

## Chronotopes of Hellenic Antiquity: The Strait of Reggio and Messina in Documents from the Grand Tour Era

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Few other localities, in the Mediterranean and beyond, can compete with the alluring literary reputation of the Strait of Scylla and Charybdis, the monsters from the *Odyssey* that have traditionally been associated with the marine passage between Calabria and Sicily. In Homer's account, Odysseus had to cross a narrow passage, on each side of which lurked a fearsome monster. The first, Scylla, was a six-headed predator whose waist was encircled by wailing, canine heads. The second, Charybdis, was a vast creature whose gaping maw could gulp mountains of water along with anything that sailed too close.<sup>1</sup> Homer did not provide a specific setting for the tale, but the vagueness of the epic poem and geographical clues gave rise to a tradition that identified the Strait as the setting of the myth.<sup>2</sup> By looking at modern written and visual accounts from the Grand Tour era, ranging from the many eighteenth to the early twentieth centuries, this chapter will illustrate how some European travellers viewed the relationship between the Homeric myth and the Strait. This relationship grew out of philhellenism and, often, from an urbanite perspective of lands they would have perceived as remote and timeless, uncontaminated by modernity and at once exotically beautiful yet subtly threatening. Focusing on a textual and visual analysis of these historical documents, this chapter traces a series of interrelated issues: first, the impact of the Greco-Roman literary tradition on inspiring re-enactments of the voyage of Odysseus within the Strait. The South of Italy became the setting for erudite escapism and literary travel: within the region, striking sceneries co-existed with the disquieting *rêverie* of legends and myths. Second, the chapter will demonstrate how these monstrous-feminine creatures were seen to allegorize the marvels and dreads of an area characterized by

inspiring geographical landmarks, currents and volcanic activity, and the co-existence of a poetic-romantic and rationalistic model of the reception of myth. Third, the chapter will discuss how the Strait began to be conceptualized as a counterpart to the civilized space represented by European states. Entering the area of Magna Graecia entailed an experiential motion through time. The South was thus understood as a space characterized by natural wonders, picturesque and wild landscapes, surviving myths of marine monsters, backward villages and the ruins of ancient civilizations.

Moreover, the chapter offers some thoughts on the dissemination of the geo-cultural trope of the Strait today, suggesting a long-lasting influence of the travelogues on local histories of the region, to the point where they have become strongly tied to its heritage, alongside the reception of Hellenism and its symbols.<sup>3</sup> First, the Grand Tour decisively anticipated the establishment of modern tourist industries – for which the Strait can be said to have become a potential ‘myth-place’, a leisured space of escapism.<sup>4</sup> Second, the travel literatures elaborated through the Grand Tour experience represent some of the first historical documents in which the Strait began to circulate in modern cultural and leisure industries. The Strait was understood through commonplace ideas of ancient Greek antiquity, in the guise of a *chronotope*, a literary travel location informed by ‘the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships . . . artistically expressed in literature.’<sup>5</sup> Indeed, the Grand Tour era could be said to have inaugurated a specific way of looking at the landscape of the Strait and its symbols. Depicted at once as a seemingly timeless, ahistorical setting of idyllic beauty and subtly disquieting exoticism, yet at the same time a cultural space inextricably tied to Hellenism and its myths, the Strait has maintained this image up to the present day, within a broader cultural supremacy assigned to Hellenism within Western popular histories and discourses on heritage.<sup>6</sup>

### The Grand Tour and classical antiquity

The fascination of artists and travellers for the Mediterranean Sea, its myths and history as transmitted through the Greco-Roman tradition<sup>7</sup> was decisive to the reception of the area.<sup>8</sup> For European elites, the presence of sporadic travelogues such as Thomas Hoby’s diaries from 1547–64, along with the advent of modern tourism, travelling to such destinations and re-enacting previous explorations became a formative experience.<sup>9</sup> The appropriation of classical culture by erudite travellers took the form of a rite of passage in which intellectuals, writers,

artists and poets travelled to places like Florence as of the highest artistic expression of the Renaissance, or Rome and its material traces republican and imperial history.<sup>10</sup> Further south beyond Naples, their encounters gave rise to amazement. In Calabria and Sicily, the former glory of the Greeks seemed to be confined to a complete historical oblivion, and travel acquired an added layer of adventurous, exotic enticement.<sup>11</sup>

The Strait of Scylla and Charybdis represented perhaps the most striking landmarks of Homeric myth, along with Capri and its Sirens in Campania, the rocks of the Cyclops in Aci Trezza, and Hephaestus' Mount Etna in Sicily. The lexical correspondence between the Scylla monster and the coastal town of Scilla, in the ancient Chalcidian region, has been a crucial element through which modern European visitors to the Strait have understood the area.<sup>12</sup> The town's toponym decisively reinforces an association that dates as far back as ancient Greek coinage.<sup>13</sup> On the Sicilian coast, Cape Pelorus ('monstrous') also bears an etymology consistent with the Homeric tale.<sup>14</sup> Localizations of Greek mythology, shared across travel diaries and literary accounts, can be related to a tradition of Homeric geography that can be traced back to Strabo's accounts<sup>15</sup> and which left its mark on works such as Eustathius' twelfth-century CE commentary on Homer, and Ortelius' 1619 *Sicilia Antiqua*. Later, localizations were transmitted in widely available compendia of knowledge such as the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* and Jean Baptiste Le Rond D'Alembert and Denis Diderot's *Encyclopédie*: in the latter, Scylla and Charybdis are discussed in sections on mythology and poetry as well as those on ancient and modern geography, and mapped 'in the Strait that separated Italy from Sicily'.<sup>16</sup>

The year 1783 saw the publication of two influential travelogues that used myth-places as landmarks for their itineraries: the Abbé de Saint-Non's *Voyage pittoresque* and Henry Swinburne's *Travels in the two Sicilies* (see Fig. 2.1), successful books that prompted later translations and reissues.<sup>17</sup> An increasingly abundant body of travel literature had already been catering to audiences searching for books on this area of Italy – in 1771, Johann H. Riedesel had published *Reise durch Sizilien und Großgriechenland*. An established tendency of these texts was also to align ancient and modern sites through place names. Riedesel's, Saint-Non's and Swinburne's travel books abounded in references to Greco-Roman literature. Riedesel cites the 'Charybdis of the ancient' close to Messina.<sup>18</sup> Swinburne also locates the mythical Scylla within the Strait, and compares his comfortable travel to the more perilous journey of Ulysses.<sup>19</sup> Saint-Non's voyage dedicates several pages to the *detroit* of Scylla and Cape Pelorus.<sup>20</sup> Crossing the Strait soon became an established must-see in the rediscovery of southern Italy's classical landmarks.<sup>21</sup>



