

Lowell Edmunds, ed., *Approaches to Greek Myth*, Second Edition. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014. 470 pages. 12 illustrations. ISBN-13: 978-1-4214-1418-8 (hardcover), 978-1-4214-1419-5 (paperback), and 978-1-4214-1420-1 (electronic); ISBN-10: 1-4214-1418-X (hardcover), 1-4214-1419-8 (paperback), and 1-4214-1420-1 (electronic).

The 2014 second edition of *Approaches to Greek Myths* updates the 1990 collection that has for many years been standard and staple for the study of mythology. In more recent years, a number of similar books has emerged, such as *The Cambridge Companion to Greek Mythology* (2007), *Brill's Reception of Myth and Mythology* (2010), and *The Blackwell Companion to Greek Mythology* (2014); this second edition takes its place among them. In this update, Lowell Edmunds again lends his magisterial touch to a carefully curated selection of essays on different aspects of mythological study; the result is an anthology surveying the most influential trends, methodologies, approaches, and perspectives in Greek myth. As for the contributors and their chapters, several are reprising (and in some cases updating) their work from the first edition, while a larger number are offering fresh essays. All in all, the 2014 edition is a substantively different volume from its predecessor and should be regarded as such, not as a cosmetic or superficial reissue.

I reviewed the paperback version and found it an attractive volume that was sturdy yet portable—in short, a book that both can be used as a frequently consulted resource and can endure such handling. From the cover art of Ingres' famous *Oedipus and the Sphinx* to the cream-colored, acid-free paper stock, the book gives the inviting impression of accessibility; the pages are readily legible, clearly printed (never underestimate the value of typography) and a tangible pleasure. As for the content, it seems to me most useful to the reader that I first look at the chapters individually and afterward offer a few general observations on the book as a whole.

Edmunds opens the volume with his contribution, both an introduction to and broad overview of mythology as a term of definition, a body of ancient narrative, and a field of study. Formulating a working definition of myth that is both useful and accessible sets the tone for the volume, and Edmunds follows with thumbnail sketches of approaches to myth that pave the way for more detailed treatments by the volume's other contributors. Declaring that his particular emphasis in this volume is “the practice of Greek mythology” (19), Edmunds concludes his introduction by suggesting further avenues of mythological study, perhaps to be included in a future edition; these suggestions are intriguing in themselves and encourage readers to consider gender, linguistics, archaeology, the role of myth in history (as distinguished from history in myth), the history of mythography, and the sociology of Greek myth, especially vis-à-vis Rome.

Jordi Pàmias's essay on analysis and creative adaptation comprises Chapter 1, “The Reception of Greek Myth.” Pàmias offers a historical overview of reception from its ancient beginnings to the start of the 20th century, choosing occasionally to focus on particulars in the timeline. While articulating a working definition of reception that

distinguishes it from the transmission or survival of myth—that is, reception as the active participation of readers, notably in new contexts—Pàmias also recalls the essential distinction between myth and its expression in poetic, choral, dramatic, and visual forms. On that note, he provides a sweeping survey of pivotal moments and movements in the study of myth: the cultural leap from orality to literacy, the establishment of Hellenistic libraries and their fostering of mythological commentary, the technological breakthrough of the codex format, medieval and Renaissance transmission (with the useful reminder that “the history of the reception of myth is also the history of the transmission of texts”(53)), euhemerism and allegory as the earliest approaches to the meaning of myth, and the debates of more recent eras that still inform and energize reception studies.

Chapter 2, “What’s Sauce for the Goose Is Sauce for the Gander: Myth and Ritual, Old and New,” is a reprint and update of H.S. Versnel’s essay from the first edition, considered a fundamental treatment of myth, ritual and religion, and their relationship in ancient Greece. Even more engaging than the lucid outlines of major ideas (from the dying and rising year god and sacred kingship to initiation to thoughts on marginality) is Versnel’s inclusion of the human element; he brings a deft touch to character sketches and anecdotes of James Frazer and Jane Harrison, those scholarly stalwarts behind myth-ritual theory. He also offers a lively commentary on the history of ideas; for instance, he piquantly opines that attempts to trace all myths to a single source led to “the wildest excesses” (100). Versnel then ends with an examination of new developments in the ritual approach to myth (Walter Burkert and Jean-Pierre Vernant will be familiar names) and thoughts on possible angles for future research, including the fruitful combination of initiation, myth, and ritual studies in place of the previous divisions among them.

