Mythical creatures appearing in astral myths of Herakles in relation to the lineage of Phorcys and Ceto in Hesiod's Theogony

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Abstract. In the fifth century BCE, astral mythology, the mythical origin, and the mythical associations of the constellations developed into a specific genre that began to flourish during the Hellenistic period. This paper explores three extant works on astral mythology produced during that period: the *Phaenomena*, written in the third century BCE by Aratus of Soloi (ca. 310-245 BCE); the *Catasterisms*, written by Eratosthenes of Cyrene (276-194 BCE); and the *Astronomy*, written in Latin by Hyginus (64 BCE-17 CE). Next, this paper looks for constellations in which Herakles is prominent in the story of the myth of origin. Then, it compares these constellations and mythical creatures related to Herakles with a diagram drawn by Martin L. West in his commentary on Hesiod's *Theogony* and introduces a possible relation between the mythical creatures appearing in the astral myths related to Herakles and the genealogies in Hesiod´s *Theogony* under the lineage of Phorcys and Ceto. Having the constellations associated with Herakles and its myths, the paper searches for geographical areas where Herakles might have performed those myths. Finally, the paper compares the geographical area with the area of Phoenician colonization, similar to the area of influence of the god Melqart. Centuries later, the stories told by astral myths involving Herakles referred mostly to feats related to the sea and performed in the first place by Phoenicians. Later, the Greeks probably copied those feats. The conclusion is that those astral myths reflected an area of expertise of the Phoenicians: the sea. Perhaps the stories of monsters and creatures of the sea were just a way of depicting the perils of the sea or the stories of hostility between Greeks and Phoenicians for control of colonies in the Mediterranean between the 7th and 5th centuries BCE.

In the fifth century BCE, astral mythology focused on the mythical origin of the constellations and developed into a specific genre that began to flourish during the Hellenistic period. The oldest extant work of the genre is the *Phaenomena*; it was

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written in the third century BCE by Aratus of Soloi (ca. 310-245 BCE) and described the constellations with just a few mythic allusions. The *Phaenomena* is not considered original but based on a lost work written in the fourth century BCE by the astronomer Eudoxus of Cnidos (ca. 408-355 BCE). The second oldest extant work of the genre, the *Catasterisms*, was written by the Alexandrian polymath Eratosthenes of Cyrene[1] (276-194 BCE) and included short stories about the origin of each constellation. The third extant work of the genre is called *Astronomy*. It was written in Latin by Hyginus (64 BCE-17 CE) and draws from the *Catasterisms*, the *Phaenomena*, and other sources.

Within these three works, some of the stories in which Herakles is mentioned refer mostly to feats related to places reached in the first place by Phoenicians. Later, those feats were probably copied by the Greeks. It seems that those astral myths revolve around areas in which the Phoenicians were experts: the sea and colonization. Perhaps the stories of monsters and creatures of the sea were just a way of depicting the perils of the sea, or the stories of enmity between Greeks and Phoenicians for control of colonies in the Mediterranean during the 8th, 7th, 6th, and 5th centuries BCE.

As a short historical introduction, it is necessary to bring to attention that by the 9th century BCE, Phoenicians (allegedly under the patronage of a new god of Tyre called Melqart) founded colonies in Sicily, Sardinia, Cadiz (Spain), Lixus (Morocco), and Utica (Tunisia);[2] and by 814 BCE they founded Carthage (Tunisia).[3] Phoenicians were proficient sailors. They built a maritime empire, perhaps one of the first maritime empires of history, a significant feat for that period, which implied night navigation, traversing the columns of Hercules, and exploring the Atlantic.

[1] The whole original work of Eratosthenes is lost. However, two good fragmentary summaries have come down to us. The fullest of the two is known as the Epitome. The other is known as the Vatican Fragments and even though less complete it includes some details omitted in the Epitome. Eratosthenes and Hyginus, *Constellations Myths with Aratus's Phaenomena*, trans. by Robin Hard (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), [hereafter, Eratosthenes, *Constellations Myths*], p. xxxvii.

[2] Michael Dietler, 'Colonial Encounters in Iberia and the Western Mediterranean: An Exploratory Framework', in *Colonial Encounters in Ancient Iberia: Phoenician, Greek, and Indigenous Relations*, ed. by Michael Dietler and Carolina Ruiz (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), p. 4.