**Fig. 2.1** Unknown author, Strait of Messina with Charybdis and Scylla, 1686.

In his 1812 *Letters*, Astolphe de Custine, a French aristocrat, said of travel in the region of the Strait, 'I could not have forgiven myself had I not let myself be transported by the waves of the strait that have seen the passage of Ulysses' boat. It was either to face Scilla's rocks, or not come to Calabria at all.'<sup>22</sup>

Scilla's rocks were 'celebrated by the ancient fables' and part 'of classical memory': crossing the Strait thus became a form of access through and to a space predetermined by the imaginative feeling of ancient mythology.<sup>23</sup> Citing the Odyssean passage became a recurrent practice, a chance to display erudition, poetic flair or naturalistic and antiquarian interest. A sense of fascination with the South's mythical toponyms pervaded re-enactments of the 'real' routes of the travel of Odysseus, as travellers drew poetic and artistic inspiration from the landscape and at the same time displayed their modern, rationalist interpretations of ancient sea myths, beliefs and superstitions.

### Mapping the myth-places

Cartographic media such as maps or engravings, along with their visual renditions of the literary myth-places, also insisted on the Strait as an exotic

land. Together, these media established southern Italy on the map of travel literature.<sup>24</sup> Visual consumption of the sceneries of southern Italy was on the rise and enjoyed increasingly literate international audiences. Reisefeld's *Reise* had been translated into French and English in 1773, Swinburne's *Journey* into French and German in 1785, and Saint-Non's *Voyage* into English and German in 1789. Within the South, the Strait of the Greek legends represented an iconic, powerful landmark. Riedesel discussed the currents of the Straits in relation to the actual currents off the shore of Messina.<sup>25</sup> Swinburne debated the toponymical relation between the mythical Scylla and Cape Scyllaeum, another locality that sat alongside traditional mythical associations.<sup>26</sup> Saint-Non dedicated extensive attention to Reggio, Messina, Scilla and Cape Pelorus.<sup>27</sup> His lavishly illustrated travelogue included a map of southern Italy clustered with references to myths, from Cape Pelorus in the Strait to the Lestrigonians in Sicily, and the Promontory of Hercules in Calabria (see Fig. 2.1). Saint-Non followed in the footsteps of a previous journey by 'travelling philosopher' Carlantonio Pilati, between 1775 and 1777.<sup>28</sup> La Salle's *Voyage* (1829) similarly describes mythical landmarks such as 'Jaci Reale' and its 'rocks of the Cyclops' (Aci Reale in Sicily, off Mount Etna) and the Strait. The latter occupies a special place: among the many hazards and wonders of the South, 'there exist two in particular, which the imagination of poets and popular traditions have recognized under the names of Charybdis and Scylla.'<sup>29</sup> Later on, Norman Douglas, a British writer, would describe Capri as the land of the Sirens, indulging in poetic and imaginative descriptions of the marine fauna and its relations to myths.<sup>30</sup> Overall, these documents show a rich constellation of mythical localizations set in the Mediterranean, which found in the Strait and Scilla a consistent and well-known place name. Along with other myth places, the Strait's fame faded back into myth as a fascinatingly remote region, which only became accessible through the routes informed by ancient sources, but also initiated novel exploration. As a consequence, the village of Scilla and its scenery began to enjoy increasing attention in their own right. Achille Étienne de La Salle's 1822–6 *Voyage* reports the Strait as a place where nature had unfolded its marvels.<sup>31</sup>

This fascination was shared by Willem Fortuyn's artwork for an article on 'the southern view of the town of Scilla' from 1773. Fortuyn here epitomizes the *picturesque* – an aesthetic category bringing nature as an essential element together with monumental remains and the relics of the past<sup>32</sup> – while incorporating the monsters as part of a tradition that had been widely established in media such as encyclopaedias, engravings and etchings and cartographic iconographies. In addition to contributing to the establishment of a *picturesque*

landscape, Fortuyn visualized the monsters within a smaller frame in the artwork. This choice could be related to previous cartographic practices: landmarks from the Greco-Roman tradition had already populated various mapmakers' bestiaries, such as the 1515 Schöner globe.<sup>33</sup> However, while earlier sea monsters inhabited and symbolized unknown areas of the far seas, Fortuyn's Scylla and Charybdis could hardly be said to represent the lurking dangers of the sea anymore, at a time when science and progress in navigation technology had made travel safer, and as the Age of Discovery pushed the uncharted areas of wilderness away from the Mediterranean. Rather, the Strait resonated with tales of ancient sailors who would risk their lives by navigating dangerous straits with primitive technology, while the monsters could serve as iconic and anthropomorphic embellishments, expressing a philological and literary form of erudition shared by writers and readers. Matthaeus Merian's *Topographia Italiae* (1688) depicted the Strait of Scylla and Charybdis from the close perspective of the sea, allowing the reader to interpret the now absent monsters as metaphorical embodiments of the currents, rocks and whirlpools of the Strait. The rise of positivist thought could thus be said to have favoured the tendency – which already existed in antiquity – to explain myth as a form of imperfect, pre-scientific thought, which concealed geographical or natural truths behind allegorized symbols, on which proper, modern rationality could finally shed light.<sup>34</sup> Scylla and Charybdis had been related to the Strait's unique currents that generated whirlpools, as well as the protruding rocks of the town of Scilla, ever since the accounts of Thucydides.<sup>35</sup> Thus the myths became commonly explicable as embodying the apprehension and fears of ancient sea people dealing with the dangers of currents, unknown marine creatures or volcanic eruptions from the nearby Etna and Stromboli. The monsters stemmed from phenomena 'exaggerated by people's imagination to the point where they became fables.'<sup>36</sup> And yet, while science could now explain sights that the ancients would have feared and transfigured into myth, this still did nothing to dispel the fascination with the Strait and southern Italy as a cove of mythical landmarks and scientific curiosities.

