressions. Of the centaurs only Cheiron can be considered divine and his immortality as well as his intellect and refined nature sets him apart from other centaurs. In his case one could say that hybrid appearance serves as an indicator of godly nature, in the same way as hybrid forms were used in the ancient Near East to clearly identify those, like genies and demons, who operated beyond the mortal sphere.

If the same is true of the wild centaurs, it requires us to remember that the genies and demons of the ANE could perform either apotropaic functions or attacking functions, bearing out the principle that the most ferocious enemy makes the most effective ally. So the hybrid appearance of the wild centaurs, too, could be an indicator of their supernatural provenance. However, it would be remiss not to consider some of the other possible implications of the monstrous appearance of Ixion's descendents. Ixion was a man favoured by the gods and described as a hero, who inexplicably committed the heinous crimes of killing a relative and seducing his divine host's wife (Pindar, *Pythian* 2.25). This breach of the code of conduct of civilised society, the rules that govern proper interaction between man and god, and man and fellow man, resulted in rift which separated Ixion from his community. Ixion's recklessness not only presented a threat to society, but his upset of social custom challenged the order of the cosmos (Detienne 1977:87-89) and as such must be considered monstrous. The man

Ixion, in his denial of propriety, became a monster and suffered the fate of a monster: his personal punishment was banishment to the liminal extremes, turning through the skies tied to a wheel. But personal punishment was not enough for an act that tore the cosmic fabric; an act that warned the world that the threat to culture was not an external threat only, but one which could arise within the gates of civilisation. Ixion's *capacity* for monstrous behaviour had to be disowned by society and also banished to the wilderness. So it seems that by virtue of transference Kentauros, born of Nephele, and his progeny of centaurs who roamed the wilderness were invested with the unpredictability and unscrupulous arrogance of their forefather. They gave physical expression to the internal monstrosity of Ixion.

The centaur's primary transgression is that of species, and that already earns it the epithet "monster". The use of the term *teras* for a being that seemed to combine elements from different species was discussed in chapter one. In the case of the centaur the human and the animal elements are untainted, in other words the equine half is fully equine without further compromise of skin, tail or other features. In the same way the human half is fully human in form without grotesque tusks or horns. More so than if human and animal features were mixed up in a haphazard way, this clear segregation of human and animal features accentuates the transgression between species. By leaving the two species – human and horse – largely intact we are prompted to consider their individual attributes and what their combination might imply. If Man is cultured, civilised, intelligent and governed by justice while the horse is chthonic, otherworldly, powerful and untamed, what behaviour do we expect from a hybrid? It appears that the centaur's disposition is either fully monstrous (like Eurythion) or fully good (like Cheiron and Pholos) and that there is no vacillation between these two states. Instead the centaur, in its duality, seems to give shape to the inner nature described by Plato in the *Republic* (9.588-589). This composite creature that is man's inner being has to be accommodated and cared for by man. If one element of the composite creature is nurtured above the others, it results in an imbalance which is grotesque. The "good" centaurs demonstrate the result of this balance achieved, with the human and equine elements coexisting in harmony and keeping each other in check. Cheiron, usually described as "wise", is no less of a centaur for his goodness, and nowhere do we see signs of his human component taking over his inherent hybrid nature. Cheiron's goodness, his wisdom, is rooted in his identity as creature of the earth. The skills Cheiron teaches heroes are skills he, being

closely related to the animal, the instinctual and the earth, would have access to: medicinal remedies and the skills of hunting. As monster Cheiron has access to the gifts of nature (von Blanckenhagen 1987:87). The "bad" centaurs are exemplars of the threat of nature, of what happens when the dark, powerful, uncontrolled force of nature, present in animal and in man, goes unchecked by the gifts of civilization. These centaurs are what man might be without order, justice, culture and restraint and both internally and externally they symbolise the very opposite of the Greek ideal of *sophrosyne*. It is of great importance that the centaur contains such a large proportion of the human in its physical representation. It emphasises the thin line that separates humanity and monstrosity, and it is a reminder that internal monstrosity can take on human form, just as internal humanity can take on monstrous form.

iii. Locality and liminality

True to monster types, the centaur is relegated to the wilderness on the outskirts of civilised land. Traditionally centaurs roamed the slopes of Mount Pelion, mountainous regions beyond the reach of law and order, inhospitable to man. Both the "good" and the "bad" centaurs are found in these liminal locations. Indeed, as discussed above, that which exists in the sphere of nature is not *a priori* bad, though its juxtaposition to the civilised world often brings about that implication. Besides living on the geographic periphery, Centaurs are frequently associated with a pronounced chaotic space: the cave. Cheiron receives his wards in his cave on Mount Pelion, and when Heracles visits Pholos on his way to hunting the Erymanthian boar they have supper in the cave of Pholos (Apollodorus, 2.5.4). Caves were the chosen haunt not only of centaurs, but of other monsters too: Scylla hides in a cave on a narrow strait (Homer, *Od.* 12.55-95) and Polyphemus and his fellow Cyclopes also live in caves (Homer, *Od.* 9). Even gods on occasion make use of caves, and we know that Zeus was hidden in a cave as a baby (Hesiod, *Th.* 475-485) while the sorceress Calypso successfully detained Odysseus in hers (Homer, *Od.* 5.55-90).

Caves as a setting come loaded with connotations of darkness, separation, chaos and "otherness". The visitor to a cave suffers on a physical level the disorientation brought about by the darkness, and on a psychological level separation from the outside world, the illuminated and known. This sets him apart from his natural habitat, from the rules that control the world outside the cave. In the cave, Zeus is released from the bonds that control

the world, allowing him to rise above and rule that world. Calypso disorients Odysseus so that he forgets about his mission and the responsibilities that the outside world holds. Inside the cave the rules of the outside world holds no sway, and the monsters that inhabit caves exist independent of the laws of nature. Plato in his *Republic* famously used the imagery of a cave to represent confusion and misinterpretation as man tries to fathom the real world purely by looking at shadows cast onto the cave wall. Besides its associations of darkness and chaos, caves are liminal spaces. Being partly enclosed by the earth, often leading deep into rock or mountain, it becomes a locus mid-way between the world above and the world below the surface. This caused caves to be seen as a transition point between the normal world and the underworld. As such they came to be thought of as "ports" through which the land of the dead could be accessed. This made caves ideally suited to the ritual worship of chthonic gods, oracular activity and rites of initiation (Cox 2010: 69-79).

All of these attributes position caves as a symbolic counterpoint to the civilised location of, say, a public hall. As such caves make an unusual setting for social activities associated with high culture, yet we see examples of this in relation to Centaurs: Cheiron mentors his wards in his cave on the slopes of Mount Pelion while Heracles and Pholos dine together at the cave of Pholos on Mount Pholoe. The contrast between the dark and chaotic setting of the cave and the refined activity conducted in these cases within, highlights the disparity between the cultured represented by the hero, and the untamed represented by the monster. It also shows an interesting intrusion of the cultured into the domain of the chaotic: we are used to seeing monsters transgressing but it is notable that in these examples the hero (peacefully) enters the liminal sphere where the monster is at home.

In Sophocles' *Trachiniae* we learn that the centaur Nessos lives by the river Evenus, ferrying people who needed to cross the water (*Trach.* 559). The river is a liminal entity on two counts: firstly in its function as boundary between distinct geographic areas and secondly on account of its bringing together (and separating) the elements of earth and water. Water in itself has associations with the Other, that which is not owned and as such is not seen as part of the local identity. It is an element that is mysterious and associated with the underworld and death. The centaur's able plotting of the river sets it apart from the humans he carries across. His proficiency in navigating the water reminds us that monster figures thrive in liminal contexts inimical to humans. In this case the watery element of the river resonates

with the equine element of the centaur. The service the centaur provides to his human cargo echoes the duties of the horse in early religion as the ferryman of the souls of the departed from the land of the living to the land of the dead.

We have seen sufficient evidence that centaurs populate the outskirts of society both geographically and conceptually. The mountain wildernesses that form part of their habitat are far removed from civilised land, while the caves and rivers may be geographically closer but conceptually they provide a counterpoint to that which is known and owned. However, in typical monster-style the centaurs do not keep to their assigned territory away from human habitations. The tribe of anonymous²¹ centaurs living on the slopes of Pelion was never only a distant threat. In the *Illiad* 1.245 we hear that centaurs are formidable foes and that only the bravest of men would be prepared meet them in battle. But these battles between man and centaur were fought not on battlefields in far off locations. The centaurs were active and intrusive, joining man on his home turf, in his cultural activities, and causing disruption from within.

Unlike other monsters, we find centaurs interacting with humans in a seemingly “normal”, human manner. Cheiron trained and taught young heroes, Pholos befriended the hero Heracles and Nessos provided a transportation service that required close interaction with humans. While these specific activities may be conducted in liminal spaces, i.e. caves and rivers, the interactions are of a civilised kind and in a human context. The monster does not remain a distant threat. Equally the separation afforded man by the civilisations he creates and the culture he nurtures cannot guarantee him immunity from the existence of monsters. The distinction between man and monster does not lie in geographic separation, and the centaur’s disregard for the barriers reminds us – as it did the Greeks – of this.

²¹ Though some authors do name them, like Ovid in his *Metamorphoses* (12.210), centaurs other than Cheiron, Nessos, Pholos and possibly Eurytion are usually referred to collectively and are seldom individualised.

iv. Infringement on culture

While often described as a group or tribe, there is little evidence in Greek literature and art of an organised society of centaurs. They seem to have lived in close proximity to each other for the sake of convenience rather than out of a sense of community or attachment. When the centaurs living close to Pholos smell the wine that he had opened for his guest (Apollodorus, 2.5.4), they attack their neighbour and his guest with little regard for communal unity. Their inherent irrationality – in other words their failure to conform to either internal or imposed rules – would preclude an ordered community life. Even when the centaurs do act as a group, as they do when engaged in battle with humans and appear to have a common goal, there is still no organization. The impulse to act is selfish – to obtain women or wine – and not a united one. The result is chaotic. In ordered societies restraint is codified in the culture of the people and in the laws laid down and abided to by the community. The centaurs, however, do not have the ordering agency of culture. They abide by no external law nor are their actions tempered by internal restraint. They are described as “lawless” (Sophocles, *Trach.* 1096), which is as severe an indictment on a being as the Greeks could conjure up. Without law there could be no restraint, no order and no civilization.

In the *Odyssey* 21.295-304 we are introduced to the Thessalian centauromachy by Antinous who holds up the behaviour of the centaur Eurytion at the wedding of Perithous as a negative example of the proper behaviour of guests. Later Ovid (*Metam.* 12.210-535) spends rather more time on the unfolding of the story, using emotive language and detailed descriptions that leaves us with no doubt about the uncontrolled and savage nature of the centaur’s behaviour. In this account the wedding of Perithoos and Hippodame is set, again surprisingly, in a cave and under the trees. This natural setting is in contrast to the nature of the occasion: weddings form part of the institutions that order human interaction in civilised society, but here the ceremony is celebrated in a setting which represents the very opposite. Nature, and the cave in particular, are agencies of chaos. Ovid makes a point of accentuating the refinement of the wedding by drawing attention to the ordered tables and the guests reclining at them as at a symposium. There are fires, a godly element and symbol of civilization, and the sound of festive songs. In stark contrast then is the behaviour of Eurytion who, drunk and filled with lust, lunges at his host’s bride and tries to force himself on her. This sets off the rest of the centaurs who, abandoning the protocol that pertains to guests, also seize Lapith

women for themselves. This breach of etiquette does not go unpunished and the Lapith men attack the centaurs who are now wild and uncontrollable beasts. It is a thin line indeed that separates chaos and civilisation.

The Peloponnesian centauromachy, as told by Apollodorus, also takes place in the locus of the monster: Heracles, on his way to performing his fourth labour, stops over at the cave of Pholos for supper. On his insistence his host opens a hidden jar of wine, the smell of which drives the neighbouring centaurs wild. They attack the diners (Apollodorus, 2.5.4). Again the monsters remain physically in their liminal space, on the mountainside and in caves, but the hero Heracles – another transgressor – crosses over into their sphere. The hero travels with the attributes of civilization. More than that – the hero is the founder and protector of world order. So when he moves into the wilderness amongst the centaurs he establishes order: in the midst of nature he has a civilised dinner with his friend, having his food cooked (not raw like his centaur friend) and insisting on having wine with his meal. The revolt of the beasts in the face of the ordering agent of the hero leads to a battle. The hero performs his duty as destroyer of monsters and clears the wilderness by driving out the centaurs, thereby establishing order. The centaurs are driven off Mount Pholoe and scattered across the world. Some unsuccessfully seek refuge with Cheiron, where Heracles kills not only them but inadvertently Cheiron as well. At this point Cheiron's duality is drawn to a point of crisis: his kinship with the centaurs overrides his civil nature and unable, or unwilling, to negotiate on their behalf he suffers the same fate as the monsters. In the process Cheiron has to shed his godly aspect, his immortality, allowing him to die like the mortals of his kind. Other centaurs successfully seek refuge with Poseidon who, as god sympathetic to their equine natures, is able to intervene. He stores them in a suitable site for monsters: like Typhoeus they are hidden under the earth.

The centaur's base lusts set it apart from enlightened society. Wine was ubiquitous in the Greek world and, as today, it had connotations of refinement. Wine as a result of viticulture, the act of taming nature through farming and viniculture, is firmly rooted in the civilised world. This art is the fruit of culture and science beyond the reach of the wild centaurs, and it is jarring to see these monsters drink it. Through imbibing it they consume something of the order and culture which belongs to man and absolutely not to the monstrous. The incapacity of centaurs to hold their liquor confirms the impropriety of their drinking wine. At the same

time we must not forget that wine also had its associations with the god Dionysos and his rites, which could become notoriously uncontrolled and violent. The effect of the wine on the centaurs is pronounced and they become both lecherous and violent. Both tendencies that represent violations: the first translates into the rape of human women by the centaurs, showing utter disregard for the laws of society and the cosmic laws separating animals, humans and gods. The violence directed at the wedding guests contravenes the moral contract of society into which, it would seem, the centaurs were included right up to the Lapith wedding. Challenged by the accessibility of wine and women their animal natures erupt and they are no longer able to integrate in the civilised community of the Lapiths. The result is a dramatic intrusion and the defiling of civilised Greek custom with their uncouth behaviour.

We see another example of monstrous behaviour in Sophocles's *Trachiniae*: the centaur Nessos, offering to carry Deianeira across the river, tries to rape her. Having been shot by one of Heracles' poison arrows, he deceives his victim into thinking that his blood – now poisoned with the venom of the hydra – would act as a love potion. In this way Nessos manipulates Deianeira into killing her own husband. This is the only example of such underhanded plotting on the part of a centaur and this, too, is unsettling. Our expectation is for centaurs to be "rude, lawless, savage, unapproachable and unmatched in might" (Sophocles, *Trach.* 1096-1097), but deviousness is normally found amongst men and gods. As a behavioural trait not generally associated with monster-type creatures, again our understanding of the centaur is challenged.

As has become clear, when the centaurs come in contact with the order inherent in civilization, their chaotic natures take over and they demonstrate the very opposite. With these actions the centaur highlights with great efficiency the difference between culture and nature, in the same way as his external composition demonstrates the contrast between man and animal. The duality inherent in the centaur can find symbolic application on different levels. The discussion so far has focused on the centaur as a construct representing the counter-cultural and the chaotic in a mythological structure that relies on the supplanting of this natural state with a construct of order, as symbolised by the gods and expressed in the culture of the Greeks. The centaur invites consideration of nature of man and beast and the implication of a being that consists partly, but also wholly, of both. As a representation of

what man would be without culture, the centaur contains the threat within his own composition: man can be wise, controlled and refined, like the centaur Cheiron, as represented by his human element, or he can be driven by uncontrolled animal passions represented by his equine half. The line of differentiation is so clear and yet so easily crossed.

