ARCHAIC GREECE AND THE ANCIENT NEAR EAST

When the Gods Were Born: Greek Cosmogonies and the Near East. CAROLINA LÓPEZ-RUIZ. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2010. Pp. xii s+ 302. ISBN 978-0-674-04946-8.

Homer's Odyssey and the Near East. BRUCE LOUDEN. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011. Pp. vii + 356. ISBN: 978-0-521-76820-7.

As classical scholars have become increasingly aware, the mutual exchange of ideas, techniques, and products among ancient Greeks and Near Eastern peoples was remarkably fluid and long-lasting.[1] In approaching this cultural interaction, the books by López-Ruiz and by Louden take the eighth century BCE as their temporal focus, the former book examining Hesiod's *Theogony*, the latter Homer's *Odyssey*. López-Ruiz and Louden both argue that scholars have not fully appreciated the correspondences between Greek myth and literature and the myth and literature of a specific West Semitic people—the Phoenicians for López-Ruiz, the Hebrews for Louden.

Of the five chapters in Carolina López-Ruiz's book (*When the Gods Were Born: Greek Cosmogonies and the Near East*), the first is particularly compelling. In chapter 1, López-Ruiz explores the dynamic relationship that existed between the Greeks and Phoenicians. Known in Greek sources primarily as maritime traders, the Phoenicians conveyed in their travels not only material goods, but also mythic and religious ideas. During the eighth and seventh centuries BCE, many Phoenicians moved westward, founding major colonies (such as Carthage) and probably also settling within many Greek cities in a small-scale, unrecorded manner. It is in precisely this period (750–650 BCE) that eastern motifs increase in Greek art, myth, and literature.

[1] Prominent in this field are the studies of Walter Burkert and of Martin L. West. See especially Burkert's *The Orientalizing Revolution: Near Eastern Influence on Greek Culture in the Early Archaic Age* (Cambridge, Mass., 1992) and West's *The East Face of Helicon: West Asiatic Elements in Greek Poetry and Myth* (Oxford, 1997).

In chapter 2 López-Ruiz investigates the puzzling line in the *Theogony* (35) when Hesiod asks, "But what do I care about these things concerning a tree or a stone?" Rather than seeing the line as simply an obscure proverbial saying or transitional formula, López-Ruiz argues that the "tree and stone" expression can best be understood in a Near Eastern context.[2] Close to the Hesiodic passage is one in the Ugaritic Baal Cycle; both passages concern divine knowledge and divine speech. Accordingly, line 35 looks back at the encounter with the Helikonian Muses (22-34), in which Hesiod receives divine inspiration/knowledge from the Muses, and the Muses (27–28) speak of their ability to utter true/false things.

López-Ruiz turns to the Succession Myth in chapter 3. She argues that scholars have underestimated the similarities between the myth in the *Theogony* and the evidence both from the Ugaritic deity lists and from the *Phoenician History* of Philon of Byblos (first-second centuries CE). The Ugaritic deity lists appear to show that Philon preserves a genuine (and independent from Hesiod) Northwest Semitic (i.e. Phoenician) cosmogonic-theogonic tradition. My brief summary does not do justice to the riches found in this chapter (especially the fascinating comparison of Kronos to the Canaanite god El), which, along with chapter 1, is the book's strongest.

In chapter 4 López-Ruiz argues that Orphic theogonies (poems and accounts associated with the mystery cult of Orphism) illuminate Hesiod's *Theogony* in two ways. First, the Orphic theogonies are often closer to their Northwest Semitic/Southern Anatolian counterparts than Hesiod's; this suggests that the Orphic theogonies reflect traditions independent from (and not just in response to) Hesiod. Second, the clearer religious/ritualistic nature of Orphic theogonies suggests that Hesiod's *Theogony* may originally have had such a nature itself.

López-Ruiz concludes in chapter 5 by noting that cosmogonies/theogonies are particularly well-suited as items for cultural exchange. The poets of such works were viewed much like craftsmen, who often traveled from city to city plying their trade. In their travels, these poets could easily pick up "foreign" cosmogonic/theogonic ideas and work these ideas into their poetry.

[2] On the proverbial and transitional character of Hesiod *Th.* 35, see M. L. West 1966: 167–69 (*Hesiod: Theogony* [Oxford]) and 1997: 431 (*op. cit.*, n. 1).

