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PARTHENIUS ON THE SARONIC GULF

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## PARTHENIUS ON THE SARONIC GULF

Our only attested story from the *Metamorphoses* by Parthenius of Nicaea<sup>1</sup> concerns the treacherous Scylla, daughter of Nisus (Suppl. Hell. 637). It comes to us as an etymology of the Saronic gulf, preserved by commentators on Dionysius Periegetes 420-422 *δοιαὶ δ' Ἰσθμια νῶτα περιβρομέουσι θάλασσαι, ἢ τ' Ἐφύρης ἀντικρὺ ποτὶ ζόφον, ἢ τε πρὸς αὐγάς ἢ ἐλκομένη, τὴν μὲν τε Καρωνίδα κικλήσκουσιν*. The scholia in this passage (= SH 637(a)) start by telling us that, according to Euphorion (fr. 172 Powell = 170 van Groningen) the sea was called Καρωνικόν because the hunter Κάρων was drowned in it;<sup>2</sup> they continue *ὡς δὲ Παρθένιος ἐν ταῖς Μεταμορφώσεσι λέγει, ... Μίνως ... προσδήσας αὐτὴν [sc. Scyllam] <πηδαλίωι νεῶς> ἀφῆκεν ἐπικύρεσθαι τῆι θαλάσσει. ὅθεν Καρωνικὸς οὗτος ὁ πόντος ἐκλήθη*. The implied etymology is stated even more clearly by Eustathius in his commentary on the same passage of Dion. Per. (= SH 367(b)) *ὁ δὲ κόλπος παραγραμματισθεὶς<sup>3</sup> ἔσχε τὴν κλήσιν ἀπὸ τοῦ κύρεσθαι*.<sup>4</sup> Meineke (*Analecta Alexandrina*, 1843, p. 272) described this etymology as 'haud indigna [Parthenii] ingenio'; we may note the use of 'traho' in Latin poetic references to this legend (Propertius 3,19,26, Ovid, *Met.* 8,142, [Virgil], *Ciris* 390).<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The six-line hexameter fragment on Byblis (Suppl. Hell. 649) might belong to the *Metamorphoses*. Some have deduced from Ἐρωτικὰ Παθήματα 11,4 *φαεὶ δὲ τινες καὶ ἀπὸ τῶν δακρῶν κρήνην ῥύησαι* that Parthenius' own version of the myth (he has just quoted SH 646) did not include the most obvious transformation (Byblis' tears into a spring, cf. P.M.C.Forbes Irving, *Metamorphosis in Greek Myth*, Oxford, 1990, p. 390), which was in Nicander, *Heteroeumena* bk. 2 (fr. 46), and recurs in Ovid (*Met.* 9,663-665). M.L.West, however, doubts this inference: 'Parthenius' self-quotation illustrates the story introduced by οἱ δὲ πλείους ... φαεὶν ... To add a further detail, whether or not it had appeared in his poem, he had to say something like *φαεὶ δὲ τινες καὶ ...* He could not have said *φημὶ δὲ καὶ ...* because that would deprive the story of all traditional status.' It is even conceivable that the elegiac SH 640 (on the love and transformation of Comaetho) came from the *Metamorphoses*, though we do not know of another transformation poem in that metre.

<sup>2</sup> cf. *Et.Mag.* p. 708,52 Gaisford. A fuller and slightly different version of the drowning occurs in Pausanias 2,30,7 (cf. *schol. Eur., Hipp.* 1200); although no source is there stated, the details (e.g. a cult of Artemis Saronis and the change of name from Phoebaean to Saronic) are such as would have appealed to a Hellenistic poet. Another etymology is given by Pliny, *N.H.* 4,18 'sinus Saronicus olim querno nemore redimitus, unde nomen, ita Graecia antiqua appellante quercum'. This too may reflect a poetic source, since *καρωνίς* = oak is a very rare usage, found (apart from the lexicographers) only in learned Hellenistic poets (Callimachus, *hymn* 1,22 and *Aetia*, SH 276,10, Parthenius, SH 646,4).

<sup>3</sup> 'altered by the change of a letter'. This may betray Eustathius' unease with the etymology, although the motif of the name produced by a small alteration occurs elsewhere in learned poetry (cf. A.S.Hollis, *HSCP* 94, 1992, 277).

<sup>4</sup> cf. Tzetzes on Lycophron, *Alexandra* 650 (though he does not make the connexion with *κύρω* explicit) *ἐλκομένη διὰ τῆς θαλάσσης, ὅθεν καὶ ὁ τόπος τοῦ πελάγους, οἶαι, ἐκλήθη*.

<sup>5</sup> though of course the Romans are unable to exploit the connexion with the Saronic gulf.

It was a clever idea to derive the name neither from the hunter *Κάρων* (Euphorion fr. 172 P.) nor from the *καρωνίδες* surrounding the gulf,<sup>6</sup> but from something that was done to Scylla. And *κύρω* is an appropriate word to describe a body being dragged through the sea.<sup>7</sup> But, since Parthenius was probably proposing a new and competitive etymology, his implied connexion between the verb and the name, *Κᾶρωνικὸς ἀπὸ τοῦ κύρεσθαι* appears far inferior to those of his rivals. This is all the more odd since there was another verb available which would have made the etymology seem much more convincing. I suspect that something has gone wrong in the transmission, and that Parthenius connected the *κόλπος Καρωνικός* with *καρόω* rather than *κύρω*. The advantages of a verb with short *α* rather than long *υ* are obvious. Furthermore, *καρόω* is used by a poet in whom Parthenius would certainly have been interested in a very similar context (of a person 'swept along' through the water). When describing the punishment of the lesser Ajax, Lycophron writes (Alex. 387-389):

τὸν δ' οἶα δύπτην κηρύλον διὰ στενοῦ  
αὐλώωνος οἶει κῦμα γυμνήτην φάγρον  
διπλῶν μεταξὺ χοιράδων καρούμενον.

This application of the passive verb (to an object swept along) is unique, and might well have been in Parthenius' mind.

It is hard to see why Parthenius should have provided an unconvincing etymology for the *κόλπος Καρωνικός*, connected with *κύρω*, when he could have done much better with *καρόω*. Perhaps, therefore, our surviving sources represent a faulty paraphrase of an original. This could tell us something about Parthenius' *Metamorphoses*. R.O.A.M. Lyne<sup>8</sup> leaves open the possibility that this work might have been written in prose (like the *Ἑρωτικὰ Παθήματα*), in which case the scholia to Dion. Per. 420 (and related sources) might even preserve a verbatim quotation. But the likelihood that the *Metamorphoses* was a poem would be increased if we could see here Parthenius offering a new etymology for the Saronic gulf which was inspired by a passage in Lycophron, and has been misunderstood by a later commentator.

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<sup>6</sup> cf. Pliny quoted in n.2 above.

<sup>7</sup> e.g. Nonnus, *Dionysiaca* 22,177 and 369.

<sup>8</sup> in his edition of the pseudo-Virgilian *Ciris* (Cambridge, 1978), pp. 13-14; cf. the final words of the editors on *Supp. Hell.* 637. Lyne in the end (p. 14) reasonably inclines to the view that the *Metamorphoses* was a poem.