Some authors interpret the centaur as the inner turmoil of the hero given physical, external representation (Harris and Platzner 1995:230). This interpretation has merit and gives insight into the battle between the hero figure and the monster: the hero fights to establish order and protect the cosmic structure which is not natural, but constructed and in need of constant maintenance (Vernant 1982:115-116; Lloyd-Jones 1980:8). This battle is echoed on an internal, psychological level: man also battles his inner animal in order to achieve and protect his moral structure, his identity and culture – his internal order which is under threat of collapsing into animal wildness.

c. Satyrs and sileni

The centaur shares its equine-hybrid form with another nature spirit – the satyr. While of shared origin and similar composition, the centaur and the satyr present very different interpretations of the human-horse monster. Both these creatures probably have their roots in early Greek religion as horse-demons (Padgett 2003:4) and their equine elements would call on the same associations with horses. Like centaurs, satyrs live in the woods and groves on the periphery of developed, inhabited spaces and like centaurs they provide man with a cautionary model: 'beware or be like this'. Their physical appearance which, unlike the centaur, is a melding of human and animal traits reflects an inner nature that combines the worst elements of the two species (Padgett 2003:4).

The physical construction of centaurs and satyrs are very different: where the centaur joins the nearly complete and uncompromised forms of horse and man, the satyr mingles elements of the two to form a new one. He has a human posture with either human or equine legs and tail, upright body, human arms and head but equine ears. The satyr's physical assembly along with the deliberate distortion of facial features, bald head or long stringy hair and an exaggerated phallus put this creature, like the centaur, in juxtaposition to the Greek ideal. Likewise his nature is an amalgamation, but seemingly only of the bad traits of man and animal, and there is no

suggestion of a potentiality for good. Where in the centaur the human aspect highlights the true nature of the animal, and vice versa, in the satyr we see the potential of man debased and tainted by the animal.

In what is the earliest literary reference to the satyr, they are pronounced "worthless" and "unfit for work" (Hesiod, Fr. 10a17-19 [olim 123] and 10b West, quoted by Gantz 1993:135). They are pronounced to be different to their siblings, the nymphs and the kouretes, and there is a sense of failure, of being ineffectual, attached to them. As hybrid monster the satyr is physically and by nature composite. They live in the wilderness and in contravention of the laws of man. Yet the satyr is not threatening. Their persistent but weak attempts at rape, their lasciviousness directed at woman, man or animal, their weakness for wine, their crossing of the boundary between man and animal, between the supernatural and the earthly sphere – in all of these ways the satyr is a challenger of Greek man's cultural construct and a threat to the cosmic order. But theirs is a threat that is so feeble as to be seen as amusing rather than dangerous (Padgett 2003:27-36). The incorporation of the satyr into the retinue of Dionysos irrevocably divorced this hybrid from his monstrosity, turning it into a harmless woodland sprite. As naturalised member of the mythological structure the satyr became part of culture, and its Otherness lost its threat.

These creatures' sporadic appearance in literature, either as satyrs or as silenoi²² is outperformed by their popularity in decorative art. Satyrs are seldom individualised, and rarely take center stage in narrative or visual representation. They hover on the fringes as inhabitants of the woodlands as decorative devices or, later, as attendants in the retinue of Dionysos. The earliest depictions of satyrs showed them either in search of wine or sex and there is something threatening in their relentless pursuit, their lack of discrimination and their aggressively erect penises (Padgett 2003:30). From the early fifth century BCE, a point for which the Francois Krater (Fig.5) stands as beacon, the satyr is included in Dionysiac processions where they dance, play the flute and cavort with maenads (Gantz 1993:136; Padgett 2003:30). Their lasciviousness is now less aggressive and more mischievous. Their role is now not so much representing the counter-cultural as being the "anti-paragons of male behaviour" (Padgett 2003:34). So while

²² For the interchangeable use of "satyr" and "silenos" see Padgett 2003:30 and Gantz 1993:135-139.

watered down, remnants of their cautionary role remain. Frequent scenes of failed attempts at sexual conquest and of satyrs being rejected and punished by maenads or nymphs must have been intended to amuse (Gantz 1993:137) or at most to be a charm against such embarrassment (Padgett 2003:32). It is believed that the Athenian satyr plays influenced the view of satyrs and helped develop this hybrid being in the comic direction. Many of the visual impressions from the late sixth century BCE show satyrs in more varied context and performing human roles or replacing famous mythological figures (Padgett 2003:34) in a way that reflects the role-playing of theatre (Fig.6). At this point the hybrid being is so integrated into the cultural expression as to be entirely divested of his earlier monstrosity, his potentiality for being threatening to the Greeks.

d. Visual representation of centaurs

Visual representation of the centaur evolved over time and in the process passed through a spectrum of interpretations that range from the apotropaic to the narrative, from grotesque monstrosity to paragons of familial harmony. This evolution is of particular interest since it continues the theme of transition, transgression and change that characterises the monsters studied here. It also tells us that the specific requirements for monsters changed through the ages. In earlier times Greek man needed supernatural, grotesque and powerful monsters to give expression to the unseen forces of chaos that both threatened and helped define civilization. In later times Greek monsters became more sophisticated, the challenge they represented was of a psychological kind, the threat changed from an overt external one to an internal conflict.

The combination of the forms of man and horse is not an aesthetically logical one. The result is both visually and conceptually uneasy. The centaur does not merely swap out a number of limbs or even half a body with that of another creature. It is a strange adjoining of two almost-complete bodies. The horse half, in some representations, merely loses a neck and head but it gains a near-complete human body. In other representations a complete human body is appended at the lower back with a horse's trunk and rear, sacrificing only the human buttocks in construction. This flexibility of composition is not unusual in Greek mythology as both authors and artists tend to depict mythical beings in a way that best suits either plot or medium. If anything, it affirms the fluidity of monsters: there is no uncertainty about the identity of the centaur, only varying interpretations of construction. It would seem as if certain models were preferred at different times (Padgett 2003:9-19). Here the connection between disposition or

nature and external appearance becomes relevant: it would seem as if the "good" centaurs were represented with a greater proportion of human features, i.e. they would have human front feet and agreeable facial features. On the other hand the "bad" centaurs tended to have equine front feet and distorted facial features. In both interpretations the plurality of limbs and in this case presumably also of vital organs leaves little doubt about the creature's status as monster (Fig.7, Fig.8, Fig.9)

i. Ancient Near Eastern influence

While it is generally accepted that the extensive contact between the Greek world and the ancient Near East led to a mutual borrowing of images, it is not certain whether this transfer was limited to the images or whether some content traveled with these images (Childs 2003:49). The influence of the artistic and mythological traditions of the much older ancient Near Eastern cultures on the emerging Greek civilisation could have taken various forms: artistic designs and devices could be adopted cross-culturally without any of the context or meaning of the design. Alternatively some of the local symbolism could accompany the design, and lastly the function of the design could accompany it in the transfer.

Of the monsters in the Greek bestiary, the centaur owes the least to the influences of the ancient Near East (Bianchi 2004:18; Padgett 2003:5). Of the many human-animal hybrid monsters in ancient Near Eastern art only a small number are pure human-equine centaurs. Yet these figures do have a striking resemblance to the much later Greek centaur. It appears that they, possibly because the horse element resonated with the symbolic value attached to this animal by the Greeks, appealed to the Greek imagination. In this way an echo of the ancient Near Eastern centaur is found in the centaurs of later Greek art, warranting a brief discussion of them here.

One of the examples of a pure human-equine of the ancient Near East is found on a Middle Assyrian cylinder seal (Fig.10) and two similar ones are found as terracotta figurines recently discovered in Ugarit (Padgett 2003:131). The cylinder seal shows a centaur with equine body and feet and human torso. The centaur holds in his one hand a bow and in his other the foreleg of a small upside-down animal. The construction of the centaur is very similar to that which we see later in Greek art. The depiction of the centaur as hunter is also one that is

familiar from Greek examples, as is the centaur's accompaniment by a human, possibly a hero figure. Childs (Padgett 2003:132) posits that in this example the strong resemblance in torso and facial features of the centaur and the hero implies association, and that both figures probably represent *Lahmu*, a primordial god from the Akkadian pantheon. The fact that the one figure is a hybrid would presumably then be an indication of the *Lahmu's* exalted status and divinity (Padgett 2003:132). But this "pure centaur" is the exception. The more common version of the ancient Near Eastern centaur contains other hybrid elements, like the wings and scorpion tail on the hunting centaur on a cylinder seal dating from the thirteenth century BCE (Fig.11). In the Near Eastern context these attributes identify the being as a demon or a genie (Padgett 2003:6; 10).

So it is likely that the ancient Near Eastern man-horse hybrid made its way to Greece, and that some of the associated pictorial traditions accompanied it. But whether the *function* of the monster in the Near East had any influence on the Greek versions is debatable, primarily because we are not entirely certain what their function in the Near East was. From what we understand they existed independent of a narrative context (Childs 2003:51-53), or at least none of these narratives are extant. Childs (2003:50) suggests that the Near Eastern centaur's primary function was that of an apotropaic being and that this function accompanied the monster to the Greek world. Bianchi (2004:19) however recommends caution when assigning meanings to early composite beasts in Greek art since they "only acquired canonical appearances and interpretations" in the late sixth century BCE.

ii. Centaurs in Greek art

At this point would it be sensible to acknowledge that not all Greek human-equine hybrid figures were centaurs. Certain artifacts from the early Archaic period make it clear that human-horse hybrids were used to depict characters we know from the narrative legacy not to be centaurs at all. Gantz (1993:144) describes a Protocorinthian aryballos (Boston 95.12) showing the confrontation between Zeus and Typhoeus, with the monster represented as a human-equine hybrid. A second example is found on a Cycladic relief pithos (Fig.12) where Perseus is shown decapitating a Medousa represented as a centaur-like hybrid (Padgett 2003:10; Gantz 1993:144). And this is not an anomaly: a scarab seal of the same period (Fig.13) also shows Medousa as a centauresque hybrid monster. In this example Medousa is

not only a horse hybrid, but she also has wings. Padgett (2003:10) suggests that the artist's intention of depicting Medousa as a hybrid was to convey the monster's demonic nature. Where in the Near East the animal hybrid body may have sufficed as such an indicator, in the Greek context since the hybrid form may already have become associated with the mythological centaur, this may not have been enough as a signal of divinity. The addition of wings ensures that the message comes across.

Looking at the representations of centaurs in Greek art, it is clear that between the sixth and the fifth centuries BCE the Greek view of these creatures underwent a dramatic change. In early representations they are anonymous and decorative (Fig.14), while from the sixth century onwards they develop greater individuality and personality. Bianchi (2004:19) proposes that early Greek representations of centaurs depicted them, much like their eastern forebears, as external forces of good and evil. Much like the demons and genies of the ancient Near East they existed to either harm or protect humans. It was only during the sixth century that the fragmented stories that developed around these beings in Greece, were canonised into a mythological structure resembling that which was passed down to us. Woodford (2003:135) concurs and emphasises that this shift in how centaurs were illustrated parallels a psychological shift in how they were understood by the Greeks: instead of the seeing only a repulsive monster, people came to consider the origins, motivations and life experience of the centaur. In truth, they projected their own experience onto the monster, and so the centaur evolved into a humanised version of its former, monstrous self. Once absorbed into the corpus of Greek mythology, centaurs took on a symbolic subtext.

This shift presents a radical change in how centaurs were understood and, consequently, depicted. It is important to recognise, however, that the underlying sentiment that generated them as grotesque monsters – the fear of the unknown – was still very much contained in the humanised centaur of the fifth century. The threat changed from an overt, external and public one to a subtle, psychological and personal one. In the rational age monsters changed from being attackers and guardians to presenting models for human behaviour (Bianchi 2004:19).

The earliest appearance of a centaur figure on Greek soil is the Lefkandi centaur from the 10th century BCE Euboia (Padgett 2003:7; Bianchi 2004:18) (Fig.15). As a terracotta funerary

figurine it is apparent that the attacker/guardian function of the centaur dominates. Childs (2003:64) confirms that this figurine was found in two pieces split between two separate tombs, and that this is an indicator that this centaur was meant as an apotropaic figure. According to Childs it is important to acknowledge this protective function the Greeks assigned to the hybrid: "As a genie of the wild, the centaur in the Near East and Greece had a apotropaic function, since its presence on Late Geometric and Orientalizing vases in non-narrative contexts can only be explained as such" (Childs 2003:64-65). This cannot be contested, but in the case of the Lefkandi centaur a mythological narrative already seems to be making itself known: there is a mark on the figure's left front leg that is considered to be an intentional addition to a figure which, otherwise, lacks unnecessary detail (Padgett 2003:7). The only explanation we have is that this mark represents a wound, similar to the ones inflicted on Cheiron and Pholos. The implication is that some kind of narrative may already have surrounded the centaur figure even as early as the tenth century BCE (Padgett 2003:7).

It is only 200 years later, during the eighth century, that the centaur erupted in full force on the Greek art scene as bronze and ceramic figurines, and the subject matter for vase painting (Bianchi 2003:18). In a bronze group from 750 BCE we see a man and a centaur in confrontation (Fig.16). As with the Lefkandi centaur, this scene could have many interpretations were it not for one telling detail: what seems to resemble a blade sticking from the side of the centaur figure. As with the wound on the leg of the Lefkandi centaur, this blade implies that the two characters are acting out a narrative. Scholars have interpreted the group to represent Zeus battling a Titan or the monster Typhoeus (Hemingway 2003:135), which is possible considering the generic use of a horse body to signify monstrosity, as already discussed. The other interpretation would be that this scene represents a battle between a Lapith or a hero and a centaur (Hemingway 2003:135). The hero figure, if it is such, would most likely be Heracles since he has the largest repertoire of centaur confrontations (Hemingway 2003:135). The human figure is markedly larger than the centaur, creating the impression of superior strength.

Such battle scenes between centaur and man become very popular as subject matter in later Archaic and Classical Greek art (Hemingway 2003:135). There is a positive wealth of black figure vase painting depicting scenes of combat between heroes and centaurs dating from

these periods. The narrative is now a prominent component and there are clear visual clues, if not actual labels, identifying the mythological figures. In an example from Sicily dated ca. 500 BCE (Fig.17) the energetic composition employed is effective in conveying the idea of a tough contest between hero and monster. Heracles is clearly identified by his club and his lion skin cape, but the centaurs are generic figures. On another example from the same time (Fig.18) the centaur, however, is clearly identifiable by the context as Nessos. Heracles is identified by his club, while Nessos holds the unsophisticated weapons of rocks in his hands. Flanking the fighting figures are Deianeira and her father, Oineus, giving compositional and narrative context to the combat.

These battle scenes, and the fervour with which they are depicted, are telling of the symbolic value this type of interaction carried. Every contest between hero and centaur became a battle between order and chaos, between good and bad, between the Self and the Other. In Athens the battles between Theseus and the centaurs and Amazons were powerful symbols of the defeat of the barbarians and in particular the Persians. Incorporated into the west pediment of the temple of Zeus at Olympia and the south metopes of the Parthenon (Padgett 2003:17) these were constant reminders to the Greeks of their superiority.

From an early stage of its visual development the centaur was assigned certain attributes which became part of its identity, and indeed served as a visual cue to positively identify centaurs. In literature and art their weapons of choice are trees or branches, elements which accentuate their wildness and lack of culture: they do not fashion weapons with forethought and skill. Their fights are spontaneous and they grab what is close at hand and since their locus is the wilderness, trees are fitting weapons. This is one of the prominent differences between Greek centaurs and ancient Near Eastern centaurs: the bow and arrow of the 13th century hunting centaur sets it apart from the Greek centaurs who never employ such civilised weapons (Fig.11). In statuettes there are frequently indications that sticks, branches or saplings used to be attached to the centaur figures, and in paintings and engravings this detail is rarely missing. On the Parthenon metopes we see that the conflict between Theseus and the centaurs, traditionally placed in a natural setting, is moved indoors into civilised space (Padgett 2003:17). This seemingly minor detail carries a great deal of symbolic value as it brings the threat of chaos right into the inner sanctum of Greek culture. The discordance of a battle in the Greek home, of using household implements as weapons (here again the

centaurs grab whatever is at hand) and the resultant destruction serves to heighten the threat of the centaur, the enemy, and polarise the elements of hero and centaur.