My main criticism of López-Ruiz's book is the author's contention that most of the Greeks' knowledge of Near Eastern myths was filtered through Greek contact with Northwest Syria/Palestine. For example, in her discussion of the Succession Myth in Hesiod's *Theogony*, López-Ruiz (128) posits a "Graeco-Levantine tradition" of myth and argues that "this Graeco-Levantine axis enabled the transmission of influential Hurro-Hittite myths (such as the castration motif, the swallowing of the stone, and some features of the Storm God's monster-enemies) . . ."[3] Why couldn't Greeks have learned of Hurro-Hittite myths, in particular, from an oral Anatolian tradition that preserved the myths down to Hesiod's day?[4] Why must the Phoenicians be the middlemen in the transmission of these specific myths?

López-Ruiz (36–37) points to oral storytelling in a familial setting as a means for foreign myths to be preserved and transmitted. Why couldn't bedtime at the Hesiod household have featured the young Hesiod begging his mother or father—who was allegedly from Kyme in Ionia—to tell him one more time how that sky god (the Hurro-Hittite Anu, the Greek Ouranos, or whoever) lost his kingship?

Although Bruce Louden's book (*Homer's Odyssey and the Near East*) is longer than López-Ruiz's book—13 chapters rather than 5—it is in many ways more narrowly focused and, at the same time, more oriented toward the field of classics. Louden's thesis is that Homer's *Odyssey* is composed of what Louden calls "genres" of myth—that is, different types of mythic stories, such as romance and the fantastic voyage. Recognizing these genres of myth and how they fit into the *Odyssey*, Louden argues, removes many of the perceived problems in the poem's narrative and construction.

In my view, Louden's readings of the *Odyssey* are consistently convincing and enlightening. To further explicate the genres of myth, Louden compares the genres in the *Odyssey* with similar genres found in Near Eastern literature. Louden singles out the Hebrew Bible—which he calls the Old Testament—and especially

[3] Similarly, W. Burkert 1992: 7 (*op. cit*., n. 1) speaks of "the literary culture of ancient Syria" as "[t]he bridge that once provided the direct contact" between Greece and the mythological traditions of the Near East.

[4] By contrast, M. L. West 1997: 626–27 (*op. cit.*, n. 1) argues that the Hurro-Hittite Succession Myth reached Greece in stages: passing first from "Hurrian-speakers to Greeks," then "through north-west Semitic intermediaries," and finally from Greek-controlled western Cyprus.

the book of Genesis as the Near Eastern work with the most mythic genres in common with the *Odyssey*. Louden's practice of examining the biblical and other Near Eastern genres against those in the *Odyssey* illuminates how the Odyssean genres function in the Homeric poem.

Louden's book is more classics oriented in that, while López-Ruiz appears to move comfortably from Greek to the several Near Eastern languages she treats in her book, Louden uses exclusively translations of non-Greek works, including the Septuagint for the Hebrew Bible. In addition, Louden builds upon and very frequently cites his two earlier books, *The Odyssey: Structure, Narration, and Meaning* (Baltimore, 1999) and *The Iliad: Structure, Myth, and Meaning* (Baltimore, 2006); in a few instances, he even quotes what he had written in those earlier books (146n.19, 153, 181n.4, 226n.9, 254n.11).

One of the strengths of Louden's book—his defining of the different genres of myth that make up the *Odyssey* and many other ancient works—is also occasionally a weakness. Some of Louden's definitions for the genres of myth are overly simplified and do not match all the ancient evidence. For example, on theoxeny (i.e. a god in disguise testing the hospitality of mortals), Louden contrasts *positive theoxeny* (when a community treats the god hospitably) with *negative theoxeny* (when a community is inhospitable to the god). "In both kinds of theoxeny," says Louden (32), "the host is hospitable. It is the response of his surrounding community that radically differs."

There are several ancient myths, however, that fit neither of Louden's two types of theoxeny. For example, the myth of Dionysus found in Euripides' *Bacchae* can be viewed through the lens of theoxeny: while the Theban community is apparently receptive to the arrival of Dionysus, it is the host—the Theban king Pentheus—who makes the fatal error of mistreating his disguised divine guest. Another example is Ovid's myth of Lycaon in *Metamorphoses* 1.216–39. (Louden makes no mention of Lycaon. The Ovidian theoxenies to which Louden does refer [32-33], those of Hyrieus and of Baucis and Philemon, fit his scheme of the hospitable/inhospitable community.) While the Arcadian people accept that Jupiter is actually a god and begin to worship him, the Arcadian king Lycaon himself doubts Jupiter's divinity and plans both to kill Jupiter and to test him by serving him cooked human flesh. Both Pentheus' and Lycaon's stories are *negative theoxenies* of a different sort from the one Louden describes: in both cases the community (Thebans/Arcadians) is hospitable to the god in disguise (Dionysus/Jupiter), but the host (Pentheus/Lycaon) violates hospitality.

