SIMON ESPOSITO
Independent researcher
Traralgon, Australia
https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8274-7615

UDC: 821.14′02:821.111′01].091

AN ANCIENT GREEK COGNATE OF *BEOWULF*: IDAS AND MARPESSA, AND THE LEUKIPPIDES

Abstract. – The search for ancient analogues of the Anglo-Saxon epic *Beowulf* has found parallels only of style and isolated motif. But the complex of myth around the Greek hero Idas can be reconstructed as a parallel of its plot, and may be the first from a heroic tradition outside Scandinavia. If confirmed, this would prove that the essential form of *Beowulf*, the elaboration in epic of a universal fairytale known as "The Three Stolen Princesses" (formerly "The Bear's Son"), was inherited from a common Indo-European tradition. The correspondences are supported by an identically phrased epithet used of the heroes Idas and Beowulf in the *Iliad* and *Beowulf*. The reconstruction depends on reconciling conflicting accounts of Idas' marriage, the stories of Marpessa and the Leukippides.

Key words. – "The Bear's Son", Beowulf and Greek mythology, fairy and folk tales, Indo-European epic, "The Three Stolen Princesses".

Introduction

The Anglo-Saxon epic *Beowulf* is a Christianized testament of the Northern Iron Age, composed probably in the eighth century CE and surviving in a single manuscript of the early eleventh.[1] Despite the poem's length, the plot is a simple one: the Geatish hero Beowulf sails to Denmark and saves it from the monster Grendel; and returning to his home he dies slaying a dragon whose rage over a stolen treasure has fallen on his people. The long history between the fights, during which Beowulf ascends to the kingship after the Geats have been led into a series of disastrous wars, is narrated only in digressions, giving rise to a distinctive two-part structure placing the otherworld adversaries in the foreground. That they carry so much of the poem's meaning then raises the question of its

[1] *Beowulf* and the *Iliad* quoted and translated from the editions by Mitchell and Robinson 2007, and Van Thiel 2010. Both poems are here understood as "secondary epic": literary works composed in oral-formulaic style, but drawing on a living tradition of oral poetry.

prehistory – and even whether this structure reflects a different ethical tradition – and this is what motivates the search for its sources and analogues.[2]

One of the achievements of the search was to identify that the main plot is an elaboration into epic of a universal fairytale known as "The Three Stolen Princesses", telling of the hero's descent into the lower world in quest of maidens abducted by a monster, Type 301 in the Aarne-Thompson-Uther (ATU) index of traditional narratives[3]. It was also discovered that it has a cognate text in the fourteenth-century CE Icelandic *Hrólfs saga kraka*.[4] This is a directly narrated version of the same history of Scandinavian high kingship that *Beowulf* tells allusively, and it demonstrates the central place of the fairytale in that history. The variant they share lacks its defining marriage story – turning instead to the heroic potential of the fights with monsters – but *Beowulf* goes further in limiting its female characters to a small range of stereotypes drawn from early medieval aristocratic values. The fairytale background might well indicate that the richer cast of otherworld and mortal women in *Hrólfs saga*, despite its hostile portrayals of those who contest sovereignty, reflects the inherited story.

It was natural also to search for analogues of *Beowulf* in other epic traditions and early Christian literature; but this has been limited in its results, finding only parallels in rhetorical patterns and isolated motifs. Pursuing the story of the Leukippides, though, reveals a full structural parallel of fairytale and epic in the marriage of Idas and Marpessa, a lost myth of some importance (centred on Apollo's defeat by a mortal hero), surviving only in the allusion of *Iliad* 9.555–564 and its more informative ancient commentaries, and a few variants in Archaic poetry.[5] *Beowulf* and *Hrólfs saga* would then not only have a common origin in Northwest Germanic tradition, but also reflect a vastly more ancient epic inherited from Indo-European and given a new setting in northern Europe. A reconstruction depends on reconciling conflicting accounts of Idas' marriage, the Homeric tradition – in which he and Marpessa are the parents of the hero Meleager's wife – and another more fully recorded saga-history that tells of his death soon after betrothal to one of the Leukippides, the "daughters of Leukippos".

---

[2] Summarized in T. M. Andersson 1996.