Another intriguing visual element in the tradition of centaur depiction is the variation in use of human and equine feet. Typically the back feet are equine, but since the earliest depiction variation of human and equine front feet has occurred (Padgett 2003:10) and sometimes both types appear in the same visual instance. From this it would seem that both types were accepted, though it does appear as if the human version was more prominent in earlier times and the equine type popular at the end of the seventh century BCE (Gantz 1993:145). In sixth century eastern Greece there was a tendency to have human legs ending in hooves (Padgett 2003:11), but it seems as if this element was subject to artistic preference and fashion more than that it indicated anything about the monster itself. That having been said, Gantz (1993:145) believes that there is a trend to be identified that assigns more human attributes to centaurs that are civilised and good, while more equine features were assigned to the offspring of Ixion. In support of Gantz's statement, we find that the centaurs that Heracles battles (Fig.17) have hooves, but that depictions of Cheiron tend to have a full human body, legs and front feet. A black figure lekythos from 510-500 BCE demonstrates the human model beautifully (Fig.19): here the good Cheiron receives Achilles as his ward. Cheiron's feet are carefully articulated and the muscles on his human legs defined in exactly the way the hero Perseus' are. The detail on the toes draws attention to the modeling of the human feet. This example also demonstrates the use of clothing in the depiction of centaurs, who are usually – in accordance with their wildness and lack of culture – naked. When centaurs are clothed it tells the viewer something about that creature's relationship to culture. We find only Cheiron and Pholos treated in this way (Padgett 2003:18). The drape of the cloth effectively covers up the inherent chaos of their hybrid bodies. But Cheiron is still centaur, and on the lekythos we see that he holds the ubiquitous sapling in his one hand, confirming his association with the centaur race and in turn his close association with the wisdom of nature. It is an interesting inversion to have the young Achilles naked between the clothed hero and the wise centaur. During his mentorship the monster Cheiron will "clothe" this hero in culture.

In conclusion then, centaurs as grotesque beings with apotropaic powers feature prominently in Greek art of the eighth and seventh centuries BCE, and from the sixth century they begin to

act in mythological narratives. But from the late archaic period monsters in general seem to lose their appeal as subject matter and it is as if Greek artists no longer wanted or needed the discordant features, the overt visual aggression of the monster (Woodford 2003:133-136). In his essay titled *Easy Monsters*, Peter von Blankenhagen (1987:87) theorises that the monster figure, as it moved away from its apotropaic roots and came to represent not so much the external threat as the internal dichotomy of man, was tamed. The centaur, the one monster figure that retains artistic prominence into the fifth century, became increasingly gracious with the distorted features of earlier replaced by regular and even noble appearance. This process of sanitation happened on a visual and a conceptual level: not only are the centaurs on the metopes of the Parthenon graceful in appearance, in a famous painting by Zeuxis the monstrous centaur is reinvented as family man (Blankenhagen 1987:87, Woodford 2003:135). The appearance of the female centaur and centaur children incorporated the centaur into the Greek cultural paradigm, removing it from the antisocial, counter-cultural elements that typified it as monster (Fig.20, Fig.21). As with the satyr, the death knell of the monster comes with its absorption into the imagery of organised religion and again we see this when the centaur joins the retinue of Dionysos. Here, with no trace of its former wildness or susceptibility to wine, it cavorts mildly with the satyrs and nymphs; an exotic creature where once it was a profound threat. It is only when we see these Bacchic centaurs on sarcophagi, where they became remarkably popular decorative features (Blankenhagen 1987:87, Woodford 2003:136), that we recall the function of the horse as psychopomp and see a glimmer of the centaur's former monstrosity.

CHAPTER 5: Agents of transformation: the function of hybrid monsters

Having looked at the composition of hybrid monsters and the interrelationship between appearance, nature and behaviour, the function of the monster figure in the ancient Greek world will be brought under scrutiny. One of the earliest identifiable functions of monsters is that of being guardians. Something of this trait remained even in later Classical and Hellenistic Greece after monsters had become well-developed as mythological characters with a complex range of functions. Before looking at these Grecian monsters it would be meaningful to turn to the monster traditions of the ancient Near East in order to gain an appreciation of the historic background against which the later Greek monsters developed, and by which they were influenced. Only then can the discussion turn back to Greek hybrid monsters and the way in which they functioned as apotropaic beings, but also as agents of transformation – beings that assist the mythological hero, or the observer, to cross over from one state to another.

a. History of the function of the monster

The influence of ancient Near East on the way in which the centaur was visualised by the Greeks has already been discussed, along with the acknowledgement that there is slim evidence of similarity in terms of function and nature between the centaur-like beings of the Near Eastern empires, and those of the Greek world. It is possible that the Greeks adopted the composition of the ancient Near Eastern hybrid only as an appealing design and later applied it to the developing mythological monster, the centaur. However, when considering the function of hybrid monsters in general, it would be remiss not to revisit the ancient Near East to investigate in more detail the use to which their hybrids were put, and see whether this deployment was carried over in some way to the monsters of the Greek world.

Childs (2003:51) points out that the iconography of the ancient Near East was far more heterogeneous than that of Greece, and that even the homogenizing influence of Assyria – an empire very adept at using iconography for political ends – did not discourage the existence of region-specific styles. This, along with the fact that there is little by way of literature to assist in the interpretation of the images, leaves much to be deduced from elements such as repeated themes, contexts and media. Porada (1987:5) insists that a narrative context may not have been the ultimate answer to interpretation, since ancient Near Eastern monsters are void of a

consistent, fixed meaning and that they derive their significance in each instance from their context. Compared to this, later Greek art was very different. Here it was of consummate importance that the viewer understood exactly which monster he was looking at in order for the context to be interpreted correctly. This is also a reason why Greek depictions often come with labels identifying the characters, while this is very rarely the case with earlier Near Eastern examples (Porada 1987:5).

Reade (1979:329-342), in his review of the role of art in Assyrian ideology and propaganda, points out that ancient Near Eastern rulers were exceedingly adept at using iconography as a tool to announce and justify their rule. On the one hand iconography created a vital association between the king and the supernatural, lending an incontestable legitimacy to his rule. On the other hand the imposing scale of some examples, and the locations of others (found at the extreme ends of the empire), impressed upon the viewer the extent of the king's power and resources. This imagery was meant to impress all under the king's rule, including subjected nations situated far from the centre of power. This same fact is also the reason why pictorial inscriptions were far more useful than text based inscriptions in conveying the message of the king's dominance: many of the desired audience spoke different languages or dialects, and on top of it, were likely to be illiterate. As a result much of the preserved ancient Near Eastern art veers away from the narrative exactly *because* it is by nature "political and religious statements" (Childs 2003:51-53). While this explains much of Near Eastern art, it does not provide a satisfactory explanation of the hybrid monster figures we find there.

The very existence of imaginary composite creatures in their iconography is a testament to the ancient Near Eastern awareness of "unseen forces acting on the world", and a desire to portray these forces (Goodnick Westenholz 2004:11). The action of assigning a visible form to the intangible is a powerful action. It implies that the limits, and limitations, of an essentially irrational force are understood. By giving that force a fixed shape, it is assigned a degree of rationality and with this comes the potential for being influenced. It is therefore agreed that one of the primary reasons for the development of monster figures is to gain control over the irrational, and by doing so to avert misfortune. Bearing this in mind, it would be useful to look at the contexts in which monster figures in the ancient Near East are found.

Perusing the available examples, it is striking what a large percentage of composite monsters are associated with the entrances and doorways of public buildings like palaces and temples. Images such as the monumental bull-demons and lion-demons that lined the entrances to Neo-Assyrian palaces and the spectacular *Mušhuššu* depicted in glazed brick on the Ishtar gate of Babylon would have been aimed at impressing both the subjects of the king as well as visiting dignitaries, accounting for the creatures' striking scale and execution. There is little doubt that these depictions are, as Childs says, "political and religious statements" yet their positioning at entrances may have another function. This statement may be supported by the small clay figurines of griffin-men and fish-genies found buried in the foundations at the doorways to rooms (Childs 2003:55). These figurines would not have served any ideological use, being buried out of sight, so their existence must point to an alternative purpose. A reasonable interpretation is that these hybrid monsters served an apotropaic function, protecting the entranceways against the access of evil forces.

This presents us with a conundrum: On the one hand the hybrid monsters of the ancient Near East have grotesque, physical compositions. As the representations of unseen, threatening forces they were assigned powerful attributes: the claws of the fierce eagle and the feet of a lion imparted the dominance, aggression and power of those predators to the hybrid. Wings, too, were a powerful attribute and their addition "transformed...earth-bound animals into supernatural beings, demonic versions of the natural beast" (Goodnick Westenholz 2004:36). The composite attributes of the hybrid monster made clear its elevation above the realm of the tangible, the natural and the known, as befitting the manifestations of abstract powers. It would seem then that the hybrid monster is a considerable threat and ominous enemy. Yet these beings seemed to perform a protective function.

To understand this, we must acknowledge that these hybrid beings and their powers were closely associated with gods. They could be seen as the servant or companion to a god, but could also be an opponent that needed to be subdued by that god (Goodnick Westenholz 2004:14). Monsters shared with gods an ambivalence that could make them either a formidable foe or a valuable friend. In the same way as the gods could be entreated to offer protection, so hybrid monsters could be called upon to turn their powers towards the protection of man. They could become protective genies. Accordingly, in depictions these monsters are often shown confronting or subduing proponents of disorder (Goodnick Westenholz 2004:12; Childs 2003:63).

Childs (2003:50) insists that this apotropaic function of monsters of the ancient Near East and Greece precedes their secondary, mythological role. Before becoming absorbed in narratives, the depiction of monsters had a purely protective use. His concession that myth also performs an apotropaic function of sorts, in that it aims to enforce the cosmic boundaries, seems to imply that the apotropaic function of the monster was transferred to the narrative as a whole. In Greek mythology it would certainly seem to be the case since while the *narrative* can be seen to be apotropaic in the sense that it serves to protect and enforce cosmic boundaries, monsters typically *represent* chaos and are seldom found to be controlled by or acting in the interest of the ordering agent. It is only in their broader mythological function that they help “maintain[s] divine order and promote[s] right action” (Childs 2003:50), and so fulfil what Childs calls their primary function.

b. Agents of transformation

Once monsters become absorbed in a mythological narrative their original apotropaic function, which is a fairly straightforward action of repelling bad and attracting good, gains a more complex dynamic. If the actual mythological narrative took on the function of protecting the divine order as Childs (2003:67) suggests, it would seem that the monster-figures operating within the narrative were free to develop a greater variety and subtlety of function. In early narrative their roles are still simplistic: monsters are generated by primordial powers to counter the establishment of order, to present an army of foes in opposition to civilisation (Oshima 2004:38). Later monsters tend to be individualised, their strengths and weaknesses gain subtlety, and their one-on-one confrontation with a proponent of order gains a personal aspect. The conflict moves from the universal to include the personal, from the physical to include the psychological, from the external to include the internal.

Myth, and by extension the characters that populate myth, operates in a variety of manners: Certain myths provide people with a foundation story, a sense of history, continuity and context. Other myths provide explanations for cosmic or biological events that could not be logically understood. Myths can provide guidance by presenting models for culturally acceptable behaviour, and warnings for unacceptable behaviour. Some myths also present analogies for shared human experiences and some of these include the difficult process of transitioning from one life phase to another (Csapo 2005:1-9; Dowden 1992:3-43; Kirk 1974). In Greek mythology,

monsters can be found in myths across the whole of this spectrum: In creation myths they represent the chaos that needs to be overcome in order to establish civilisation. In others they provide explanations for events such as storm wind and tempest (brought on by the defeated Typhoeus) or cot death (the vengeance of the evil Lamia). The Cyclops Polyphemus encourages man to take under consideration the respective natures and behaviour of civilised humans and monsters, while centaurs give physical expression to the internal dichotomy of man. But it is in the tales of combat between man and monster that the hybrid's many-faceted function becomes most apparent.

c. Hero and monster

Most monsters, and certainly the hybrid monsters discussed in this study, at some point enter into combat with either a hero or a god. These encounters are not chance dramatic events aimed at adding interest to a narrative. They represent the primary function of monsters in Greek mythology and literature: monsters exist to be fought and overcome (Dowden 1992:134). Their very definition as beings representing that which is not known and not owned, as that which roams outside of the boundaries of civilised land and as beings inimical to the culture of its inventors, necessitates that they be slain. Their submission preserves the cosmos.

In most narratives we find monsters occupied with a peripheral duty or task related to guarding weak points in the cosmic segregation of spheres. In this way Cerberus guards the gates of Hades, serving as a one-way valve into the Underworld, meekly allowing the dead to enter but ferociously resisting any soul from exiting. The Lernean Hydra similarly guards an entrance into the Underworld, while Pegasus prevents the unauthorised crossing of Bellerophon – hero though he is – to the realm of the gods (Kirk 1974:75).

Other monsters patrol borders in more subtle ways: we know from the previous chapter that the centaur exists in the grey area where the definition of man and animal, nature and culture requires careful consideration. Conceptually this monster crosses and re-crosses these boundaries, at the same time compromising and defining them. The centaur makes man conscious of his own boundaries and his potential to move nearer and further, and even to cross, these. On either side of the boundary stands the centaur holding up a mirror to man's nature: on the one side is good Chiron, on the other, evil Nessos.

Certain monsters regulate human behaviour by acting as the executors of the will of the gods. The sea monster to which Andromeda is sacrificed following her mother's boast of beauty that surpassed that of the Nereids (Apollodorus, 2.4.3) serves as a reminder of the grave consequences man suffers when his mortal boundaries are crossed and the gods are offended. The example and threat of the monster encourages man to toe the line. Cohen (1996:13) calls these monsters "vehicles of prohibition": "[the] monster of prohibition polices the borders of the possible... exists to demarcate the bonds that hold together that system of relations we call culture, to call horrid attention to the borders that cannot – must not – be crossed." The monster is a kind of herdsman. This patrolling of the borders is what the monster does while he "waits" for the hero. It is in the confrontation between monster and hero that the purposes of *both* these mythological roles are brought into sharp focus: The monster is meant to guard the boundary. The hero is destined to cross it. The typical outcome of the ensuing confrontation is that the monster is slain and the hero is able to pass.

Let us look briefly at the hero figure. The heroes of Greek mythology are distinct from us in three ways: Temporally the hero belongs to a "mythical period" in Greek history that ended just after the Trojan War (Murgatroyd 2007:70), so even to Greek audiences the hero was from an era distant and slightly foreign. Conceptually the hero-figure is separate as a result of his surpassing the everyman on almost every terrain - in provenance, appearance, courage, skill and achievement. Eisner (1987:189) points out that the entire generation that the writings of Homer and Hesiod refer to was one more formidable, more capable and more valiant than that of their Greek audience. The Bronze Age hero excelled in a context where the standard of capability and virtue was exaggerated. This realisation accentuated the divide between audience and hero so that to both later Greek and modern audiences alike their abilities and achievements could only present an unattainable ideal, a model to be emulated but not matched. The third way that heroes are distinct refers to their own ambiguity. The phenomenon of Greek hero cults – the practice of worshiping deceased individuals either at their tombs or at a shrine – is interpreted by two scholarly hypotheses: The one, a literary approach, links the veneration of heroes as godlike beings to the legacy of the epic tradition. The other, an archaeological approach, proposes that the hero cult is an extension of ancestor worship (Antonaccio 1994:389-410). The details of these arguments fall beyond the scope of this thesis, but what is of concern here is that the hero cults signify that certain mortal individuals, ancestors of the Iron Age Greeks, were regarded as

more than mere men. The stories told often assign them a divine and a mortal parent and even if they themselves were not semi-divine, they certainly enjoyed the favour of the gods. Their abilities, possibly due to their being related to the gods, and their achievements, bolstered by divine assistance, ensured an enduring impact on mortal society. On their death, they were worshipped – an honour normally preserved for the gods. While not immortal themselves, heroes were immortalised in the fame their deeds earned them (Eisner 1987:189).

