

BOOK REVIEW

A Companion to Greek Mythology. Edited by Ken Dowden and Niall Livingstone. Blackwell Companions to the Ancient World. Malden, MA and Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011. Pp. xxvii + 643. Hardcover, \$199.95/£110.00. ISBN: 978-1-4051-1178-2.

What is the difference between a guide and a companion? On an expedition, you might employ a guide if you know where you want to get to, but are not certain about which way to go. You would bring along a companion, on the other hand, if you were less concerned about getting to the destination by the shortest route, and instead were interested in learning more about what you might see on the way; a companion might encourage you to go down by-ways, pause to see the view, and possibly even persuade you that your original destination was not really where you should be going. On this basis, Dowden and Livingstone's volume is very much a companion, and distinctly not a guide.

The book is made up of twenty-eight chapters, which, after the introduction, are arranged in six parts. The titles of the parts ("Establishing the Canon," "Myth Performed, Myth Believed," "New Traditions," "Older Traditions," "Interpretation," "Conspicuous") do not immediately make clear what the individual chapters discuss, and chapters within sections take very different approaches to superficially similar material. Two examples must suffice. Part I, "Establishing the Canon," consist of three chapters: in "Homer's Use of Myth" (27–45) Françoise Létoublon identifies references in the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* to stories known from the Epic Cycle, and then discusses how these stories and some others, are used in the poems. Ken Dowden, in "Telling the Mythology: From Hesiod to the Fifth Century" (47–72), gives a brief history of mythography, that is, concentrating on works that compile stories of gods and heroes, and despite the chronological limits suggested by the title, he ends with an analysis of Pseudo-Apollodorus' *Library*. Radcliffe Edmonds starts his chapter on "Orphic Mythology" (73–106) with the statement that "there was no such thing as Orphic mythology in the classical world," before going on to discuss the various stories that, in antiquity or more recently, have been attributed to Orpheus and "Orphic tradition," which

are bound together more by their exoticness than by their sharing any distinctive doctrine. Létoublon provides a page of notes, Dowden half a page and Edmonds fourteen pages.

Similar diversity is to be found in the three chapters that make up Part IV, "Older Traditions." Nicholas Allen's "The Indo-European Background to Greek Mythology" (341–56) is mainly about Dumézil's methods, and is applied to four "case studies," two of which are about early Roman history, while the other two make comparisons between Indian texts and Hesiod and the Epic Cycle. Alasdair Livingstone and Birgit Haskamp's chapter on "Near Eastern Mythologies" (357–82) presents the basic features of Mesopotamian, Anatolian and Ugaritic mythologies, essentially as comparative material. In contrast Nanno Marinatos and Nicolas Wyatt, in "Levantine, Egyptian, and Greek Mythological Conceptions of the Beyond" (383–410), are much more ready to engage in comparisons, amongst other things offering a distinctive interpretation of the location of Hades in the *Odyssey* on the basis of Egyptian comparanda, illustrated with helpful diagrams.

Sometimes the allocation of chapters to parts might appear a little arbitrary. Susan Woodford's study of visual material, "Displaying Myth: The Visual Arts" (157–78), a useful guide to what was depicted where, which includes an appendix on "how to identify myths depicted in images," is placed in Part II, "Myth Performed, Myth Believed," but in Part V, "Interpretation," Woodford contributes, "Interpreting Images: Mysteries, Mistakes, and Misunderstandings" (413–23), which discusses a number of case-studies of misinterpretation, and is effectively a coda to the earlier chapter. Here it sits alongside chapters by Sian Lewis on "Woman and Myth" (443–58), which mainly discusses women *in* myth, but also myth in women's (or gender) studies, and Richard Armstrong on "Psychoanalysis: The Wellspring of Myth?" (471–85), a critical, but sympathetic, discussion of the place of myth in Freud and Jung, among others. All these chapters are in some sense about interpretation, although not necessarily interpretation *of myths*: and all scholarship is interpretation of something. Dieter Hertel's "The Myth of History: The Case of Troy" (425–41), a clearly presented revisiting of the age-old question of the historicity of the Trojan War, has also been put under the "Interpretation," while Alan Griffiths' similarly titled, but considerably more wide-ranging "Myth in History" (195–207), has been placed in "Myth Performed, Myth Believed."

This slightly haphazard organization contributes to the character of the book. The editors make no claims to completeness in the areas they cover, and in the introduction, "Thinking through Myth, Thinking Myth Through," happily identify a number of topics they were unable to include. Above all, anyone looking for discussion of the reception of Greek myth in modern literature should look elsewhere. Nor is it the case that all the contributions are of equal quality, although most have something to interest the inquisitive reader. Although many volumes in the Wiley-Blackwell series of companions may set out to provide a single place for students or general readers to get an introduction to the subject, and an indication of current trends in scholarship, Dowden and Livingstone have recognized that this would be impossible to achieve in a manageable volume on Greek mythology. So this is a book to dip into, rather than to read through from cover to cover. But that is equally a way of saying that it is a volume to which the reader can return often with profit.

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