"Release the Kraken!" – The Recontextualization of the Kraken in Popular Culture, from *Clash of the Titans* to *Magic: The Gathering*

© *Stian Sundell Torjussen (Hedmark University of Applied Sciences)*

- Perception is more important than reality
Mark Rosewater

During the last two decades, cinema audiences have seen a string of movies with stories taken from Ancient Greek or Roman mythology and history.[1] After the release of the Coen brothers' *O Brother, Where Art Thou?* and Ridley Scott's *Gladiator* in 2000, we have seen blockbuster movies such as Wolfgang Petersen's *Troy* (2004), Oliver Stone's *Alexander* (2004), Zack Snyder's *300* (2006) and Brett Ratner's *Hercules* (2014), as well as the TV series *Rome* (2005-2007) and *Spartacus: Blood and Sand* (2010-2013), to name but a few. Their commercial success has made it possible to speak of a revival of the ancient epics on screen. Each of these productions is interesting in the perspective of reception studies because they present a specific image of the Ancient world to a very large audience. The movies rely in varying degree on input from scholars as "expert advisers", but common to them all is the main goal, which usually trumps the efforts to make a historically correct film: Making a profit.[2] This is evident in movies based on stories from Ancient Greece. Here, Gideon Nisbet argues, the audience has no clear, or at least no positive, image of "the Greek". "The Greek" is seen as slow, contemplative, vague, associated with politics and philosophy, while "the Roman" and the Roman Empire are seen as fast, belligerent, filled with gladiators and action.[3] "[P]opular culture has no clear visual idea of 'Greece'" (Nisbet 2006: 16). One can argue that there has been a preference for stories set in ancient Greece in the last decade, but there is still a curious blend of the Greek and Roman, where the "Greek" is often downplayed or "Romanized" in order to be more exciting and to fit the expectations of the audience better.[4]

The demand for profit has an impact on the presentation of the Ancient world. Filmmakers are eclectic in their use of elements from Ancient cultures, their choices influenced by current trends and popular tropes. Reception studies of the Ancient world in popular culture therefore have to take the process of recontextualization into account, understood here as the process of placing or considering something in a new or different context. This is especially important if we want to understand the relationship between academic and non-academic representations of the Ancient world.

The aim of this article is to examine the process of recontextualization in popular culture and its effect on how the Ancient world is represented today. The Kraken provides us with a case study of how a specific element in one culture, the Scandinavian/Northern, is recontextualised into another, the Greek. By studying various representations of the Kraken, I will argue that the introduction of the Kraken in the myth of Perseus and Andromeda in the 1981 movie *Clash of the Titans* started a gradual recontextualization of the Kraken into a Greek setting in popular culture. This becomes especially evident with the release of the *Theros* expansion to the collectible card game *Magic: The Gathering* in 2013. The process illustrates how a non-academic discourse, where the Kraken becomes part of Greek mythology, develops independently from an academic discourse. By doing this I hope the article will be a contribution to a better understanding of how reception in popular culture works.

CLASH OF THE DISCOURSES

A dichotomy between "academic" and "non-academic" is a simplification. Within each we find a plethora of competing discourses. Furthermore, the "academic" and "non-academic" discourses intersect in multiple ways. One example where such intersection might take place is in the undergraduate classroom (Grossman 2005: 73). Entering a course in Greek history, the students bring with them preconceived notion of Greek history, described by Hans-Georg Gadamer as "prejudices" (Gadamer 2013: 289 ff.). These prejudices, Gadamer argues, are in fact essential since they provide us with a framework of knowledge that in turn helps us to put new knowledge into perspective. The discourses compete for attention and authority and the intersection between them may be described as "clashing discursive assumptions" (Grossman 2005: 73).

Often this intersection never takes place, simply because the "non-academic" discourse is too persuasive or because only one discourse is considered. The discourses have their own "codes" which makes communication between them difficult.[5] Therefore, in the transition from an academic to a non-academic context, information may be simplified and sometimes distorted or misunderstood (Grossman and Murphy 2005: 1; Grossman 2005: 85). Nevertheless, it is often this simplified version which is spread, thereby becoming the mainstream discourse (Schiffman 2005: 36).

Sometimes a version may become completely dominant. An example of this is the reception of the Dead Sea Scrolls from Qumran. After their discovery in 1947, an article summarizing the find was published in *The New Yorker* in 1955. This article presented the theories of researcher Andre Dupont-Sommer where the scrolls were described as Christian and connected to the origin of Chrisitianity (Schiffman 2005: 27 ff.). According to Schiffman, this article, where a specific theory about the scrolls were presented to a non-academic audience, "permanently shaped the entire thrust of Dead Sea Scrolls reporting as it has continued up until now" (Schiffman 2005: 28). Even though the scrolls contained new and interesting texts, many of the issues treated were already known to researchers, e.g. that Christianity sprang out from a Jewish milieu and that Jesus was not considered to be the first or only Messiah. Still, the texts were presented as potentially dangerous for the Church, which led to theories that the Vatican had hidden away certain texts (e.g. Baigent and Leigh 1991). This is of course a theory that captures the attention and imagination of the audience, either in the form of newspaper articles or in novels.[6]

The Dead Sea Scrolls, and the controversy surrounding them, illustrate how a myth or story (in this case the contents of the scrolls and their meaning) assumes numerous versions which are competing for legitimacy. The contexts in which myths and stories are told (and received) determines or influence which elements or "truths" are highlighted. The reason why one specific version is chosen over another is composite and complex. It could be based on Gadamer's prejudice ("I believe in this version, because I heard that it is the right one"), meticulous study ("this version is more correct – I have studied the original inscription myself"), profit ("we focus on this version because the audience will love it") or something else. The current study of the Kraken is not an attempt to debunk a certain version, but rather to see how and why a specific version has become more dominant than others.[7]

In the following, I will focus on the legendary monster Kraken, and how it has been recontextualized from a Scandinavian to a Greek context. The case of the Kraken provides us with an example of "open recontextualization", meaning that the recontextualisation of an element, the Kraken, is used in a new context, the myth of Perseus and Andromeda, without controversy. Both these myths have been told and retold throughout history and, as with every myth, there are several versions of each. However, the Kraken only first appears in the Mediterranean and in a Greek setting in the film *Clash of the Titans* from 1981; this is the point where the lineage of Kraken myths and Perseus myths intersect. We will see how this has led to the Kraken becoming a recurring character in a Greek setting since then. Studying this process may tell us much about how popular culture shapes our perception of the past and how recontextualization is sometimes determined by commercial needs. We start with a quick survey of what we know about the monster.