So the hero is set apart from his audience temporally, conceptually, and most importantly by the fact that he became more than just a mortal man by transiting into the sphere of the divine. This makes the hero a kind of intermediate figure. Like our hybrid monsters, he shows a disregard for the boundaries that separate the mortal and the immortal, the possible and the impossible, fact and fiction.

Some heroes share more traits with monsters than others. Gilmore (2003:191) concludes that the difference between monster and hero is not that great at all, and that both are frequently assigned similar attributes – fearlessness, stamina, supernatural power – and that they behave in similar ways. While Gilmore refers to heroes and monsters in the very broad sense, his statements ring true when applied to the Greek context. By tying Sinis to bended pine-trees, throwing Sciron off a cliff to be eaten by a turtle, killing Cercyon and making Procrustes fit onto his bed, Theseus does exactly that for which his enemies themselves are regarded as monstrous (Apollodorus, 3.16.1; *Epit.* 1.1-4). Eisner (1987:207) makes a similar observation when he, quoting Kirk (1974:206-207), draws attention to the juxtaposition of nature and culture within the person of Heracles: While this hero is tasked with labours that signify the defeat of nature through culture, actively defeating the forces of chaos by clearing out and civilising the jungle (Dowden 1992:138), he himself carries elements of that chaos. The more obvious signs of this are his wearing of an animal skin and his use of a club as a weapon. Both of these attributes are generally regarded as belonging in the sphere of nature: it is the uncivilised, the uncultured, that resorts to being naked or wearing skins, and it is those bereft of the skills of civilisation that resort to using primitive weapons such as rocks, branches and clubs. On top of that Heracles is hairy and driven by passions for food, drink and sex, his temper is explosive and his strength superhuman (Kirk 1974:206-207). This dichotomy is strongly reminiscent of the centaurs that also combine elements of highest culture and basest animal passion in their make-up (Eisner 1987:207; Kirk 1974:207). In their disregard for boundaries, illustrated by their crossing the

divide between mortal and immortal, human and animal, we find that heroes like monsters operate in that sphere which exists in between the cosmic categories. Heroes are indeed kinds of monsters. The difference is that heroes possess an inner and outer logic: their motives are familiar and their appearance pleasing. It is the conflict that results when proponents of these two groups, heroes and monsters, meet that is of interest to us.

Campbell (2008) employs Van Gennep's analysis of rites of passage to describe the adventure of the hero. He passes through the same three distinct phases: the departure, the initiation and the return. Of these three stages, it is the middle one – the initiation - that is of interest to us for it is here that the hero meets the monster. The first phase sees the hero separating himself from his fellow man by travelling outside of his normal boundaries. He sets out on a journey that takes him beyond the confines of what is known, to where the norms and rules of civilisation no longer hold sway. Once he has transgressed into this sphere of the unknown, the hero is confronted with a number of adventures. Since this intermediate space is the preserve of the monster, the hero's adventure often includes a confrontation or battle with such a being. The monster is occupied with his peripheral duty or task. It is either threatening civilisation, such as the Erymanthian boar that ravaged the countryside or the sea monster to which Andromeda was sacrificed, or it bars the way of the hero preventing him from passing through to a specified destination, such as the Sphinx preventing Theseus from reaching Thebes. In order to fulfil his destiny, the hero has to overcome the monster. So the meeting between the hero and the monster is not an accidental one, but one that is sought out (Murgatroyd 2007:131). The hero prepares for the meeting, arming himself and sometimes seeking assistance (Campbell 2008:57), and then travels a distance to find the monster. His aim is to defeat the monster, thereby earning a reward which could either take the shape of something tangible or access to the place that lies beyond the limit guarded by the monster. The monster by its very nature is an enemy with unusual talents and fighting techniques. Its size and appearance is intimidating enough, but it usually also has the advantage of an impenetrable skin (Nemean Lion), regenerating or multiplying limbs (Lernean Hydra), a lethal gaze (Medousa) or irresistible song (Sirens). To overcome the monster requires exceptional skill, both physical and mental. The destruction of the monster brings about change. Order triumphs over chaos, a community is released from tyranny and the hero proves his mettle.

The hero, tempered by his experience, returns to his home. Yet this return is not a simple task (Campbell 2008:167-169). It frequently happens that the hero does not transfer easily back into his own space. By leaving his home, transgressing the confines of his sphere and entering a space where the logic of his world does not hold sway, the hero transcends his society (Schwartz 1969:83). The degree of transgression, both in the hero's physical journey from the ordinary world into the intermediate space of monsters, and his achievements in that space, unsettles the cosmic balance (Schwartz 1969:83). When the hero returns "with his life-transmuting trophy" (Campbell 2008:167), the prize or victory, his changed status hampers his reintegration. Schwartz, quoting Campbell, uses the example of Prometheus to illustrate how the transgressions and transformations of the hero, even in obtaining a gift for society "so unbalances the fabric of society that he can never go home again" (Schwartz 1969:83).

It is this aspect of the hero, brought to the fore by the tragic heroes of Athenian drama that, rather than the ideal held up by the Homeric hero, serves as a warning: the "reckless" actions of the hero can tear the fabric of order (Auden 1968:16 cited by Eisner 1987:193). Eisner tables the possibility that Greek drama, through the tragic hero, contrived to counteract the "bad influence" of the epic hero, counselling everyman to be content with his fate rather than to aspire beyond his limits to the ambitious ideals of Achilles and his ilk (Eisner 1987:192-193). Whether such a deliberate agenda existed or not, the concept is not entirely foreign - it calls to mind the contrast between the Greek epic hero and the Babylonian Gilgamesh. While the epic hero is seen to uphold cosmic order through his adventures, in the Babylonian epic the hero's campaign against the monster Humbaba is not supportive of the divine order, but exactly the opposite. Instead of glory, the hero Gilgamesh and his companion Enkidu earn the scorn and punishment of the gods for their needless killing of Humbaba (Oshima 2004:38).

But we will turn our attention to the conflict between the Greek hero and the monster. While monsters were primarily there to be subdued in the process of establishing civilisation in the wilderness and order in the chaos (Dowden 1992:135-141), this study suggests that as mythology developed, confrontations between monsters and man took on a more complex dynamic. The facing of the dread creature took on greater symbolism and brought about a desired change in the hero. The monster becomes a partner of man, cooperating to bring about transition. The argument is that the monster performs a key role in this change, this initiatory process undergone by the hero. It is the internal transition from one state to another, and the

social impact of such a change, that we intend to investigate in an effort better to understand hybrid monsters as agents of transformation.

d. Rituals and initiations

Recently a debate developed about the interpretation and the actual extent of initiatory practices in ancient Greece. David Dodd (Dodd et al 2003:xiii-xvi), in his preface to a collection of works on initiation in ancient Greece, expresses his and many of his fellow scholars' frustration at what they feel to be a too general and generous application of the concept of initiation in the interpretation of Greek cultural and literary constructions. He argues that the work of intellectuals such as Jung, Levi-Strauss and Van Gennep influenced Classics scholars from the 1950's onwards, leading prominent works of authors such as Joseph Campbell, Mircea Eliade, Jean-Pierre Vernant and Pierre Vidal-Naquet to create the false impression that initiation "was a common and coherently legible phenomenon within the Greek world" (Dodd et al 2003:xiv). Since there is little irrefutable proof that there was a widespread practise of puberty rites in Greece, Dodd's argument is against the indiscriminate reading of Greek myth and ritual practices as coming-of-age rituals. This debate is too specific for discussion in this thesis. In what follows initiation-themes in Greek mythology will be regarded as the symbolic enactment of moments of profound change or growth without evaluating the degree – or not – of relationship to actual archaic ritual practices.²³ For the purposes of this study it will be sufficient to acknowledge myth and ritual as unique manifestations of the same need for symbolic expression (Csapo 2005:180). Initiation rituals as a sub-set of rites are of concern inasmuch as they are related to myths of initiation, as a sub-set of myth: the study of the one aids the understanding of the other.

The drumbeat of life is felt in the inescapable progression from infancy to youth, youth to adulthood and adulthood to old age. It is also apparent in the social, professional or religious graduation from one state to another. However expected and necessary these changes may be, when they arrive they present man with points of high anxiety. These are transitional moments where the past is left behind and a transition into a new definition of Self is sought. Such

²³ Faraone (2003:44) defines initiation as the moment at which a person achieves "some important qualitative change both in their public status and in their self-awareness of their own personal growth and individuation".

evolutions are hard not only because they are challenging, but also because they imply risk and danger: as the security of the former state is left behind and before successful transition to the new state is achieved, there is a period of exposure. During this in-between, liminal phase success is not guaranteed.

It is common to find that ritual action mediates these points of transition. This is demonstrated by the abundance of rituals associated with birth, puberty, marriage and death (Jameson 1988:962). In uncertain times, like its broader context of religion, ritual action imparts a sense of predictability and control over the outcome of events. Rites are not always religious in nature, but introduce an element of the "supernatural into critical human affairs" (Jameson 1988:962). Indeed, in ancient Greece rites frequently covered areas of life with which the immortal gods could not have direct contact due to the threat of pollution (Jameson 1988:962). The relevance of rites and rituals to our study of monster figures is twofold: Firstly, there is evidence that rituals are performed in a liminal space, that very space we have come to associate with monster figures. Secondly, rituals of transition often contain an element of fright introduced by a wild animal or monster.

i. The liminal space of ritual action

The religious rites of ancient Greece were typically performed in special areas removed from the spaces where general business was conducted. Ritualised actions performed leading up to, and during, the rite created a physical and psychological separation between the ritual space and normal life. The transition from the profane to the sacred sphere was most clearly indicated by the relocation of the participants from their normal environment to a site of special significance. These sites could range from sanctuaries to shrines, temples, sacred caves or groves or even just an altar. These sites were further separated from the outside world through the special rules of conduct, specified by the ritual and enforced by the cultic officials, which applied within its confines.

Ritual sites did not have to be geographically remote. In her consideration of Vidal-Naquet's views of the Athenian *ephebeia*, Irene Polinskaya (2003:85-86) suggests that the liminality of the *ephebes* – as initiates stationed in forts on the frontiers of Athens – can only be interpreted as "*metaphorical* liminality" since Athens can not be said to have had truly remote

frontiers. Not quite agreeing with Polinskaya's narrow reading of "frontier", this study would suggest that metaphorical liminality, or "conceptual liminality" (Lada-Richards 1998:52) is, in a ritual context, entirely sufficient.²⁴ The sense of the participant is that of being cut off from familiar surroundings, and that sense needs not be created by geographic distance alone. The *Arrephoria*, an Athenian ritual, required that two or four young girls spend a year living and serving Athena at the temple of Athena Polias on the Acropolis (Paus. 1.27.3; Kirk 1974:228). This ritual separation of the girls certainly implied that they were dislocated to a liminal space, physically and temporally, but the Acropolis cannot be said to be on the distant frontiers of Athens. Physical removal from the normal world did not require exaggerated geographic separation; what was required was a conceptual segregation. This conceptual segregation could be established and enforced with the help of a number of ritual elements.

The action of moving out of the normal environment and approaching the ritual site was an obvious requirement of participation in ritual activities. This journey could take the form of a procession, which would draw attention both to the distance between the worldly and the sacred space, and to the act of transiting between the two.²⁵ Prayers in the form of poems or hymns could accompany this procession into the ritual sphere. Hymns, along with the ceremonial washing or sprinkling of water that formed part of the ritual action, helped cleanse and prepare participants while offering a form of protection (Jameson 1988:964).²⁶ Other actions that served to create distance between the normal and ritual areas included modified behaviour preceding the ritual, like the avoidance of contact with pollutants such as death, birth, disease or sex (Jameson 1988:962, 964). Lastly the inclusion of special costumes, scents, flowers, woollen fillets (Jameson 1988:966) and the presence of cultic objects of

²⁴ In a similar vein Newman asserts that, in selecting spaces that may be shared between worlds, the "sense of elevation is as important as the fact of elevation" (Newman 1996:35).

²⁵ The processions from Eleusis to Athens, and then back to Eleusis formed an integral part of the Eleusinian Mysteries. See Bowden (2010:26-38) for a more detailed discussion.

²⁶ Jameson (1988:964) points out that hymns were sung by soldiers moving into battle as a form of protection. In the ritual context this protective element would be relevant as participants are moving out of the familiar into a liminal space that is inherently dangerous, with the purpose of confronting a dread enemy.

special significance assisted in demarcating a geographic and temporal space within which the ritual activities could take place.

Gilmore's discussion of public festivals as ritualised events of regeneration in both primitive and modern societies, draws attention to the demarcation of the ritual space through the suspension and inversion of rules (Gilmore 2003:155-173): during the festival period the normal rules governing conduct no longer hold sway. This can be seen in the adjournment of normal daily activities, ecstatic behaviour, cross-dressing, pranks and sometimes ritualised acts of violence and destruction. Lada-Richards (1998:50-53) also emphasises the liminal space that is created by removing the known and accepted rules, specifically in initiation ceremonies. In the liminal space, free from the controls of regulations, there is space for the unexpected to happen. She describes liminality as "a ground of ritual 'license', where all kinds of 'inversion' of social patterns, institutions, norms and everyday behaviour ... are ... legitimitised ..." (Lada-Richards 1998:52).

Now that it is understood that "conceptual liminality" – physical, temporal and behavioural – form a central part of ritual behaviour, the question arises as to the purpose of this state of suspended order. Firstly, as in the case of festivals, there is an element of ritual descent into chaos, so that through the rejection of that chaos the normal running of society can be re-established and order re-affirmed (Dowden 1992:142). What this is, then, is a ritual of regeneration such as demonstrated by the festivals in which Gilmore (2003:155-173) is interested. The liminal period with its associated contra-order elements is a necessary state to pass through so that the ordering structures implemented by society can be reaffirmed. Having been confronted with the alternative to the ordered state, renewed commitment is a strong action taken against chaos.

ii. Animals in rituals

In chapter three the role of animals in ancient Greece was discussed, including the interactions humans had with them as sacrificial offerings, as quarry for hunting, as financial assets and as pets. The focus here will fall briefly on the role that animals performed specifically in the context of initiation rituals. In her study of the role of animals in Greek tragedy, Thumiger (2008:3) asserts that "...animals appear at crucial moments in the plot,

signposting crisis, change and inescapable necessity." As in tragedy, the appearance of animals in ritual actions should not be regarded as incidental. Animals, as representations of the flipside of what is human, at once confronts us with the opposite of man and with man's innate potentiality: the animal can represent nature and chaos, all that has to be tamed or suppressed in order to ensure the survival of civilised man, and at the same time the animal can serve as a warning to man of the seeds of chaos that lie within himself.

Herding of cattle is an activity associated with initiation rites based on the fact that it is conducted on the outskirts of inhabited areas, i.e. in a liminal space. It is also an activity that requires exerting influence over proponents of nature. By using both his mental skill and physical strength to control the animals, a young man can prove his mettle and earn increased status. Mythological affirmation of this statement can be found in Herakles' stealing of Geryon's cattle which is regarded not only as a civilising action, but as also an initiatory one (Dowden 1992:137). Hermes' theft of Apollo's cattle allows him to assert himself and establish a relationship with the god - an action which has obvious initiation content (Johnston 2003: 157-161, Dowden 1992:137). Hermes, a god closely associated with initiation rituals is also frequently shown as a hunter.²⁷

Vidal-Naquet, in his *The Black Hunter*, famously associated the hunt with the *ephebe* or young male initiate, stating that "...hunting is firmly on the side of the wild, the 'raw', of night, and the skills employed in the Spartan *krypteia* were those of hunting." (Vidal-Naquet 1986:20). There seems to be agreement amongst scholars that hunting formed a central part of the training of youths and maturation ceremonies in ancient Greece (Marinatos 2003:132). It is also a well-known fact that hunting was one of the subjects taught by Cheiron to his protégés as he guided them from childhood to adulthood. However it is interesting, as Marinatos points out, that it was not so much the *killing* of the animal as the *overcoming* of it, the wrestling and the containment of the animal, that seems to have had significance. Referring to a number of bronze figurines and flat bronze plaques found at the sanctuary of Kato Syme on

²⁷ For a more comprehensive discussion of Hermes as god of initiation see Marinatos 2003:130-151. Marinatos explores Hermes' hunting activities as another form of initiation which displays dominance over nature (2003:147).

