

CONNECTIONS BETWEEN MYTH AND HISTORY

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The present volume contains many valuable contributions highlighting the connections between myth and history in various genres of ancient literature, and also shows a wide recognition of archaeological evidence (e.g. J. Redondo, M. Meyer, J. Bravo). While suffering from the typical inconsistencies of published conference proceedings, in this case of the 2019 Patras meeting on ‘Mythical History and Historical Myth: Blurred Boundaries in Antiquity’, many of the individual chapters address fundamental aspects of the complex interrelationships between myth and history. Unfortunately, the book lacks an explicit emphasis on these aspects: the preface offers only a superficial summary of scholarship and does not comment or contextualise the individual contributions, which are at first arranged according to literary genre, an order that then dissolves into the vaguely titled sections ‘Loci and Tempora’ and ‘Roman Era and Late Antiquity’. A division according to the functions of myth (political, aetiological, temporal ...) would have been more fruitful. The arrangement, however, does not detract from the important contributions of the individual articles.

The book contains very few typographical errors and comes with an *index rerum et nominum notabiliorum*, but, unfortunately, not with an *index locorum*, which makes the contributions less visible to scholars seeking information on particular passages.

The first part is devoted to epic texts and deals with the links between poetry, historiography and historicity, beginning with a fresh and original look at an often neglected corpus by Christopoulos. He analyses the information about Homer’s poetic persona found in the pseudo-Homeric epigrams by assuming a system of legitimation: the epigrams echo the biographical information provided by the various *Lives of Homer*, which underlines their authenticity and thus their literary value. J. Burgess then compares elements of the lost Aristotelian *Constitution of the Ithacans*, as recorded by Plutarch, particularly the events surrounding the exile of Odysseus, with the Homeric narratives. The Ithacan version takes a more local political stance than epic and therefore provides fundamental insights into the retelling of a pre-existing myth within a set of historiographical rules. In a paper on the distant past in ancient epic G. Zanetto operates with the terms of ‘vertical’ and ‘horizontal’ storytelling, the former being a linear chronology of generations and the main axis that interests Zanetto, for example in the memories of Homeric Nestor. This verticality enhances the credibility and historicity of the epic narrative. C. Antypas interprets Homeric Ithaca as a kind of proto-*polis* by analysing the behaviour of its inhabitants and several political terms such as *anax*, *basileus*, *laos*, *demos*, *hetairoi* and *oikos*, thus showing a political dimension of myth as a means to a *polis* culture under the supervision of the goddess Athena.

Part 2 deals with lyric poetry. First, V. Kousoulini looks at founding myths in the elusive genre of *parthenia*: several myths dealing with the abduction and/or rape of women lead to the birth of demigods and thus to the recovery of the women or the compensation of their families, i.e. to the restoration – or foundation – of domestic and political order. Another example of this interweaving of myth and politics is found by

E. Lytle in the interpretation of a funerary epigram from Ambracia (*SEG* 41.540A), as he considers both the city's self-representation and the literary standard of the epigram. Lytle reads the so-called Pyraiboi as descendants of the Homeric Peraiboi, that is, the inhabitants of Dodona: their murder of Ambracian citizens would then allude to a failed embassy to the oracle.

The historiographical part of the volume deals with the many facets of history as paradigmatic and symbolic. Meyer demonstrates the mythicisation of the Tyrannicides and the Marathonomachoi in Athene's memorial culture through sculpture and steles. Emblematic of the struggle against tyranny, the groups become symbolic for the self-representation of the Athenian *polis*, 'shaping history'. In a parallel reading of Thucydides' Archaeology and the Sicilian Expedition N. Marinatos provides a powerful argument for a new interpretation of the luckless Nicias: equivalent to Agamemnon, but doing a better job, even if his plan is thwarted by the unexpected arrival of the Spartan forces. N. Bershadsky gives a thought-provoking interpretation of the complex traditions surrounding the heroic defence of Argos by the poet Telesilla and her army of women, linking the degrading *perioikoi* marriages of women to the Argive tribal reforms of the mid-fifth century, the myth of the women wearing beards as a topsy-turvy *aition* of the festival of the Hybristica, and the defeated snake as a phallic symbol for the defeated men. O. Levaniouk's interpretation of Herodotus' account of the betrothal of Agariste deals with the strange story of the suitor who dances away his marriage. Levaniouk compares it with news reports about weddings from contemporary Indian media, which prove that the elements displayed in Herodotus' story are not unrealistic. The choice of comparison feels somewhat arbitrary, but Levaniouk draws a conclusion that is valuable for the volume as a whole: that traditional stories can be characterised as 'crossing freely between history and myth and belonging fully to neither' (p. 163). Another Herodotean paper by Redondo offers an almost encyclopaedic reading of Herodotus' various versions of the origin of the Scythians, comparing parallel motifs in Hesiod, in Scythian archaeological artefacts, in the Persian epic *Shahnameh*, in Valerius Flaccus and in Diodorus Siculus.