THE KRAKEN AND OTHER SEA MONSTERS

The Kraken appears quite late in the written sources, but it is clear that it belongs to the North Sea and North Atlantic, especially around the coast of Iceland and Norway. The earliest reference to a sea monster in these parts is in Snorri's *Prose Edda* (c. 1220), which refers to the gigantic "Hafgufa", meaning literally "Seasteam". In later texts, this monster is described as being the size of a small island with a mouth as wide as the fjords of western Norway.[8] The teeth of the Hafgufa, we are told, are often mistaken for gigantic stone cliffs.[9] The monster is also mentioned in the first edition of Carl von Linnaeus' *Systema Naturæ* from 1735, a taxonomy of several species where it is given the fitting name *Microcosmus marinus*, classified as *vermes* (mollusc).[10]

Wooden carving from Olaus Magnus (1555), *Historia de Gentibus Septentrionalibus*

Perhaps the best known description of the monster, which now is named "Kraken", is found in Bishop of Bergen (Norway) Erich Pontoppidan's *Det første Forsøg paa Norges Naturlige Historie* from 1753. [11] In the second book, Pontoppidan focus on the beings of the sea, including mermaids, mermen, sea serpents and the Kraken, described as "undoubtedly the largest monster of the sea". [12] According to fishermen Pontoppidan had spoken to, the Kraken is huge and dangerous, but at the same time a good omen since large schools of fish are said to dwell above the monster.[13] Fishermen knew this and were prepared to get to safety should the bottom of the sea suddenly start to move up towards the boat. If seen from a distance, we are told, the Kraken appears as a small island with numerous tentacles which sometimes are mistaken for trees. When the Kraken submerges itself again, a maelstrom follows, threatening to swallow boats that have ventured to close.[14]

Pontoppidan's descriptions became, either directly or indirectly, an inspiration to later works, such as Alfred Tennyson's poem "The Kraken" (1830), Hermann Melville's *Moby Dick* (1851), Jules Verne's *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea* (1870) and H. P. Lovecraft's monsters in his short story "The Call of Cthulhu" (1926), to name but a few. Common in many of the texts is that its home is in the North Atlantic/Norwegian Sea, usually around Iceland and off the Western coast of Norway. It is enormous and dangerous.

Tales of giant sea monsters are found in most coastal cultures. As Cornelia Coulter concludes in her early study of myths of sea monsters around the world: "it is evident that they are not confined to any one country or to any one historical period" (Coulter 1926: 49). In ancient Greek sources we find several references to gigantic man-swallowing sea monsters, referred to as *kêtos* (kh=toj), a generic term for whales or sea monsters. There are myths where both Herakles and Perseus are swallowed by sea monsters and we find the sea monsters Scylla and Charybdis in Book 12 of the *Odyssey*, and in literature from the Roman Republic onwards.[15] The monsters of these tales have most likely been inspired by the whales venturing into the Mediterranean Sea, mostly Fin and Sperm whales; but also the gigantic Blue whale has been observed (Papadopoulos and Ruscillo 2006: 199 ff.).

Even though the Kraken comes from the North, the various sea monsters around the world resemble one another.[16] This makes the recontextualization of the Kraken so much easier since it is little more than its name that needs to be changed. Still, this should be true also for other cultures. So when and how did the Kraken end up in the Ancient Greco-Roman context and what are the implications of this?

THE KRAKEN IN *CLASH OF THE TITANS* (1981)

The introduction of the Kraken into the Ancient Greek world can be dated to the release of the movie *Clash of the Titans* (1981). The Kraken had only had a few appearances in movies and books before this, and its native environment was not fixed to any specific region. We see a recontextualization, where the Kraken is separated from its Scandinavian/North Atlantic environment, in John Wyndham's novel *The Kraken Wakes* (1953). Here, the Kraken is a race of aliens who takes residence in the sea, all over the world, and use this as a starting point for their invasion of the world. In the Jack Vance novel *The Blue World* (1966), we find the "Kragen", a squid-like race, ruling the water-covered planet. The Kraken is also found in a Western setting, off the coast of San Francisco (*The Wild Wild West*, TV series 1965-1969), and, finally, in the sea just outside a Norwegian village (an episode of *Voyage to the Bottom of the Sea*, 1964). The Kraken is still a sea monster, but it no longer resides exclusively in the North Atlantic. As long as there is water, the Kraken can appear anywhere.

The appearance of the Kraken in a Greek mythological setting in *Clash of the Titans* is in accordance with its previous appearances in popular culture. Also, the myth on which the movie is based, the myth of Perseus and Andromeda, features a sea monster. In the movie, King Acrisius of Argos imprisons his daughter Danae in fear that she might get a child. According to a prophecy, he will die if she does. Nevertheless, Zeus is able to impregnate her. When Acrisius finds out he locks her daughter and the newborn half-god Perseus in a casket and throws them on the sea to die. The two are washed up on the island of Seriphos. Zeus is angered by Acrisius' actions and kills him, thus fulfilling the prophecy. He also orders Poseidon to release (or let loose) the Kraken so that it can destroy the city of Argos. As Perseus grows up the story takes him to the city of Joppa where he is betrothed to princess Andromeda. Andromeda is about to be sacrificed to the Kraken in order to keep it from destroying Joppa as well. And so, the rest of the movie follows Perseus in his quest to defeat the Kraken, a quest that leads him to Hades and back, carrying the severed head of Medusa which is the only weapon that can defeat the Kraken, by petrification.

