

same generation of gods as Athena, Poseidon or the Dioscuri. Because she is a primordial power endowed with *metis*, Thetis, like Metis herself, transcends the methods and forms of *mētis* peculiar to the Olympians as these appear through the respective modes of operation of Athena, Hermes, Aphrodite, Hephaestus, and Zeus. Thus there is no reason why Thetis should not intervene in the manner of Athena. The polyvalency of her *metis* is such that she could just as well have appeared as a craftsmanlike builder of ships (cf. *supra*, p. 141ff).

Detienne, Marcel & Vernant, Jean-Pierre (1978)
Cunning Intelligence in Greek Culture and Society.
Harvester Press.

CHAPTER 9

The feet of Hephaestus

According to traditions from Rhodes, the Telchines¹ are metal workers with the power of the evil eye, magicians who are invariably malignant and who are primordial powers. We find them at the centre of a complex of myths which comprise the series of accounts of their adventures in Rhodes and Ceos, through which one can grasp the structure of the set of connections and relationships which link them with two groups of powers: on the one hand similar metallurgical powers such as the Sinties, the Dactyli, the Cabiri and Hephaestus and, on the other hand, the primordial powers connected with the sea, namely Proteus, Thetis and Psamathe. Through the network of myths in which they play a part we can define certain aspects of metallurgy seen as a particular form of activity and also various characteristics of the blacksmith considered as a human type. We can consider how metallurgy relates to farming and how the blacksmith and metal work relate to the area of the sea, the powers connected with it and its cosmogonical role. We can also study how the metal-worker is represented as an agent, the way he walks, how his limbs are shaped and the tools he uses to hold the metal. It is impossible within the scope of this work to study the full range of mythical evidence on the subject of metal work, so we have chosen to concentrate on one animal, used as a model in this context, which incorporates the essential characteristics of the myth of the Telchines and which also enables us to draw attention to one aspect of major importance in the representation of the blacksmith in archaic Greece, namely the morphology of his lower limbs. Our richest source of information on the Telchines is a treatise on the terms of insult used by the Greeks, written

by the Roman historian Suetonius.² In this erudite work produced in Greek by the director of the Greek libraries belonging to the Romans under the reign of Hadrian, a whole series of points stress the affinities between these metallurgical powers and the world of the sea: the Telchines are the children of the sea; their adventures take place on islands such as Rhodes and Crete; finally, they are presented as amphibious beings which, in the course of their metamorphoses, take on the appearance of sea creatures: 'Sometimes they resemble demons, sometimes human beings and then again sometimes fish or snakes'. But Suetonius' text is not limited to general information of this nature; it goes on to give much stranger details. Without undertaking a close study of the textual problems raised by the precise terms in which this information is given,³ it is fair to summarize it as follows: some of the Telchines have neither arms nor legs and their fingers are webbed like the feet of geese. They are also said to have a glittering gaze and black eyebrows.⁴ While the latter feature appears to refer to the magic power of the Telchines, the former two which are complementary suggest an animal form which illustrates the Telchines' power of metamorphosis—to be more precise, the two last forms mentioned by Suetonius, namely those of fish or snakes. 'To lack arms and legs' (*âcheires kai âpodes*) was, for the naturalists of antiquity, a characteristic feature of fish, the creatures whose body is one continuous trunk from head to tail.⁵ Now the fish-shaped creatures mentioned by Suetonius also have a membrane between their fingers 'like geese'. Their webbed fingers are therefore joined directly to the trunk of their body. There is only one animal which answers this description perfectly. It is the seal, the fish-shaped mammal whose short feet in the form of flippers have five fingers contained in a sheath of skin. The behaviour that is characteristic of it, its place on the animal scale and the special qualities with which it is endowed are all features which support such an identification and enable to us to define the Telchines both as primordial powers and as metal-workers.