Crete, interpreted by Marinatos to bear testament to ancient initiation rituals, she points out two key facts: one is that the plaques depict youths subduing live, wild animals. The other is that the animals in question are alive, bound and carried by the youths. This carrying of the animal – shown clearly to be onerous with the young men’s knees and bodies bent under the weight – has to be a test of strength. This alone makes the plaques fit in well with a maturation rite, but it also seems to have broader application as a test of manhood (Marinatos 2003:132-133). In the Homeric *Hymn to Hermes*, the newborn Hermes lifts up two of Apollo’s cattle and turns them onto their backs before sacrificing them. The *ephebes*, during the festival of Proerosia, did something similar (Marinatos 2003:133 quoting Lebessi). The carrying or lifting up of an animal seems to imply domination, complete control of the animal’s movement and destiny. In an initiatory context this is a way for the young man to prove his physical ability and on a metaphorical level to show his dominance over the chaotic power of nature. The initiate controls nature, and chooses order and culture as represented by the ritual and sacrifice.

Turning our attention to cleansing rituals, the scapegoat provided society with a mechanism of purging itself of ills. Cleansing rituals aim at creating a clear division between the community and that which is polluting or threatening. Through ritual action pollutants are removed, consigned to the external and banished in an effort to restore balance to society. The *Thargelia*, one of Apollo’s more important festivals, can be seen to have contained such a scapegoat element as two goats were ritually ejected from the community (Kirk 1974:232). In a related manner animals may have assumed the sins of the community by standing in as sacrificial victims: upon the killing of a bear, an animal sacred to Artemis, a famine descended on Athens and an oracle declared that someone’s daughter had to be sacrificed to appease the goddess. Embaros dressed a goat as his daughter and sacrificed the animal instead of the child, following which goats were regularly sacrificed, presumably instead of girls (Dowden 2003:103 quoting the *Suda* epsilon 937 Adler). The substitution of a deer for Iphigeneia provides us with a mythological equivalent.²⁸

²⁸ See comments on substitution sacrifice in chapter four. For a more detailed discussion of substitution sacrifice and the proposed links to animal cults, see Cook (1894:81-169).

iii. Monsters in rites of regeneration

While digressing momentarily from the ancient Greek world, the next section aims to acknowledge the role of monsters in communal rituals of regeneration. It relies heavily on the insights of David Gilmore into village festivals of southern Europe, and it confirms the nature and function of monsters as discussed so far, albeit in a modern representation. The assumption is that the essential function of monsters within societies is constant, so that even post-medieval monsters can assist us in understanding those of ancient Greece.

Gilmore (2008:155-173) provides fascinating insights into ritual festivals where the monster figure features as a kind of scapegoat. He describes the human tendency to externalise the internal state as a "deep need in the human psyche to objectify inner states as metaphors and living symbols...to deny complicity and find external scapegoats to blame [in an effort to] defend the self from the self..." (Gilmore 2008:172). He goes on to explain that the sacrificial victim and the scapegoat both serve as metaphors for that which is to be rejected in the community and in the Self, in order to secure both "communal renewal" and "individual redemption" (Gilmore 2008:172). The sacrificial victim and the scapegoat both represent uncontrolled nature, chaos. In the southern European village festivals they take the form of form of frightening monster-constructions parading through the streets of the town, threatening the inhabitants. The monsters, either men dressed up in costume or mechanical structures, launch attacks on the villagers, who retaliate. The ultimate and inevitable defeat of the monsters clears the village of evil and introduces societal renewal.

The monster parading through the town streets transgresses into and interrupts the communal life of the village. The suspension of the normal regulations that govern the functioning of the village for the duration of the festival creates a liminal period, a weakening of the barrier that keeps chaos at bay. The irruption of the monster into the village is only logical: it is a liminal creature and it patrols the borders of civilisation. A weakening of the controls, as is brought about by the festival, will allow chaos to enter. The threat the monster carries with it not only unites the village in fear, but reaffirms the requirement for the structures that ensures order. The banishment of the monster re-establishes order, with all participants recommitted to the restrictions and controls that form part of civilised communities. This is the "communal renewal" Gilmore (2008:172) refers to.

One last point has to be made before letting festival monsters be: these creatures are also not free from ambivalence. As by now expected of monsters, they contain the paradox of being partly divine in their mysteriousness, awesomeness and power. So while the threatening festival monster is feared by the villagers, it is also the object of admiration and reverence (Gilmore 2008:192). Lada-Richards (1998:67) adds that the degree to which the ambivalent creature is reviled or revered would be related to the degree of open-mindedness of the society within which it functions, with more conservative societies likely to scorn it and more open societies tending towards veneration of the monster.

Having seen how monsters can be put to use to ensure the continuance of a society a) by offering absolution of sins through transference and rejection, and b) by causing members of the community to re-commit to the ordering structures society, the discussion now moves on to rituals of initiation.

iv. Monsters in initiation rituals

The aim of this section is neither to prove nor disprove the prevalence of initiation ceremonies in ancient Greece, but to look at the way in which monsters function in initiation-type rituals. Once the function of initiation-type monsters is better understood, an assessment of certain hybrid monsters in Greek mythology and the ways in which they conform to these "ritual monsters", can be attempted.

Rites of transition or initiation rituals often are – though they need not always be – aimed at helping a young member of the community pass from a juvenile state of dependence to an adult state of responsibility. There are two key changes that happen during an initiation: Firstly, the social status of the initiate changes, so that the way in which the community perceives and interacts with the individual is altered. Secondly, the initiate undergoes an internal transformation which gives him or her insight into the working of the community and his or her new position in it. In other words, the way in which the initiate perceives and interacts with the community is altered.

The liminality of the ritual space facilitates the transition of the initiate in the following ways: It removes the initiate from his or her familiar surroundings so that the initiate is "naked", or receptive, to the experience. The inversion of the norm, uncertainty and chaos of the liminal

space unbalance the initiate. And lastly it provides the initiate with a challenge to overcome. Since "at the core of every initiation-sequence lies the 'mystery of death and resurrection'" (Lada-Richards 1998:53, quoting Eliade 1959:85), the challenge is typically a symbolic death. In ritual terms this is illustrated by the descent into a liminal space such as a tunnel or a cave or a fort on the outskirts of society, and a frightening encounter, such as with a monster.

According to Pausanias (1.27.3) the young girls that partook in the *Arrhephoria* in Athens descended, at night, down an underground passage, carrying parcels of unknown content from the Acropolis to the precinct of Aphrodite. There they left their parcels and received a new parcel, also an unidentified wrapped object, which they carried back up to the Acropolis. There is much conjecture as to what the content of these parcels might have been. Guesses range from cakes or figurines in the shape of snakes and male genitals, to live snakes, babies and a wrapped rock (Robertson 1983:241-288). The popularity of snakes as forming part of the ritual comes from the mythological association of the girls with the daughters of Cecrops, who were frightened either by the snakes guarding the baby Erichthonius, or by the serpentine appearance of the child himself (Robertson 1983:257-258). Lada-Richards (1998:51) and Robertson (1983:257-258) agree that the *arrhephoroi* in all likelihood encountered snakes in some form on their journey.²⁹ The nocturnal journey, the uncertainty of the parcels' contents and the proximity of snakes must have made the experience terrifying for the young girls. This is the fear that stands between ritual initiates and the completion of their transition. In the initiation ritual the monster acts as the bringer of death but also, as will become apparent, of re-birth. As such the snake with its similar symbolism of death and resurrection, makes a pre-eminent ritual monster.

Confrontations with the monster during a liminal time – that period when all predictability and security has been removed – take on an intensity that brings about a cognitive transformation in the initiate (Gilmore 2003:156). The monster brings about a point of crisis. The ritual monster, which is frequently composed using elements of the known assembled in such a way

²⁹ Note that both Robertson (1983) and Faraone (2003) disagree with the interpretation of the *Arrhephoria* as an initiation ritual.

as to cause a cognitive disjunction, is all the more bewildering, puzzling and frightening for its elements of familiarity. The monster is a visual representation of the familiar broken up and in decay, the embodiment of chaos (Lada-Richards 1998:52-53). Its threat is many-faceted: It embodies chaos and the destruction of society, of all that is known to the initiate. It threatens the initiate physically. It also threatens the initiate with failure to transition, should he not be able to face and overcome the monster. This would leave him stuck in the liminal space, an intermediate being just like the monster (Lada-Richards 1998:56).

Kirk (1974:238-240) cautiously speculates that the many Greek mythological examples of temporary transitions of men into wolves may contain some reference to initiation rituals. Usually a man is transformed into a wolf, and transformed back into a man after a number of years provided that he never ate human meat as a wolf.³⁰ This transition could refer to a liminal period entered where the boundaries between man and animal become compromised, and man is challenged to find his identity. The eating of human flesh would represent failure, the ultimate betrayal to society. It would consign the initiate, if the myth is to be read in initiation terms, to be permanently incorporated into the liminal world of the monster. Indeed, the initiate's journey not only into the liminal habitat of the monster, but into its very belly – on the brink of incorporation – is ritually and mythologically well-represented. One only needs to think of Jason or the biblical Jonah. As a continuation of this theme, Lada-Richards (1998:53n37) cites examples where the actual initiation hut is built in the shape of a monster, so that its external appearance mirror its symbolic status. During initiation period the initiate moves into the "monster", and after a successful initiation the initiate emerges from the hut, brought back from the brink of assimilation with chaos, as if re-born.

The use of masks is very effective in rituals. They offer instant hybridity, converting the wearer into an animated being of uncertain nature and of monstrous appearance. A range of such masks were found at the sanctuary of Artemis Orthia at Sparta, ranging in appearance from agreeable to monstrous. Lada-Richards (1998:60) proposes that the masks could have had a didactic function by "offering initiates the opportunity to explore every aspect of

³⁰ For an example of such a myth, see Pausanias 8.2.6.

marginality and strangeness, assuming every possible form of otherness, learning how to break the rules the better to internalise rules...". This concurs with Victor Turner's views of the initiation ceremonies of the Ndembu of Zambia and their frightening cultic costumes that aimed to "teach the neophytes to distinguish clearly between the different elements of reality, as it is conceived in their culture" (Gilmore 2003:156).

So monsters are not only there to threaten and scare initiates. They also fulfill an educational role in the way that they impart the initiate with new insights. In order to complete the transition successfully, the initiate has to internalise these insights, observe the monster's familiarity and its strangeness, and gain a better understanding of the values of his society. The monster becomes the ally of the initiate, enabling him to gain these insights, facilitating the transformation required. Again Cheiron's mentorship of Greek heroes serves to illustrate: Cheiron is no less a monster than any of the other centaurs, and his skill as mentor does not rely on his denouncing his hybridity. It is his duality, his affinity with the mysterious powers of nature, his skill at hunting and healing as well as the arts of civilisation that makes him an effective facilitator of transformation. By accepting his teachings but also by observing his duality, the young hero learns about the boundaries of his nature and his culture. The initiate, himself momentarily a boundary crosser in a liminal space, needs the guidance of the monster in order to complete the transition successfully. We are reminded of Cecrops, himself endowed with a serpent's tail, who introduced such cultural elements as writing and religious rituals to Attica, guiding its people through a transition from a state of nature to a state of culture (Kearns 1989:89-90; Lada-Richards 1998:67-68).

In conclusion, it has been well established that liminality constitutes the natural habitat of the monster. It has also been shown that rituals create such a liminal space by employing certain physical and behavioural delimiters. It is not surprising then to find that monsters enter the ritual space. Like Thumiger's animals in Greek tragedy, monsters, too, appear at the point of crisis. Their function, however, is what is of interest. As proponents of chaos that erupt in the midst of the village festival, to be fought and expelled, they bring about renewal. As frightening beings confronting initiates and bringing them to clearer insights into their community and their role within it, they bring about change. It can be concluded that monsters perform a vital role in the communal life of societies and in the personal life of individuals. Having drawn on sources that fall outside of ancient Greek literature, mythology

and art, these findings can now be applied to hybrid monsters within the ancient Greek bestiary and test their function as agents of transformation.

e. The Minotaur

i. The relationship between myth and ritual

The hybrid monsters at the centre of this discussion are creatures of myth, but it has also been shown that monsters can perform a ritual function. Of great interest is the connection between myth and ritual, which would allow the transfer of monsters between these two genres. The debate about the relationship between myth and ritual is ongoing. While it is rarely disputed that a connection can be observed between mythology and ritual action, some scholars discount theories of an interdependence on the grounds that such arguments cannot be applied absolutely and consistently (Kirk 1974:223-253, particularly 252-253). Others believe that much can be gained from exploring such interrelationships, even if one's findings fall short of E.R. Leach's categorical statement that "myth implies ritual, ritual implies myth, they are one and the same" (Leach 1954:13, quoted by Kirk 1974:226).

The "ritualist" school of thought insists on the existence of a "strong general connection between myth and ritual", but it allows for various interpretations of exactly what shape or form this connection could take (Csapo 2005:180). Burkert, building on the work of Durkheim, Malinowski and Harrison – all of whom explored the relationship between and interdependence of society, myth and ritual activity – ultimately abandoned the quest to derive the one from the other and asserted that ritual, as a "[dramatization] of the order of life" and myth, as a "[clarification] of the order of life" exist independently of each other (Burkert 1983:33, quoted by Csapo 2005:180). Yet, importantly, they arise from the same need "to give symbolic expression to 'basic biological or cultural programs of action'" (Burkert 1979:18, quoted by Csapo 2005:180). In other words they are different expressions of the same thing. What makes Burkert's finding so important is that it validates the significance of studying the one in the light of the other without needing to prove a direct relationship: mythological narrative can do much to enhance the understanding of ritual action, and vice versa. Whether myth preceded ritual, or ritual gave rise to myth now becomes a fallacious argument because neither statement can be proven to be consistently true: the relationship

between myth and ritual is not an aetiological one. The relationship is one of a shared origin and concomitant development: it is the same drive for symbolic expression that leads to the development of both ritual and myth.

It is based on this understanding of the interrelationship between myth and ritual that the discussion now turns back to the mythological to consider the Theseus-myth as initiation myth, and the function of the Minotaur as a monster but more importantly, as a hybrid monster with a ritual function.

ii. The Theseus-myth as initiation myth

While Theseus³¹ makes literary appearances in works as early as the *Illiad*, his initial persona is not that of a unique champion but rather of a figure amongst many others, belonging to a race of heroes. The development of his character and the repertoire of deeds attributed to him can be traced in literature and art, and can be mapped against Athens' development as powerful city-state (Agard 1928:84). A popular theory is that the Pisistratids or Cleisthenes, and later Cimon, purposefully "adopted" Theseus, raising the profile of this Attic hero by embellishing his exploits and playing up his Athenian heritage (Hahnemann 2010:43). Attic writers such as Bacchylides, Sophocles and Euripides contributed to Theseus' prominence by relating not only his Cretan adventure, but his other exploits which were unrepresented in earlier literature (Gantz 1993:248-249). In art, equally, from the last quarter of the sixth

³¹ Theseus' Cretan adventure retained popularity into modern times largely due to tantalising elements that seemed to bridge the spheres of myth and historical fact: Sir Arthur Evans' excavation of the palace complex at Knossos which started in 1900, suggested a new interpretation of the mythological labyrinth as the actual palace of Minos. The prominence of the bull as pervasive decorative motif on all manner of secular and sacred objects, from jewellery to architecture, suggested a close association between Cretan society and the bull – an association that would present a suppressed nation with fertile breeding ground for a bull-monster. To add to this, depictions of human interaction with bulls in the context of sport or ritual "bull dancing" shows that Cretans engaged very closely with bulls, frequently with disastrous results. With some placing these games in the very middle of Cretan palaces (Ward et al 1970:131) the myth of Theseus and the Minotaur can almost be transferred from myth to history.

century these new adventures of Theseus were widely represented on Attic Red- and Black-Figure vases (Hahnemann 2010:43) and, a little later in the mid-fifth century in sculpture as well (Gantz 1993:249).