### Between nature's dread and beauty

In the eyes of modern visitors, the Strait, and broadly speaking the South, belonged to a part of the world still bordering on the wild and untamed forces of nature, such as volcanoes and unique marine currents: while such phenomena were now understood by science, they nonetheless characterized the region with

a majestic threat. Along with an appreciation of the area's natural beauty, there lurked a sense of fear for its underlying, threatening forces of nature. It is interesting to read Fortuyn's treatment of Scilla as if foreshadowed by such relations. Scilla is principally represented as a picturesque, idyllic place, though the monsters situated in the smaller illustration at the bottom of the print, in addition to reminding the viewer of the area's genealogy, embody the lurking dread that the area inspired. Earthquakes and tsunamis had been feeding the imagination of European travellers for many centuries, and were largely reconnected to these ancient myths.<sup>37</sup> In 1638, German polymath Athanasius Kircher had returned from his travels in southern Italy 'having witnessed the eruptions of Mount Vesuvius' – one of the two volcanic landmarks of southern Italy, together with Etna in Sicily – 'as it creaked and groaned under the strain of its geologic rhythms'.<sup>38</sup> This experience heavily influenced his *Mundus Subterraneus*, a vast compendium of symbols, curiosities and stories in which Hephaestus and Etna, as well as the whirlpools of the Strait, were portrayed as marvellous places. The book was produced in Amsterdam, 'the centre of the European book trade', highlighting the already strong interest of European urbanites in the images of mythical landmarks in the far-away South.<sup>39</sup>

Several documents from the Grand Tours display similarly strong reactions to travelling in the area of the Strait, though through a rationalizing lens that set them apart from Kircher's metaphysical peregrinations.<sup>40</sup> Custine's *Mémoires et voyages* of 1830 insists on the 'couleur d'époque' of southern Calabria, its delightful scenery and the sublime nature of the primordial forces that make it appear a paradise on earth.<sup>41</sup> Yet the region also bears traces of the most terrible effects of a nature that had 'revolted against the conquests of man, deriding his civilization'.<sup>42</sup> Duret De Tavel, a French official, described the earthquake and tsunami which devastated Calabria and Sicily in 1783, reporting how the promontory of Campallà (Monte Pacì, south of Scilla) 'collapsed into the sea and pushed an enormous mass of water onto the opposite shore . . . swallowing all the people who were seeking shelter from the previous earthquake on the shore of Scilla'.<sup>43</sup> Another report on the disaster was signed by Didier, who wrote that 'the huge mass of water flowed on the two borders of the Strait, swallowing a great number of Sicilians . . . and the Calabrese who had sought shelter'.<sup>44</sup> These renditions were often accompanied by interpretations of monstrous figures as allegories. In 1907, Norman Douglas equated the metaphorical dread of the Sirens and Scylla and Charybdis to sinister phenomena 'like the worst earthquake of the century' and debated the mythical figures as signifiers of death and putrefaction. Scylla, oscillating between the utter monstrosity of her Homeric

form and the accursed femininity of some of her variants, embodied both the beauty of Scilla's landscape and the suffering inflicted by nature upon its inhabitants.<sup>45</sup> The destruction and wholesale suffering brought about by the 1783 earthquake that devastated the region (with Scilla as one of the epicentres)<sup>46</sup> bewildered literate visitors, who would relate to the place through a combination of beauty and horror encapsulated by the symbols.<sup>47</sup>

Aside from the historical event of the 1783 tsunami, poetic enjoyment and rationalizing interpretations went hand in hand with traditional versions of the tale. Charles Didier rehearsed the notorious etymological explanation of the dogs' heads of Scylla as the hissing winds through the rocks that produced a deceitful barking sound;<sup>48</sup> Arthur John Strutt also noted in 1842 that the rocks in Scilla seemed to be eternally fighting a marine war with the 'barking waves'.<sup>49</sup> Edward Lear reported, with a hint of disappointment, expecting howls and screams but being unable to perceive even a small 'degree of romance in our researches' (1852); however, he was still awestruck by the 'wide expanse of sea' and the 'very magnificent' rocks of Scilla, 'rising above the boiling current of dark blue foamy water'.<sup>50</sup> All sorts of suggestive elements contributed to inspire poets and intellectuals: the cliff dominating the sea, the rocks, the view of Sicily and the Aeolian islands, the peculiar customs, and even the fishing techniques that allegedly corresponded to those described in the *Odyssey*: the travelling aristocrat Custine noted, while passing 'through Charybdis and Scylla', that the hunt for swordfish, a peculiar 'species of notorious monsters', could be found in ancient texts.<sup>51</sup> Elements of atavistic fear could be elicited by a plethora of suitably inspiring elements in the eyes of the rationalizing visitors. Marine animals like sharks and whales roamed the Strait with threatening, massive mouths – the identification of monsters and marvels through science, including those found in curiosity cabinets, were another penchant of positivist explanations. Protruding sea rocks would serve as a danger for boats, and winds would hiss and wail through the cliffs, sounding like packs of dogs. Strong tides and whirlpools would appear, spurred by the meeting of the Ionian and the Tyrrhenian seas at different sea levels and temperatures, generating turmoil and dangerous eddies.

### 'Southernizing' the landscape: nature and civilization

The scenery of the Strait, separating the mainland from Sicily and with the Aeolian islands in sight, certainly inspired literary appreciators with its combination of idyllic beauty and threatening natural phenomena. Visitors to



the Strait came not only from philhellenic cultural backgrounds, but also from latitudes with relatively less welcoming climates, and were thus inclined to idealize the scenery. Still, the power of the landscape's seemingly objective, pre-cultural marvels was also largely prepared and fostered by a series of grand narratives on civilization and nature. The myth of Scylla and Charybdis served, in this light, as a suitable symbol for one of the European continent's peripheries, and for untamed nature. Partly, the reception of the landscape was caused by the region's insularity. Even by the early sixteenth century, when the cartography of Europe 'was very well established', and when 'that of the New World and the coasts of Africa was evolving rapidly', the Strait still functioned as a border for access to the East and South.<sup>52</sup> Even as new continents were discovered and colonized, and the unreachable poles of the Earth conquered by daring explorers, the area around the Strait remained relatively inaccessible to European travellers: Mediterranean Sea routes had declined in favour of transatlantic exchanges and, paradoxically, modern visitors to the region could choose to 'play Ulysses' after tortuously reaching southern Calabria by land from the Italian peninsula.<sup>53</sup>