The story in the movie is an adaptation of a version of the myth known from ancient sources, with some differences.[17] In the best known versions of the myth, from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (written around 8 AD) and pseudo-Apollodorus' *Bibliotheca* (c. first or second century AD), Perseus is given a pair of winged sandals from Hermes. It is with these that he is able to fly around on his quest to rescue Andromeda. However, in the film, Perseus uses Pegasus. This version is also found in Giovanni Boccaccio's retelling of the myth in his *Genealogy of the Gods* (10.27) from the middle of the fourteenth century. Following this tradition, many Renaissance painters depict Perseus on Pegasus as he confronts the dreaded sea monster threatening to devour the helpless Andromeda.[18]

In the film, the Kraken, designed by the legendary Ray Harryhausen, is portrayed as a humanoid creature, with a head, neck, four arms, scales, and a snake-like body (http://www.warnerbros.com/clash-titans-1981#). This makes it somewhat different from previous Krakens who are usually depicted as squid-, fish- or crablike beings. There are several depictions of sea monsters from Ancient Greece, but they do not resemble Harryhausen's Kraken.[19] As Tony Keen (2013: 32) observes: "*Clash* [*of the Titans*] is a bit more eclectic – the sea-monster of the original Greek legend takes the Norse/German name of Kraken, and in facial appearance it is a reworking of the Ymir from *20 Million Miles to Earth*", the last being a film released in 1957 which Harryhausen also worked on. The face of the Kraken, as Liz Gloyn (2013: 65) has pointed out, also resembles the monster in *Creature from the Black Lagoon* (1954). The name Kraken came, according to Harryhausen, at a later stage in the development of the film. In an interview published by Warner Bros Home Entertainment, Harryhausen explains that they didn't use the "Leviathan" from the original myth, since they "didn't want to reproduce a dragon-type character". The name was taken from *The Kraken Wakes*, the John Wyndham novel referred to above, simply because "the name Kraken has a nice sound to it, rather menacing".[20]

The film was a commercial success. With a budget of 15 million dollars, the film made more than 40 million dollars, making it one of the most profitable movies in 1981.[21] The success of the movie ensured the Kraken's immortalization on screen. Just as there are several versions of the Perseus myth in Ancient Greece and Rome, *Clash of the Titans* introduced another, although a much later, version of the myth where the Kraken played an important role. The film, then, is an example of how filmmakers, authors, and others engage with the ancient tradition in order to create a new narrative (Green 2013: 75).

The Kraken appears in various settings in movies, books, games and comics following the 1981 release of *Clash of the Titans*, but it is not easy to find a consistent pattern. In computer games the settings vary. In Nintendo's *Earthbound* (1994) and SEGA's *The Ocean Hunter* (1998) the Kraken is a mindless adversary found in the equivalent to our Pacific Ocean. In Microsoft's *Age of Mythology*, the Kraken is a monster in Norse mythology, controlled by Odin and Loki, while in other games such as Activision's *Marvel: Ultimate Alliance* (2006), Sony's *God of War II* (2007), Eidos Interactive's *Tomb Raider: Underworld* (2008), and Hi-Rez Studios' *Smite* (2013) the monster is found in a Greek setting. We see the same in the movies where the Kraken roams the Caribbean in *Pirates of the Caribbean: Dead Man's Chest* (2006), and the Mediterranean in *Tentacles of the Deep* (2006). In the popular book series *A Song of Ice and Fire* (1996-) by George R. R. Martin, a golden kraken serves as the sigil of House Greyjoy, a house representing the equivalent to the Vikings. These are just a few examples, and the list could go on, but the point here is that the Kraken appears in various settings. Common to the representations, however, is that the Kraken rarely operates of its own accord; it is almost always summoned to do the bidding of some greater evil. That the Kraken is somehow controlled is an

interesting development of the representation of the monster since this feature is absent in the older, Scandinavian sources. However, this is a feature of the Greek *kêtos* as we have seen in the Perseus myth known from Apollodoros (*Bibliotheca* 2.4.3), where the sea monster is summoned by Poseidon as a tool to exact punishment. Three other features are also common in representations of the Kraken after 1981: It lives in the ocean, it is enormous, and it is irrational.

<div align="center">THE KRAKEN IN MAGIC: THE GATHERING – THEROS</div>

In the games, movies, and books where the Kraken appears, the creators (authors, screenwriters, designers) have made a decision whether or not to include it. It is, as we have seen, difficult to identify any shared rationale for this inclusion. Therefore, we shall look closer at a popular collectable card game which, in addition for its inclusion of the Kraken in their game, has documented the rationale behind its inclusion: *Magic: The Gathering.*

Magic: The Gathering is a collectible card game designed by Richard Garfield. The earliest version of the game, from 1993, had 120 cards from which the players designed decks containing at least 60 cards representing various spells, monsters and artifacts, as well as land cards needed to play the cards (Garfield 2006: 541). In the game, each player takes on the role of a wizard who tries to defeat the opponent in a duel by casting spells, summoning monsters to do their bidding or playing powerful artifacts. The game was an instant success, and since 1993 there has been a steady stream of new cards every year. Each year approximately four sets of cards containing between 160 and 350 unique cards have been released. The amount of unique cards available is now enormous, making the possible decks available functionally infinite.[22] *Magic: The Gathering* is published by Wizards of the Coast, a company owned by Hasbro Ltd., and is considered one of the corporation's most profitable products. Today there are more than 20 million players worldwide.[23]

Soon after the first cards were published, expansion sets with additional cards started to come out. The theme of the *Arabian Nights* set, published in 1993, was a curious mix of Islam and Arabian myths and legends, where the players could control creatures such as "Aladdin" and "Ali Baba", cast spells such as "Jihad" and "Army of Allah", and control artifacts such as "Flying Carpet" and "Aladdin's Lamp". An overall theme for the set probably made it easier for players to immerse themselves into the game.