In Chapter 3, “Greek and Near Eastern Mythologies: A Story of Mediterranean Encounters,” Carolina López-Ruiz considers Greek myth in the comparative context of the wider Late Bronze Age Mediterranean with its complex exchange and interplay of various narrative and cultural traditions. In looking at the interaction of ancient Greek and Near Eastern elements, López-Ruiz raises two essential questions (what Near Eastern material was adapted by the Greeks and how) and offers thoughts on why this subfield of study is relatively young. She also does yeoman’s work in clearly laying out a number of considerations and caveats of methodology, including cautionary notes that treating Greek culture as monolithic is too simplistic an approach, that language is not the same thing as culture, and that “[w]e are dangerously used to subsuming a vast array of cultures, with their distinct languages and mythical traditions, under the convenient labels ‘Near East’ and (more vaguely) ‘Orient’ (161).”

Joseph Falaky Nagy approaches Greek myth through Indo-European myth in Chapter 4, “Hierarchy, Heroes, and Heads: Indo-European Structures in Greek Myth.” With the useful introductory reminder of how Georges Dumézil revitalized this area of study by changing its focus (from attempting to reconstruct a lost religious whole to investigating instead critical elements in Indo-European myths that gave rise to later myths in descendant traditions), Nagy considers how Greek myth in particular might offer

contributions to the greater question of Indo-European mythology. This becomes especially engaging as an update, corrective, and qualifier to Edmunds' opinion in the first edition that for the most part Greek myth has little to offer the Indo-European approach. The current status of the question embraces more complexity: even Dumézil's famous tripartite view of Indo-European ideology now seems to encompass more than the three functions of sovereignty/religion (rulers and priests), force (warriors), and fertility (producers of food, wealth, and children), and in contemplating Indo-European mythological traditions "the goal is not to retrieve a fossilized *Urmythologie* but to study some of the varieties of specialization and transformation that sustain a protean ideological heritage in Indo-European cultures" (223–4).

Chapter 5, "Odysseus and the Oar: A Comparative Approach to a Greek Legend," offers William Hansen's collection and analysis of some 30 versions of the "Sailor and the Oar" type tale of which Odysseus' at *Odyssey* 11.121-34 is but one. As a case study Hansen's work delves into narrative contexts and varieties of application of the core story, but it is also an exemplar of this kind of comparative folkloric research. The advent of comparative folklore as a field of study birthed an interest in myth as narrative (instead of, for instance, as symbol or ritual), and this in turn spotlights typology and the core elements of stories that are transmitted. Hansen infers that folktales already existed far back in antiquity and that these stories were transmitted orally down to later times when they finally were written down and collected. This argument has been challenged on occasion, but as I write this review, new studies drawing from evolutionary biology have applied phylogenetic research to folktales and posited a great age indeed for them; see most recently <http://rsos.royalsocietypublishing.org/content/3/1/150645.full-text.pdf> from 2015. Hansen's focus on the "Sailor and the Oar" story and its many manifestations highlights what they all have in common (a clear opposition between sea and land), presents Odysseus' tale as a Homeric adaptation of an already venerable core, and offers thoughts for further work, such as the need to consider the social context of telling stories.

Claude Calame's study of a city's founding myth comprises Chapter 6, "Narrative Semantics and Pragmatics: The Poetic Creation of Cyrene." No whole, continuous narrative of this myth is extant, thus compelling Calame to examine the fragments of story that do exist, scattered across different genres, each with its own generic expectations: Calame devotes valiant effort to collating and examining such disparate bits and pieces. At the core of his analysis is the identification of three elements in Cyrene's foundation story: (1) its logic and syntax, (2) its semantics, values that the story bring to bear in the world of the poet and his audience, and (3) its pragmatics, references to the story being performed on particular occasions. While Calame's case study as a whole as much to recommend it as a lesson in how to piece together a myth and its social contexts, his careful consideration of the third point - pragmatics - may be the most useful reminder to students and researchers of myth that more than one temporal context is in play, for in a story "the past that is narratively, semantically, and poetically constructed is always a function of the present" (287), and Calame argues that

effective analysis on syntactic and semantic fronts cannot occur without also taking in account the (often forgotten) pragmatic element and performance context.