In addition to being hard to reach, in the eyes of the Travellers the Strait was certainly neither urbanized nor European, though nor was it quite Oriental either; at the same time, it was not entirely archaic, though definitely not completely civilized. Such a perspective was underpinned by a selective view on the area – a binary between urban and country life that could be transposed into a North/South narrative, itself part of a 'complex interplay between the ancient and the modern in Renaissance humanist culture'.<sup>54</sup> The fact that the Strait served as a passage to foreign cultures reinforced the tendency to overanalyse the landscape's exceptional nature and pit it against modernity's culture. For instance, phenomena that were supposed to be unique to the area, such as Charybdis' whirlpools, in fact occurred elsewhere, in much more geologically striking ways, close to the Scandinavian Lofoten islands. Still, due to the cultural influence of Hellenism, the term 'Charybdis' had become a signifier for these phenomena, as can be seen in a print of the 'Charybdis Muscana', representing the Moskstraumen whirlpool (in which erupting columns of water artistically recall the heads of Scylla).<sup>55</sup>

The impact of the so-called Age of Discovery on the understanding of the world certainly contributed to the exoticized, awestruck reception of the Strait within the South of Italy.<sup>56</sup> Dynamics of centre and periphery – and consequently of culture and nature, familiarity and foreignness – took centre stage in binary representations of Europe and its borders.<sup>57</sup> In the case of southern Italy, this perspective was further reinforced by the aforementioned tendency of seeing the region as the site of a 'stark contrast between present-day isolation and the

lost glory of the past'.<sup>58</sup> This view of Italy became a constant in foreigners' depictions of the region, even if it had earlier origins – Italian Dominican Leandro Alberti (1479–1552), who lived between Bologna and Rome, had already drawn abundantly from ancient tropes in describing Calabria as an extension of ancient Greek history, and disseminated them in print decades earlier.<sup>59</sup> As his *Descrittione* of Italy ventured into uncharted territory, Alberti relied on ancient texts, maintaining an 'eerie silence on contemporary political and religious upheavals', while displaying 'garrulity in relating myths, legends, and anecdotes from the long-lost past'.<sup>60</sup> Alberti's obliviousness on Byzantium, or other histories from the region, displays a highly selective focus on the South of Italy as an ideal extension of the *topos* of Hellas that could be reclaimed as essentially Western, even though it bordered on the Orient. This perspective reflected the South's 'imaginative destiny at the margins of Europe', which could be understood 'in relation to that of Eastern Europe, itself a link between modernity and backwardness'.<sup>61</sup> The former, however, benefited from the classical tradition: Aristocrat Custine wrote on both the Strait (1830) and the 'East' of Europe in 1843, considering both areas primitive and underdeveloped, but only the latter populated by savages with not a hint of taste or civilization.<sup>62</sup>

One can thus understand the selective gaze that determined the visitors' frequent choice to focus less on urbanized centres like Reggio and Messina and more on depictions of small villages and the countryside. Mythical place names worked as 'a culturally dense access to ancient history', even though their reception, as in all cases, was being obviously influenced by and 'intimately connected with present coordinates and interests'.<sup>63</sup> While effective differences existed in the level of development between southern Italy and the fast-developing northern countries affected by the Industrial Revolution, visitors' representations still exasperated socio-cultural differences. A descent to southern Italy seemed to equate to an utter temporal regression, towards an Orient/South that was also the Past. Natural and cultural wilderness could merge into one as the Strait began to acquire narratives that connoted uniqueness and nostalgia. Travel experiences usually came with an infatuated or patronizing lens that could turn to scorn when vestiges of the former glory were rare or non-existent, since the mythical landscape could also be profitably commoditized. Saint-Non marketed southern Italy in his travelogue after realizing that north of Rome, Italy was not such a novelty to his audience. He asked the artist Denon to turn empty plains into powerful views of 'rustic' bridges with added vegetation growing out of the ruins to enhance the picturesque effect. Saint-Non also quickly capitalized on the 1783 earthquake – occurring almost at the same time the *Voyage* was about to go to press, destroying

Reggio, Messina, Scilla and other places. Saint-Non went back to print and used an illustration of Messina – represented as a torn page – as the cover.

The experience of colonialism provided another grand, underlying narrative. Colonial parallels, as noted by Ceserani, ‘would soon take centre stage in the writing of ancient history, affecting views of Magna Graecia ... imagined as a colonial territory of the ancient Greeks’: ever the pragmatic Briton, Swinburne produced a scrupulous account of motives for interest in the South, refraining from merely dramatizing the ruins of Magna Graecia but instead noting that ‘a situation blest with so delicious a climate and so fine a haven, must have attracted the early notice of the eastern navigators, who, like Christopher Columbus, Francis Drake and James Cook of modern times, sailed from home in quest of new worlds, and unexplored coasts.’<sup>64</sup> Prominent travelogues mostly ‘fail to mention the work of early geographers and topographers who had written on Magna Graecia, presenting instead their trips to South Italy as novel explorations of unknown lands’, showing a ‘widening gap between local and foreign approaches to the region’ at that moment in history.<sup>65</sup> The new travelogues stepped into territory conceptualized as uncharted, as reflected in their narrative style, publishing history and their fixation on ruins and landscape. Early modern travellers made sense of the new worlds that they encountered on their travels through their own ethnocentric views: borders were imagined and manufactured as territories where meanings were created and transformed.<sup>66</sup> Attached to Italy’s ‘ankle’ on its southernmost border, forming a progression of high mountains descending to steep cliffs, the landscape of Calabria afforded vistas of the Strait only after tortuous mountain paths: crossing was an exciting and potentially profitable act that could be framed as a narrative of world discovery.