Since then, more than 80 sets have been produced. Usually, three consecutive sets, published over a period of about 10 months, make up a "block". Each block has its own lore, sometimes connected to previous blocks. Many of the themes are based on cultures and/or mythologies such as Arabian, Celtic, Japanese and Chinese. The designers use elements from these cultures, such as creatures and myths, and incorporate them into the game through individual cards. Thus, in the Japanese/Chinese-inspired *Kamigawa* block (2004-2005) the players could put samurai and *kamis* (spirits) in their decks, while the Celtic inspired *Lorwyn* block (2007-2008) featured faeries (fae). An important part of each card is its artwork. Therefore, in the *Kamigawa* block, the art on the cards reflects the artistic style of the Japanese and Chinese cultures. The visual presentation of the cards in a block is of interest because it contributes to the players' idea of that specific culture (Grossman 2005: 77).

In 2013, Wizards of the Coast introduced a new block based on Ancient Greek mythology and culture. The first set of the *Theros* block, the name itself being a combination of *Theos* (God) and *Heros* (Hero), contained 249 cards with motifs and characters taken from Ancient Greek culture and mythology.[24] The myths were important, especially the myths and the mythology found in the epics of Homer. In the set, and in the two other sets in the same block, we find minotaurs, oracles, gorgons, the three-headed Kerberos and of course heroes and gods. The names of the gods and heroes are similar to those found in Greek mythology. Thus we find "Heliod, God of the Sun" and "Erebos, God of the Dead", or names which resemble the Greek name for the element they control, e.g. "Purphoros, God of the Forge" (pur, pu=r = fire) and "Thassa, God of the Sea" (thalassa, qa&lassa = the sea). At the start of the design process of the *Theros* set, lead designer Mark Rosewater made his team study Greek mythology in order to find inspiration for the set. In one of the articles describing the process, designer Ethan Fleischer is pictured sitting at a desk surrounded by books on Greek mythology and culture such as Herodotus' *Histories*, Edith Hamilton's *Mythology* (1942) and Karl Kerenyi's *The Gods of the Greeks* (1951) (Fleischer 2013). However, the designers soon became aware of a problem they had to deal with when they wanted to present a Greek-inspired theme to the game, here described by Rosewater:

How does a gorgon behave? There wasn't a shared cultural answer […] How does a centaur function? I realized I had no idea – at least, not in a manner that would be consistent for the majority of players. Why? Because there isn't a shared cultural identity for centaurs, meaning there's not a unified expectation of how they behave. (Rosewater 2013a)

Whether or not Rosewater's statement is shared by "the majority of players", this must have felt like a very acute problem for the designers. The success of *Theros* was crucial, not only for the designers, but also for the company and the owners of the game. The success relied upon how well the Greek theme presented by the designers matched the players' expectations of "the Greek". Presenting a Greek theme that did not resonate with the players' expectations could result in a drop in sales.

This problem – how to reconstruct and present the "Greek" – is also apparent in many of the movies whose stories have been set in Ancient Greece. As Gideon Nisbet has shown, common for many of the movies set in Ancient Greece, at least those released before 2000, is their mixture of the "Greek" with the "Roman" (Nisbet 2006: 8, 17). In his analysis of Roger Corman's movie *Atlas* (1961), Nisbet notes the same dilemma that was facing Rosewater and the designers of *Theros*:

Corman is unable to make Atlas look Greek, not because he is filming on the cheap (although that doesn't help), but because popular culture has no clear visual idea of "Greece" that he can appeal to – no idiom that he can invoke. (Nisbet 2006: 16)

Rosewater decided that they should trust their own instincts and focus on the image they themselves had of ancient Greece, meaning the one they brought with them from their own childhood (Richard 2013). This meant that a trinity of gods, heroes and monsters of ancient Greece should be the prime focus in the set.

So, why does the Kraken appear in this set? As one may expect, considering the amount of cards produced since 1993, the Kraken makes its appearance in *Magic: The Gathering* too. In fact, there are currently 9 Kraken cards in the game, but as the table below shows, it has not been connected to any one specific setting.

Card name	Set	Year	Appearance	Flavor Text	Cultural setting
Polar Kraken	*Ice Age*	1995	Head and front of a serpent-like creature emerging from the sea, biting a large ice floe with polar bears on it	*"It was big. Really, really, big. No, bigger than that. It was big!" – Arna Kennerüd, Skyknight*	Northern
	Masters Edition	2007			
Tidal Kraken	*Mercadian Masques*	1999	Humanoid monster with four arms attacking a coastal city from the sea	*To merfolk, pirates are a nuisance. To pirates, merfolk are a threat. To the kraken, they're both appetizers.*	Fantasy, but a clear reference to *Clash of the Titans* in the artwork
	Eighth edition	2003			
	Ninth edition	2005			
Kraken's Eye	*Darksteel*	2004	Close-up of an eye. Artifact	*It's seen the wonders of entire worlds trapped in the depths of a bottomless ocean.*	Unclear
	Ninth Edition	2005			
	Tenth edition	2007			
	Magic 2010 Core Set	2009			
	Magic 2011 Core Set	2010			
	Magic 2012 Core Set	2011			