The transitional elements contained in the Theseus myth beg closer scrutiny. One facet of interest is the personal transition of Theseus as young man to Theseus the Attic hero. Another is the transition of Athens from a Greek settlement like any other to a political and cultural leader amongst the Greek cities, and Theseus's mythological role in achieving this. In what follows the focus will be on these elements.³² Before continuing with the investigation as set out above, and before considering the Minotaur as a monster with a function in the ritual space, it is necessary to consider this creature using the common themes for monstrosity outlined in chapter two.

The Minotaur as monster

The Minotaur's hybridity is absolute: instead of descending from a line of monstrous or dichotomous creatures, it was born of the queen of Crete and a bull of exceptional beauty (Tsiafakis 2003:91). Both parents can be said to have epitomised their respective categories: the queen as a human, first amongst her people, and the bull as a perfect specimen of its kind. Yet it must be remembered that the Cretan bull was not an entirely ordinary animal: it used to belong to the god Poseidon who sent it up from the waves in answer to Minos' prayers. The bull was different to normal Cretan cattle by having crossed the divide between the divine and mortal spheres as symbolised in the narrative by the elements of ocean and of land. The bull was invested with symbolic power by its connection with the divine, and its ability to transit between spheres. When Minos betrayed the god by not returning the bull to the divine sphere (through sacrifice) he compromised the proper relationship between god and king and, by extension, the cosmic balance. It is against this background that Pasiphae's unnatural infatuation with the bull must be understood: Minos' disregard for proper action by

³² The cross-over between myth and historical fact – a trend which falls tantalisingly close to the transitional nature of our monsters – and the survival of the Minotaur in modern society – a topic which warrants a study of its own – is reluctantly left for another occasion

giving Poseidon his due is mirrored in his wife's equal disregard for the laws of nature. The Cretan bull comes to symbolise the compromise of the normal lines of division that govern cosmic order. This compromise was brought to full, physical expression in the Minotaur which was born with a monstrous mixture of human and animal elements.

While early depictions indicate some fluidity in the actual arrangement of human and bovine features, by the sixth century most representations of the Minotaur conformed to that of an upright figure with the legs, trunk and arms of a man but the neck and head of a bull (Childs 2003:91) (Fig.22). But this composition was not unique to the Minotaur. As early as the beginning of 3 000 BCE the bull-man of Mesopotamia was portrayed with the same general composition (Goodnick Westenholz 2004:26): an upright figure with a human torso and head, and bovine hindquarters, feet and tail. In Mesopotamia the bull was not a commonly kept animal, nor was wild ox or bison indigenous to the area. These animals were associated with the mountainous areas to the east of the civilised land, and as such they were inherently foreign (Childs 2003:53; Goodnick Westenholz 2004:26). The mountainous regions, apart from lying on the edges of known territory, also had associations of danger and of being inhospitable to civilisation. Accordingly, in the ancient Near East the bull assumed a symbolic connection with that which lay – both geographically and conceptually – beyond the local and the known. The addition of bovine elements to a hybrid being, besides indicating connections with the divine sphere, assigned elements of liminality and danger to the monster.

However, it has been shown that the danger implied by the monster could also be applied "homoeopathically" to avert that self-same threat which it represented. In the literature of the area, the bull-man's dual nature as both enemy and associate of deities is frequently called to the fore (Childs 2003:53; Goodnick Westenholz 2004:26), and visual examples of both are available. It is not surprising, then, to find this apotropaic function of bull-figures applied to entrances either as small figurines buried in the foundations, or, like the Assyrian *lamassu*, as oversized quadruped bull-demons that guard gateways. Inscriptions such as "go out death, enter life" (Goodnick Westenholz 2004:26) which on occasion accompany such figures, confirm this protective function. In this role the bovine hybrid assumed a pivotal position in ancient Near Eastern society: positioned at the point of transition – the gate – it served to separate life and death, good and evil, order and chaos, that which belongs inside

the sphere of civilisation and that which is excluded from it. Positioned in the liminal space of the gate, it shunts the desirable in, and the undesirable out.

So, as with many of the hybrid monsters of ancient Greece, the Minotaur also had its roots firmly in the East. Shear (1923) contends that narrative aspects as well as the iconographical tradition associated with the Theseus-myth was transferred from Asia Minor to the Mediterranean via Lydia. In support of this theory he calls on the composition of the Minotaur which closely resembles the Mesopotamian bull-man configuration in literature and art (Shear 1923:148), the combative positioning in opposition to a human figure that forms the "standard" visual arrangement of the Minotaur (Shear 1923:149) and lastly the proposed association of the word "*labrys*", Lydian for double-edged axe, with the Greek myth. On the last point, Shear argues that Theseus is often depicted using this weapon, that the "*labrys*" was a sacred symbol of Lydian royalty and also found "everywhere in Crete", and finally that "*labrys*" is the etymological root from which the word "labyrinth" is derived (Shear 1923:148; also see Seltman 1953:99). Even if this is true and the iconography and some of the narrative elements of the myth was borrowed from the East, the Athenian myth functioned within a Greek society. It would be sensible to look at its function and relevance in this context.

In ancient Greece the bull was not quite as foreign an animal as it was to the people of the ancient Near East, so its significance did not spring from unfamiliarity and inherent disassociation with the animal. Bulls were well known in Greece, but what significance did they have? They were not economically significant since they were of limited use, were expensive to maintain and difficult to control (Foxhall 2006:150). They were also not typically used for sacrifice (Foxhall 2006:150): where the bull is specified as a victim, as when the Cretan bull is sent from the sea to Minos specifically for this purpose, symbolic meaning has to be assumed. For similar reasons Foxhall (2006:150) points out that bulls depicted as yoked to a plough carried a ritual reference, though exactly what ritual this would be is not clear. To the Greeks the bull played a primarily symbolic role: it was imbued with representational meaning based not on its foreignness or its economic prominence, but on its aggressive nature and raw power. The bull's vibrancy and physical strength invited association with masculine power and violence (Foxhall 2006:150) so it was frequently associated with male gods. Zeus and Poseidon both assume the appearance of bulls, or use bulls, at times when they want to impress their power upon humans. In this way Zeus took the form of a bull to

abduct Europa (Apollodorus 3.1.1), Poseidon sent a bull to Minos to show his divine support for the future king (Apollodorus 3.1.3) and against Hippolytos (Apollodorus *Epit.* 1.19). Heracles battled Acheloos in the shape of a bull (Apollodorus 2.7.5). Other bulls, their fearsomeness enhanced by abnormalities like madness or fiery breath, presented fierce opponents against which the strength of heroes could be pitted: Heracles had to capture the Cretan bull as one of his labours (Apollodorus 2.5.7), Theseus had to kill the Marathonian bull (Apollodorus *Epit.* 1.5) and Jason had to yoke the bronze-footed bulls of Aietes (Apollodorus 1.9.23).

Given its symbolic associations it would be safe to assume that when the head of a bull was assigned to a monster figure it lent that figure attributes of unnatural power and aggression. The monster becomes enriched with symbolic and possibly, as will be demonstrated, even ritual connotation. The choice of head as the body-part generally assigned to the Minotaur is interesting. It has been acknowledged that the main physical attributes of animals assigned to composite monsters are chosen to represent and confer the unique talents of the original animal to the monster: the wings of the raptor captures its speed and ferocity, the claws and jaws of a lion its power and dominance. It is worth noting then that the head of the bull is not representative of the bull's brute strength and aggression – that would be better symbolised by its size and powerful body. Yet depictions show a monster with a normal human body of standard stature. Woodford (2003:137) agrees that the Minotaur's composition is particularly unfortunate since it combines the weakness of man's body with the "limited intelligence and articulateness of a bull". But it is unlikely that this would have been a Greek audience's primary impression. Chances are that the head of the bull with its horns created an immediate association with the *symbolic* bull. The horned head could have the same immediate transformative effect as the addition of a mask to a participant in a ritual. That the human body of the mythological monster was thought to be imbued accordingly with the strength of a bull is almost certain, but of greater importance is the association with the symbolic animal. The primary impression of the Minotaur would have been of a monstrous creature of undefined nature, divine potency and virile aggression. As hybrid, the psychological challenge it presented to the boundaries between human, animal and the divine was a threat to the natural order. The physical challenge it presented to the hero, as representative of civilisation, threatened the existence of Greek culture.

The transgressions inherent in the provenance and the physical composition of the Minotaur are further developed in the narrative. The unnatural appearance of the Minotaur is made all the more shocking by the fact that it enters the human sphere in a "normal" manner: the monster is born like a human child. There is no version of the myth that hints at a dramatic birth such as erupting from a severed neck or growing from the earth. The eruption of the monster right in the midst of the civilisation, from the queen's body and into the very essence of order – the palace – is a dramatic intrusion from the liminal sphere into the heart of civilised society. The Minotaur is placed in juxtaposition to the kingdom of Minos – the civiliser, the custodian of order on Crete.

When Homer mentions Minos (*Od.* 11.568-571; *Od.* 19.178-190), the justness of the Cretan king and his close affinity with the gods are accentuated. However, when Minos reneges on his promise to sacrifice the bull asked of Poseidon, Minos himself turns into a monster. At this point Minos allows personal desire and self interest to interfere with his position as king, protector of his people. Campbell (2008:11) likens Minos to the archetypal tyrant-monster whose greed leads him to claim the benefits meant for the greater good. Minos' monstrosity extends further: it is evident not only in his disregard for proper behaviour towards the gods and responsible action towards his people, but also in the tyrannical tribute he later demands of the Athenians. The Minotaur as a monster is the result and the external representation of Minos' internal monstrosity. The inversion of king to monstrous tyrant is manifest in an actual monster: a figure typical of inversion and transgression.

As a hybrid monster one would expect the Minotaur to exhibit counter-cultural tendencies, and there are a number of ways in which the mythological narrative demonstrates this. Most prominent is the Minotaur's segregation from society (Diodorus Siculus 4.77.1). It is not surprising to find the Minotaur removed from the palace and from Cretan society: it exposes the true nature of the king and represents a cultural threat to the kingdom. Its confinement in the labyrinth, a man-made liminal space, not only removed it from society but positioned it on the other side of the divide between order and chaos, between the "here" that is known and the "there" which represents unknown and un-owned space. The confusion and treachery of the labyrinth's winding pathways suits the chaos this structure represents. In addition to its disorientating design, it can be assumed that that the labyrinth was very dark, a fact corroborated by Gantz's (1996:264, 268) observations of Ariadne's help taking the form,

not only of providing the thread needed to escape the labyrinth, but also of holding up a light-giving crown to disperse the darkness.

The very isolation of the Minotaur, both in its being the only one of its kind and in its being locked away in the labyrinth, accentuates its inherent separation from communal life which typifies civilisation. The Minotaur is not only an outsider to human society, but a lone figure bereft of association even with others of his type. His isolation is complete.

The threat of the Minotaur is given expression in his taste for human flesh. It is not clear whether the monster chooses to eat humans, or whether it is the choice of monstrous Minos to feed it human meat. For the Athenians the result was the same: the sacrifice of their young men and women to the Minotaur, with the knowledge that they were going to be eaten by the monster, presented more than a social tragedy: it was a cultural catastrophe. By having the Minotaur devour the cream of Athenian society³³ every nine years, the cultural identity of Athens was eroded. It was gradually being incorporated into the chaos of the Minotaur and the labyrinth. The tribute to Crete was paramount to cultural dissipation into wildness – the ultimate failure of civilisation.

Some of the other attributes that position the Minotaur firmly in the domain of “monster” are more clearly observed in visual depictions. It is interesting to note that the one element of the myth that receives the least attention in literature – the actual combat between Theseus and the Minotaur – is the scene most often chosen for illustration. One could postulate that in a narrative with much scope for plot and detail, the *fact* of Theseus’ victory – rather than the battle – is of primary importance. In the visual arts the most meaningful moment has to be selected. The point of conflict also gives the artist the opportunity to convey the contrasting natures of the monster and Theseus. Typically, for instance, the Minotaur is not depicted wearing clothing while Theseus is traditionally shown in dressed in fine clothes (Agard 1928:84-87). The Minotaur’s nakedness accentuates his uncivilised nature whereas Theseus’ finery does the opposite: it reminds us that Theseus is a proponent of culture and civilisation.

³³ Certain sources say that the victims were chosen by lot, but others say that Minos travelled to Athens to hand-pick the best of the eligible youths. See Plutarch, *Thes.* 17.2-3.

The Minotaur's naked human body topped by the bovine neck and head accentuates the shock of the monster's hybrid and unnatural composition. Had the monster been clothed, he may have resembled an actor wearing a bull mask. The confrontation between Theseus and the Minotaur generally shows the monster fighting not in the manner of a bull, i.e. storming with his horns towards his target, but in the manner of a man wrestling.³⁴ Elements of the combat also serve to contrast the wild beast to the cultured hero: Theseus is always armed (Gantz 1996:268) while the Minotaur is unarmed. The Minotaur, in a manner befitting his status as monster bereft of culture, is frequently shown with rocks or even boulders in his hands (Shear 1923:137; Gantz 1996:268) (Fig.23).

Having used the themes set out in chapter two as common features shared by monsters, to evaluate the Minotaur it can be concluded that this monster displays a fair number of the typical traits. But this only proves some assumptions about monsters and the Minotaur as a hybrid monster. The next section will address the ritual function of the Theseus myth and the Minotaur's role as agent of transformation.

The Minotaur as agent of transformation

King Minos of Crete first appears in Homer's *Odyssey*, but it is only with Diodorus' account dating from the first century BCE that a full description is given of Minos' deception of Poseidon and Pasiphae's desire for the un-sacrificed bull, which resulted in the birth of the Minotaur (Diodorus Siculus 4.77.1-4). The Minotaur, either because of his monstrosity and the shame that it brought on the city (Diodorus Siculus 4.77.1; Ovid, *Metam.* 8. 130) or because of oracular instructions (Apollodorus 3.2.4), was confined in a labyrinth. At this time, as recompense for the death of his own son, Minos imposed a tribute on Athens in the form of seven young men and seven young girls that had to be sent to Crete every nine years. These youths were fed to the Minotaur (Pausanias, *Desc.* 1.27.10; *Suda*, epsilon 1421 Adler). On the third occasion the young hero Theseus sailed to Crete along with the tribute. With the help of the Minotaur's sister, the princess Ariadne, Theseus destroyed the monster, escaped from the labyrinth and put an end to Crete's tyranny over Athens. Plutarch, in his *Life of*

³⁴ For more on Theseus as a hero associated with athletics and wrestling in particular, see Agard 1928:84-91.

Theseus, also quotes sources that rationalise the more outlandish elements of the myth. According to the Cretans, Plutarch writes, the Bull of Minos was not an actual monster but a brutal general named Taurus. Instead of being sacrificed to a monster, the youths were detained in a dungeon and presented as prizes at the funeral games held in memory of Minos' dead son (Plutarch, *Thes.* 16.1).

This attempt to explain the symbolic myth through rational fact does no harm to the reading of the myth, and is even supportive of its reading as a narrative representative of an initiation-like process. Whether Theseus confronted an actual composite monster in an attempt to free his city from tyranny or whether he faced a feared general with the same purpose in mind, the essential elements of the plot remain the same: a young man moves outside of his familiar surroundings to a place that is unknown and of dread reputation. There he encounters a ferocious enemy, which he overcomes. After the ordeal, neither the young man nor the way in which he relates to his environment is the same: he has undergone a personal and a social transformation. Van Gennep's division of the initiation ritual into the processes of "separation, liminality and reintegration" (Marinatos 2003:130) is clearly represented.