[3] References to ATU types are the revised index of Uther 2004. On the "tale type" (recurring story-patterns made up of sequences of motifs) as the basis for robust historical and geographical comparison, see G. Andersson 2000, 17–20.

[4] References are to the chapter divisions in Slay 1960; these are retained in the translation of Byock 1998.

[5] For the scattered sources, see Gantz 1993, 89–90 and 196.

Greek Saga-History and "The Three Stolen Princesses"

The Leukippides, Hilaeira and Phoibe, were depicted in Spartan legend as Messenian princesses abducted by the Dioskouroi, Kastor and Polydeukes, on the eve of an arranged marriage to their cousins the Apharetidai, the "sons of Aphareus", Idas and Lynkeus. The marriage would have united the royal houses of Messenia, Sparta's colonized neighbour; and the legend represents an assertion of Spartan supremacy (against a traditional Messenian history of resistance) that was reflected in propaganda imagining sons borne by the sisters to the Dioskouroi as ancestors of its historical kings.[6]

An older tradition, preserved from the *Kypria* (the prequel to the *Iliad*), knows the Leukippides as daughters of Apollo, and the legend appears to commemorate the transfer of a Messenian royal cult to Sparta. The mortal king Leukippos, "White Horse", would then be derived from a title of Apollo in his solar aspect.[7] The Dioskouroi are cast in the uncharacteristic role of abductors rather than rescuers, which assimilates them to a pattern of foundation myth typical of the Iron Age (archetypally the twins Romulus and Remus, and the abduction led by Romulus of the Sabine women). It is thus more likely that a primary myth, of otherworld sisters abducted by a being from the lower world,[8] was drawn into the purely historical legends forming around the tenth-century BCE Dorian conquest of Lakedaimon and foundation of Sparta, and its adoption of the Dioskouroi as patrons.

An episode from Peloponnesian saga-history – attested in multiple variants establishing its greater antiquity – contradicts the Spartan story. It continues the Argonaut tradition of the pairs of brothers as companions; but, falling into strife, there is a raid on Messenia, a pursuit, and an ambush set by the Dioskouroi in which all except Polydeukes are killed. Most accounts include the remarkable detail that it is *Idas* who survives the combat, and is about to kill Polydeukes when he is struck down by a thunderbolt from Zeus, a contrivance suggesting that *he* was the original hero.

Idas and Apollo are in fact the only common figures between this complex of myth and the separate tradition of his marriage to Marpessa; and the question then arises whether the apparently conflicting traditions can be reconciled. In surviving accounts Marpessa is the daughter of Eue-

---

[6] Accounts of the conflict are compared in Gantz 1993, 324–327.

[7] On the Leukippides as solar deities, see West 2007, 232 and 235; and further references in Davies 2019, 102–103.

[8] In archaic form often associated with landscape myths: for a pattern offering an archetype for lower-world rescues in Eurasian fairytales (variants and episodes centred on ATU 313 "The Magic Flight"), compare "The Beginning of the Narran Lake", in Yolen 1986, 231–233.

nos, a tyrannical river god of the Pindos mountains, from whom she is won by Idas; and her choice of Idas as husband must be defended a second time against Apollo. But without the framework of Spartan legend Idas' origin is obscure, apart from the general association with the southern Peloponnese, and a tradition that he was a son of Poseidon. Assuming *him* to have been the hero of the Leukippides story, and that his marriage to Marpessa reflects its happy ending, yields a fully articulated version of "The Three Stolen Princesses", in the distinctive variant compounded with the Bear's Son tale – an independently occurring ancestor legend that forms the hero's birth story – known as the main fairytale analogue of *Beowulf*.

"The Three Stolen Princesses" is extremely diffuse in its variations, and no example represents all of the permutations better than the reconciled Idas myth.[9] Herakles is acknowledged to be characterized partly as a bear-hero, at least in the humanized form of the "Strong John" tradition (ATU 650, tales of a precociously and supernaturally strong but otherwise unpromising youth), but Idas is another such figure, of prodigious strength and appetite, "who was the strongest of men born upon the earth at that time" – in the identical phrasing of *Iliad* 9.558–559 and *Beowulf* 194–197 and 789–790 – and who successfully challenges Phoibos Apollo with his bow just as Herakles challenges Helios. To this can be added the motifs of Euenos as a lower-world being, bound to the limit of the River Lykormas, from whom the winning of Marpessa is unmistakably a rescue; Poseidon's horses as the supernatural helpers in their escape; and the contention with Apollo over Marpessa as the fight with the dragon (or dragon-figure) of the subtype ATU 301D "Princess's Ring", a story-pattern that like *Beowulf* separates lower-world rescue from culminating fight with a more extended sequence of adventures.

