

## BOOK REVIEW

*Drakōn: Dragon Myth and Serpent Cult in the Greek and Roman Worlds*. By DANIEL OGDEN. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013. Pp. xviii + 472. Hardcover, \$185.00. ISBN 978-0-19-955732-5.

Everyone knows that dragons are best left alone, but who has ever heard of *The Tale of the Undisturbed Dragon*? Modern culture relishes the dragon, who appears in our fantasy games, as our team mascots, even painting the skin of girls with dragon tattoos. In antiquity dragons guarded treasure, licked and healed wounds, and haunted temples, springs, and sacred precincts. Early Indo-Europeans were heroically killing dragons even before they left their homeland and spread their dragon-lore far and wide. As every fan of Harry Potter knows, *Draco dormiens nunquam titillandus*—a warning that never has and perhaps never will be heeded. Given the beast's ubiquity throughout history and our continued fascination with it, a book such as this should find many readers.

Perhaps the two best-known books on ancient dragons are Fontenrose's *Python* (Berkeley, 1959) and Watkins' *How to Kill a Dragon: Aspects of Indo-European Poetics* (Oxford, 1995). These were written from the perspectives of comparative mythology and Indo-European poetics, while Ogden favors instead a folklorist position in which dragon tales are seen as specific instantiations of a folk-tradition that was nearly universal already in antiquity. He thus intends "not to speculate about what may have gone before, but to provide a descriptive handbook of what actually was, and a point of orientation within the rich fields of literary and iconographic evidence" (1) for the Graeco-Roman *drakōn*. The volume succeeds as a handbook, with dense footnotes listing the principal primary texts, iconographical sources, and scholarly discussions of specific dragon tales. There is a certain zeal for completion (we get, for example, a footnote (111 n 233) cataloging all 69 depictions of Heracles chaining Cerberus given in *LIMC*). In fact, however, the book includes many speculations, some ingenious and a few as fanciful as the subject of the book, and often about events that may have taken place before the creation of a literary record or as suggestive rationales for dia-

chronic changes. These are some of the most interesting parts of the book, and it is undoubtedly richer for it.

The book begins with a brief introduction of the Minoan-Mycenaean, Near-Eastern and Indo-European material. The first six chapters are devoted to dragons of Graeco-Roman myth and their battles against humans. The first trio of chapters reconstructs individual myths and the stages of their development from the archaic period on. Analyses in these sections are preceded by orienting summaries of the myths' canonical versions. We find dragons in pure form (e.g. Hydra, Ladon, the Delphic serpent), composite dragons and their battle myths (Typhon, Echidna, the Lamiae, Gorgons, Chimaera, Cerberus, etc.), and the *drakontes'* marine cousins, the *kētē* or sea monsters (e.g. the beast slain by Perseus, Skylla). Earlier (21) Ogden criticizes Watkins, somewhat unfairly, for playing fast and loose with an inherited poetic formula for slaying a dragon, but this last detour shows that he encounters similar problems (here and throughout) in applying the term *drakōn* where it perhaps does not always belong.

The second trio of chapters approaches the same group of myths from a series of thematic perspectives. This section is far less homogenous than the previous one. Chapter 4 is a catch-all that takes up unrelated but fascinating topics such as dragon genealogies (uniting most of the pure or composite *drakontes* and *kētē* into a single family tree), male and female naming patterns, dragon beards and crests, the caves dragons inhabit, the marking of their territory, their association with springs, their role as guardians, their association with treasure, the types of restitution for killing dragons, the ways dragons are memorialized, and rationalizations of dragon stories. Chapter 5, "Masters and Mistresses of *Drakontes*", compiles lists of those who fight with and against dragons (deities, virgins, the races of Marsi, the Psylli); chapter 6 studies a series of symmetries between dragons and their slayers, such as the symmetrical kinds of weapons they bring to the battle (e.g. dragon fire is fought with fire, dragon venom with poison).

The next quartet of chapters is devoted to cults of dragon heroes and gods. Chapter 7 is on the association of dragons with the earth, the underworld, and underworld powers, and the return of heroic dead turned into dragons (especially in Attica: Cecrops, Erichonius, Cychreus, Draco). Chapter 8 studies the *drakōn* gods of wealth and luck: Zeus Meilichios, Zeus Ktesios, Zeus Philios, Agathos Daimon, and lucky house snakes. Chapter 9 takes up the *drakōn* gods of healing: Asclepius, Amphiaraus, Trophonius, and Glycon. Chapter 10 ends this section by considering the practicalities of keeping and maintaining real sacred snakes in sanctuaries (while some of the confusing evidence can be cleared away

by realizing that certain individual unseen snakes were merely imaginary). The “capstone,” chapter 11, plots the tradition of Christian hagiographic dragon fights as it develops from earlier pagan models. According to Ogden, most of these are not negative responses to pagan cult so much as assimilations of earlier pagan narratives.

On many themes this book is exhaustive, but where it is not it nonetheless touches on so many different areas that it will be a reference of first resort and a spur to future research for all those interested in Classical dragons. Interested readers may also want to consult the sourcebook by Ogden that serves as a companion to this volume: *Dragons, Serpents, and Slayers in the Classical and Early Christian Worlds: A Sourcebook* (Oxford, 2013).

SHANE HAWKINS

*Carleton University*, shawkins@connect.carleton.ca