Deep-Sea Kraken	*Time Spiral*	2006	Gigantic monster with snake-like body, carapace, octopus-like mouth, tentacles and insect-like legs in the front	*The rift remained open for days, sluicing ancient seawater. It closed only after the last great tentacle squirmed its way through.*	Unclear
	Commander 2014	2014			
Kraken Hatchling	*Magic* 2013	2013	Crablike gigantic creature with shell, tentacles and mouth with fangs	*A spike and a maul are needed to crack their shells; but the taste is worth the effort.*	Fantasy
	Zendikar	2009			
Shipbreaker Kraken	*Theros*	2013	Gigantic, crab-like monster with claws and a long serpent-like body	-	Greek
Kraken of the Straits	*Born of the Gods*	2014	Crab-like, gigantic with tentacles, lurking just beneath the surface, ready to attack a boat	*Thassa felt no need to punish the sailors for their folly in crossing the straits. The kraken would do it for her.*	Greek
Kraken (token card)	*Duel Decks: Elspeth vs. Kiora*	2015	A gigantic sea monster rising up from the sea. Carapace and tentacles holding a ship	-	Greek
Stormsurge Kraken	*Commander* 2014	2014	Monster with tentacles and scaly front, mouth with fangs, emerging from the sea destroying a ship	*Most see krakens as wantonly violent, failing to notice their meticulous attention to detail when dismantling a vessel.*	Unclear, but the sailors are lightly dressed, one wearing a toga-like attire

Two of the cards deserve special mention. The first of these is the Polar Kraken in the *Ice Age* set from 1995 (http://gatherer.wizards.com/Pages/Card/Details.aspx?multiverseid=159241). The cards in this set were connected to an arctic/sub-arctic region of the game's fantasy setting. The set's "Polar Kraken" is a natural inhabitant of this region, just like the Kraken in the Norwegian and Icelandic legends. However, the need to label the Kraken "Polar", suggests that this is just one variant of a more widespread species.

The next noteworthy appearance is in the *Mercadian Masques* set from 1999. The set has a generic fantasy setting so it is not obvious which culture or mythology some of cards are based upon. Therefore, we cannot pinpoint the monster depicted on the card "Tidal Kraken" as belonging to one specific setting (http://gatherer.wizards.com/Pages/Card/Details.aspx?multiverseid=83301). However, if we look at the artwork of the card, we see a striking resemblance to Harryhausen's Kraken in *Clash of the Titans* (1981). On the card, the monster is advancing from the sea towards an unsuspecting coastal city, its sheer size creating a tide that will contribute to the town's demise. Most importantly, the Kraken has four arms, just like the Kraken in the *Clash of the Titans* (1981).

The rest of the krakens are diverse, but we see that most of them are presented as crab-like in appearance and that they have long, snake-like bodies. This is also true of the Kraken in the *Theros* set from 2013, the "Shipbreaker Kraken"

(http://gatherer.wizards.com/Pages/Card/Details.aspx?multiverseid=373637). A few days prior to the release of the *Theros* set, *Wizards of the Coast* arranged a press conference where some of the forthcoming cards were presented to the audience. One of the cards was the "Shipbreaker Kraken", a card showing an enormous crab-like monster rising up from the sea. Immediately, someone from the audience shouted out "Release the Kraken!", a comment that was met with laughter and applause.[25] This is a reference to the 2010 remake of *Clash of the Titans* where this line was first heard; in the original from 1981 we hear Zeus say "Let loose the Kraken!"[26] It is interesting to note that during the following Q&A session no one questioned the Kraken's inclusion in a Greek setting. For the designers, the inclusion of the Kraken was a conscious choice made because of the *Clash of the Titans*:

> Krakens are actually Norwegian. But, you see, there was this movie called *Clash of the Titans* featuring the famous line "Release the Kraken!" and, well, a kraken. One of the lessons of the Kamigawa block was that we have to deliver not on what a source of inspiration actually is but rather on what players think it is. Perception is more important than reality. (Rosewater 2013b)

Rosewater is here referring to the difference between what is found in the ancient sources, on the one hand, and the expectations of the players on the other. The designers are open about this, which is why this might be seen as an open recontextualisation of the Kraken. As we have seen, the same thing was done in the *Clash of the Titans* (1981) when the name "Kraken" was adopted because of its menacing sound. The inclusion of the Kraken in *Theros* is exactly what Nachbar and Lause expect to find in a commercial product with such deep roots in popular culture:

> [P]opular culture tends to be imitative, repetitive and conservatively resistant to change. Once producers discover a successful formula – a set of ingredients which seems to reflect audience desires – they tend to repeat it as often as it remains successful. (Nachbar and Lause 1992b: 6)

Reception studies seem relevant here (Jauss 1967, Martindale 1993, Hardwick 2003). Rather than focusing on how an object (i.e. text, monument, sculpture) was created, Jauss' approach, building on Gadamer, is to focus on the text's later reception and the different meanings it is given through the ages. For something to become an immediate success, a best-seller, the product has to be in as much agreement with the prejudices of the audience as possible. The timeless classic, on the other hand, the product or work of art that enters into a society's canon, is, according to Jauss, usually not understood and even frowned upon by its contemporaries. The hallmark of "the Classic" is its ability to go beyond contemporary ideas and give us a glimpse of the ideas of future generations (Jauss 1970: 25). The relevance of such a view is debatable, but the spectrum imagined by Jauss, with the immediate success, the bestseller, on one end of the scale, and the frowned-upon or ignored product that later may become a classic, on the other, makes it is easier to see where a commercial product like *Theros* would want to be placed. The receiver is always situated within a specific historical context when reading and interpreting a text. Following Gadamer, we have a preconceived idea of what e.g. the "Greek" is. This idea is challenged or adjusted by a new text, and our prejudices enter a dialogue with the new text's ideas. Our prejudices and the new ideas are sometimes in agreement, or close to it, while at other times, there may be a deep conflict.[27] For something to become a success, the product will benefit to be in as much agreement with the prejudices of the audience as possible. The inclusion of the Kraken is, as we have seen, not coincidental. The Kraken is there to answer an expectation among the potential buyers of their product.