The association of Marpessa with Apollo identifies her at some level with the Leukippides; only the latest of the references in Greek poetry explicitly say Idas and Apollo contend over her as *marriage rivals*, and Leukippos is traditionally the father of *three* daughters. The splitting of a unified myth of "Apollo-Leukippos" and his three daughters into separate strands can be explained by the exceptional role of the third daughter, Arsinoe, as mother of the healer Asklepios. Her name is not fixed in the tradition: although the circumstances of *Arsinoe's* marriage are not known, she is also *Koronis*, in a variant of the Asklepios myth that preserves a parallel of Marpessa's choice of Idas over Apollo.[10]

---

[9] See the the appendix to this article for a tabular summary drawn from "typical" examples of the fairytale, against which the elements of the ancient texts are set.

[10] Gantz 1993, 91.

But fragmentation of the myth is also an implied consequence of the fairytale archetype itself. Not only are there simplified variants involving just one princess; in the full version one sister guides the hero in rescuing the other two, and he has *two* treacherous companions, from whom they must again be rescued. The companions may also be the hero's brothers, and Aphareus is *also* traditionally the father of three sons. And they may be magical beings in their own right, with powers like Lynkeus' swiftness and keen sight.[11] They aid the hero in his descent to the lower world, but then cut the rope on him before he can climb up after the princesses, claiming for themselves the rescuers' reward of marriage with the older sisters; and this is the space in the story-pattern into which the Dioskouroi can be drawn as rivals of Idas.

"The Three Stolen Princesses" and Indo-European Epic

That such a coherent sequence of motifs can be assembled from the scattered sources (with so few substantial variations between them other than the Marpessa and Leukippides marriage traditions) demonstrates the antiquity of the fairytale pattern for the myth; and its compounding of the two variant types as episodes of one story – the rescue from the lower world *and* the fight with the dragon – matches the most distinctive structural feature of *Beowulf*. The roles of Euenos as father and Apollo as rival must be reversed, but the father of the princesses is a jealous guardian in many versions of the fairytale; and in the most closely related traditions of dragon-slaying tales the adversary can be other kinds of supernatural being.

This means that the story of Idas and Marpessa is far more than the sharing of some motifs with what is after all a comprehensive epic, and supports the fundamental insight of Friedrich Panzer in 1910 that the correspondence between *Beowulf* and the fairytale demonstrates its pre-Germanic origin. Panzer established the universal distribution of the Bear's Son tale; and most importantly for the prehistory of *Beowulf* found evidence of the fairytale's compound form reflected in common Indo-Iranian tradition.[12] But the lack of parallels in epic-heroic traditions outside Scandinavia led to a rejection of his conclusions about the poem, and even interpretations sympathetic to its basis in fairytale have attributed it to the inspiration of English or Scandinavian authors.[13]

---

[11] Lynkeus, loyal to the end, is not an anomaly in the fairytale pattern, since he bridges closely related ATU 303 "The Twins or Blood-Brothers" (and its hybrids with ATU 300 "The Dragon-Slayer"), notable for the role of the hero's supernatural animal companions, of equal importance to his brother (and sometimes substituted for him).

[12] Panzer 1910, 226–245.

[13] For example Lawrence 1928, 171–178.

