

BOOK REVIEW

Female Mobility and Gendered Space in Ancient Greek Myth. By ARIADNE KONSTANTINOY. London-Oxford: Bloomsbury, 2018. Pp. 189. Hardcover, £81.00. ISBN 978-1-4742-5676-6.

Both within the different areas of the ancient Greek household and outside it, historical and archaeological research provides us today with a potentially more flexible assessment of the ability of ancient Greek women to move from space to space: some mobility was possible, dependent on age/status and time/occasion. The exact relation of that nuanced picture of ancient social reality to ancient social ideology cannot, given the evidence, be decidedly defined. Konstantinou opts for an alternative quest: deciphering the interplay between social ideology, social praxis and mythic imagination (also one of her long-term concerns in previous talks and published papers). The resulting monograph comes as a welcome contribution to a number of domains: the reading of ancient mythology, cultural history, space and gender analysis and the study of epic and tragic poetry (her two key primary sources).

An introductory chapter outlines the objects of the study (“mobility” and “space”) and contextualizes their study historically (the ancient Greek archaic and classical social ideology) and methodologically (post-structuralist and feminist readings of individual representative narratives of ancient Greek myths, chosen roughly from the same period and genre). The subsequent main body of the book falls into two parts. In Part 1 (“Goddesses on the move”), Konstantinou extends her revisionist take (an enterprise initiated in her 2016 article¹) on the Vernantian consensus view of Hestia’s immobility as mirroring current ideology regarding female domesticity (lack of mobility, seclusion within the *oikos*) vs. male mobility (the paradigm of Hermes). Using archaic epic sources (epics, Homeric Hymns), Konstantinou contextualizes Hestia’s case within the para-

¹ Vernant’s matching of Hestia with Hermes is replaced with a comparison between Hestia and Eos in Konstantinou, A. 2016. “Hestia and Eos: Mapping Female Mobility and Sexuality in Greek Mythic Thought”, *AJPh* 137: 1-24.

digns of other quite mobile virgins (Athena, Artemis: Chapter 1) and non-virgin goddesses (Aphrodite, Demeter: Chapter 2) and the occasionally immobile Hera (Chapter 2). The end result is a variant picture of female divine mobilities, shown to be unbound by gender and by any notion of a focal domestic center/household axis.

Part 2 (“Heroines on the move”) involves a number of shifts. We move forward from the Archaic to the Classical period. We turn from divinities to mortals: Io and the Danaids (Chapter 3), maenads and huntresses (Iphigenia, Callisto and others: Chapter 4). We turn from Homeric narratives to tragic dramas: *Prometheus Bound*, Aeschylus’ *Suppliants*; Euripides’ *Bacchae*, *Hippolytus*, *Iphigenia in Tauris*; Aristophanes’ *Lysistrata* (a few post-classical sources are used for huntresses). The object of the study itself also undergoes some ramifications: a distinction is introduced between large-scale mobility (journeys to faraway lands) and small-scale mobility (the exit from the paternal house); investigation of the nature of gendered spaces appears as a new focus, due to the perspective of the primary sources at hand. Two principal questions drive the analyses of this part: how does tragedy envision the small-scale mobility of heroines (large scale mobility is rather regrettably not given serious consideration); how does the mobility of certain types of tragic heroines, whose stories are related to ritual contexts, possibly relate to ritual practices known from other sources? Her related answers suggest (*inter alia*) the following fundamental claims: tragedy more than epic focusses on the tension between inside-outside, using the centrifugal journeys in and out of the household to reflect principally on the Athenian experience of the rite of marriage; tragic ritual space occupies a place between myth and ritual, possibly reflecting but not replicating historical religious practices.

The examination of the mobility of tragic mortals set *vis-à-vis* the previous one of Homeric female divinities, reveals myth as less flexible in its conception of mortal female mobility and gendered spaces. For, while myth often sets mortal women outside the household, it consistently erects diaphanous barriers that deny their exit beyond the limits of their culturally determined domestic roles. Mythic gendered spaces populated by women are either gender segregated (only women, solitary places) or spaces symbolically beyond (beyond polis, culture, civilization). To allude to the importance of the spatial parameter, and to raise awareness of the invisibility and diachronicity of those cultural fences throughout the evolution of human mythic imagination, Konstantinou adopts the term “glass walls” (fully explained in Chapter 5). Through the use of the term, she attempts to draw a comparison between those ancient mythic barriers and the hurdles

obstructing female advancement in modern workplaces. Reflecting on current feminist discourse on gender, Konstantinou manages thus to point out how human imagination is diachronically mediated by individual and social experience, to show the interconnections between gender history past and present. While others have otherwise brought to light that complex interchange between fictive creation, social ideology and reality, the application of that modern feminist concept into the reading of ancient Greek myth is new and extremely apt.

That said, one is at points left wanting for more in order to clarify the interconnections between the past itself: the way the differences between the divine and mortal paradigm map out the archaic and classical social ideology, the ways and the possible extent to which the different generic conventions of her chosen sources (Homer and tragedy) may be influencing the different portraits of female mobility and space within each genre. To start from the latter, outside a brief excursion on the nature of theatrical performance space,² the generic features of narrative epic poetry are not put under similar consideration. Regarding the first, Konstantinou, briefly considers (149) the status of immortality and/or the shift towards a more rigid gender ideology in the Classical age (an argument of her 2016 article as well) as the defining factors of the divergence between tragic mortal and Homeric divine women. In passing she refers to the case of divine Thetis, who unlike other goddesses lives at the bottom of the sea and needs to mobilize herself towards Olympian spaces. Thetis is explained away as aberrant and thus irrelevant to the present study (149, 154n. 7). However, to discard investigation of her case, the paradigm of a goddess so deeply intermeshed with the implications of mortality in the epos, is perhaps the dismissal of a good opportunity to see how the limits of mortality (in this case of the condition of mortal motherhood) actually influence the spatiality and mobility of a divine female in the epos.

² In this section Konstantinou's discussion is principally influenced by Easterling, P. E. 1987. "Women in tragic space", *BICS* 34: 15-26. Easterling and others, like Foley and Mendelsohn (cited by Konstantinou at 109 n. 11), have been effective in revising Shaw's 1975 (also mentioned by Konstantinou, 86) formulation of the "female intruder" (the female outside in drama seen as by definition transgressive). Subsequent studies, whose reference could perhaps also strengthen Konstantinou's overall argumentation on mythic space as culturally constrained, have further shifted the emphasis to the cultural definition of female action and speech as determinants of the gender character of spatial movement and space in drama. See e.g. Chong-Gossard, J. H. K. O. (2008) *Gender and Communication in Euripides' Plays: Between Song and Silence*. Leiden and Boston.

The overall assessment remains: this book will prove a thought-provoking reading for graduate students and scholars of myth, religion and ritual, space, gender and cultural history. To be able to unpack some of the multiple ways those clusters of concepts and material might interact together at different levels for a larger design is a critical (in both senses) achievement in its own right.

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