

BOOK REVIEW

Exploring Greek Myth. By MATTHEW CLARK. Chichester and Malden, Mass.: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012. Pp. xiii + 196. Paper, £19.99/\$34.95. ISBN 978-1-4051-9455-6

Noting the popularity of university-level Classical myth courses, and the variety of books for the general audience, Matthew Clark presents material beyond that found in introductory textbooks including “some of the research that has accumulated over the past decade in a way that is accessible for those who are not yet scholars in the field” (ix). The book is packed with useful references and discussions, which are both its strength and weakness.

This is a slim volume of thirteen short chapters, each with an interesting title: 1. “The Knife Did it”: myth definitions and characteristics; 2. “Six Hundred Gods”: myth and religion; 3. “Homer’s Beauty Pageant”: myth traditions; 4. “Pelops’ Shoulder”: myth sources; 5. “Ikaros’ Wings, Aktaion’s Dogs”: myth and meaning; 6. “The Bones of Orestes”: hero and society relationships; 7. “Born from the Earth”: city and family foundation myths; 8. “The Judgment of Paris”: Greek and non-Greek myth; 9. “Boys in Dresses, Brides with Beards”: gender; 10. “Agamemnon’s Mask”: history and myth; 11. “Orestes on Trial”: myth and thought; 12. “Plato and the Poets”: philosophy; 13. Conclusion. Each chapter has three to seven sections including boxed material such as: overviews of specific myths; use of a myth in Western tradition; and further explorations (exercises for essays). In the general myth classroom, many of these topics are touched on only briefly, so their discussion is welcome.

The use of authors not usually used as myth-book sources (Pausanias, Palaephatus, Diodorus Siculus, Hyginus), and works from standard sources (Homer, Hesiod, the tragedians, Apollodorus, and Ovid) makes the book unusual. The former authors appear when Clark goes beyond the standard stories, showing how myths that are less well known play a role in ancient Greek life. For example, Clark differentiates Panhellenic (e.g. the myth of Persephone, 6–10) from local myth (e.g. Bouphonia at Athens, 11–13).

Clark discusses myth theory from scholars such as Burkert, Detienne, Vidal-Naquet, et al. (the works of Joseph Campbell are largely ignored). Discussions

presented after a particular story facilitate understanding of ancient Greek culture. For example, after the story of Myrrha and Adonis (box, p. 120) Clark unpacks Detienne's structuralist understanding of the myth and the Adonia festival, and contrasts it with the Athenian Thesmophoria as festivals of sterility and fertility.

For all the book's usefulness, several problems caution *caveat lector*. First, there are a plethora of references to places in Greece, some well known (e.g. Athens, Delphi), others not (e.g. Arcadia, Megara, etc.), but there are no maps to assist a reader unfamiliar with Greek topography.

Second, there are many references to images, and the book has ten figures, mostly from vase painting. Otherwise, the reader is referred to *LIMC* (pp. 63, 64), or to other sources, e.g. the figures referred to in T. H. Carpenter, *Art and Myth in Ancient Greece: A Handbook* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1991) for the Judgment of Paris (box, p. 99). The ten figures, however, are problematic, due to inconsistent contrast quality. For example, Fig. 12.1 (p. 162) has excellent contrast, while Fig. 1 (p. 8) is somewhat muddy, making details hard to see. While most images exemplifying ancient myths portrayed in vase painting are only mentioned in passing, the François Vase (Fig. 3.1, p. 40), is discussed in detail, band by band as an example of a "visual catalogue of Greek myth" (39). However, the image provided is so small that it is difficult to see what Clark is referring to.

Another problem lies in Clark's accuracy. Several Pausanias references are incorrect by a section or two: the citation for the stallion Areion, progeny of Demeter and Poseidon (p. 9), given as *Guide* 8.25.5, should be 8.25.7; 1.15.6 as the citation for a statue of Athena next to a shrine of Hephaestus in Athens (p. 87) should be 1.14.6. The problem is not limited to Pausanias. Plato, *Gorgias* 485d, given as a reference to Euripides' *Antiope* (p. 5), should be 484e. There is also an occasional problem with presentation accuracy. In discussing girls' ritual (pp. 115–9) Clark notes stories of young women, Kyrene, Kallisto, and Daphne, raped by gods. These are examples of initiation patterns, which "... would turn ... [girls] temporarily into boys or men, ... either in behavior or in appearance. ... All of these mythic women reject marriage and become hunters." (p. 117). Yet, while Daphne was pursued by Apollo and became a laurel tree, there is nothing in her story that indicates that she was a huntress.

In addition, one wonders why Clark did not use certain sources. In discussing Indo-European myth and linguistics linked to Greek myth, Clark presents Ovid's flood (*Metamorphoses* 1.163–421) and its connection to those in the *Bible* and *Gilgamesh* (pp. 101–3) yet does not mention the Hindu version found in the

Mahabharata. This omission seems curious because in discussing the Ages of Mankind on p. 104, Clark cites the *Mahabharata* for the sacrifice of Purusha.

In overview, many of Clark's secondary sources, such as the multi-volume *LIMC* and others, are only likely to be found in a university library, and not accessible to the ordinary, educated reader. These sources and the exercises given as essays for "Further Exploration" lead one to wonder for whom the book is intended. While the apparent audiences are students who have studied mythology and the general reader (p. ix), would a general reader wish to write an essay—a task more suited to a school exercise? Clark's website at the Department of Humanities at York University states that this book is in fact "an upper-level textbook." Thus, the book is an intriguing addition to the study of myth, but best appreciated by those in an upper-level myth course, or by a serious student of myth who wishes an in-depth survey.

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