Besides the basic structure, there are a number of other elements to the myth that hint at its relationship to initiation. The Cretan adventure is flanked on either side by ritual action. In the same way that ritual elements demarcate the liminal space for sacrifice, Theseus' dedications before and after the journey to Crete seem to establish a liminal space within which the adventure is to play out. Before his departure Theseus makes a dedication to Apollo of a branch of the sacred olive tree wrapped in wool, and visits the Delphic Oracle. On his return he makes sacrifices to Apollo again, and the same ritual elements of olive bough and wool are present (Plutarch, *Thes.* 18.1, 22.5), bringing the liminal period to a close. The first indication of a liminal space having been created occurs during the sacrifice Theseus makes to Aphrodite on recommendation of the Oracle. During the sacrifice on the sea shore, a space of transition in itself, the female goat victim turns into a he-goat. This inversion seems to imply the suspension of the normal cosmic rules. The gender change of the goat is echoed elsewhere in the myth, where Theseus includes two young males in the number of the tribute, as part of the female quota. Plutarch relates that these two youths were pampered and dressed up to resemble girls, and so to deceive their Cretan enemy (Plutarch, *Thes.* 23.2). Not only is this gender-based crossing-over indicative of the liminal state, but it is well-

represented in ritual action. Initiation rituals of young men often include a period of time during which they are dressed up as girls (Fontenrose 1943:362, citing Jeanmaire 1939).

The journey by sea from Athens to Crete carries with it strong symbolism of transition from one sphere to the other via the liminal element of the ocean. It is not only the geographic separation that lent Crete its foreignness. To the Greek mind Crete itself contained a high degree of "otherness". Sherratt proposes that, as the Greeks developed a national identity, they came more and more to regard Cretans as distinct from them. Crete came to be associated with the sea-faring Phoenicians, as foreign and anarchistic (in Watrous 1997:599).³⁵ This would make the journey from Athens to the palace of Minos a true transition into the wilderness where the legislation, the rules of conduct of civilisation, no longer held sway. As tangible representation of the liminality of Crete, the labyrinth occupies the central point of focus of the myth. This space, man made but designed to confuse man, hiding a monster in its unfathomable coils, is the embodiment of liminality.

In his discussion of the use of timber circles and labyrinths by primitive societies, Newman (1996:35-37) stresses the importance of liminal spaces as "nexus" where two fundamentally different worlds can interact. Along with the natural boundaries of rivers, seashore, woods, mountains and caves, man-made structures can be highly effective in creating a sense of separation from the normal world. The sense of disorientation experienced in the woods, particularly in dim or dappled light, where the trunks of the trees seem to form an infinitely repeating pattern is re-created in the timber circles of Newman's study (1996:35-36). A similar effect is created in a labyrinth. Here, too, every view appears to be a replica of the previous view. The observer knows this not to be true, and the conflict between the sensory and the cognitive experience creates an intense state of confusion and disorientation. Newman makes the perceptive observation that the one-dimensional face with which a geometrically shaped labyrinth confronts the observer conflicts with the viewer's three-dimensional experience of moving through the labyrinth. This conflict aids the "de-

³⁵ See also *Suda*, kappa 2407 Adler: To speak like a Cretan, i.e. to lie.

contextualisation" of the Self (Newman 1996:35), stripping it in preparation of a profound experience. This is the space into which the hero Theseus moves.

Before meeting the Minotaur Theseus has meetings which according to Graf (2003:17) highlights two key elements of the initiation myth: identity and sexuality. En route to Crete Theseus confronts his divine father – Poseidon. On his arrival in Athens Theseus was reunited with his mortal father, Aegeus, but his assimilation into the royal family was marred by the resistance of the Athenians and his father's wife Medea to accepting him as royal son and heir. The meeting with, and full acceptance by, Poseidon represents Theseus' finding his true identity. The next meeting is with Ariadne, Minos' daughter, who falls in love with Theseus. In the narrative plot it is Ariadne that provides the vital clue that allows Theseus to exit the labyrinth. It is also assumed, though not explicitly stated, that Theseus obtains the sword, with which a plethora of Attic vase paintings show him killing the Minotaur, from Ariadne. It is appropriate that this masculine symbol comes from Ariadne as it is her role to initiate Theseus into sexuality (Graf 2003:17).

The narrative continues with Theseus' confrontation of the monster, the ecstatic moment of transformation.

Literature does not provide much detail about the skirmish: it is enough that Theseus meets and destroys the Minotaur. In most depictions the moment of Theseus' blade penetrating the monster is captured. There are a few examples, however, that show Theseus dragging the Minotaur out of the labyrinth (Fig.24), and a *stamnos* from 650 BCE (Gantz 2003:266) that shows the Minotaur as being fettered, while Pausanias (*Descr.* 3.18.10-16) describes an illustration that also depicts the Minotaur as bound and being lead alive out of the labyrinth by Theseus. While exceptional, these variations are in harmony with the findings above about ritual dominance over animals: it is not merely the killing of the animal that is of significance but the initiate's dominance over it. Certainly the dragging of the Minotaur out of its lair, and the binding of its feet, are clear expressions of Theseus' dominance over the monster. But what is the effect of this victory?

Theseus had already pitted his strength against formidable enemies before he reached Athens so he is not new to battle or to victory over proponents of chaos. The defeat of the Minotaur

is different in that unlike the other confrontations, it brings about a transformation in Theseus: before his Cretan adventure Theseus is a boy, striving to be like his personal hero, Heracles, and seeking acceptance in his father's city. His crusade to clear the dangerous lands between Troezen and Athens of villains seems to be only in emulation of Heracles, whom he also imitates in adopting a club as weapon. After his victory over the Minotaur, however, Theseus achieves his own identity. He no longer emulates Heracles but is a hero in his own right. He returns to his father's city as the saviour of Athens and takes the position left by his father's suicide. His emergence from the labyrinth, as the emergence of the initiate from the liminality of the monster-shaped hut, indicates his successful transition from an adolescent state into adulthood. His transformation from boy to man is best illustrated by Pausanias' description (*Descr.* 1.19.1) of an occasion upon Theseus' return to Athens where he, passing the unfinished temple of Apollo, is mocked by the builders because of his youthful and girlish appearance. In response he unyokes the oxen from a nearby cart and throws them up into the air. This act of dominance over the animals, as Marinatos (2003:133) points out, changes the bystanders' perception of him as boy, likened to a virgin, to him as being a man.

There are some alternative versions of the events that followed Theseus' exit from the labyrinth, and Plutarch supplies a few of these (*Thes.* 19.1-20.5). In one Theseus scuttles the Cretans' ships in the harbour, thereby not only preventing pursuit, but putting a symbolic end to Crete's centre of power. Other versions make his escape into a full-blown naval battle. Another puts an end to Crete's political dominance over Athens by having Theseus marry the Cretan princess and replace Minos as king (*Suda*, alpha iota 23 Adler). What these variations have in common with each other and the more generally told story is that the balance of power between Athens and Crete was re-defined by Theseus' adventure. This draws attention to the fact that Theseus' initiation was not only a personal process of awakening, but that it had broader socio-political repercussions. Besides the personal transformation of Theseus, the myth also traces the political transformation of Athens.

Theseus' defeat of the Minotaur and his breaking of the power relationship between Crete and Athens heralded a new beginning for Athens. Upon the victorious hero's return from Crete his first action was to unite the people of Athens, until then spread out over a wide area, into a single city-complex. He introduced a class-structure to Athenian society, put a representative government in place, introduced festivals and finally laid down his royal power in aid of a

democracy (Plutarch, *Thes.* 24-25). Athens made the transition from a disorganised kingdom to an organised democratic state – the Greek epitome of civilisation. The Theseus-myth tells the story of Athens' confrontation with monstrous Crete, island of liars, and how its triumph over Minos and his Minotaur helped Athens to find its true identity and, in doing so, graduate from juvenile city to the leading city-state of Greece.

As narrative greatly influenced by Attic authors and artists, the initiation myth of Theseus and the Minotaur runs alongside the political development of Athens. The initiation elements apply not only to the hero, but to the city he has come to represent. As a result Theseus's trial by monster goes hand in hand with the ordeal his city has to suffer: The initiation process requires a symbolic death which, in the case of Theseus, takes the form of entering the labyrinth and facing the Minotaur. The juvenile Theseus dies, allowing Theseus the active member of his community to emerge. For Athens this death is represented by the bleeding off of fourteen of its best young people by Crete, a figurative hobbling of the kingdom's potential. Yet this death heralds the emergence of Athens as cultural and political beacon. Both Theseus and Athens emerge from the crisis, reborn to their new identities: Theseus as adult hero, Athens as independent city state.

Conclusion

At the outset of this thesis it was posited that the hybrid monsters that form the focus point of the study are creatures of the imagination and that they have no tangible foothold in reality. It was also taken as a given that they are products of the society that create them: their physical appearance as well as their natures and behaviour are products of the associations, experiences and anxieties of the humans that brought them to life. The assumption was that much could be learnt about the creator, by investigating the created monster.

Attempts at defining monsters compel us to accept that these creatures are highly disparate. The term "monster" seems to be a collective noun for a group of beings that have very little in common. It is only when the attention is turned away from the actual creature and turned towards the person calling it a "monster" that some pattern starts to unfold.

This enquiry focused on the monsters found in the mythology, literature and art of ancient Greece, but more specifically on those creatures that contain both human and animal elements. What has become clear is that these beings personify much of the concern and angst the Greeks had about, not only their identity as Greeks, but their identity as humans. The Greeks were not only apprehensive of people foreign to them and their habits, but they were also concerned about their relationships with their closer neighbours – animals. They acknowledged some commonality between them and animals, but at the same time rejected the animal as inimical to the ideals of civilisation. The creation of hybrid monsters betrays an attempt at achieving differentiation from foreign nations but also from other biological life on earth.

The monsters so created turn out to be complex creatures filled with symbolic meaning. More interestingly, while by nature rebellious, monsters – those of ancient Greece but also those of different cultures in any era – do conform in surprising ways: They are ambiguous by nature so that it is not always clear whether they are inimical or protective beings. Their ambiguity is often reflected in their physical composition but also in their often surprising "genetic" links to man and/or to divinity. They represent the chaotic, the wilderness, the instinctual and the uncontrolled that stands in opposition to the order and reason of culture and civilisation. Yet while conceptually in juxtaposition to the world of man, the monster remains close, lurking on the periphery of man's boundaries. Like an island surrounded by the ocean, civilisation is hugged by the chaotic that not

only stands in contrast to it, but helps define it. Monsters, while decidedly *not of* civilisation, becomes essential to it.

It is in the investigation of the nature of monsters, at the hand of the human-horse hybrid, that the complexity of the monster construct becomes apparent. The monster is not the opposite of man, but a reflection of man. The physical composition of the centaur betrays its internal dichotomy: it contains the potential for both chaotic and destructive action and for civilised – and civilising – action. The figure of Cheiron demonstrates that monstrosity is not the fact of the chaotic, the instinctual, the sensual. These things are inseparable from life and indeed enriches life, as Cheiron demonstrates with his gifts of medicine. Monstrosity becomes a decision *man* makes about who *he* is and how he behaves. "In the end, there can be no clear division between us and them, between civilisation and bestiality. As we peer into the abyss, the abyss stares back." (Gilmore 2003:191).

It is in the discussion of the function of monsters that it becomes apparent why they are required by man. Apart from their early apotropaic functions, monsters perform a role in the societal context of man. By offering absolution of sins through transference and by encouraging community members to renew their devotion to the structures of society, they can secure the continuance of the community. In the ritual context the initiate's confrontation with a monster figure brings him to clearer insights into his community and the part he is to play in it. Monsters play a role in the process of cognition which requires a death to the old way and a re-birth with new insight. Monsters facilitate this transition – they are a midwife to the new consciousness.

The ritual monster is brought into the sphere of ancient Greek mythology in the review of Theseus and the Minotaur. The initiation aspects of this myth look at both the personal aspect of transformation (the individual's conflict with the monster) and the social aspect of transformation (the importance of the individual's transition for his community). Like in the initiation ritual, the monster acts as the bringer of death, but also of re-birth.

In conclusion, the phenomenon of monster beings is not related to certain communities in certain eras or of certain levels of sophistication. Monsters are where man is. They are an inherent part of man and how he deals with his own dichotomous nature and his life in a world that is irrational and uncontrollable. Monsters are a constant because the plight of man remains essentially static. It is only their appearance that varies as the frame of reference of the communities in which they

function, differ.³⁶ What was the purpose of hybrid monsters in the ancient Greek world? There could be many answers. What this study aimed to show is that at least a part of their purpose was to confront man with what he was, what he might be and what he chose to become.

³⁶ “[Monsters] have the pedagogical function of stimulating people’s power of analysis and revealing to them the building blocks from which their hitherto taken-for-granted world has been constructed” (Gilmore 2003:21)

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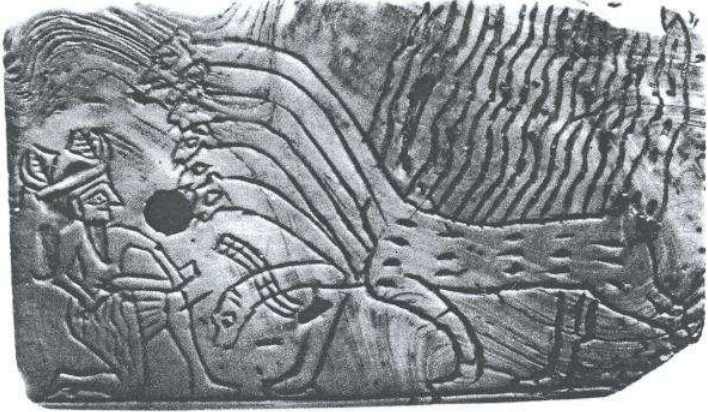
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Addendum 1: List of Figures

<p>Fig.1</p>	<p>Mongol Cavalry (Bronowski 1930:80).</p>	
<p>Fig.2</p>	<p>Ninurta battling a 7-headed monster. Shell. Southern Mesopotamia. Early Dynastic III period, ca.2500-2400 B.C.E. Bible Lands Museum Jerusalem 2051 (Goodnick Westenholz 2004:191).</p>	

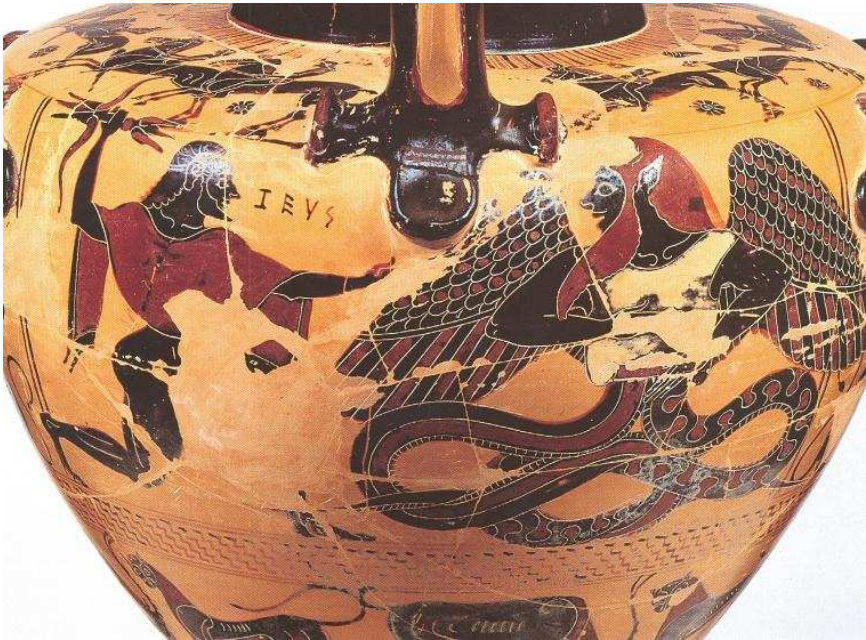
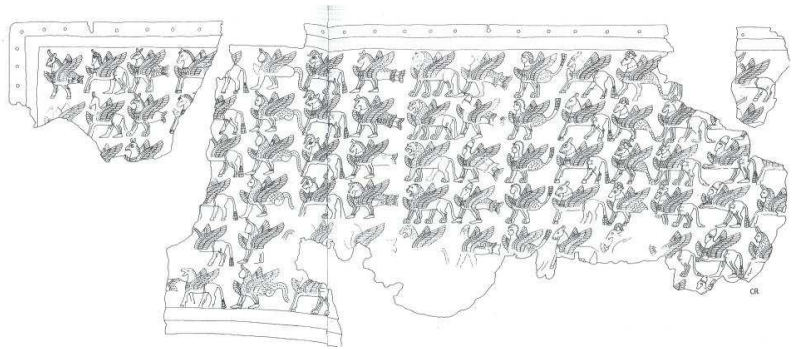

<p>Fig.3</p>	<p>Black-figure hydria: Zeus and Typhon. Greek, Chalcidian, probably made at Thegion in Sicily, ca.540-530 B.C.E. StaatlicheAntikensammlungen und Glyptothek, Munich (596) (Padgett 2003:95).</p>	
<p>Fig.4</p>	<p>Belt with rows of fantastic winged creatures. Bronze. Urartu. 780-700 B.C.E. Bible Lands Museum Jerusalem 142 (Goodnick Westenholz 2004:98-99) (Padgett 2003:17).</p>	
<p>Fig.5</p>	<p>The Francois Vase, black-figure volute-krater: the Return of Hephaistos. Greek, Attic, ca.570 B.C.E., signed by Ergotimos and Kleitias. Museo Archeologico Nazionale, Florence (4209) (Padgett 2003:29).</p>	

Fig.6

Red-figure hydria: satyr actors. Greek, Attic, ca.470-460 B.C.E., attributed to the Leningrad Painter. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Francis Barlett Donation (03.788) (Padgett 2003:35).

