

BOOK REVIEW

The Greek Gods in Modern Scholarship: Interpretation and Belief in Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Century Germany and Britain. By MICHAEL D. KONARIS. Oxford Classical Monographs. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016. Pp. viii + 361. Hardcover, £75.00. ISBN 978-0-1987-3789-6.

This is a meaty, erudite, and sometimes perplexing account of several pioneering figures in the modern study of Greek mythology and religion. Konaris' monograph, which does heavy lifting in restoring to visibility some of the "less known scholars who played an important, if unacknowledged, role in the history of the discipline" (4), will certainly be consulted in years to come; there is a wealth of knowledge here. What perplexes about this book is that, for all its professed interest in the lives of its protagonists, the biographical coating applied to the study of their scholarship is fairly light. The enterprise is more John Edwin Sandys than Arnaldo Momigliano, and no real thought is given to the myth-making traps of academic biography (as flagged in e.g. Mary Beard's *The Invention of Jane Harrison*).

The introduction tees up the book as an investigation into Greek religion's disciplinary evolution "in interrelation to its historical context," with the traffic between German and British scholarship during the 19th and early 20th centuries granted pride of place. Among the academic fields rounding into shape in this period and figuring in Konaris's exposition are archaeology, anthropology, and comparative linguistics. The prioritization of German and British discourses to the exclusion of other scholarly traditions calls for some comment, and it is to the author's credit that he recognizes the need to provide it. Unfortunately, the justification offered is flimsy: "... some of the most important developments in the study of Greek religion ... occurred in Germany ... and Britain" (3); but surely one can do better than replaying the familiar script of Germany and Britain as the two places where the truly important things happened (especially since, as Konaris goes on to acknowledge and as is apparent from many of the footnotes, French scholarship is no bit player in the modern study of Greek religion).

Chapter 1, entitled “The Tyranny of Nature Over the Greek gods” in a nicely allusive gesture to E.M. Butler’s *Tyranny of Greece over Germany*, takes as its main focus the rise of physical interpretation as a dominant strain in the study of the Greek gods. Very much entangled with “nature-loving Romanticism” (53), physical interpretation sought to locate in individual divinities a core identity expressive of or wedded to aspects of the natural environment. As Konaris underlines, this school of thought enjoys its moment in the sun in those years when modern Greece was unlocked for tourist consumption. To give a sense of physical interpretation’s scope and influence, Konaris structures this 78-page chapter with its 401 footnotes around five figures: P.W. Forchhammer (1801–1894), F.G. Welcker (1784–1868), L. Preller (1809–61), F. Max Müller (1823–1900), and W.H. Roscher (1845–1923). The coverage is thorough, and in the case of Welcker painstaking.

Chapter 2 (“Stammesgötter and Universal Gods”) presents case studies of three trailblazers in the historicizing study of Greek religion: K.O. Müller (1797–1840), H.D. Müller (1819–93), and E. Curtius (1814–96). Much as he had earlier done with Welcker’s anti-Semitism (pp. 69–70), the author does not shy from tackling K.O. Müller’s racism—the theme of one of the most provocative sections of Martin Bernal’s *Black Athena*. Konaris also brings out well and clearly how H.D. Müller and Curtius strive to clear away the thick brush of Greek religion’s polytheistic branching to reveal a presumed Urmonotheismus, and how E. Curtius’ research incorporates late 19th-century archaeological discoveries. For all its strengths of detail, however, the chapter often tends to bury the argumentative lede. There are also some missed opportunities: what about the emergence of art-historical approaches to the study of Greek divinities, as exemplified in the 1893 *Griechische Götterideale* of F.G. Welcker’s student Heinrich Brunn?

Konaris next serves up Hermann Usener (1835–1906) as intermezzo (ch. 3: “Ancient Polytheisms and Modern Antagonisms”). Fourteen compressed pages cover how Usener’s theory of *Sondergötter* became infused with “contemporary confessional polemics” (190)—a compelling but underdeveloped take. More effective if perhaps over-long is the fourth and final chapter, which turns from Germany to the reception and contestation of German scholarship in Britain (“British Responses”). The line-up is formidable, with some usual suspects in familiar roles: beginning with Tylor and Mannhardt as intellectual background to Frazer’s Corn- and Vegetation-God, the chapter whips through Robertson Smith’s innovations in the study of ritual praxis and A. Lang’s disagreements with philologists and comparativists before devoting two long sections to L.R. Farnell

and Jane Harrison. Konaris brings the curtain down with a general conclusion on Greek religion's rollercoaster ride down to the present day; an eight-page appendix surveys Apollo's fortunes in 20th- and 21st-century scholarship.

There is no question that, taken together, the book's chapters succeed in demonstrating how "the interpretation of Greek religion and its gods during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was intertwined with major contemporary religious and cultural questions" (266). However, save for occasional nods at the works of scholars such as C. Stray and S. Marchand, the nation-building, colonial, and imperialist undercurrents of so many of the writings sampled in the main chapters do not receive more than sporadic consideration. And while the book is impeccably researched, its display of learning could have been organized much more digestibly: two massive chapters (1 and 4) sandwich two significantly shorter ones (2 and 3); effective transitions within and between chapters are few and far between; and some of the footnotes could have been pared down. But the book is well produced, and typos are rare.

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