Naturally, there were exceptions to this narrative. British explorer Thomas Hoby had admired Messina’s neoclassical ‘fountaine of verie white marble’ in his 1547–64 *Travels* (representing Neptune, Scylla and Charybdis, commissioned by the Senate in 1557 and dedicated to Michelangelo’s assistant Giovanni Montorsoli), and had praised the city as quite lively.<sup>67</sup> The fountain – receiving and amplifying a tradition of illustrations, maps and art while signalling the relation between myth and the city – was an expression of the wealthy elites’ power within the harbours of the Strait, though most European visitors tended to essentialize the whole region as archaic. Custine’s visit to Reggio in 1830 almost ruined his uchronic wanderings into the lost past of Greater Greece as he was forced to acknowledge that the urban centre was actually, like the Messina of Montorsoli’s statue, modern – a busy and well-connected harbour. In time, though, he resumed his previous accounts on pre-modern vistas and the rural

and isolated world of the southern spirit, romantically celebrating Arcadian life and the pre-cultural wilderness of the picturesque.<sup>68</sup> The new genre of travel writing was in some ways 'divisive almost by definition, as foreigners . . . claimed the right to treat the South as an unknown region.'<sup>69</sup>

### The tourist gaze

In some respects, travelogues preconized the fascination for otherness and experiential loss of the modern tourist. As early as 1176, John of Oxford, the Bishop of Norwich, had behaved like an ill-suited traveller today, complaining about the 'excess of heat' during his trip to see 'the rocks and the whirlpools of Scylla and Charybdis.'<sup>70</sup> Like a modern tourist, albeit with a scarcely adaptive spirit, the bishop wanted to bridge over to the disembodied mythical materials by touching the place 'with both feet on the ground.'<sup>71</sup> While merely an anecdote, this episode sits well with the series of socio-cultural historical dynamics through which the exoticism of the Strait was framed and transmitted from elite travellers into modern tourism.

Riedesel, Saint-Non and Swinburne were highly influential in perpetuating the mythical fame of the Strait in such a perspective. Subsequent visitors did not refrain from commenting on the Strait of Ulysses as one of the main attractions to the symbolic consumption of the area, even if they were only passing on a boat on their way back to Naples. Goethe, with Riedesel's guide in hand in 1768–88, was one of these visitors.<sup>72</sup> This perspective preconized an onset of tourism in which commonplace sights of the South were formed exactly 'as economic and political might in Europe shifted northward', and the status of Italy and Greece diminished, while their allure grew as comparatively distant lands that attracted interest from seekers of exoticism.<sup>73</sup> Novelty became a recurring motif during the eighteenth century, a time of discovery and new beginnings that also saw the emergence of new forms of antiquarianism. Revolutions in taste and social formations meant that 'traveling gentlemen replaced armchair scholars as the main figures of innovation.'<sup>74</sup> With the Napoleonic Wars, southern Italy had progressively become a destination for travellers in search of traces of ancient civilizations, though most of them stopped at Naples, since roads and facilities were generally very poor.<sup>75</sup> When in 1705 the English playwright, essayist and poet Joseph Addison praised Italy as a travel destination, 'he was referring to a country whose southernmost point, as far as the tourists were concerned, was still Naples.'<sup>76</sup> The majority of early

eighteenth-century visitors did not foresee even brief excursions off the beaten track and probably assumed that ‘l’Europe finit à Naples . . . La Calabre, la Sicile, tout le reste est de l’Afrique’ (Europe finishes in Naples . . . Calabria, Sicily, all the rest is part of Africa).<sup>77</sup> Towards the nineteenth century, however, travelling was no longer a prerogative of the élites, and tourism in the South became gradually more widespread among the lower classes that mimicked the aristocrats.<sup>78</sup> In the same period, there was a growth in the production of travel accounts, which stimulated foreign travel. The popularization of the routes ran parallel to the establishment of mythical monsters as recognizable signifiers of the area, a trend already well established by media such as maps and illustrations. Gissing’s *By the Ionian Sea*, ending with an image of Etna and the Strait of Scylla and Charybdis, featured an attached map of southern Italy and Sicily.<sup>79</sup>

Travel literature ‘provided an opportunity for autobiography and literary amateurism, not least in the readable context of a heroic or mock-heroic journey’.<sup>80</sup> An influential textbook already existed in the form of Joseph Addison’s *Remarks on Several Parts of Italy* which concerned the ‘antiquities and curiosities’ to be found in Italy, depicting southern Italy, in orientalizing fashion, as a trekking ground for reliving the landscapes and stories of Greek civilization.<sup>81</sup> Works like the 1819 *Classical Tour through Italy and Sicily* by Richard Hoare further demonstrated the blend of literary interests and leisure that would, at a later point, be labelled as literary tourism.<sup>82</sup> An antiquarian, Hoare set off to little-documented areas of the South and Sicily, guided by classics like Pliny and Horace. Murray’s 1863 *Hand-Book for travelling in the Continent* was embraced, along with similar books, as a model for touristic behaviour. The archaic civilization of the South held the romantic promise of an escape from modernity and its grip on the individual. The *uchronia* of the South, the continent’s original cradle as part of Greater Greece (and thus Hellenic history) could mean losing the self in intellectual, historical or poetic contemplation. A form of escapist movement anticipated the leisure industries’ subsequent catering to tourists seeking ‘personal adventure’ and a ‘crossing of boundaries’, defined in reference to the ‘distressingly remote’ landscapes they sought, as well as by ‘the demand for alterity’ that the industry produced and quenched.<sup>83</sup> One example may be found in George Robert Gissing’s affectionate re-enactment of the classical voyage, which seemed to project him back to the moment when myth ‘first occurred’, through a form of mythical reactivation.<sup>84</sup> Thus Gissing spoke about the Strait in 1901 in his travelogue *By the Ionian Sea*:

Alone and quiet, I heard the washing of the waves; I saw the evening fall on cloud-wreathed Etna, the twinkling lights come forth on Scylla and Charybdis;

and, as I looked my last towards the Ionian Sea, I wished it were mine to wander endlessly amid the silence of the ancient world, to-day and all its sounds forgotten.