Seals are amphibious fin-footed mammals, amazingly well adapted to the aquatic life of the sea; they have a streamlined body, a rather flat head and forelimbs which are short

and close to the trunk while the back limbs are dragged passively along behind. For us they are exotic creatures. In Antiquity, however, they abounded, being widely distributed in both the Mediterranean and the Aegean Seas. There is plenty of evidence for this ranging from Strabo, Diodorus and Agatharchides, writing on the Island of Seals and the large numbers of these mammals living in the Red Sea, to the many legends about seals, whether they be in Homer or in the *Cyranides*. Seafarers and those with specialist knowledge of the sea in Antiquity are in agreement when they declare the disappearance of the seal from the Mediterranean to be a recent phenomenon. At the beginning of this century these amphibious creatures still wintered near Cape Fegalo and until only a few years ago some were still to be seen by passing vessels on the shores of deserted islands.⁶

The image of the seal in Greek antiquity centres upon two essential features of this animal, namely its amphibious nature and the fact that it is fin-footed, or to put it another way, its way of life and its morphological characteristics—two aspects of the seal which are closely interconnected as is shown by comparing two texts from Aristotle. In the *Historia Animalium* the seal is described as an amphibious animal: 'it does not take in sea-water; it breathes and sleeps and brings forth its young on dry land (near the shore though, it is true) as belonging to the land animals which have feet; on the other hand it spends most of its time in the sea and gets its food from the sea and therefore we must discuss it along with the aquatic animals'.⁷ Divided between land and sea, by preference inhabiting the shore, the strip of land which borders the sea, the seal is only in a position to lead this type of double life because it enjoys certain morphological peculiarities which make it possible for it to belong to the category of fishes as well as to that of land animals. This is a point which is stressed in Aristotle's *De Partibus animalium*: 'Seals, if regarded as water animals, are anomalous in having feet; if regarded as land animals, in having fins (their hind feet are altogether like those of fishes, ie. fins)'.⁸

A number of texts define this type of double life led by the seal more closely. First there are the accounts ranging from Aristotle to Aelian of the up-bringing of the young seal.⁹

This is how Plutarch describes the training of this amphibian: 'Seals give birth to their young on dry land; little by little they lead them towards the sea, give them a taste of it and then immediately take them out of it again. They repeat this procedure several times until they have got them used to it and given them so much confidence that they enjoy being in the sea-water'.¹⁰ This toing and froing of the young seal between the land and the sea conveys more than just the amphibious nature of an animal that belongs both to land and to sea; it also reveals one of the major roles of the seal for the ancient Greeks: the seal was a mediator between the dry and the wet, bringing together the elements of sea and land. Ever since the episode of Proteus in the *Odyssey*, seals, for the Greeks, had been animals which came up from the depths of the sea to lie in the shelter of caves along the coasts: they seem to display a particular partiality for the ribbon of wet land which links the dry to the wet. When they need to sleep the seals of the Old Men of the Sea come to lie on the seashore (*parà rhēgmīni thalássēs*);¹² and it is also to the beach (*epi rhēgmīni pōntou*) that Psamathe, the sister of Thetis, comes to give birth to a son called Phokos, the Seal, when in order to elude the grasp of AEneas she has herself assumed the form of this animal.¹³ But these fin-footed amphibians do not only settle in the caves along the sea coast, they sometimes choose rocks battered by the waves, known to the Greeks as *spilades*. This is the very expression Hera uses to describe the place where Leto will give birth to a child which, for fear of the anger of Hera, no land will accept: 'Leto will give birth where the seals of the sea produce their young, upon the lost rocks'.¹⁴ Now Delos, which is the place in question, is indeed a windy isle, a rock battered by the sea. It is, according to one mythical tradition, even a land without roots, a floating island.¹⁵ Delos wanders over the sea, borne along with the current by the Notos or the Euros winds. In contrast to the earth, 'wide-bosomed Gaia', whose deeply anchored roots ensure a solid and unshakable seat for mankind to dwell on, the floating island is a portion of earth which is half immersed in the sea and which is subject to movement in two directions, either horizontally or vertically. Sometimes it is buffeted from left to right and from right to left

by the waves and sometimes it rises up from the depths of the sea and is then lost again in the immensity of the Pontos. The analogy between the floating island and the seal which inhabits it is perfect. For mythical thought the position of both was half-way between the earth and the water. They do not belong totally either to the one or to the other and because they combine elements of the sea and the earth equally, both act as mediators between the two.

The animal model of the seal, the amphibian whose position is profoundly ambiguous, is affected by a tension between two contrary influences; one connects it with the land and the human beings who live there, the other with the sea and the forces which are hostile to man. The disparity of behaviour which this one animal displays is underlined by the existence of two aspects of the life of the seal. One of these stresses the seal's affinities with the human race, the other its power of the 'evil eye'.