CONCLUSION

The Kraken has only been swimming in the Mediterranean since 1981. Still, it is interesting to see how the image of the Kraken as an instrument of the Greek gods has made its mark on popular culture since then. The appearance of the Kraken in *Theros*, and the designers' rationale for including it in a Greek setting, illustrates this. The designers are completely open about the reasons for their inclusion, and many of the players probably are too. The Kraken's journey from the North to the Mediterranean provides a case study of how eclectic popular culture is. This is not a feature exclusive for popular culture. As we have seen, there are several versions of the Perseus myth. According to Apollodorus and Ovid, Perseus flew through the air on his winged sandals, while according to Boccaccio the hero flew in on Pegasus. Pegasus attained a more prominent role in the fourteenth century, while the Kraken entered the myth in the late twentieth century. The *Clash of the Titans* (1981) is where these myths meet and creates yet another version, which is used several times after 1981, perhaps most explicitly in the *Theros* set. The

"Shipbreaker Kraken" in *Theros* is not just a homage, but a logical consequence of the trope that was created in the *Clash of the Titans* (1981).

The rationale behind the use of a certain version of a myth is varied and composite. As with the Dead Sea Scrolls example referred to above, the choice of which version to use, or believe, can be based on Gadamer's prejudice, study, profit, or something else. Myths, and the interpretation of myths, have been used to support political arguments throughout historical time and continue to legitimize political systems, claims and actions. The examples from our own time are numerous. It should not surprise us that a company that wants to sell games to as many people as possible, does the same. Greek mythology is what the producers want it to be. Of course, commercial success is dependent upon it being accepted by the general public. Still, the presentation may change over time, as new, hitherto unfamiliar elements are introduced. Through this, the idea of "the Greek" becomes ever changing. Our conception of "Greek mythology" is shaped by what we are told, either in the auditorium, in books, through epigraphic studies or through games and films. The ideas found here are constantly changing according to new insights, new finds, new perspectives and new speculations. In research the aim is to give a more nuanced, more "correct" presentation of how we believe things might have been. There are constant discourses and debates here. The same is also found in popular culture even though it operates according to different rules. While playing *Theros*, a player may see the Kraken as an integral part of Greek mythology on a par with the Gorgon or Herakles, simply because the cards say so, or because he or she has seen the Kraken in the *Clash of the Titans*. Or, it might be accepted *because* of its reference to the movie, not because it originally was part of the Greek world, but because it has become so in the popular culture discourse. Here we have seen how the Kraken has made its appearance in Greek mythology, creating a new version of the Perseus myth. This new version has paved out a new mythical tradition that may be further strengthened through future products, be they games, movies or something else.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Baigent, M. and Leigh, R. 1991. *The Dead Sea Scrolls Deception*. New York, London, Toronto, Sydney: Touchstone.

Brand, M. and Crow, T. 2008 (eds.). *The Color of Life. Polychromy in Sculpture from Antiquity to the Present*. J. Paul Getty Trust

Brinkmann, V. and Wünsche, R. 2004 (eds.). *Bunte Götter. Die Farbigkeit antiker Skulptur*. Glyptothek München.

Coulter, C. C. 1926. The "Great Fish" in Ancient and Medieval Story. *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association* 57: 32-50.

Fleischer, E. 2013. An Even-Handed Tale. Last accessed September 2, 2015: http://www.wizards.com/Magic/magazine/Article.aspx?x=mtg/daily/feature/263

Gadamer, H.-G. 2013. *Truth and Method*. London, New Dehli, New York, Sydney: Bloomsbury.

Garfield, R. 2006. The Design Evolution of Magic: The Gathering. In: Salen & Zimmermann 2006: 538-555.

Gloyn, L. 2013. "The Dragon-Green, The Luminous, The Dark, The Serpent-Haunted Sea": Monsters, Landscape and Gender in *Clash of the Titans* (1981 and 2010). In: S. J. Green and P.

Goodman (eds.), *Animating Antiquity: Harryhausen and the Classical Tradition. New Voices in Classical Reception Studies - Conference Proceedings Volume One*, 64-75.

Green, S. J. 2013, Perseus on the Psychiatrist's Couch in Leterrier's *Clash of the Titans* (2010): Harryhausen Reload for 21st Century. In: S. J. Green and P. Goodman (eds.), *Animating Antiquity: Harryhausen and the Classical Tradition. New Voices in Classical Reception Studies – Conference Proceedings Volume One*, 75-85.

Grossman, M. 2005. Mystery or History: The Dead Sea Scrolls as Pop Phenomenon. *Dead Sea Discoveries* 12 vol. 1: 66-86.

Grossman, M. and Murphy, C. M. 2005. Introduction: The Dead Sea Scrolls in the Popular Imagination. *Dead Sea Discoveries* 12 vol. 1: 1-5.

Hamilton, R. 1839. *The Naturalist's Library, Vol. VIII: Amphibious carnivore including the Walrus and Seals also of the Herbivorous cetacean &c.*

Hardwick, L. 2003. *Reception Studies*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Jauss, H. R. 1967. *Literaturgeschichte als Provokation der Litteraturwissenschaft*. Konstanz.

Jauss, H. R. and Benzinger, E. (tr.) 1970. Literary History as a Challenge to Literary Theory. *New Literary History*, 2 vol. 1:7-37.

Keen, T. 2013. Greek elements in the Sinbad movies of Ray Harryhausen: A lesson in Classical Reception. In: S. J. Green and P. Goodman (eds.), *Animating Antiquity: Harryhausen and the Classical Tradition. New Vocies in Classical Reception Studies – Conference Proceedings Volume One*, 29-40.

Keen, T. 2015. An alternative model for looking at classical movies. Last accessed June 7, 2016. http://tonykeen.blogspot.co.uk/2015/09/an-alternative-model-for-looking-at.html

Keyser, R., Munch, P. A., Unger, C. R. 1848. *Konge-speilet. Et philosophisk-didaktisk skrift, forfattet i Norge mod slutningen af det tolfte aarhundrede.* Christiania: Carl C. Werner & Comp.

Martindale, C. 1993. *Redeeming the text. Latin poetry and the hermeneutics of reception*. Cambridge University Press.