Part 4 moves on to the genre of drama and the most decidedly political uses of myth. In a careful reconstruction of the fragmentary Aeschylean *Aetnaiai* P. Cipolla explores the political context of the play, which deals with a local Sikel myth. Aeschylus' consistent Hellenisation of the Sikel deities of the Palici seems to point in the direction of political propaganda in favour of Hieron, the Sicilian tyrant. E. Karakantza rereads Sophocles' *Antigone* and shows that 'necropolitics', i.e. the physical desecration of enemy bodies, was not at all unheard of in Athenian politics: it was practised, for example, in the cases of the oligarchic coup of 411 BCE and the execution of the Samian marines in 438 BCE. In addition to commenting on necropolitics, Karakantza challenges the Hegelian reading of the dichotomy between divine and human law: in the famous first stasimon she finds a clearly optimistic view of the way in which humans shape their world. In a paper on the Sophoclean *Trachiniai* Antonopoulos discusses the play's dating in the context of contemporary events, claiming that the Athenian campaign against Aetolia and the founding of the Spartan colony of Heraclea in Trachis are reflected in Sophocles' text. A less political reading of the same text is offered by G. Seferiadi, who understands Heracles as a kind of *deus ex machina* who sets the precedent for a sacrificial ritual and lays the groundwork for the future of his legendary family by initiating the marriage between Iole and Hyllus. In the discussion of two plays from Middle Comedy Papachrysostomou shows the interplay between myth and contemporary politics that is so unique to this phase of Greek comedy. Using the examples of Ephippus' *Busiris* and *Geryon*, she offers convincing new interpretations, which have the Athenian Nicostratus

mythicised into Heracles and Nectanebo into Busiris, while Philipp II of Macedon is portrayed as the monstrous Geryon.

The section 'Loci and Tempora' opens with a contribution by Bravo, who shows the interplay between myth and city representation, such as the replacement of the hero Adrastus in favour of Melanippus by Cleisthenes in Sicyon or Corinth's establishment of the cult of Melicertes at Isthmia and the institution of the cult of Pelops at Olympia. C. Di Serio presents an interesting study of (mostly) late mythographical texts that illustrate the etiological function of myth as a temporal phenomenon: while situated in a timeless mythical time, the origin stories of, for example, human speech or the Heraion of Argos construct the reality of the narrators. A. Velaoras examines the representation of Macedonia in Euripides' tragedy *Archelaos*: the play serves to demonstrate the Hellenicity of the mythical hero whom the commissioner of the tragedy, the Macedonian king of the same name, regarded as his ancestor in the conspicuous medium of drama, possibly performed in the impressive theatre of Diom at the Olympia festival.

The final section, 'Roman Era and Late Antiquity', is opened by C. Trinacty's analysis of Seneca's Stoic rewriting of the Flood myths, namely their descriptions in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and Virgil's *Fourth Eclogue*, which are important models for Seneca's text. Trinacty offers an interesting view of the workings of myth within Stoic philosophy. Parallel storytelling is also of interest in F. Lecocq's article on the Phoenix myth. She analyses the Herodotean version, which shows influences of Hesiod, of the Egyptian love song of the birdcatcher and of Egyptian religious depictions of birds with circular symbols expressing eternity: various elements of the myth reappear in later retellings and become a sensitive political issue in imperial Rome, where considerations of duration, renewal or end of the world are now controlled by the ruling power. J. Allen also looks at different perspectives in the ancient world, but focuses more on synchronic dialectics. He analyses three texts by Lucian: *Toxaris sive Amicitia*, *De Dea Syria* and *Hercules*, all of which show the reception of Greek myth in various parts of the empire, with non-Hellenic, non-Roman figures, i.e. Scythians, Syrians and Celts reinterpreting Hellenic mythology and defending their own standpoints on these issues. G. Karla analyses the use of myth in Libanius' imperial speeches. While the orator distinguishes his practice from the fictional stories embedded in historiographical works in an attempt to emulate Thucydides and thus to present his encomium as related to historiography, his *exempla* are all mythical in the modern sense, rendering the distinction between myth and history rather rhetorical. In the final contribution G. Harrison gives a careful reading of the use of myth as a means of characterisation in the anonymous tragedy *Octavia*. Using this method, he approaches the difficult attribution of lines 201–20 – and comes to the honest conclusion that the question remains problematic: a parallel passage sung by the chorus of female supporters of Poppaea suggests the male chorus as speakers, but the mythological references do not fit their usual 'historical' lens.

As can be seen from this summary, the common denominator of all the contributions is 'the use of myth'. While the detailed analyses of often marginalised and non-canonical texts are fascinating and often fun to read, the volume as a whole feels loosely connected and could have been made more coherent if the contributions had been organised thematically and the common threads made more visible.

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