Although the seal may appear separated from the human world by both its condition as an animal and its aquatic nature, it is nevertheless linked with it through several aspects,—through certain physiological peculiarities pointed out by the naturalists, through its liking for life on dry land on shores frequented by fishermen, and also through the disturbing resemblance it bears to the human form, a resemblance often referred to in the course of a long tradition of folklore. In the *Historia Animalium*, after noting the seal's affinities with the quadrupeds (like them, it is viviparous and it feeds its young with its milk), Aristotle twice stresses the resemblance these amphibian mammals bear to the human race: the seal gives birth to its young at any season 'as is the case with men'; and although the genital organs of the female seal resemble those of the sow, in other respects she is 'like a woman'.¹⁶ Alongside these observations made by naturalists, we must consider the information given by geographers about the close relations between seals and the men who live along the coasts. In his description of the Isle of Seals, situated right at the tip of the Red Sea, off the coast of the Ichthyophagoi, Agatharchides tells with wonder of the friendly relations which exist here: 'It would seem that a kind of everlasting peace has been concluded between men and seals. The men

never seek to harm the seals who, for their part, never attack the men. Each species respects the territory of the other and the two live together on terms of amicability which are rarely to be found between groups of men who live close to each other'.¹⁷ It is in a similar context that we should locate Aelian's anecdote about the love affair between a seal and a sponge diver: One day a seal fell in love with a man who collected sponges. It came out of the sea and was united to him in a cave by the sea. This fisherman was the most ugly of men but in the eyes of the seal he possessed dazzling beauty of the rarest kind.¹⁸

One side of the seal's way of life thus brought it close to the world of men. Furthermore the morphology of the seal was such that it presented precise features of similarity with the human race. In the *Cyranides* a passage describing it runs as follows: 'the marine seal is a very fine animal, it has *human hands* etc'.¹⁹ This corresponds to Aristotle's remark: 'its forefeet are like hands'.²⁰ This same point of resemblance struck the French traveller Thévenot, many centuries later. When he was travelling along the coast of Sinai, opposite the Seal Islands of Antiquity, he was intrigued by a certain fish known to the natives as the man of the sea. 'This fish is large and strong and the only extraordinary thing about it is that it has two hands which are in effect like those of a man, but the skin of this fish looks like that of a chamois'.²¹ Two points should be noted about this description, published in Paris in 1664. First it mentions 'human hands' as do the *Cyranides* and recalls the comparison made by Suetonius, writing of the Telchines ('they have fingers joined together by skin, like geese'); and secondly, it mentions the name 'man of the sea' which natives used for the seal. The man of the sea and the seal are two species which the elder Pliny cites, one after the other, in his list of sea monsters.²² It may be quite by chance that these two species appear together in Pliny's list, but, nonetheless, they are two species whose affinities are noted as early as in the *Odyssey*, in the episode about Menelaus and the Old Man of the Sea. The fact is that Proteus was deceived by the seal-disguise Menelaus and his companions adopted when they dressed up in the freshlyflayed skins of these sea mons-

ters; and the reason he was deceived is undoubtedly that the distance between man and seal is one that is easily crossed. The resemblance between seal and man seems all the greater because the sea-creature does in some ways look rather like a human being.²³

So one image of the sea is that of a philanthropic animal with close affinities with the human race. But in another set of texts it is a misanthropic creature, a distant inhabitant of the depths of the sea, one of the group of animals considered impure and wicked.²⁴ When it rises from the sea, this monster of the deeps seems to be returning from the Beyond. It has a strong smell, the smell of the abyss. It gives off an odour of death which can only be dispelled by ambrosia, the life-giving fragrance of the Immortals.²⁵ The chthonic aspects of the seal caused an evil interpretation to be put upon its physiological characteristics and thus it was seen as the enemy of the human race. It was said that when on the point of being caught it would vomit out its rennet and eject its seed attempting in this way to deprive men of substances endowed with highly valued qualities, rennet being a remedy for epilepsy while the seed of the seal was supposed to cure sexual impotence.²⁶ When Aelian reports this behaviour of the seal in his *Historia Animalium* he goes on to remark: 'Yes, by Zeus, this animal certainly is a bearer of the evil eye, *báskanos*'.²⁷ But this role is not without ambiguity for every *báskanos* is ambivalent in that it is at the same time *baskánion*, that is to say a means of protection against the evil eye. So the seal, or even the smallest part of one can serve as an amulet whose protective powers are all the more dependable because of the very great power of the evil eye which the seal possesses. Plutarch, the *Cyranides* and the *Geoponica* all give lists of the various parts of the seal which can be used as amulets:²⁸ the heart of a seal, nailed to the mast of a ship protects the vessel from all danger; the long, stiff whiskers from its nose guarantee spectacular success; its finger nails afford protection against all enchantment, cure every disease and ward off all evil. As well as these powers which it shared with a large number of other animals, the seal was also believed to give forewarning of, or ward off, atmospheric phenomena such as thunder, hail and storms. Plutarch maintained that the skin