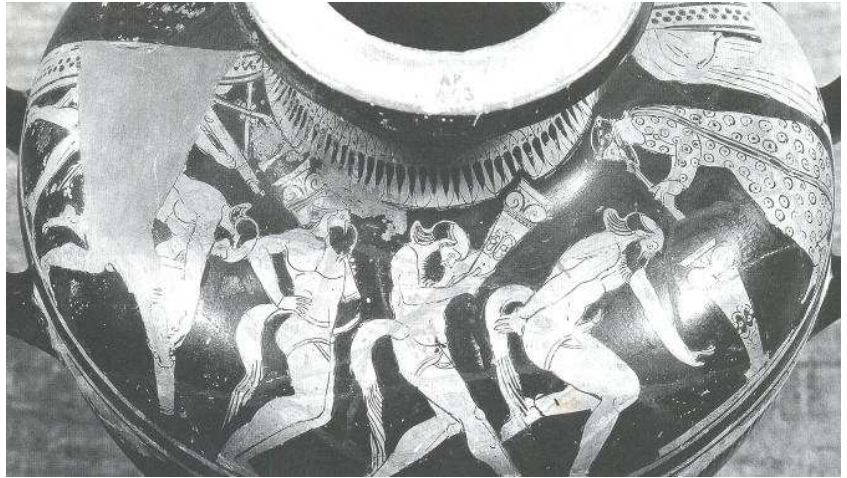
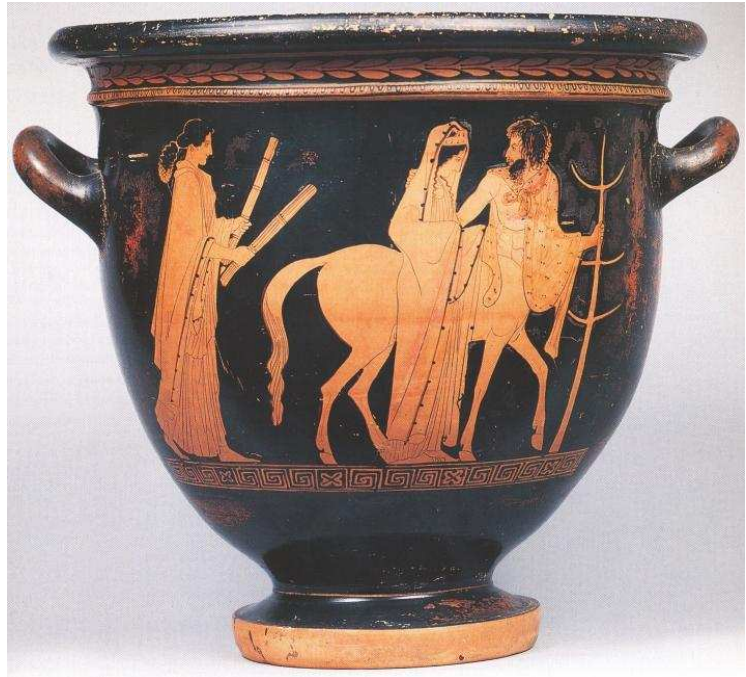

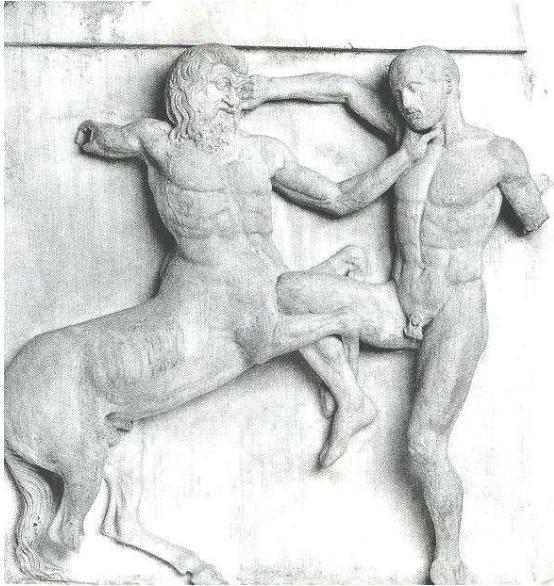
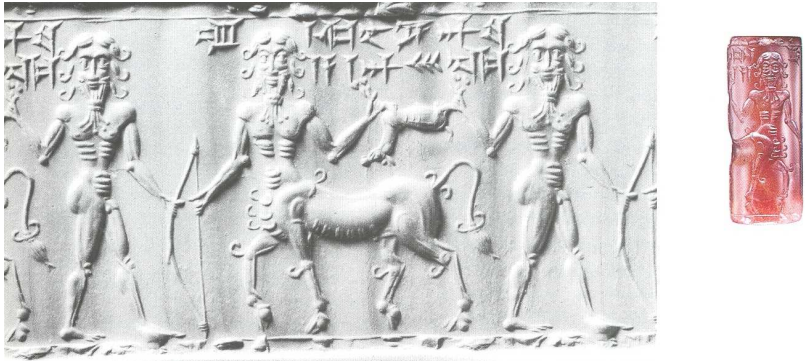




Fig.7

Red-figure bell krater with the wedding of Cheiron. Greek, Attic, ca.440-430 B.C.E., attributed to the Eupolis painter. Ceramic. Private Collection (Padgett 2003:200).



<p>Fig.8</p>	<p>Drawing of a painted alabastron: possibly Cheiron and Chariklo. Greek, Early Corinthian, last quarter of the seventh century B.C.E. Rhodes Archaeological Museum (11.550) (Padgett 2003:17).</p>	
<p>Fig.9</p>	<p>South metope 31 from the Parthenon: Lapith and centaur. Greek, Attic, ca.438 B.C.E., marble. British Museum, London (Padgett 2003:16).</p>	

<p>Fig.10</p>	<p>Cylinder seal with laḫmu and centaur. Middle Assyrian, middle to late thirteenth century B.C.E. Rose quartz. Private collection (Padgett 2003:131).</p>	
<p>Fig.11</p>	<p>Cylinder seal with winged centaur hunting gazelles. Middle Assyrian, first half of thirteenth century B.C.E. Red jasper with inclusions. Private collection (Padgett 2003:129).</p>	
<p>Fig.12</p>	<p>Relief-pithos: Perseus killing Medusa. Greek, Cycladic, found in Boiotia, second quarter of the seventh century B.C.E. Musée du Louvre, Paris (CA795) (Padgett 2003:87).</p>	




<p>Fig.13</p>	<p>Impression of a scarab seal: Gorgon-centaur. East Greek, early sixth century B.C.E., carnelian. Location unknown (Padgett 2003:10).</p>	
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Fig.16 Man fighting a centaur.
Greek, Peloponnesian, Late
Geometric period, ca.750
B.C.E. Bronze. The
Metropolitan Museum of Art,
New York, gift of J.Pierpont
Morgan, 1917 (17.190.2072)
(Padgett 2003:133).



Fig.17 Black-figure neck-amphora
with Herakles battling the
centaurs. Greek, Attic,
ca.500-475 B.C.E., attributed
to the Diosphos Painter.
Found in Sicily. Ceramic.
Private Collection (Padgett
2003:190).

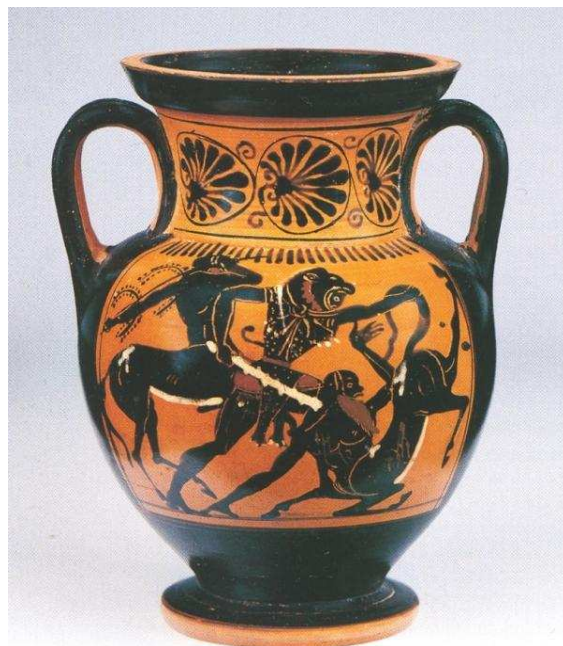


Fig.18 Black-figure amphora with Herakles and Nessos. Greek, Athens, ca.530-520 B.C.E., attributed to the Medea Group. Ceramic. J.Paul Getty Museum, Malibu, California (88.AE.24) (Padgett 2003:197).

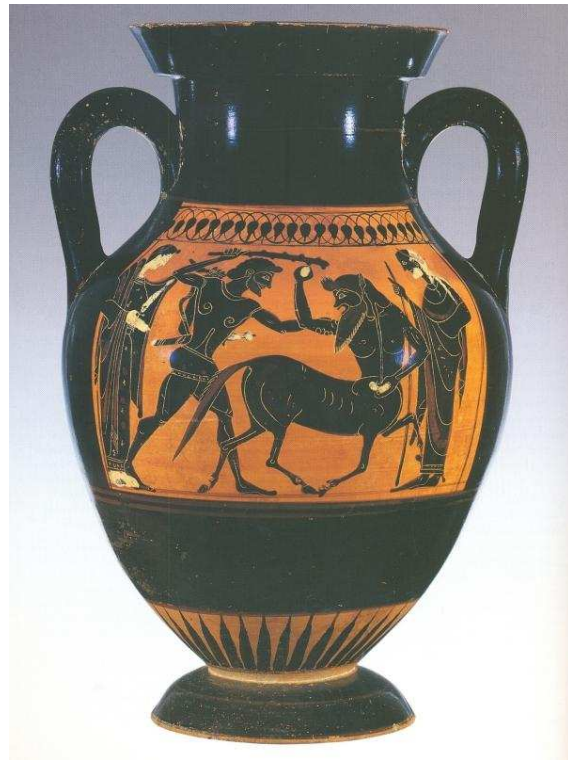
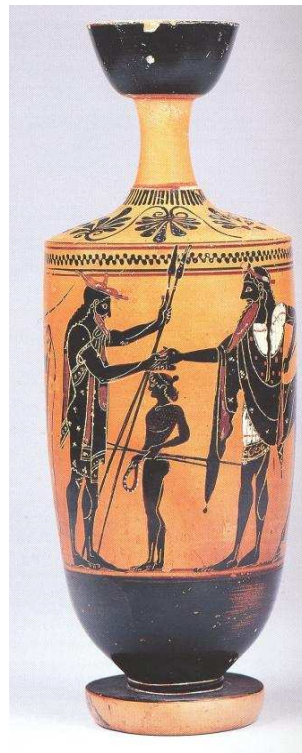


Fig.19 Black-figure lekythos with Cheiron receiving Achilles from Peleus. Greek, Attic, ca.510-500 B.C.E., attributed to the Edinburgh Painter. Ceramic. Private collection (Padgett 2003:207).





<p>Fig.20</p>	<p>Sequel to Zuexis' centaur family. Mosaic, either a Roman copy of a Greek prototype of c.300 B.C.E. or a Roman original of the second century ANE. Antikensammlung, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin – Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Berlin (Woodford 2003:137).</p>	
<p>Fig.21</p>	<p>Centaur family. Detail of a Roman sarcophagus from the first half of the third century ANE. Louvre, Paris (Woodford 2003:137).</p>	

Fig.22 Black-Figure Amphora:
Theseus and the Minotaur.
Greek, Attic, ca.550-540
B.C.E. Attributed to Lydos or
a painter close to him. J.Paul
Getty Museum, Malibu
(86.AE.60) (Padgett
2003:91).

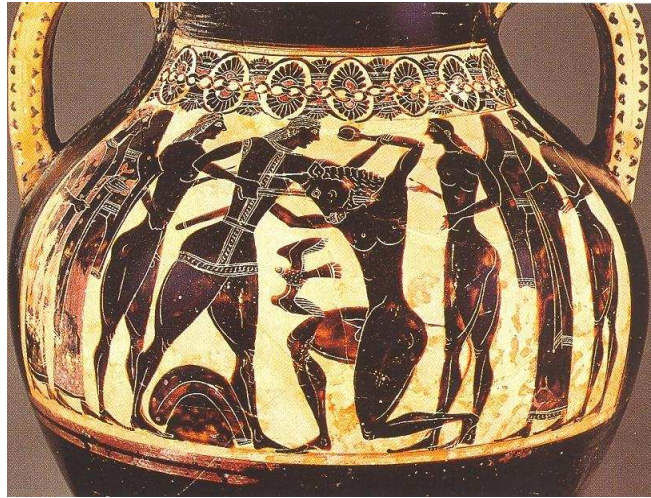


Fig.23 Theseus fighting the
Minotaur, from a red-figure
kylix signed by the painter
Epiktetos, from Vulci, ca.
520-500 B.C.E.. By courtesy
of the Trustees of the British
Museum. Photo: Ronald
Sheridan (Ward et al
1970:16).

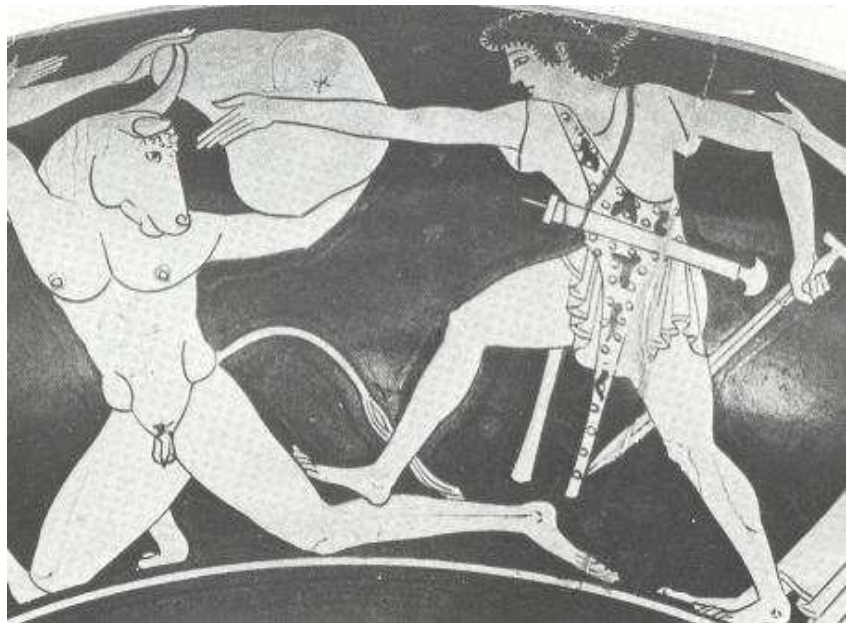


Fig.24 Theseus dragging the dead Minotaur from the Labyrinth, watched by Athena, from a Red-Figure cup by Aison.
Photo: Courtesy of the Museo Arqueologico Nacional, Madrid (Ward et al 1970:38).