Such was the fame of the Strait among some travellers that the images of myth were not separable from geography. In *The Dialogic Imagination*, Bakhtin defines a chronotope (or 'time space') as 'the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature'.<sup>85</sup> For Bakhtin, the chronotope was a formal, constituent category of literature. In this context, I am borrowing his definition to define the Strait of classical myth as a conflation of historical and temporal otherness, a discourse that could be extended to southern Italy at large. In the body of documents explored by this study, Hellenic Italy, seemingly virgin and undiscovered, became an ideal setting for travelogues.<sup>86</sup> Books such as Lenormant's *La Grande Grece* (1881) widely advertised and capitalized on Magna Graecia's unfulfilled potential as 'an alluring, little-known destination and subject of study'. Elisabeth Décultot's likening of Winckelmann's history of art to a travel narrative grasped this tendency for the foreignness of place and narrative to converge on past remoteness, inviting it to be traversed.<sup>87</sup> All in all, these experiences anticipated a sense of 'touristic landscapes', for which the seductive nature of these places resided not just in their 'natural' aspects, but also in opening up the self to an encounter with it and the 'unknowns of the journey'.<sup>88</sup>

### The Strait: chronotopes of affect

With the onset of mass communications, globalized transmissions of information, along with the rise of transnational audiences and cultural industries, the Strait's identity and its recognizable features were further disseminated. Today, across a great variety of media, the myth is still related with the Strait, and the Strait owes part of its fame to the 'monsters'. This occurs increasingly outside of traditional, local contexts. Moreover, as a native of the area of the Strait, I have been able to observe for many years that the assumptions and ideas drawn from the mainstream, international media inevitably return to impact on the ways in which locals conceptualize the Strait. In Scilla, some people have celebrated the myth by establishing novel statues, exploiting mythical names for restaurants such as *Glaucus* or *Le Sirene*; it can be said that many consider the cultural capital of myth as an intangible yet essential form of capital to draw from, for the benefit of the tourism and hospitality sector. The Grand Tour travelogues played a part

in these developments, since they have been incorporated into local histories of the area, becoming part of the tradition themselves. Marketing imagery, publications and promotional materials produced by institutions and publishers frequently frame them as part of their local history, along with a sense of appreciation for everything that might reinforce and exalt a sense of continuity with Greco-Roman traditions. Tourism has become increasingly reliant on image from myth, while also owing a debt to the European travellers' historical documents. From a broader perspective, the Grand Tours also form part of an episode within a longer relation, beginning with the ancient coins bearing the mythical Scylla as a symbol and leading to today's lexical and visual markers of 'Greekness', with restaurants characterizing it as a myth place.<sup>89</sup> For a region that would fall into the category of 'vocationally touristic' areas, the Grand Tours have themselves become part of the broader philhellenic narrative.<sup>90</sup>

Today, promotional narratives for the town of Scilla as a coastal resort typically rely on exalting the natural beauty and wilderness of the place, within the mythical frame of the Homeric legends, and offer accounts of the famed European visitors as part of the discourses underlying souvenir production, travel guides and commodities. The Grand Tours have become as much a part of the affective relations to the past as the area's relation with Hellas. Calabrese publisher Rubbettino republished many travelogues in a new book series, with a companion website and smartphone application designed to rediscover the 'itineraries of myth and history' in the region, offering extensive attention to Scilla.<sup>91</sup> The series serves to reframe the discovery of Calabria through the lens of travel, but also provides a historical and critical analysis of the travelogues. Among the various highlights, the website features a comparison between the routes of Saint-Non (1783) and Pilati (1775–7).<sup>92</sup> Other publishers also employed the Grand Tours as yet another proof of the South's beauty and mythical ascendance. The weight and impact of the Greco-Roman tradition, along with the way in which European philhellenes viewed the former as both a model for and the pinnacle of civilization, has become a dominant narrative among local institutions and cultural elites in the area today. This is also true of their fetishization of Hellenism, in spite of southern Italy's history of exposure to a much broader variety of civilizations and influences, some of which are historically perceived as belonging to the 'Orient'.<sup>93</sup> *Mutatis mutandis*, even older perceptions of the remoteness of places such as those found on the Tours, fuelled by the tension between metropolitanism and the countryside, are surprisingly enduring: until very recently, one could find Michelin guides describing Scilla as the place of Homeric myths, but also as a place where transportation is lacking

and public services are poor. Up to the present day, the Strait is described, both from outside and in local accounts, as a destination undiscovered by mass tourism that would tend to entice the more adventurous visitor.

While the idea that Scylla and Charybdis equate to the Strait of legend contributes to general historical narratives of Greekness, the idealized image of the Strait's uniqueness contained in the travelogues, along with the fact that this affiliation is an object of local pride, is part of a broader narrative of glorification of past Greek glories within the region. The Strait plays an important role in this narrative: even the rationalizations of myth made by earlier visitors have been echoed, fundamentally untouched, by local biologists keen to divulge how a welcoming beach can turn into a dangerous undertow during storms, and how abyssal fish, washed ashore by tides, are shown to have inspired the legends.<sup>94</sup> For some, the vistas, the whirlpools and the marine fauna have become entirely unique phenomena that contribute to the inimitable aura of the Strait. Regardless of its actual beauty, the extraordinary, unique nature of the Strait is mediated through a process of reality filtered by myth. The Strait, however, played its part in a larger claim: for somebody as affectively invested as the late Italian philologist Franco Mosino, the *Odyssey* was arguably the work of the poet Appa, from Reggio Calabria.<sup>95</sup> Homeric geographies, invented and reinvented for centuries on the basis of the most diverse associations between myth and location, are heavily ingrained in this region.<sup>96</sup> In the Strait, attempts to even question the associations between Homeric myth and the Mediterranean locations – perhaps by a reminder that the *Odyssey* was first and foremost a work of poetry – are usually met with lukewarm or downright hostile receptions, exposing the resistance of deeply ingrained affective histories. The mere idea of stripping Scylla from its mythical origin equates to heresy.<sup>97</sup>

## Conclusion

This chapter has discussed how travellers during the Grand Tours era received Greco-Roman traditions by perceiving the South and the Strait as a wild frontier of Europe, riddled with mythical landmarks. Travelogues and maps drew on landmarks to reconnect Hellas with a romantically defined South on which visitors could project their fascinations for pre-modernity, wilderness and exoticness. Modern European travellers contrasted the region's qualities with their nations' modern, rational and mundane lives. Once the monsters of a frightening sea, Scylla and Charybdis became embellishments signalling an



erudite appreciation of the past *grandeur* of a backward region, allegories of an ambiguously beautiful and dangerous land. In the process, myth was explained as a pre-scientific account of the marvels and dreads of an area seen as a wild territory of whirlpools and volcanic activity, for which Scylla and Charybdis and other myths became the signifiers. At the same time, these mythical creatures established an affective attachment between landscape and literary travel that was often based on a romantic form of nostalgia for Greek glories of the past. Such conceptualizations, along with visual depictions of the Strait, anticipated modern tourism and impacted on local histories of the region.