of a seal is never struck by lightning; in the *Cyranides* it is reported that if a seal-skin is nailed to the prow, the ship will never be assailed by fire from the sky; and again, in the same collection of writings, it is said that a seal-skin wards off thunder, danger and demons. Finally, on three occasions the *Geoponica* describe the seal-skin as being the most effective means of affording protection against the ravages of hail for vines, wheat fields and farming land.

The seal is an ambiguous creature, and doubly so: in its double attitude or 'duplicity' towards men and also in its way of life now on the land and now in the sea. And there is a yet a third side to its ambiguity: the uncertainty of an animal that is both a fish and a quadruped. This third kind of ambiguity manifests itself both in the seal's strange gait and in its peculiar limbs. Seals move along in a strange manner because, as Aristotle points out, they are aquatic creatures with feet and at the same time terrestrial quadrupeds whose limbs end in flippers. The seal appears to drag itself along, it slithers forward, progresses in undulations, snakes along so to speak, pushing with the forelimbs on its flanks and repeatedly contracting and oscillating its body. The ancient writers did not fail to notice such a singular gait. Pliny the Elder²⁹ writes 'the flippers which they use in the sea take the place of paws when they drag themselves along the ground'; and Aristotle: 'To get down steep places it just lets itself go without attempting to walk, because it is unable to get a grip with its feet'.³⁰ In a chapter of the *Historia Animalium* devoted to the different ways of life, Aristotle notes that among terrestrial creatures some fly while others move about on the ground, and of the latter group some walk, some crawl and others move by undulation. He then goes on to observe that some birds have 'weak feet' (*kakópodes*) and for that reason are known as 'ápodēs'. And at this point he introduces a remark on the subject of the seal: 'the seal too, has stunted feet' (*kekolobómēnoi pódes*).³¹ The verb *kolobóũsthai* is the one Aristotle uses in the same treatise to describe the morphology of fish: 'In the tribe of fishes, the external parts are still further stunted. Fishes have neither legs, hands nor wings . . . but the whole trunk has an uninterrupted line from head to tail'.³² With its truncated external parts 'the seal is a sort of stunted quad-

ruped' (*hóspēr pepērómēnon. tetrápoun*). Its extremities are carefully described in the *Historia Animalium* as follows: 'Immediately behind its shoulder blades are attached its front feet, similar to hands, like those of the bear, for each has five toes and each toe has three flexions (*treís kampás*) and a smallish nail. The hind feet also have five toes and flexions and nails similar to those of the front feet, but in shape they are comparable to the tail of a fish'.³³ In this description, as in those already mentioned, emphasis is laid first and foremost on the ambiguities of the seal: now a quadruped, now a fish; now equipped with feet and hands, now without arms and legs. The tentative nature of the expressions used faithfully reflects the ambivalence of a creature forever poised between the status of a fish and that of a quadruped, equipped with feet and paws like terrestrial animals but at the same time lacking arms and legs like marine creatures. Secondly, this description makes it quite clear that the ambivalence in the seal's way of life finds its fullest expression in the morphology of the extremities which characterise this fin-footed amphibian. Are these limbs, with their multiple joints, hands or feet or flippers? It is an unresolved enigma: the feet are flippers and these flippers are hands. The passage from Aristotle indicates that several definitions are possible for the seal: a quadruped with flippers, a fish with hands, a kind of human being without arms or legs or, again, a man-fish or a fish-quadruped. Together they show clearly enough that the image of the seal oscillated between three terms: namely, fish, quadruped and man, and the tension between them made the image of the seal appear to be quite unlike that of any other animal. The third notable feature of this description of the seal's extremities is the importance Aristotle attaches to the concept of curvature. The fingers of the front paws, like those of the back feet, each possess three joints, *treís kampás*, and their shape is reminiscent of the sinuous appearance of the fish's tail. The extremities of both its front and its rear limbs makes the seal a creature of curves; and this fundamental feature of its silhouette is further emphasised by its rolling gait and sinuous and curved movements.