[3] Maria Eugenia Aubet, *Tiro y las colonias fenicias de Occidente: Tercera edición actualizada y ampliada* (Barcelona: Bellaterra Arqueología, 2009), pp. 175-84.

A few centuries later, by the fifth century BCE, Herakles was equated with the Phoenician god Melqart.[4] However, Herakles was not considered a colonizing hero during the archaic period: the colonial Herakles was typical of the later colonial experience.[5]

To investigate a possible hidden connection with the Phoenicians, the first step is to take advantage of the equation of Melqart with Herakles and look for myths in which the figure of Herakles is prominent in the extant works of the genre of astral mythology. In Aratus, Herakles does not play any role in the myth of any constellation.[6] In the *Castasterisms*, however, Herakles is the central character in several myths of origin. Catasterism 3rd tells that the snake which was protecting the golden apples of Hera was turned into a constellation because it was killed by Herakles.[7] Eratosthenes writes:

> This is the large Serpent, the one that lies between the two Bears. They say that it is the one that guarded the golden apples and was killed by Herakles; it was placed among the constellations by Hera, who had appointed it to guard the apples in the land of the Hesperides.[8]

Catasterism 4th considers the constellation of the Kneeler as Herakles stepping on the snake and crushing its head with his knee.[9] Originally known as Ergonasim, to Eratosthenes not only the Kneeler is Herakles but dedicates most of the astral myth to Herakles. Eratosthenes writes:

> This is Herakles, so they say, standing on the Serpent. He can clearly be seen to be standing there with his club upraised, and wrapped in the lion´s skin. It is recounted that when he went to fetch the golden apples, he killed the serpent that had been stationed as a guard; Hera had placed it there for the very purpose of confronting Herakles. […] The serpent is there with its head upraised, while Heracles tramples on it, holding it down with one knee as he treads on its head with his other foot, and he is brandishing his club with his right hand, as though about to strike it, his left arm being wrapped in the lion´s skin.[10]

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[4] Corinne Bonnet, *Melqart: Cultes et Myhtes de l´Héraclès Tyrien en Méditeranée,* Studia Phoenicia VIII (Leuven: Presses Universitaires de Namur, 1988), p. 98.
[5] Irad Malkin, *A Small Greek World: Networks in the Ancient Mediterranean* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p.122.
[6] Aratus, 'Phaenomena', in Eratosthenes*, Constellation Myths*, pp.139-67.
[7] Eratòstenes de Cirene, *Catasterismes*, trans. by Jordi Pàmies (Barcelona: Fundació Bernat Metge, 2004), [hereafter Eratòstenes, *Catasterismes*], p. 85.
[8] Eratosthenes, *Constellation Myths*, p. 12.
[9] Eratòstenes, *Catasterismes*, pp. 89-91.
[10] Eratosthenes, *Constellation Myths*, pp. 26-7.

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On the constellation of the Kneeker, Hyginius repeats almost all the comments of Eratosthenes and adds not only that Aratus claims that no one can know who the Kneeler is, but other opinions such as Hegesianax who propounds that the Kneeler is Theseus or others who say that the Kneeler is Thamyris. Hyginus writes:

> Aeschylus says in his play *Prometheus Unbound* that this is Heracles, fighting not with the dragon but with the Ligurians; for he says that while Heracles was driving away the cattle of Geryon, he passed through the territory of the Ligurians, and when they tried to seize the cattle from him, a fight broke and he shot many of them with his arrows; but when he was out of arrows, Heracles overwhelmed by the host of barbarians and his lack of weapons, sank down on to his knees, having already suffered many wounds; Zeus took pity on his son […] and brought about a large number of stones around him, by use of which Heracles was able to defend himself […].[11]

Catasterism 11th makes the Crab placed in the sky by Hera after being crushed by Herakles during his fight with the Hydra.[12] Eratosthenes devotes almost half of the astral myth of the constellation of the Crab to Heracles. Eratosthenes writes:

> It would seem that it was placed among the stars by Hera because when Heracles was trying to kill the hydra with the assistance of the others, it jumped out of the lake and bit him on the foot, as Panyassis recounts in his *Heracleia*. They say that Heracles in a fury crushed it with his foot and that the crab attained the great honor as a consequence of being numbered among the twelve signs of the horoscope.[13]

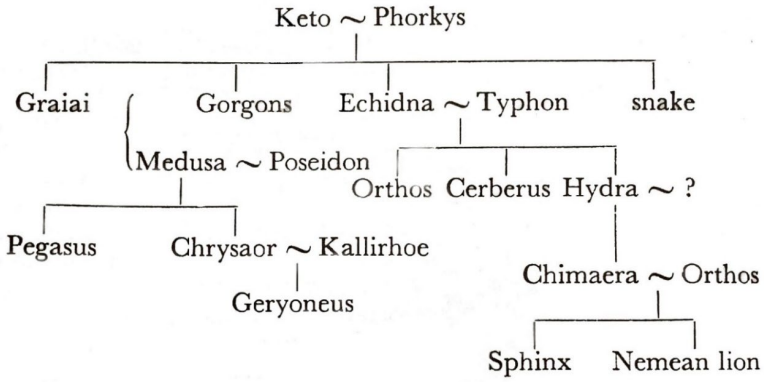
Catasterism 12th treats the constellation first as the lion being placed in the sky because it is the king of the beasts, the Eratosthenes adds as the second option that the lion is the Nemean lion killed by Herakles.[14] Eratosthenes writes:

> […] it would seem that this sign of the zodiac was granted that honor by Zeus because the lion holds the leading position among the four-footed beasts. Some say that it was placed there to commemorate the first labor of Heracles; […]. This also explains why Heracles carries the lion's skin […]. This is the lion that was killed by him at Nemea.[15]

[11] Eratosthenes, *Constellation Myths*, p. 28.
[12] Eratòstenes, *Catasterismes*, p. 116.
[13] Eratosthenes, *Constellation Myths*, p. 66.
[14] Eratosthenes, *Constellation Myths*, pp. 69-71.
[15] Eratosthenes, Constellation Myths, p. 69.

Catasterism 29th explains the myth of the constellation of the Arrow as revolving around Apollo.[16] In *Astronomia*, however, the arrow belonged to Herakles who used it to kill the eagle who was eating by day the liver of Prometheus.[17]

In summary, these are the constellations in which Herakles was considered prominent. Moreover, the creatures killed by Herakles in the *Catasterisms* are either offspring of Neptune or descendants of Phorcys and Keto. Preliminarily, there is a possible connection with the sea through Poseidon, Phorcys, and Keto. The geographical location of some of those astral myths, such as Atlas, the end of the ocean (which could be the Atlantic), Erytheia (the red island), Gades, Tartessos, and Libya,[18] shows that the mythic itineraries of Herakles happened in places colonized by Phoenicians in which the cult of Melqart was already established.[19]



Offspring of Phorcys and Keto. Martin L. West, *Hesiod Theogony*.[20]

On the constellation of Pegasus, to Aratus it is a big monster named Hippos who has Andromeda's head pinned to its navel by a common star which with three other stars forms a large square formed by four bright stars; the head and shoulders of the Horse are marked by fainter stars except for one on the mouth. To Aratus, the Horse is not a quadruped but it is cut off at the navel, and it is said to have created on Helicon the spring Hippocrene with a kick of its forefoot.[21]

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[16] Eratòstenes, *Catasterismes*, p. 192.
[17] Hygin, *L'Astronomie,* trans. by André Le Boeuffle (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1983), Liber Secundus 15, p. 47.
[18] Stesichorus, *The Poems*, trans. by M. Davies and P.J. Finglass (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), p. 258.
[19] Malkin, *A Small Greek World*, pp. 120, 122.
[20] West, M. L., *Hesiod Theogony* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966), p. 244.
[21] Douglas Kidd, *Aratus: Phaenomena* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), [205-224], p. 89.