For a number of years now Christiane Sorvinou-Inwood has been an influential name in the study of mythological images on Greek pottery, and Chapter 7 focuses on a particular story in visual form: “Myths in Images: Theseus and Medea as Case Study.” Sorvinou-Inwood was instrumental in changing the answer to the question of how to read (or interpret) images on vases: no longer regarded primarily as illustrations of literature or vignettes of daily life, vase paintings are now considered systems of signs that interact with each other to create meaning. Semiotics displace the “connoisseurship” approach that focuses on chronology, dating, and artistic attribution based on small stylistic characteristics. Moreover for Sorvinou-Inwood, images as signs are polysemic: they do not have fixed, static meanings, but instead they can communicate ambiguous, ambivalent, or multiple meanings depending on context with a sort of visual semantics. “Formal iconographic analyses alone are not sufficient” (358), Sorvinou-Inwood reminds us, especially when cultural determination complicates attempts at objectivity. Suggesting that two sets of analyses (iconographic and semantic) should be carried out separately and independently to prevent fallacious conclusions, she puts theory into practice, giving the reader a practical lesson by considering vase paintings of Theseus chasing Medea from Athens and interpreting them against the context of Athenian pride following victories against Persia at Marathon and Salamis.

The eighth and final chapter of the volume consists of Robert Segal’s “Greek Myth and Psychoanalysis,” in part supplanting and supplementing Richard Caldwell’s essay from the first edition that posited myth and dreams having the same function. Segal begins by sketching out the positions of the two most influential psychoanalytical approaches to myth in the twentieth century, Sigmund Freud’s and Carl Jung’s, then appending Claude Lévi-Strauss’s later structuralist and Jacques Lacan’s post-structuralist theories, and taking up contemporary Freudian and Jungian applications. Segal also offers a corrective to the usual opposition between Freud with his complexes and Jung with his archetypes (later so well popularized by Joseph Campbell’s *Hero with a Thousand Faces*): “It is conventionally assumed that, on myth in general, Freud and especially Jung are arguing against each other. But on myth both are in fact arguing at least as much against nineteenth-century theorists [who pitted myth against science] ... Most radical among twentieth-century theorists are Freud and Jung, for whom neither the subject matter nor the function of myth is like that of science. They remove myth as far as possible from any parallel to science” (431).

In closing, the second edition of *Approaches to Greek Myth* is a most useful compendium of essays and explications of the theory and practice of mythological research/study. It is a well researched and lucidly organized collection that provides an introduction to many of the issues that have animated and still energize the study of classical myth. Old situations and new complications alike find their place here, along with a wide gamut of issues and perspectives: any reader will find something familiar and yet something peculiar, something intriguing and also something provocative.

Among the eight essays there is something for everyone, though individuals may find some chapters more to their taste and interest than others, but such is the nature of so multifaceted a grand field of study as mythology. Copious footnotes and extensive, specific bibliography for each chapter make further research both easy and accessible, making this a valuable volume for all enthusiasts of mythology, be they old hands or fresh faces, seasoned academics or lay hobbyists.

A few minor quibbles: Given that Lévi-Strauss' work is so important, I would have liked to see a bit more treatment of it. Nevertheless, given the fact that the volume currently clocks in at 470 pages, I can see the practical wisdom of not doing so. Furthermore – and perhaps this is born of my own fondness for Ovid - I would have also liked to see more on his specific role in the transmission and dissemination of myth, particularly through poetry and art of those inspired by him. I would also suggest that a future edition take up more specifically the issue of reception in contemporary popular culture, particularly in film/television and children's literature where many people now first encounter mythological stories: long before anyone takes up the scholarly study of mythology, he or she has usually already encountered myth; this too is reception and part of the ongoing cultural life of ancient myth (long before I wrote this review, I was a 10-year-old who stumbled across *D'Aulaires' Book of Greek Myths* in the school library, and in interviewing my own students, I find that nearly all of them recall similar experiences; the history of myth in education may be worth a closer scholarly look). One could also expand reception studies to include an overview that included music, dance, and theatre as well as art and literature in the postclassical age. Other areas for expansion may be myth in Greek drama or philosophy, archaeological or linguistic investigations, and gender concerns. The crossover of archaeology and mythology has recently seen fascinating work, such as Adrienne Mayor's 2011 and 2014 monographs on fossil remains and mythological monsters and on Amazons, respectively.

But enough of this trifling over details. None of them should diminish this collection's achievement as a constellation of research of great scope and scale or its undeniable value as a resource for both teaching and research. It should and undoubtedly will find a prominent place on the bookshelf of anyone interested in the ongoing study, discussion, and enjoyment of Greek myth.

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