Suetonius has left us a very full description of the Telchines. They possess the power of metamorphosis so they

are not limited to a single animal form. Sometimes they resemble demons, sometimes men, sometimes fish. So the appearance of a fin-footed amphibian which the Telchines sometimes adopt is not the only fish-shaped metamorphosis within the powers of these blacksmiths of the sea. However, we may consider the seal's form to be especially suited to the Telchines because this animal image allows the metal-workers of the sea to reveal the fundamental characteristics of their mythical personality. The fact is that there are fundamental resemblances between the image of the seal in ancient Greek thought and the representation of the Telchines in myth.³⁴ As in the case of the seals, the status of the Telchines lies somewhere between that of men and that of fish. They were the first inhabitants of the island of Rhodes, having risen from the sea to which they were finally banished again by the sons of the Sun. According to the mythical traditions of Rhodes, their role was, more precisely, to act as mediators between the sea and the earth, as powers whose whole career is inseparable from Rhodes represented as a floating island, a land only half distinguishable from the waters of the sea. Finally, these metalworker Telchines who were the first human beings on Rhodes were also, for a whole set of texts, carriers of the evil eye. Their gaze changes all things for the worse, they concoct poisons from a mixture of vegetable roots, sprinkle upon the earth water from the Styx, which dries it up, and bring down hail, snow and storms wherever they choose, thus exerting upon atmospheric phenomena the same powers that seals were traditionally believed to hold.

From this brief comparison we can see that the mythical image of the metal workers of Rhodes incorporates all the conceptual features which we have found to be relevant in the representation of the seal. We should, however, make two qualifications at this point. Although the animal model of the fin-footed amphibian illuminates certain aspects of the Telchines, that is as demons of the sea and primordial beings, it does not so far appear to establish any precise connection with their role as metal-workers. Moreover, one major characteristic of the seal model, namely the strange nature of its extremities, does not appear to correspond to any feature in the representation of the Telchines. These two points are

in effect inseparable and we must undertake a direct analysis of them, for the fact is that it is this very feature of the animal model which most significantly symbolises the blacksmith aspect of the nature of the Telchines.

To discover the relationship between the ambiguous extremities of the seal and the metallurgical activity of the Telchines we must digress to consider another animal model whose fundamental elements reveal clear affinities between the morphology of its extremities and the technical activity of the blacksmith. The animal that is thus characterised both by the strange form of its limbs and by its complicity with the metal-worker is the crab, *karkinos*, the sea creature which is associated both with the Cabiri and with Hephaestus. A gloss from Hesychius makes the following two connected points: 'The Cabiri are crabs, *karkinoi*, animals which are particularly honoured at Lemnos where they are held to be gods. It is also said that they are the sons of Hephaestus'.³⁵ The Cabiri are powers of the Sea who are metalworkers. They were born from the union between Hephaestus and Cabeiro, the daughter of Proteus, the king of the seals, and they are identified with the creature which is closely associated with both the sea and metallurgy: *karkinos*, which is the Greek name for the crab, is also the word denoting the blacksmith's tongs.³⁶ Thus it seems that for the Greeks the image of this crustacean creature of the sea could not be dissociated from that of the instrument which is an appendage to the hands of the blacksmith and enables him to handle the glowing metal.

Like the seal, the crab is an amphibious creature: 'they spend their lives near the land and creep into holes and crannies'.³⁷ However, unlike the seal, the crab is not often regarded as a mediator between the water and the earth. Its originality lies elsewhere, in its limbs, the way it walks and the shape of its feet and pincers. Here, for example, is how the hard-tailed crab, the *págouros*, is described: 'A beast with crooked legs (*rhaiboskelē*), and two pincers (*dichalon*), which burrows into the sand (*ammoduētan*), walks backwards (*opisthobāmon*) ... a swimmer with eight feet (*oktāpoun nēktan*)'.³⁸ In a whole series of texts this monster with crooked legs, the crab, is an animal which does not move straight forwards: it walks