In this context the verbal parallel between *Beowulf* and the *Iliad* mentioned above suggests that there was a primary epic telling the marriage story of the Bear Hero. The shared phrasing is more complex than standard formulas describing exceptional strength or fame – such as the ἄcβεcτον μένοc "might unquenchable" and ἄcβεcτον κλέοc "fame unquenchable" possessed by heroes in Homer – and distinctive in the *Iliad* and *Beowulf* are the semantically parallel adverbial phrases inside a relative clause constructed around a superlative adjective and partitive genitive, and linked across metrical units: ὃc κάρτιcτοc ἐπιχθονίων γένετ᾽ ἀνδρῶν | τῶν **τότε** "who was strongest of those men born upon the earth | **at that time**" (*Iliad* 9.558–559, ἐπιχθονίων modifying the verb γένετ᾽ even though it is an adjective grammatically linked to ἀνδρῶν); *se þe manna wæs mægene strengest* | ***on þǣm dæge*** *þysses līfes* "who was in might the strongest of men | **at that time** in this world" (*Beowulf* 789–790). Both examples define a confrontation with a supernatural being, an emphasis that may help in their preservation; but since the purpose of Homer's allusion is to give the ancestry of Meleager's wife (daughter of Idas and Marpessa), the marriage story remains a central motivation.

That a relative clause is a key feature of the correspondence resolves the doubt over whether *se* in *Beowulf* 194–197, where the same phrasing appears at the first mention of the hero Beowulf, is a demonstrative "that one, he" or relative "who", a distinction not recoverable on linguistic grounds alone because of the manuscript's minimal use of punctuation:[14] *Higelāces þegn* [...] *se wæs moncynnes mægenes strengest* | *on þǣm dæge þysses līfes* "Hygelac's thain [...] who of the mortal-born was in might the strongest | at that time in this world". This example confirms an additional common element in the etymological link between γένετ᾽ and *moncynnes* (through Proto-Indo-European **ǵenh₁-* "beget").

The whole interlocked epithet gives the impression of utmost strength, and may be particularized to the Bear Hero. Its component phrases *appear* to be formulaic, in the classic sense of "a group of words which is regularly employed under the same metrical conditions to express an essential given idea",[15] and the comparison shows the *Beowulf* poet varying the foundational pattern in simpler formulaic style in lines 750–752 in relating Grendel's own perceptions of the struggle: *onfunde* [...] *þæt hē ne mētte middangeardes* | *eorþan scēata on elran men* | *mundgripe māran* "[Grendel] realized that he had never encountered in the world | in the regions of the earth another man | with a stronger grip". But how extensively the epithet can be paralleled in the wider epic tradition (and

[14] On the ambiguity, see Mitchell and Robinson 2007, 173.

[15] Parry 1971, 272.

in what contexts) would be crucial in determining whether Beowulf and Idas have a common origin.

A Myth of Divine-Mortal Marriage

The comparison of the Idas myth with *Beowulf* and the thread in *Hrólfs saga* devoted to the bear-hero Bodvar Bjarki, his birth and coming to Denmark to become King Hrolf's greatest champion (chs 17–34), shows that Germanic tradition cut the princesses from an inherited epic, and did not independently elaborate into epic one of the fairytale's variants that lacked the marriage story.[16] This presents a storytelling challenge that the two texts meet in different ways, *Hrólfs saga* folding together the lower-world rescue and dragon fight (the "Euenos" and "Apollo" episodes) into a *single* fight with a dragon that ravages Denmark each Yule; and *Beowulf* in its concentrated, elegiac portrait of the hero, in which the dragon fight is aligned in form with ancestor legends of stolen otherworld treasures, becoming the cause of his death and imbued with the symbolism of Ragnarök.[17]

But the interest of the inherited story in divine-mortal marriage is preserved in *Hrólfs saga* in its wider history of the Scandinavian high kingship; and Bodvar's supernatural origin is retained, unlike the humanized Beowulf. Since Bodvar's character and role in the story is explicitly that of a bear-hero, and since Beowulf has such striking parallels with Idas, it suggests that Idas should be identified with *Arkas*, another Peloponnesian hero of semi-divine birth and descended from a bear. Their stories do not directly overlap, but what emerges is a composite character that reflects the archetype of the Bear's Son hero.