The basis of the constellation is a large square formed by four very bright stars which the Babylonians knew as the constellation of IKUR.[22] The Sumerian name IKUR means 'field' and the constellation is depicted by a square plot of land divided up by irrigation ditches. On the Dendera Zodiac, the image is represented between the fishes of the constellation of Pisces. This depiction, along with what is known from Babylonian sources, allows us to identify that the corners of the constellation of the Field are the four bright stars that form the square of the constellation of Pegasus.[23]

The noun Pegasus derives from Luwian *pihassa/i-* 'resplendent, mighty' also substantivized to 'lightning', which appears as Π(ε)ιγασις (*Peigasis*) in Lycia and as Πιγασσως (*Pigassos*) in Caria.[24] The word is a derivative of the Luwian stem **piḫa-* 'luminosity, splendor, might'; the etymological interpretation seems clear: *piḫa-* comes from Proto Indo-European **b^{h}eh$_2$-* 'shine, glow', which corresponds to the Greek φαίνο (*phaino*) 'make visible'.[25] It seems plausible that the Greek Pegasos could be the successor of the Luwian storm-god of lightning ^{D}U *piḫaššaššiš*. Moreover, Hesiod describes Pegasos in line 286 of the *Theogony* as a bringer of thunder and lightning Zeus. *Theogony* 284-6 reads:

> Pegasus flew off, leaving behind the earth,
> the mother of the sheep, and came to the immortals;
> he dwells in Zeus´ house and brings the thunder and lightning to the counselor Zeus.[26]

According to this description, Pegasos is very similar to the Luwian storm-god of lightning ^{D}U *piḫaššaššiš.*The god ^{D}U *piḫaššaššiš* is a local Luwian god of Western Anatolia. The god became the personal patron deity of *Muwattalli II*. Such patronage may have its origins in the desperate search by Muwattalli II for a cure for the plague. His grandfather Supilulima died of the plague carried to Anatolia by prisoners deported from Egypt. During the reign of Muwattalli II, besides the plague still affecting Hittite territories, the capital had to be moved to the southern region of Tarhuntassa due to attacks by some tribes from the north known as Kaskas. One of the side effects of moving the capital to the South might have been a close contact with people of the territories of Arzawa, from whom the Hittites

[22] Kidd, *Aratus: Phaenomena*, p. 258.
[23] Gavin White, *Babylonian Star-Lore: An Illustrated Guide to the Star-Lore and Constellations of Ancient Babylonia* (London: Solaria Publications, 2014]), p. 139.
[24] H. Craig Melchert, 'Naming Practices in Second- and First-Millenium Western Anatolia', in *Personal Names in Ancient Anatolia*, reprinted from Proceedings of the British Academy 191, p. 34.
[25] Ignacio J. Adiego, *The Carian Language* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), p. 337.
[26] Hesiod, *Theogony,* p. 25.

copied some rituals against the plague along with other divinatory, mostly ornithomancy, and magical rituals.

According to several references in Hittite texts, most notably the early thirteen century BCE treaty between Muwattalli II and Alaksandu of Wilusa, the Arzawa lands comprised five individual kingdoms: Arzawa Minor, Mira, the Seha River Land, Hapalla, and Wilusa. Arzawa Minor, located south of the Seha River, had as its nucleus the city of Apasa (Ephesos), and Wilusa, most likely, was Troy. Roughly, the Arzawa lands occupied territory in Western Anatolia extending from the Troad region in the Northwest, inland along the valleys of the rivers Hermos and Caicos, southwards along the western coast as far as the Meander valley, and eastwards to the region southwest of the Salt Lake.[27]

Most of the terms used in Hittite ornithomancy and most of the names of the augurs and women performing the rituals are Luwian, the language shared by the people of Arzawa. Moreover, the Luwian epithet of this god presumably could have continued in Greek tradition as Pegasus mentioned for the first time by Hesiod in *Theogony* 281.[28]

In Hesiod´s *Theogony*, Pegasus and Chrysaor are sons of Poseidon and Medusa, one of the Gorgons. *Theogony* 280-3 reads:

> When Perseus cut her head off from her neck,
> Great Chrysaor and the horse Pegasus sprang forth;
> The latter received his name from being born beside the waters of Ocean,
> The former from holding a golden sword in his hands.[29]

Medusa is a mortal Gorgon. In Hesiod´s *Theogony*, Phorcys is a sea god, father of the Graiae and the Gorgons. Thus, Chrysaor's mother could be Anatolian as well.