sideways, advancing obliquely. Aristotle says that all animals move in the same manner. Whether they have four legs or more they move diagonally (*katà diámetron*), stepping first on the right forefoot then the left rear foot and so on. They all have two guiding feet—all, that is, except the crab which has four³⁹ and which walks sideways, *eis tò plágion*.⁴⁰ And there is a Greek proverb which agrees with the naturalist's description: 'You will never make a crab walk straight'.⁴¹ The gait of this many-legged creature is the more disturbing in that its feet are twisted and in front of its carapace it carries two huge pincers. In contrast to the seal, the crab has front and rear limbs which are clearly distinguished: the pincers are used to grip tightly while the feet are responsible for movement over the ground. The extremities of the crab which are clearly differentiated in this way according to their function, are also opposed to each other in another way: the way they bend. 'These claws are not for the sake of locomotion but serve instead of hands, for catching and holding; and that is why they bend in an opposite direction to the feet which bend and twist toward the concave side while the claws bend towards the convex side (*toús mèn ... epì tò koílon, toús d'epì tò peripherēs kámptousi kai helissousi*)'.⁴² The *karkínos* has an oblique walk which involves two different directions, forwards and backwards, and similarly its morphological structure comprises a double synthesis of opposites. Instead of being turned slightly outwards, the feet of the crab turn inwards, the left one curving towards the right and the right one towards the left. The contrasting curvature of the lower limbs which thus point in two opposite directions is matched symmetrically by the pincers which also curve in opposite directions and whose movement is the symmetrical reverse of that of the lower limbs. In its limbs as in its gait, the animal model of the crab represents a synthesis of all the different directions, forwards and backwards, and left and right.

All these characteristics of the crab—its twisted legs, its oblique gait, the double and opposite directions in which it moves,—are unmistakably reminiscent of the most famous of Greek blacksmiths, Hephaestus, the *polúmētis* god⁴³ with whom the crab is specifically associated on the island of Lem-

nos. The texts enable us to characterise the physical appearance of the god who is a worker in metals by three adjectives especially: *kullós* (in the compound word *kullopodiōn*), *chōlós* and *amphiguēeis*. All three refer to the blacksmith's extremities: the first conveys their curved shape, the second their truncated nature and the third the fact that his limbs bend in two opposite directions. Hephaestus is *kullopodiōn*, a god with curved feet and twisted limbs.⁴⁴ In medical terminology *kullós*, meaning bandy-legged, is opposed to *blaisós*, meaning knock-kneed just as a dislocation outwards is opposed to a dislocation inwards.⁴⁵ But apart from this specialised meaning in medical terminology, *kullós* can also mean club-footed or crooked-fingered, referring to hands crooked into a curve the shape of which would, for the Greeks, call to mind the pincer of a crab.⁴⁶ *Karkinoûn toús daktýlous* means to curve the fingers, bend them inwards, making the hand of a crab.⁴⁷ Hephaestus whose limbs are curved is certainly lame, *chōlós*. When used on its own *chōlós* describes a living creature which is truncated, mutilated or crippled; when used with the phrase *héteron póda* this adjective means lame;⁴⁸ used in conjunction with *tēn cheîra* it takes on the meaning of one-armed.⁴⁹ Hephaestus is not strictly speaking bandy-legged nor is he lame; he is 'mutilated in both legs', *hekatérous toús pódas chōlós*⁵⁰ or 'mutilated in his lower limbs' (*pērōthénta tàs báseis*).⁵¹ The curvature and mutilation of his extremities are two features which are, as it were, echoed by the third epithet, *amphiguēeis*. H. Vos interprets this to mean 'curved in both legs', while L. Deroy analyses it as meaning 'possessing two, opposite directions'.⁵² As used by Homer it fully conveys the morphological peculiarities of Hephaestus as depicted on vase paintings of the archaic period. On a number of vases—which Marie Delcourt has shown to be evidence relevant to any analysis of Hephaestus⁵³—the disablement of the blacksmith is depicted in various ways which can be reduced to two complementary models. One group of paintings shows Hephaestus with twisted limbs, bent feet and curved legs; in the other group we see the figure moving in two different directions, either with the left foot pointing forwards and the right bent backwards, or with the feet placed heel to heel with one facing left and the

other right,⁵⁴ or else with his head turned to face forwards in contrast to his feet which are pointed backwards.