Nachbar, J. and Lause, K. 1992a (eds.). *Popular Culture: An Introductory Text*. Bowling Green: Bowling Green State University Popular Press

Nachbar, J. and Lause, K. 1992b. Getting to Know Us. An Introduction to the Study of Popular Culture: What is this Stuff that Dreams are Made of? In: Nachbar and Lause 1992a: 1-35.

Nisbet, G. 2006. *Ancient Greece in Film and Popular Culture*. Bristol Phoenix Press.

Nisbet, G. 2011. Prolegomena to a Steampunk Catullus: Classics and SF. Lecture delivered at the 2011 Eastercon. Last accessed June 7, 2016:

https://www.academia.edu/543120/Prolegomena_to_a_Steampunk_Catullus_Classics_and_S F

Papadopoulos, J. K. and Ruscillo, D. 2002. A Ketos in Early Athens: An Archaeology of Whales and Sea Monsters in the Greek World. *American Journal of Archaeology* 106 (2), 187-227.

Pontoppidan, E. 1753. *Det første Forsøg paa Norges Naturlige Historie, Forestillende Dette kongeriges Luft, Grund, Fielde, Vande, Væxter, Metaller, Mineralier, Steen-Arter, Dyr, Fugle, Fiske, og omsider Indbyggernes Naturel, samt Sædvaner og Levemaade.* Volume 2. København: Gottmann Friderich Kisel.

Richard, B. 2013. Leading a Horse to Water. Last accessed August 31, 2015. http://www.wizards.com/Magic/Magazine/Article.aspx?x=mtg/daily/sf/264

Rosewater, M. 2013a. A *Theros* By Any Other Name, Part 2. Last accessed August 31, 2015. http://www.wizards.com/Magic/magazine/Article.aspx?x=mtg/daily/mm/264.

Rosewater, M. 2013b. *Theros*es Are Red (and White, Blue, Black, and Green), Part 2. Last accessed August 31, 2015. http://www.wizards.com/Magic/Magazine/Article.aspx?x=mtg/daily/mm/268.

Salen, K. and Zimmermann, E. 2006 (eds.). *The Game Design Reader. A Rules of Play anthology*. MIT Press.

Schiffman, L. H. 2005. Inverting Reality: The Dead Sea Scrolls in the Popular Media". *Dead Sea Discoveries* 12 vol. 1, 24-37.

Schleier, E. and Röttgen, H. 1993. "Perseus befreit Andromeda": Ein unnbekanntes Werk von Giuseppe Cesari, gen. Il Cavalier d-Arpino. Zu einer Neuerwerbung des Kaiser-Friedrich-Museum-Vereins. *Jahrbuch der Berliner Museen* 35, 191-213.

Szabo, V. E. 2008. *Monstrous Fishes and the Mead-Dark Sea. Whaling in the Medieval North Atlantic.* Leiden, Boston: Brill.

Unger, M. 2007. The Classic White Sculpture Once Had a Paint Job. *The New York Times* October 15, 2007. Last accessed August 31, 2015. http://www.nytimes.com/2007/10/14/arts/design/14unge.html?ex=1349928000&en=7b4d0113 87fe7649&ei=5124&partner=permalink&exprod=permalink&_r=0.

Von Linne, C. 1746. *Fauna Svecica sistens animalia Sveciæ regni.* Stockholm.

Winckelmann, J. J. 1755. *Gedanken über die Nachahmung der griechischen Werke in der Malerei und Bildhauerkunst.* Stuttgart: G. J. Göschen'sche verlagshandlung.

¹ I would like to thank C. W. Marshall and the anonymous reviewer for their critical and helpful comments on this text. Their insights have greatly improved the contents. I stand, of course, responsible for remaining errors.

² The movies mentioned above have different backgrounds and orientations. Some examples: Wolfgang Petersen's adaptation of the epics of Homer in *Troy* (2004) strips away the supernatural elements and presents the story as an historical event. The Coen Brothers' adaptation of *The Odyssey* is set in Mississippi in the 1930s. Zack Snyder's *300* (2006) is based on the comic book *300* by Frank Miller (1998) which in turn was based upon the Rudolph Maté movie *The 300 Spartans* (1962) which based its story on Herodotus' *Histories*. On the role of the advisers, see Nisbet (2011: 16).

³ Nisbet (2006: 8): "Everyone's *heard* of [Socrates'] Athens, but not many know or care what it *looks* like, and cinema has sensibly avoided running up big bills putting it on display." And p. 17: "In the popular imagination, Romans win and lose empires, fight fur-clad barbarians and bring on the dancing girls. Greeks discuss the nature of the Good or flirt with underage boys. For very different reasons, neither of these activities makes good mainstream cinema."

⁴ Keen (2015) argues that Ancient Greece (mythology) was preferred to Rome (historical) due to the success of the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy (2001-2003).

⁵ "When the coded language of academic discourse is taken out of context and read in light of the straightforward language-assumptions of the popular realm, what results is often a reinterpretation that makes very different sense (including, at times, non-sense) of the original claims." Grossman (2005: 73).

⁶ As is the case with most texts, the scrolls are still debated. Grossman (2005: 74) cites from the "Introduction" in Baigent and Leigh (1991) where the authors express their shock when they saw that the experts working on the scrolls could not agree upon its contents. This leaves the scrolls open for interpretation and speculation, especially when theories about the scrolls are "translated" into "non-academic" jargon. In extreme cases, this has led to reports and claims of a wide variety of topics covered in the scrolls, including the appearance of Elvis, a cure for AIDS, proof of life after death and so on (Schiffman 2005: 29).

⁷ "As classicists, we don't have the power to delete them [the various versions of a myth], and even if we did, I'm not convinced we'd have the right to do it. It's not a past we actually own, any more than anyone else does. Instead we can learn lots by studying *how* and *by whom* these academically defunct pasts are being used." Nisbet (2011: 19), italics in original.