Arkas was the son of Kallisto – an exiled companion of Artemis – who shares with Bera, Bodvar's mother (whose name means "Bear"), a distinctively mythological variant of animal-ancestor story, motivated through the agency of a divine-sorceress figure. Bera's persecution by the queen Hvit is a parallel of Kallisto's by Artemis, but the hostile portrayals are belied by the sovereignty myth that makes Kallisto the mother of a

[16] Bodvar's marriage to Hrolf's daughter Drifa (ch. 24) is unrelated to the main variant of the fairytale that retains the princesses: told entirely within heroic values, it corresponds to the Danish king Hrothgar's parting gifts to Beowulf. The marriage seals Hrolf's relationship with his most valued retainer; and Hrothgar concedes equal status to Beowulf's lord, Hygelac, by granting him his own choice of Danish royal treasures.

[17] The theft of a cup from the dragon's mound, and the curse on the Geats that follows upon its slaying, points to a composite of two types of ancestor legend sharing a theme of broken otherworld taboo: for the British context, see Briggs 1976, under "Fairy cup" and "Lambton Worm". The wider tradition of fairy cup legends is studied through Type 6045 in Christiansen 1958): *Beowulf* appears to innovate by having the king's receiving of the stolen cup cause a transfer of the dragon's rage onto his people rather than a dissolving of the feud.

dynastic founder. Although her story is submerged in a generic myth of Zeus as royal ancestor – and she is transformed into a bear as punishment after the birth of her son – the correspondences suggest that he displaced a figure like Bera's lover Bjorn (which also means "Bear") as Arkas' father. Bjorn is a prince cursed into the shape of a bear by Hvit (jealous of the farmer's daughter Bera whom he loves) and killed by his father's huntsmen at her instigation; but in the simple form of the Bear's Son tale the hero's father is an otherworld being who takes the shape of a bear.[18]

That Artemis and Hvit could *also* be cognate figures from the same original story is suggested by an early religious identification of the bear as a lunar animal, in a regenerative role shifting between initiation and the conferring of sovereignty.[19] Authority over initiation and the bear as a cult symbol were key attributes of Artemis;[20] and the association of Artemis, Kallisto, and *her* son is then robustly linked to the (admittedly more generically humanized) relationship of Hvit, Bera, and Bodvar. The cluster of associations between myth, fairytale, and epic would then be pre-Greek and pre-Germanic in origin, and define Bodvar and Beowulf as the heroes of sovereignty myths.[21]

The variations on these themes in its closest cognate *Hrólfs saga*, and the interweaving of Bodvar's fate with that of Hvit, and ultimately also of Skuld (the daughter of an otherworld woman), who defeats Hrolf at the end of the saga, suggests that the legendary history in *Beowulf* not only omits the hero's marriage story, but conceals similarly distinctive female characters beneath its stereotypes.[22]

The only myth told of Arkas concerns the overthrow of an indigenous Arkadian cult that has descended into cannibalism, a radically changed

---

[18] On the Bear's Son tale in its archaic Scandinavian context as ancestor legend, see Byock 1998, xxvii–xxviii.

[19] Eliade, 1963, 156–176.

[20] Burkert 1985, 151–152.

[21] This supports the identification of Idas with Asklepios' father (see above), and explains the presence of the *second* figure named Beowulf in the poem, the *son* of the culture hero Scyld Scefing, in a brief reference (lines 53–56) without anchor in wider legendary history. This perhaps reproduces a fossilized genealogical mention of Beowulf himself (where generations might easily be reversed), since Scyld, as saviour of the ancestral Danes, is in a role analogous to that of Asklepios: Idas-Asklepios and Beowulf-Scyld would then be a father-son doublet reflecting the renewal of kingship at a moment of communal crisis.

[22] A connection between this narrative framework in *Hrólfs saga* and *Beowulf* appears in a Northern saga tradition recorded by Prokopios in the sixth century CE (*The Gothic War* 8.20.1–41), telling of a queen of "Brittia" (an island described as part of Scandinavia) sailing with a great army against the Varni, a tribe dwelling east of the Rhine, to enforce her betrothal to *Radigis*, the son of their king: text and translation in Dewing 1928, 252–265. Since *Hrothgar* is the parallel of Hrolf in Anglo-Saxon tradition, the similarity of names and location suggests the final battle between Skuld and her kinsman Hrolf (chs 31–34 in *Hrólfs saga*).

ideological setting in which Kallisto becomes a source of pollution and a marriage story is again lost.[23] But its essential theme – the moral collapse of a human realm reflected in the predations of manlike monsters – is an analogue of the fight with Grendel in its pervading mood, the element of setting and atmosphere absent from the allusions to Idas and Marpessa.