Whether orientated in two directions at once or possessed of crooked legs, the blacksmith of myth is always a being with an ambiguous way of walking and peculiar limbs. It is this fundamental aspect of the metal worker that is revealed, on two closely related levels, by the animal models which have appeared to us to be an integral part of the mythical representation of the blacksmith—namely the crab and the seal, the crab being associated with Lemnos and the Cabiri, and the seal with Rhodes and the Telchines.⁵⁵ Thus our digression to establish the homology between these two animal models enables us to see the full significance of the last of the seal's characteristics, which did not originally appear to correspond to anything in the myth about the Telchines. The sinuous gait and curved extremities of the companions of the Old Man of the Sea symbolise the metallurgical function of these disturbing powers. Like the crab with its oblique walk, the seal with its sinuous method of movement represents one of the blacksmith's fundamental characteristics, namely the ambiguous nature of his limbs. This is the identifying mark of a god such as Hephaestus. The peculiar shape of his feet is the visible symbol of his *mêtis*, his wise thoughts and his craftsman's intelligence. It has been suggested⁵⁶ that Hephaestus is disabled and deformed because he has been initiated into the arts of magic. But in the Greek world there does not appear to be any evidence for men of magic undergoing mutilation as there is in certain Australian and Germanic societies. And even if it is true that the Amazons⁵⁷ deliberately deformed their male children by breaking their hips and knees, this was in order to prevent them from plotting anything against the women and to relegate these cripples to the sedentary trades of blacksmith or cobbler,—trades which, in a society where only the women exercised the warrior function, were the mark of the servitude and impotence which were the lot of the men.

In total contrast to this, it is the power of Hephaestus which is emphasised by his distinctive characteristic of being endowed with a double and divergent orientation. In order to dominate shifting, fluid powers such as fire, winds and

minerals which the blacksmith must cope with, the intelligence and *mêtis* of Hephaestus must be even more mobile and polymorphic than these. They must possess the qualities of the oblique and the curved—qualities possessed in the highest degree by the crab and the seal, the creatures which half-belong to the element of the sea with which, for the ancient Greeks, metallurgy appears to have been so profoundly connected.

Notes

1. H. Herter, s.v. 'Telchinen', *R.E.* (1934), c. 197–224 has collected extensive data on these powers.
2. Suetonius, *Peri Blasphēmion* (On Terms of Abuse) *Peri Paidion* (On Games) ed. Taillardat, Paris, Les Belles Lettres, 1967, p. 54 (text) and p. 133–6 (for the commentary).
3. At this juncture we are following the version given by Eustathius which has the advantage of simplicity (cf. Suetonius, *o.c.*, p. 99) whereas that reconstructed by J. Taillardat raises a number of difficulties.
4. The question of whether we should favour *megalōphrues*, with big eyebrows (M, L), adopted by Taillardat, or *melanōphrues*, with black eyebrows, attested by Eustathius, is a matter of some uncertainty. The eyebrows are part of the glittering gaze and of the eye with the power to fascinate or terrify: eg. the eyebrows of Hermes *polimētis* (*Homeric Hymn to Hermes* 278–80), of the Cyclopes (Callimachus, *Hymn to Artemis*, 52), of Harpalykos (Theocritus, *The young Herakles* (XXIV), 115–117). As for their dark colour, for a whole Homeric tradition (*Il.*, I, 528; XV, 102; XVII, 209) this is the colour most in keeping with the terror aroused by a spell-binding gaze.
5. Aristotle, *Hist. anim.*, 515b 24 and *Part. anim.*, 695b 5.
6. Cf. Henry Hayman in his edition of *The Odyssey of Homer*, London, 1866, Appendix C:7, p. xciii; O. Keller, *Die entike Tierwelt*, I, Leipzig, 1909, p. 407–408; V. Bérard, *Les Phéniciens et l'Odyssee*, I, Paris, 1927, p. 440–441; *Les navigations d'Ulysse*, II, Paris 1928, p. 434–435; J. Meirat, *Marines antiques de la Méditerranée*, Paris, 1964, p. 31–32.
7. Aristotle, *Hist. Anim.*, 566b 28ff.
8. Aristotle, *Part. Anim.*, 697b 4ff.
9. Aristotle, *Hist. anim.*, 567a 5ff; Pliny, *H.N.*, IX, 41; Aelian, *Hist. anim.*, IX, 9.
10. [Plut.], *De soll. anim.*, 982d.
11. *Od.*, IV, 400ff.
12. *Od.*, IV, 449.
13. Pind., *Nem.*, V, 13.