BOOK REVIEW

Imagining the Afterlife in the Ancient World. Edited by JULIETTE HARRISSON. London, UK and New York, NY: Routledge, 2019. Pp. xvi + 196. Hardback. £115.00. ISBN: 978-1-138-299979-5.

Students of history are often perplexed when they discover that it is impossible to make a comprehensive statement about what ancient people believed regarding the afterlife. In *Imagining the Afterlife in the Ancient World*, editor Juliette Harrisson brings together ten essays that address the complexity of this topic. Her brief introduction raises important theoretical questions that undergird the contributions, especially regarding the relationship between cultural products, such as texts or grave sites, and the actual beliefs of the ancients. The challenge is to discern "not simply what people in the ancient world 'believed' about the afterlife, but how they *imagined* it" (9).

The first two essays focus on Greek funerary sites. Molly Evangeline Allen's essay explores representations of the afterlife in Classical Athens, primary as depicted on *lêkythoi*, the most popular funerary vessel in the 5th century BCE. The most common image on funerary vessels from the 8th to the 5th centuries BCE was the *prothesis*, or the laying out of the corpse for visitation and mourning. This preparatory scene was gradually displaced, and by the 5th century BCE, the graveside scene was the most popular, perhaps signaling that Athenians had begun to care more about the ongoing happiness of the deceased. Nick Brown then looks closely at the complex modes of signification involved in burials. Using the example of one Phrasikleia, whose grave includes both an inscription and an accompanying statue, Brown examines how epigrams evoke multiple forms of identity (the one inscribed, the one represented as a statue and the one buried in the grave); the bereaved engages with each of these identities differently.

The next three essays shift to Roman and Etruscan funerary sites. Isabella Bossolino examines demons on Etruscan sarcophagus reliefs to make important functional distinctions among them; this challenges past scholarship that had treated most Etruscan demons as generic and interchangeable in function and representation. Josipa Lulić then considers a collection of Mercury images that is

relatively unique to 2nd- and 3rd-century Dalmatia: their uniqueness is marked by Mercury holding two rods in his hands, as opposed to the more common single rod. Mercury as a psychopomp usually serves an important role in ancient imagistic religion (articulated first by Harvey Whitehouse in *Inside the Cult: Religious Innovation and Transmission in Papua New Guinea* [1995], *Arguments and Icons: Divergent Modes of Religiosity* [2000] and *Modes of Religiosity: A Cognitive Theory of Religious Transmission* [2004]), meant to evoke a fuller narrative about the afterlife. The Dalmatian Mercuries, however, are all found in isolation, absent of other motifs that help tie them to underworld settings. The isolation and the provincial setting lead Lulić to propose that, stripped of their important imagistic contexts, Dalmatian Mercuries would have been "left as a magical amulet[s], perhaps contaminated with the image of traveling magicians" (78) who frequently used their wands in their trade. Finally, Gabriela Ingle analyzes the function of dining scenes in Roman tombs. Banquet portrayals certainly serve a commemorative purpose, but they also, she suggests, become in themselves a powerful substitute for the rites involved in care of the dead. Because the images were, in some sense, immortal, they could function long after the people who performed the rites were gone.

Three more essays deal with the imagination of the afterlife in literature. Safari F. Grey nuances our conception of the afterlife in Homer's *Odyssey*, arguing that it should be understood in a more expanded way than it has hitherto been. In particular, the semantic domains of darkness, dreams/sleep and anonymity are all varieties of afterlives, in Grey's view, and when we realize this, it becomes clear that "for most of the *Odyssey*, Odysseus is, for all intents and purposes, dead" (115). His return home is simultaneously a return to the realm of the living. Stephanie Crooks then wants to construct the nexus of afterlife possibilities that inform Daphnis' tomb in Virgil's *Eclogue* 5; this nexus involves increased attention to commemorative tombs and the increasingly prominent "Circeronian discourse on merit-based deification" (129). Harrisson's own contribution deals with the boundaries of the "real" in Propertius 4.7. Using an intriguing point of comparison (online commentary of modern ghost folklore), she finds that Propertius deployed generic folklore motifs in his story to produce a certain ambiguity about the "truth" of his work, and in doing so, raised other questions about what might be possible in the afterlife.

Two closing essays look at the afterlife in late antiquity. Julia Doroszewska and Janek Kucharski investigate the rhetorical afterlife of *maschalismos*, an apotropaic rite involving the amputation of a murderer's limbs before hanging them around their torso. Not only are the origins and purpose of *maschalismos* unclear, but also the literary evidence for it is extremely thin. Doroszewska and Kucharski

reveal that its linguistic origins lie in animal sacrifice, but interpreters gradually imbued it with a sartorial nuance derived from wrapping of a garment around a body. Hence, the "afterlife" of this tradition may have been unrecognizable to the earliest authors who mentioned it. The closing essay belongs to Frances Foster, who examines Servius' interpretation of Virgil's underworld in the *Aeneid*. Her discussion illuminates how ancient teachers worked through their own "classics" with their students and tried to reconcile apparent inconsistencies.

These essays attend to many fascinating aspects of imagining the afterlife: the literary/material portrayals, the creators of the representations, the bereaved persons and the wider communal settings, *inter alia*; as such, it is strongly recommended for scholars of classics and ancient religion. Some closing praise: this volume features several emerging scholars alongside more established ones. Harrisson should be heartily commended for including these scholars in such a project, instead of reinforcing outdated academic hierarchies.

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