Such views hold a particular significance not just for the received histories, but also for the future of the region. Antiquity and landscape can be naturalized as powerfully symbolic badges and commodities to benefit economic growth: unsurprisingly, Hellenism and Greek imagery are widely incorporated into local merchandise, websites, institutional documents and the hospitality sector. The modern reception of ancient Greek history in the region, unquestionably its most treasured tradition of cultural heritage, began precisely with the Grand Tours. While the notorious Bronzes of Riace have come to epitomize the city of Reggio's hopes for touristic development, even becoming the symbol of the city, the iconic landmarks of Scilla and their relation with myth – inaugurated by the European travelogues – represent ubiquitous symbols, signifiers of a heritage that can be seen in everything from traditional tourist guides to reviews and user photos on the website TripAdvisor, from the repertoire of local painters to photo collections on Tumblr and social media.<sup>98</sup> Of course, from a historical perspective, the Strait and the Mediterranean are territories that Greek civilizations contributed to defining as much as many other peoples and civilizations. The cultural primacy assigned to the Greco-Roman tradition – see Violi's remark on the 'splendid' history of the *megale hellas* that was 'felt as indicative of Calabria's *poleis*'<sup>99</sup> – may in some cases be seen as working at the expense of a more nuanced understanding and promotion of the complex histories of the region, from the supposed pre-Greek presence of Iapyges, Messapii and Pelasgians to the influence of the Goths, Byzantines, Normans, Spanish, Arabs and French. A broader approach to such histories would not be incompatible with either the spirit of discovery that drew European travellers to the Strait, nor the ancient Greeks' own synthesis of elements of many other cultures; overall, it could enact 'new and equally legitimate forms of heritage'.<sup>100</sup>

Regardless of the future outcome of popular local histories, it is safe to view the Grand Tours as a decisive corpus of documents, as well a historical process that, in spite of the great variety and specificity of scopes in each individual work,

could together be said to have contributed to defining the role of the region in European imagination and worldwide, while providing confirmation of modern origin myths for local histories and subjectivities. Many of the most common ideas held about this region today may be traced, in part, to the moment that the Grand Tours' romantic focus on the glorious past was received and internalized by the locals. The Grand Tours contributed to the relentless attempts of local historiographies to confirm the region's origins in Greek times. For many, it is as if the future could not be approached without firm roots in the past, as if ancient Hellas could forever dispel the fear of historical peripherality, while the beautiful and unforgiving calamities of nature are still aptly embodied by alluringly monstrous guardians.

## Notes

- 1 Hom., *Od.*, 9. 71–3; 83–5 and 101–4, *c.* eighth century BCE. Scylla's etymology can be read as the Snatcher, the Rock, or the Bitch; Charybdis can stand as the Whirlpool, the Swallower, or the Maw. See Aguirre Castro 2012 and Hopman 2012, 12.
- 2 See Stanford and Luce 1974, Romm 1994, 190–2 and Wolf 2004 on the Strait since ancient geography (i.e. from Th., 4.24.5, 5.53 onwards).
- 3 This research also owes a debt to the author's doctoral ethnographic research in the area as an 'estranged native'.
- 4 See Watson 2009 on modern tourism industries; see Shields 1991 on escapism.
- 5 Bakhtin 1981, 84.
- 6 This is neither a full-fledged history of the construction of the Italian South in Europe, nor an in-depth analysis of the monstrous figures. The focus is on the impact of the Grand Tour era in the reception and dissemination of the mythical symbols, and on literary heritage as a narrative and asset in myth-places in the Mediterranean.
- 7 The term Greco-Roman is used in this chapter in two senses: first, to designate a myth which, while drawing from pre-Greek narratives and imaginaries, has been transmitted to us as prevalently associated with Greek and, later, Roman sources; second, to avoid the use of 'classics' as a term that has been discussed as potentially loaded with elitist assumptions of value: see Wyke 1997, 7, Budelmann and Haubold 2008, 16, Hardwick and Harrison 2013, 16–18.
- 8 See Hall 2012, 3 on the impact of Homer in the 'West'.
- 9 On literary travel and tourism, see Black 1992 and Watson 2009.
- 10 Chaney 1998, xi.
- 11 The fascination for past Mediterranean civilizations was boosted by Schliemann's excavations of Troy (Schliemann 1874) and Evans' excavations in Knossos, Crete (1909). See Ziolkowski 2008.

- 12 Mazza 2002.
- 13 Hopman 2012, 124.
- 14 See Louden 2011, 168. The predominant interpretation situates the Homeric Strait between Sicily and Calabria, but a narrow passage comprised within Scylla's own cohort of cliffs – the most prominent of which sank after an earthquake in 1783 – is also often mentioned. See *infra*.
- 15 Strab., 1.2.15. On Homeric geographies, see Wolf and Wolf 1983 and Burgess, online resource: <http://homes.chass.utoronto.ca/~jburgess/rop/od.voyage.html> (accessed 20 August 2016).
- 16 Jaucourt, 'Scylla', in Diderot and D'Alembert 1751–72, Vol. 14, 845, online at: <http://encyclopedia.uchicago.edu> (accessed 1 March 2014).
- 17 Ceserani 2012, 79.
- 18 Riedesel 1773, 139.
- 19 Swinburne 1783, 326.
- 20 Saint-Non 1783, 131–3.
- 21 See Hardwick and Harrison 2013 on Western-centric assumptions on 'classics' and Wyke 1997, 5 for a definition in relation to aesthetics and ideology.
- 22 Author's own translation from Custine 1830. Custine's and most other travelogues are on Project Gutenberg (<http://www.gutenberg.org>, accessed 17 March 2017).  
On Custine, see Muhlstein 2001.
- 23 Didier 1846; Strutt 1842.
- 24 Ceserani 2012.
- 25 Riedesel 1773, 138–9.
- 26 Swinburne 1783, 316, 333.
- 27 Saint-Non 1783, 132.
- 28 Pilati and Ceravolo 2010.
- 29 La Salle 1829.
- 30 Douglas 1915.
- 31 La Salle 1822–6.
- 32 See De Seta 1982, 167 on the picturesque.
- 33 Van Duzer 2010, 7 and 34–5.
- 34 See Hawes 2014 on the rationalizations of myth in antiquity; Detienne 1986 on 'myth' seen as pre-science; Lincoln 1999 on the evolution and use of the term.
- 35 Thuc., 4.24.5, 5.53 (Σκύλλαιον περιπλεῖν); also sch. on [Plat.] *Ep.*, 545 e.  
Discussed in Hopman 2012, 135n)
- 36 Lenormant 1881–4, 270.
- 37 See Zecchi 2006 on the tsunamis and earthquakes; Romm 1994, 185 on myths.
- 38 Findlen 2004, 20–1.
- 39 Stolzenberg 2013, 15. The *Mundus* was 'a long-term, lucrative collaboration' between Kircher and the Dutch firm that published it (Rowland 2004, 199).