⁸ *Konungs Skjuggsá*, c. 1250. See also Olaus Magnus' *Historia de Gentibus Septentrionalibus* from 1555, especially ch.21: http://books.google.no/books?id=O9lEAAAAcAAJ&dq=inauthor:%22Olaus+Magnus%22&pg=PP5&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q&f=false.

⁹ This detail is also in the 14ᵗʰ century Icelandic saga *Örvar-Odds saga*, www.heimskringla.no/wiki/Örvar-Odds_saga. See Keyser, Munch & Unger (1848: 32-33).

¹⁰ The Microcosmus marinus is not included in later editions. See also von Linné's hesitation about the monster in von Linné (1746: 386): "Habitare fertur in *mari Norwegico*; ipse non dum hoc animal vidi".

¹¹ Translated: *The first attempt to describe the Natural History of Norway*. Other names used are "Krabben" ("The Crab") and "Horven". More descriptions are found in Jacob Wallenberg (1781) *Min son på galejan*; Pierre Denys de Montfort (1802) *Histoire Naturelle Generale et Particuliere des Mollusques.*

¹² Pontoppidan (1753: 340): "uden Tviil i al Verden det allerstørste *monstrum marinum*".

¹³ Cf. the old Norwegian saying: "Du maa have fisket paa Kraken" ("You must have been fishing on the Kraken"), which was used when boats returned with a good catch; Pontoppidan (1753: 344).

¹⁴ For a more detailed account of whales and krakens in the North Atlantic, see the thorough account in chapter 6 in Szabo (2008).

¹⁵ On Herakles see: Apollodorus *Bibliotheca* 2.4.6, 2.5.9; Hellanicus fragment 136 Müller; see also Lycophron *Alex.* 31-37, 468-478 and Diod. Sic. 4.42. Olaus Magnus' *Historia de Gentibus Septentrionalibus*, book 21, chapter 6, refers to accounts by Pliny the Elder, Ambrosius and Strabo. Further references: Arrian *Indica* 30 on Alexander the Great and his men who see whales in the Persian Gulf; Oppian *Halieutica* 1.360 ff.; Pliny, *Historia Naturalis* 9.4, describes a giant monster (a whale?)

which was stranded near modern Cadiz; Ps.-Kallisthenes 6 on Alexander the Great in India where they meet a strange people with horse-like faces who speak of an island with a buried treasure (Alexander is advised not to go there so he sends scouts to the island; when they approach the island turns out to be a monster which submerges itself, thereby swallowing the scouts in the following maelstrom); Lucian of Samosata's *A True History* where the heroes are swallowed by a whale and discover a whole community inside it. See Papadopoulos and Ruscillo (2002: 206 ff.) for more references. C. W. Marshall made me aware of this useful article on whales and sea monsters in the Mediterranean.

[16] Hamilton (1839: 327) was convinced that the ancient writers all referred to the Kraken in their texts.

[17] IMDb (Internet Movie Database) describes the plot as follows: "A film adaption of the myth of Perseus and his quest to battle both Medusa and the Kraken monster to save the Princess Andromeda", www.imdb.com/title/tt0082186/?ref_=nv_sr_2 (last accessed June 26, 2015). It is not clear whether the Kraken is seen as part of both the myth and the film or just the latter.

[18] I owe this reference to C. W. Marshall. See also Schleier and Röttgen (1993: 195) on the Renaissance painters and Green (2013: 75), who points out that Perseus and Bellerophon, who is usually connected with Pegasus in ancient sources, have been mixed together since the fifth century BC.

[19] In their survey of representations of sea monsters in antiquity, Papadopoulos and Ruscillo (2002: 216-219) identify three main visual depictions of sea monsters: 1. Large fish, 2. Large snake, 3. The head of a land animal on top of a fish-like, scaly body.

[20] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AEVvCgdRg-I, (last accessed June 20, 2016)

[21] http://www.boxofficemojo.com/yearly/chart/?yr=1981&p=.htm, (last accessed June 26, 2016).

[22] Especially since whilst a deck needs to consist of a *minimum* 60 cards, there is no maximum limit. As of June 2016 there are more than 13,000 cards; see http://mtgsalvation.gamepedia.com/Magic:_The_Gathering_statistics_and_trivia (last accessed June 21 2016). There are different formats for play that ensure that the actual cards available for most competitions are limited to cards released in the last two years or so.

[23] Number of players taken from an article in *The Guardian*, Friday July 10, 2015: https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2015/jul/10/magic-the-gathering-pop-culture-hit-where-next (last accessed June 20, 2016). *Magic: The* Gathering was responsible for 26 % of the net income for Hasbro Ltd. during the first quarter of 2012; see "'Magic' doubled since 2008": http://www.icv2.com/articles/news/21471.html (last accessed August 3, 2015).

[24] See: http://www.wizards.com/Magic/tcg/products.aspx?x=mtg/tcg/products/theros for a short presentation of *Theros* (last accessed August 3, 2015). *Theros* also means "summer" in Greek, but this is hardly the meaning the designers had in mind.

[25] The session was recorded on video: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lB3QJu1NaWQ (last accessed August 4, 2015).

[26] See Green (2013) for a comparison of the original and the remake of *Clash of the Titans*.

[27] An example is found in the exhibition *Bunte Götter*, initiated by *Glypothek München* in collaboration with *Ny Carlsberg Glypotek København* and *Musei Vaticani*, which toured several museums in Europe and North America from 2007; see Brinkmann and Wünsche (2004). Here, visitors to the museums were confronted with replicas of Greek and Roman statues, portraits and reliefs in full colour. As the exhibitors made clear, the use of striking colours was common in Greek and Roman art, but the result was in conflict with the image of "the Greek" and "Roman" as white, clean and devoid of interfering colours. As one of the critics noted, the polychrome art displayed was something quite different from the sober art which according to Winckelmann had a character of "edle Einfalt und stille Grösse"; Unger (2007, Winckelmann 1755: 21).