But a marriage story for Arkas, along with much Beowulfian detail, does survive in a version of his myth that had become attached to legends around the Olympic boxer Euthymos of Italian Lokris, as reported in the second century CE by Pausanias (6.6.4–11).[24] His journey to Temesa at the time of its annual sacrifice of a maiden to a monster that has taken over a temple is a striking situational parallel of Beowulf's and Bodvar's inspired journeys to Denmark at the fading of the Scylding dynasty. The Germanic tradition is more archaic in portraying the king's hall as the sacral space where the conflict takes place; but, as in *Beowulf*, there is a long watch for the monster and its escape fatally wounded into water. And the maiden's role in shaping events, promising to marry Euthymos if he rescues her, restores a key feature of the fairytales.

The comparison made possible by the Greek stories isolates as an early medieval borrowing the structure the Grendel episode shares with an Irish tale type, "The Hand and the Child".[25] This too is a "temple-cleansing" tale of the type that comes to dominate the tradition, like that of Arkas; and although it offers a prototype for the English poet's treatment of the episode – drawing together the characteristic motifs of the monster's severed arm and the hero entering a cave and killing two trolls of different sexes – the story of Idas shows that *Beowulf* places it within a larger mythic pattern reflected in "The Three Stolen Princesses".

Appendix. "The Three Stolen Princesses" Compared to Ancient and Medieval Texts

The table below places the elements of the Idas myth in a narrative sequence alongside representative fairytales and other ancient and medieval analogues. A more precise grid of elements cannot be attempted here: the validity of the observed correspondences needs to be tested against a comprehensive review of subtypes and variants across both ATU 301 "The Three Stolen Princesses" and its related tale types, especially to es-

[23] For the traditions, largely preserved in astronomical texts, see Gantz 1993, 725–729. In one variant, both Kallisto and her son are about to be slain after she has entered a temple in bear form, when Zeus transfigures them to the sky.

[24] Translation in Levi 1979, 301–304. The link to Arkas is noted in G. Anderson 2000, 94–95. Although Anderson emphasizes a variant in Kallimachos that shows influence from a "Red Riding-Hood" tradition, the story is structurally an example of ATU 300 "The Dragon-Slayer".

[25] On which see Scowcroft 1999.

tablish the distribution and relative chronology of ATU 301D “Princess’s Ring”, the closest structural parallel of *Beowulf*. Also important are the tales loosely described above as “temple-cleansing”, which appear to be reduced variants from this group: see for example the Japanese tale “Shippei Taro” (Seki 1963, 33–36), attributed to ATU 300 “The Dragon-Slayer”; and for the hostile ideological shift underlying accounts of the Artemis-Kallisto-Arkas and Hvit-Bera-Bodvar doublet, Afanasyev’s “The Sorceress” (Guterman 1945, 567–568), attributed to ATU 307 “The Princess in the Coffin”.

Fairytales cited in the left column, showing the narrative elements most closely aligned to the Greek and Germanic traditions, are Gonzenbach’s Sicilian tale “Bensurdatu” (Zipes 2004, 26–31); Afanasyev’s “Dawn, Evening, and Midnight” (Guterman 1945, 457–462), more overtly mythological in its opening; the Syrian tale “Flowers That Vanished in the Night” (Bushnaq 1986, 104–109); and the Norwegian “Bird Dam” (Christiansen 1964, 244–252), an example of ATU 301D. Texts cited in the right column are Apollodoros’ *Bibliotheka* (with translations from Hard 1997), *Beowulf*, *Hrólfs saga* (chs 20–23), the *Iliad*, Pausanias (with translations from Levi 1979), and Gantz (1993).