A similar example comes from Louden's treatment of divine councils. Regarding divine councils in myth, Louden argues (17) that "most divine councils, Homeric and other, consist of a dialogue between the sky father and either the mentor god or the god with the divine wrath." The divine council that precedes the Flood in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, however, features no dialogue between sky father/mentor god or sky father/wrathful god. Instead, when he addresses an assembly of other gods in *Metamorphoses* 1.163–215 and 240–52 (bracketing the Lycaon episode), Jupiter actually serves two roles—that of the sky father and that of the wrathful god who will send the Flood—with no god speaking in opposition to him.

In analyzing the genres of myth found in the *Odyssey*, Louden proceeds in his chapters more or less sequentially through the *Odyssey*, covering the earlier parts of the *Odyssey* early in his book, and the later parts late in his book. Thus the starting point for chapter 1 is the divine council in *Odyssey* 1.26–96 (the sky father Zeus and the mentor god Athena); Louden compares this divine council to others in the *Odyssey* (e.g.12.374–88: Zeus and the wrathful god Helios), as well as to those in Near Eastern works such as the *Epic of Gilgamesh* (VI: Anu and the wrathful god Ishtar). From the comparison, Louden notes how a divine council such as Exodus 32 represents a "radical innovation" (25) on the pattern: the mortal Moses acts as the mediating sky father, while Yahweh acts as the (subordinate) wrathful god.

In chapter 2, Louden highlights the importance of theoxeny for the *Odyssey*, especially with Athena in disguise as Mentes in Book 1: her first-hand look at the inhospitable suitors in Ithaca spurs Athena to plot their destruction (much as the two angels in Genesis 19, having encountered the inhospitable mob outside Lot's house, bring about the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah). With theoxeny, the *Odyssey* innovates by postponing the destruction of the suitors until Odysseus returns to Ithaca later in the poem.

The two overriding mythic genres in the *Odyssey*, explains Louden, are theoxeny and romance. In chapter 3, Louden compares Odyssean romance (from Odysseus' forced sojourn in exotic lands to his return home and reunion with his family) to the romance of Joseph (*Gen.* 37, 39–47); the latter innovates by having Joseph's family come to where Joseph is in Egypt (cf. 322–23). Louden's discussion of the romances' various recognition scenes (whether immediate, delayed, or postponed) is outstanding.

Indeed, the first three chapters of Louden's book—which together (16–104) form almost a third of the book's 329 pages—are fundamental for Louden's analysis of the *Odyssey*, and are, in my view, the best in the book. Other chapters have topics that include Argonautic myth (Chapter 6: Odysseus/Nausikaa/Kirke vs. Jason/Medea and Jacob/Rachel [*Gen.* 28-33]), Combat myth (Chapter 8: Odysseus/Polyphemos vs. Gilgamesh/Enkidu/Humbaba), and *The King Returns, Unrecognized and Abused in his kingdom* (Chapter 12: the second half of the *Odyssey* vs. the Gospels' depiction of Jesus). In the conclusion, Louden argues for Greek influence on many stories in the Hebrew Bible; the Book of Genesis, in particular, "can be seen in a dialogic relationship with the *Odyssey* and Greek myth" (323).

Both books exhibit similar typographical and indexing problems. López-Ruiz's book has an unfortunately high number of typographical errors, including such repetitions as "will now turn now" (105) and "in the extant texts Bronze Age-Iron Age texts" (126) and such combinations as "the their" (171), "become became" (178), and "is was" (192). Louden's text is much cleaner in this respect; the most notable typographical errors in his book are on page 23 (in the *Aqhat* Anat's father can be said to be El, not Anu) and on page 188 (in the *Epic of Gilgamesh* it is Enkidu, not Shamash, who speaks of Humbaba's terrifying voice).

While both books' *General/Subject Indexes* are fine (López-Ruiz's being the more detailed of the two), it is the books' *Index locorum/of Passages Cited* that are deficient. López-Ruiz's *Index of Passages Cited* lacks all the passages cited in the endnotes. Louden's *Index locorum* does not just lack all the passages cited in the footnotes, but it also lacks some passages cited in the text; for example, none of the nine *Odyssey* passages cited in the second paragraph on page 172 are to be found in the index.

Overall, though, both López-Ruiz and Louden succeed admirably on two fronts. Through their comparisons of the *Theogony* and *Odyssey* with an assortment of Near Eastern works, López-Ruiz and Louden not only shed valuable, and often unexpected, light on many Hesiodic or Homeric phrases, passages, or narrative units, but also locate the *Theogony* and *Odyssey* firmly within a larger eastern Mediterranean cultural milieu.

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