- 40 For an example of the rationalizing turn, see Franciscan friar and cosmographer V. M. Coronelli's explanation of the tidal flow and whirlpool in the Strait in the *Atlante Veneto*, Vol. 1, 1690, based on Kircher's *Mundus* (discussed in Cosgrove 1999, 50–2).
- 41 Custine 1830, 382.
- 42 Ibid.
- 43 Duret de Tavel 1832.
- 44 Didier 1846.
- 45 Chaney 1998, 128.
- 46 Carbone-Grio 1884.
- 47 Heinrich von Kleist's 1807 *Das erdbeben in Chili (Earthquake in Chile)*, in which the 1647 seismic event that struck Santiago is equated to Sodom and Gomorrah and used as the setting for a story of moral redemption, is another example of the coeval modern literary interest in cataclysms occurring in distant parts of the world. As a reaction to the 1908 Reggio and Messina earthquake, see Lanucara 1949. On earthquakes and literature, see Morabito 2011.
- 48 Didier 1846. See, again, Hawes 2014. Also Lincoln 1999, 3–43 and Coupe 1997, 108–9 on euhemerists and allegorists in antiquity.
- 49 See Aguirre Castro 2012 and Hopman 2012 on Scylla's etymology.
- 50 Lear 1852, 172.
- 51 Custine 1830, 156–9. The explanation of the passage in the *Od.*, 12:95–7 is referred at the earliest by Eustathius, as referenced by Saïd 2011, 161. See also Luce 1974.
- 52 Van Duzer 2010, 8.
- 53 Ceserani 2012, 87. See Arnold 2002 and Spybey 1992 on the 'age of discovery' and colonialism. See Love 2006 on maritime exploration; Hurley 1948 and Naylor and Ryan 2010 on the Antarctic.
- 54 Ceserani 2012, 31.
- 55 Unknown Dutch illustrator, in *Dissertationes de Admirandi Munci Cataractis*, Amsterdam: Janssonius van Weasberge, 1678. Whirlpools are still situated both off the Lofoten islands and the strait of Saltstraumen off Bodø, Norway. In the *Carta Marina* (1539), Olaus Magnus described it as a *horrenda Charybdis*. Van Duzer 2013, 43.
- 56 On philhellenism, see Leontis 1995. See Arnold 2002 on travel and the onset of modernity, and Spybey 1992 on exploration, the West and colonialism.
- 57 See Chard 1999 on exoticism during the Grand Tours, and Hamblyn 1996 on their relations with primitivism, Orientalism, and Romantic Hellenism.
- 58 Ceserani 2012, 1.
- 59 Ibid., esp. 77–8, on the dialectic between foreigners and locals.
- 60 Ibid. 2012, 24.
- 61 Moe 2002, 6.

- 62 Custine 1830; Custine 1843, 22.
- 63 Wyke 1997, 3.
- 64 Ceserani 2012, 95–7.
- 65 Ibid., 77–8.
- 66 Black 1992, 1. This resonates with Said's critique of *orientalism* (1978), and anticipates what would become known as the Italian Southern Question (Ceserani 2012, 31). See Betteridge 2007, 1 and Frank and Hadler 2011, 1 on frontiers and national ideologies. See Adamovsky 2006, 251 on Euro-orientalism as an East–West narrative. See Chaney 1998, xi for the patronization of Italy as 'a museum set in a picturesque landscape' and for Magna Graecia as a 'South-within-the-South'. See Ceserani on how Grand Tours shifted Northern European disdain for modern Italy from the entire peninsula to the South (Ceserani 2012, 79).
- 67 Hoby 1902, 45.
- 68 Custine 1830, 166.
- 69 Ceserani 2012, 77–8.
- 70 Chaney 1998, 3.
- 71 Crouch and Lübbren 2003, 10–11.
- 72 Goethe 1992, 269.
- 73 Ceserani 2012, 77–8.
- 74 Ibid., 41.
- 75 Black 1992, 53.
- 76 Chaney 1998, 102.
- 77 Creuzé de Lesser 1806.
- 78 Watson 2009, 166.
- 79 Gissing 1905, 235.
- 80 Black 1992, 3.
- 81 Addison 1705, 1.
- 82 Watson 2009.
- 83 Chard 1999, 17 and 20.
- 84 Eliade 1991, 32–6; Stewart 2012, 19.
- 85 Bakhtin 1981, 84.
- 86 Ceserani 2012, 212.
- 87 Décultot 2000, as noted in Ceserani 2012, 81.
- 88 Cartier and Lew 2005, 5.
- 89 Hopman 2012, 124; Shields 1991.
- 90 Cartier and Lew 2012, 4.
- 91 [www.viaggioincalabria.it](http://www.viaggioincalabria.it) (accessed 5 October 2015).
- 92 *Viaggio in Calabria*, <http://www.viaggioincalabria.it> (accessed 5 October 2015).
- 93 See Winks and Mattern-Parkes 2004 on the ancient Mediterranean; Ceserani 2012 on emerging commonplaces in the 'South'.

- 94 See Reggio Calabria's marine biology museum and the curator's enthusiasm to explain to the public how abyssal species like the Viper Fish (*Chauliodus sloani*) inspired the myth of Scylla. <http://www.museopaleomarino.org> (accessed 5 October 2015).
- 95 Mosino 2007. See also Della Dora's (2011) description of Mount Athos in Greece as a landmark endowed with inexplicable and unique mystical features.
- 96 Braccesi 2010.
- 97 See Bradford 1963, discussed in Luce 1965; Severin 1987; Bittlestone, Diggle and Underhill 2005 on this issue. See Vinci 2006 as an example of geographical revisionism.
- 98 Lombardi Satriani and Paoletti 1986.
- 99 Violi 2006, 22.
- 100 Chang and Huang, 262.