“Dawn, Evening, and Midnight”: Three princesses languish in an underground chamber. “Sovereign, our father, let us out to see the bright world and walk in the green garden.”	Pausanias 3.16.1: “Near here there is a sanctuary of Hilaeira and Phoibe [...] Apollo’s daughters. Their priestesses are called by the same name [...] Leukippides.”
Their father yields to their entreaties, but a sudden whirlwind seizes them and carries them off.	Apollodoros 3.10.3: “who were carried off by the Dioskouroi”. “In addition to these [Leukippos] had a third daughter, Arsinoe.”
	In Pausanias 3.16.2–3, the Dioskouroi spirit away a girl kept confined by her father.
“Dawn, Evening, and Midnight”: The king’s boyars will not attempt the search for his daughters, so he promises to make any man who rescues them his son-in-law.	Gantz 1993, 196: The fairytale’s linking of rescue and marriage contest is echoed by Euenos surrounding his hall with the skulls of slain suitors.
“Dawn, Evening, and Midnight”: A poor widow in a distant village has three sons, mighty champions. “All of them were born in one night.”	*Hrólfs saga*: After Bjorn is killed, the outcast Bera gives birth to three sons with supernatural animal natures. They go their separate ways, but his brothers advise Bodvar to serve at Hrolf’s court. There he shames the king’s champions at their inhospitable
“When the king’s call reached them, they straightway asked for their mother’s blessing [...] and rode to the	

capital city."

"We have come to you not to celebrate a feast, but to perform a task. Give us leave to go in search of your daughters."

"Bensurdatu": The three companions come at nightfall to a desolate place where they find shelter at the hut of an old woman. She directs them to the place where the princesses are being held.

Bensurdatu must descend by rope to the bottom of a well.

In the major variant represented by "Flowers That Vanished in the Night", a monster steals the flowers of a unique, otherworldly plant from the king's garden each year; and one year his sons await its coming in turn. The variant continues as the main version, except that captive princesses are *discovered* by the youngest son when he pursues the monster to the lower world. In its most reduced form, the pattern of *Beowulf*, there are no princesses, and it centres on the relationship between the hero and his companions as they fight the monster: a magic weapon, which in rescues from the lower world is revealed to the hero by the youngest sister, is now among treasures he happens upon in the monster's lair.

In "Bensurdatu", following a variant that subsumes elements of the subtype ATU 301D "Princess's Ring", each sister is held by a different monster, two ogres and then finally a dragon. Bensurdatu slays them in turn, and the sisters each give him a gold crown.

In "Bird Dam", the hero frees the princesses from a troll, and is betrayed by his helper, the Red Knight.

feasting, and finds an extraordinary companion in the cowardly Hjalti.

Apollodoros 3.10.3: Aphareus has three sons, but only Idas and Lynkeus enter the story.

In *Hrólfs saga* Bodvar finds shelter from a storm with the elderly parents of Hjalti, the boy he later ennobles at Hrolf's court, and they direct him on the last stage of his journey. The scene occupies the same position as the coastguard's challenge and recognition of Beowulf (lines 189–319).

In Pausanias 6.6.7–10, the story of the Arkas-Idas figure Euthymos, the attacks of an undead monster drive the citizens of Temesa to the point of abandoning the city, and their propitiatory annual sacrifice of a maiden repeats the living man's crime of rape. In *Hrólfs saga* the king lets the dragon ravage Denmark while keeping his champions safe in his hall. In *Beowulf* they are powerless to stop Grendel's attacks on the king's hall; it is abandoned at night, and they resort to sacrifices (lines 171–188).

Grendel is fatally wounded by Beowulf, and in vengeance Grendel's mother resumes his raids. Beowulf finds the sword with which he slays them when he pursues her to the mere; a miraculous light reveals other treasures.

Gantz 1993, 89–90: Allusions to Marpessa make the confrontations with Euenos and Apollo appear linked as if in one episode. Although this is the pattern of most fairytale variants, ATU 301D agrees with Beowulf in separating the episodes: the fight against troll or ogre; homecoming and recognition; and the fight against a second adversary, a dragon or dragon figure.

In “Flowers That Vanished in the Night”, a version with just one princess, a magic ram carries her back to the upper world.

“Bensurdatu”: Betrayed by his companions, Bensurdatu wanders lost in the lower world until a magic ship, bearing a token of the crowns, carries him home.

The companions are exiled, and their marriages to the older sisters presumably annulled.

The theme of bridal self-choice in the resolution of Marpessa’s story reappears in the youngest sister’s refusal to marry until Bensurdatu returns.