Thus the origins of Pegasus as well as his brother Chrysaor along with some other descendants of the lineage of Phorcys and Keto might be from Western Anatolia. Thus Pegasus and Chysaor could be Lycian or even Carian.

In Greek astronomy, the name of Pegasus is always Hippos. Aratus does not mention any wings in the figure of the Horse, nor among the stars referred to by Hipparchus. Aratus, however, attributed the Horse the creation of the spring Hippocrene. That might have induced the association of Pegasus with the Horse.[30]

On the constellation of Pegasus, Eratosthenes describes it in the Catasterism 18:

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[27] Trevor R. Bryce, 'Chapter Three: History', in *The Luwians*, ed. by H. Craig Melchert (Leiden: Brill, 2003), pp. 35-40.
[28] Manfred Hutter, 'Chapter 6: Aspects of Luwian Religion', in The Luwians, ed. by H. Craig Melchert (Leiden: Brill, 2003), p. 269.
[29] Hesiod, *Theogony, Works and Days, Testimonia*, trans. by Glenn W. Most (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2018 [2006])., p. 25.
[30] Kidd, *Aratus: Phaenomena*, p. 258.

> Only the front half of it is visible, down to its navel. According to Aratus, this is the horse that created, with a blow of his hoof on Mount Helicon, the spring that is known accordingly as Hippocrene (the Horse´s Spring).
>
> Others say, however, that this is Pegasos, which flew up to heaven after Bellerophon´s fall; but some regard the account as implausible because the Horse has no wings.

Commenting on the constellation of Pegasos (Hippos), Hyginius repeats the comments by Eratosthenes but wrongly includes Aratus as one of the authors linking the constellation of the Hippos with Pegasos, as Eratosthenes does. Hyginus writes:

> According to Aratus and many other authors, this is Pegasos, offspring of Poseidon and the Gorgon Medusa, who kicked the ground with his hoof on Mount Helicon in Boeotia to open up a spring, which is named Hippocrene (the Horse's Spring) after him.[31]

After that, Hyginus talks about Bellerophon, Pegasos, and the Chimaera devastating the land of Lycia.

> Others say that when Bellerophon came to visit Proitos, the king of the Argives, the king´s wife Anteia, fell in love with the guest and begged him to satisfy his desires […]. When she failed to achieve her wish […] forestalled him by telling her husband that he tried to rape her. Having taken a liking to Bellerophon, Proitos was unwilling to inflict punishment on him directly, but knowing that he had the horse Pegasos, sent him over to Iobates, the father of Anteia […] to allow Iobates to defend his daughter's honor by sending him out against the Chimaera, which was devastating the land of the Lycians at that time with the flame that she breathed out.[32]

Hyginus seems to accept that the Chimaera was a Lycian monster. *Iliad* 6.155-199 tells a version of the story of Bellerophon in which Pegasos is not mentioned.[33] According to Homer, the hero is sent to Lycia to kill not only the Chimaera but the Solymi and the Amazons as well. *Iliad* 6.155-199 reads:

> Now the wife of Proteus, fair Anteia, lusted madly for Bellerophon, to lie with him in secret love, but could in no way persuade wise Bellerophon, since his mind was upright. So she made a tale of lies, and spoke to king

[31] Eratosthenes and Hyginius, *Constellation Myths*, p. 50.
[32] Eratosthenes, *Constellation Myths*, p. 51.
[33] West, *Hesiod Theogony*, p. 256.

> Proetus: 'Either die yourself, Proetus, or kill Bellerophon […]. He shunned killing him […] but he sent him to Lycia, and gave him fatal tokens […], and ordered him to show these to his father-in-law so that he might perish. […] And when he came to Lycia […] then […] the king of Lycia […] first […] told him to slay the raging Chimaera. She was of divine stock, not of men, in front a lion, in back a serpent, and in the middle a goat, breathing out terribly the force of blazing fire. And Bellerophon slew her, in obedience to the portents of the gods. Next, he fought with the glorious Solymi, […] and thirdly he slew the Amazons, women the peers of men.[34]

On the other hand, Hesiod wrote that both Bellerophon and Pegasos killed the Chimaera. *Theogony* 319-325 reads:

> She gave birth to Chimera, who breathed invincible fire,
> terrible and great and swift-footed and mighty.
> She had three heads: one was a fierce-eyed lion's,
> one a she-goat's, one a snake´s, a mighty dragon's
> Pegasus and noble Bellerophon killed her.[35]

Geryoneus was killed by Herakles. The father of Geryoneus was Chrysaor, the brother of Pegasos. *Theogony* 287-290 reads:

> And Chrysaor, mingling in love with Callirhoe,
> glorious Ocean´s daughter, begot three-headed Geryoneus,
> who was slain by Herakles' force
> beside his rolling-footed cattle in sea-girt Erythea;[36]

Herakles was the enemy of the progeny of Chrysaor. Somehow, Herakles might have something in common with the Carians. The Carians are the men from Miletus, where the Meander river has its delta. Halikarnassos is a well-known Carian city. Herodotus was born in Halikarnassos by 484 BCE.

According to recent research, the Carians were famous as boatmen and shipbuilders in antiquity, partly fueled by the abundant timber for shipbuilding and partly by the protection offered by the coastal dwelling places on the coast of Caria, between the peninsula of Halikarnassos in the north and the harbor town of Kaunos and the mouth of the Indos river in the south.[37] A 'Carian thalassocracy' has been often discussed. Diodorus Siculus wrote in Book V.53 that the Carians

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[34] Homer, *Iliad Books 1-12*, trans. by A.T. Murray, revised by William F. Wyatt (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003 [1924]), pp. 287, 289.
[35] Hesiod, *Theogony,* p. 29.
[36] Hesiod, *Theogony,* pp. 25, 27.
[37] Alexander Herda, 'Greek (and our) Views on the Karians', in *Luwian Identities*, ed. by Alice Mouton, Ian Rutherford, and Ilya Yakubovich (Leiden: Brill, 2013), p. 447.

were rulers of the sea after the period of the Trojan War; in Book V.84, Diodorus argues that the Carians steadily increased their power after the war of Troy, became masters of the sea, took possession of the Cyclades, and expelled the Cretans who inhabited them; later, when the power of the Greeks increased they drove the Carians out of the Cyclades.[38]

Caria has been etymologically linked with the Bronze Age Anatolian name Karkisa. In Hittites texts, Karkisa appears to have been governed by councils of chiefs rather than kings, perhaps indicating that Karkisa never had the status of a kingdom like those of the Arzawan lands. Besides, Karkisa had sporadic contacts with the Hittites, sometimes collaborating but sometimes fighting with them. In the treaty between the Hittite king Muwattali and the king Alaksandu of Wilusa, Karkisa is a possible initial target for a Hittite campaign. Ramesses, in his account of the battle of Qadesh, lists Karkisa in the ranks of the massive army that the Hittites raised for the war, indicating that the people of Karkisa were mercenaries.[39] It has also been suggested that the Carian probably could be associated with the 'Sea Peoples' of the Late Bronze Age.[40]

Conclusion

Aratus does not mention Herakles in any of the astral myths. Eratosthenes mentions Herakles in several astral myths and devotes a great deal of those myths to Herakles. Hyginus mentions Herakles in the same proportion as Eratosthenes but adds more myths to avoid giving Herakles a prominent role by showing not only more versions but a variety of heroes in any of those astral myths. Thus it seems that Eratosthenes added Herakles in those myths. By doing so, he linked those myths with the sea, the Phoenicians, the Lycians, and even the Carians.

Most of the creatures killed by Herakles are either offspring of Neptune or belong to the progeny of Phorcys and Keto as shown in Hesiod's *Theogony*. Pegasos, son of the Medusa, one of the Gorgons, could be of western Anatolia, more specifically from the Arzawa lands. Thus Chrysaor could be Anatolian too and the Chimaera is also located in Lycia. In conclusion, the lineage of Phorcys and Keto in Hesiod´s *Theogony* may quite likely be located in western Anatolia.

[38] Diodorus of Sicily, *Books IV (59)-VIII*, trans. by C. H. Oldfather (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1970 [1939]), pp. 243, 327.
[39] Trevor Bryce, *The Trojans and their Neighbours* (London: Routledge, 2006), p. 144.
[40] Herda, 'Greek (and our) Views on the Karians', p. 444.