Gantz 1993, 196: Idas and Marpessa escape with the help of Poseidon’s horses, and Euenos perishes in the pursuit.

Gantz 1993, 324–325: Although accounts of the Apharetidai’s pursuit of the Dioskouroi give the explicit motive of retrieving stolen cattle and treasure, the episode follows close on the abduction as if causally linked. Two accounts further imply an original story based on claims of illegitimate marriage: there is a verbal confrontation between the pairs of brothers over marriage rights; and the Dioskouroi steal cattle from the Apharetidai to pay a bride-price to Leukippos.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Anderson, G. (2000) *Fairytale in the Ancient World*. London and New York: Routledge.

Andersson, T. M. (1997) “Sources and Analogues”, in Bjork, R. E. and Niles, J. D. (eds.) *A Beowulf Handbook*. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, pp. 125–148.

Briggs, K. M. (1976) *A Dictionary of Fairies: Hobgoblins, Brownies, Bogies and Other Supernatural Creatures*. London: Allen Lane.

Burkert, W. (1985) *Greek Religion: Archaic and Classical*, trans. J. Raffan. Oxford: Blackwell.

Bushnaq, I. (ed. and trans.) (1986) *Arab Folktales*. New York: Pantheon Books.

Byock, J. L. (trans.) (1998) *The Saga of King Hrolf Kraki*. London: Penguin.

Christiansen, R. T. (1958) *The Migratory Legends: A Proposed List of Types with a Systematic Catalogue of the Norwegian Variants*. Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia.

Christiansen, R. T. (ed.) (1964) *Folktales of Norway*, trans. P. S. Iversen. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Davies, M. (2019) *The Cypria*. Washington, DC: Center for Hellenic Studies.

Dewing, H. B. (trans.) (1928) *Procopius: History of the Wars, Volume V: Books 7.36–8*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Eliade, M. (1963) *Patterns in Comparative Religion*, trans. R. Sheed. Cleveland: World Publishing Company.

Gantz, T. (1993) *Early Greek Myth: A Guide to Literary and Artistic Sources*. 2 vols. Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Guterman, N. (trans.) (1945) *Russian Fairy Tales*. New York: Pantheon Books.

Hard, R. (trans.) (1997) *Apollodorus: The Library of Greek Mythology*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Lawrence, W. W. (1928) *Beowulf and Epic Tradition*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
Levi, P. (trans.) (1979) *Pausanias: Guide to Greece, Vol. 2: Southern Greece*. Rev. ed. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
Mitchell, B. and Robinson, F. C. (eds.) (1998) *Beowulf: An Edition*. Oxford: Blackwell.
Panzer, F. (1910) *Studien zur germanischen Sagengeschichte. I. Beowulf*. Munich: C. H. Beck.
Parry, M. (1971) “Studies in the Epic Technique of Oral Verse-Making. I. Homer and Homeric Style”, in Parry, A. (ed.) *The Making of Homeric Verse: The Collected Papers of Milman Parry*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, pp. 266–324. First published in *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology*, 41 (1930), pp. 73–147.
Scowcroft, R. M. (1999) “The Irish Analogues to Beowulf”, *Speculum*, 74(1), pp. 22–64. doi: 10.2307/2887269.
Seki, K. (ed.) (1963) *Folktales of Japan*, trans. R. J. Adams. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
Slay, D. (ed.) (1960) *Hrólfs saga kraka*. Copenhagen: Ejnar Munksgaard.
Uther, H.-J. (2004) *The Types of International Folktales: A Classification and Bibliography, Based on the System of Antti Aarne and Stith Thompson*. 3 vols. Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia (FF Communications 284–286).
van Thiel, H. (ed.) (2010) *Homeri Ilias*. 2nd rev. ed. Hildesheim, Zürich and New York: Georg Olms Verlag.
West, M. L. (2007) *Indo-European Poetry and Myth*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Yolen, J. (ed.) (1986) *Favorite Folktales from Around the World*. New York: Pantheon Books.
Zipes, J. (trans. and ed.) (2004) *The Robber with a Witch’s Head: More Stories from the Great Treasury of Sicilian Folk and Fairy Tales Collected by Laura Gonzenbach*. New York and London: Routledge.