

RETHINKING GREEK MYTH IN ROMAN CONTEXTS

NEWBY (Z.) *Greek Myths in Roman Art and Culture. Imagery, Values and Identity in Italy, 50 BC–AD 250*. Pp. xx + 387, ills, maps, colour pls. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016. Cased, £74.99, US\$120. ISBN: 978-1-107-07224-4.

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The presence of Greek myth in Roman art is so pervasive that students and scholars of Roman archaeology are at times guilty of becoming accustomed to its presence, no longer wondering at its role in the Roman context. This book's triumph lies in its ability to bring together much excellent discussion of Greek mythological iconography in Roman art to forge a new understanding. N. discards outdated theories, which reduce Greek myth in Roman contexts to unthinking Roman copying. Instead she argues for a need to consider how Greek myth was utilised in its Roman setting. What was it that made Greek myth so attractive to Romans and how did this inform and contribute to 'Roman' identity?

The book breaks down into an introduction and seven main chapters. The introduction outlines N.'s major research question: the function and proliferation of Greek myth in Roman contexts. N. also defines the parameters of her study: geographical (Rome and Campania), chronological (mid-first century BC to mid-third century AD) and material (large scale imagery, mainly painting, sculptures and reliefs). These parameters are sensible, especially given the overwhelming breadth of the topic under study, and allow N. to focus on well-researched case studies, suiting the contextual methodology at the book's core.

The first chapter is concerned with the history of mythological imagery in Roman public contexts. First, there is a consideration of how Greek mythological sculptures and art works, such as the Nike of Tarentum, were brought to Rome to be displayed as symbols of conquest. Second, N. notes that, beyond displaying Greek art works as 'spoils', paradoxically, Greek myth was not widely adopted in public contexts. Instead Roman myth and legend predominated. This absence is significant and, as N. surmises, reveals a preference in Rome for drawing from its own past to sculpt communal identity.

In the following three chapters N. focuses on the use of mythological sculpture groups and wall painting in Roman domestic contexts. Much is gained from her discussion of large sculptural assemblages in their landscape settings, such as the famous groups at Sperlonga (pp. 93–100) and the Niobids at Horti Lamiani (pp. 105–10). Through careful analysis in their display context, N. evokes the vicarious enjoyment of the Roman viewer who is encouraged to play the role of 'spectator and spectacle' (p. 115).

Remaining in the domestic sphere, N. moves on to consider Greek mythological wall painting and ways of viewing in Roman houses. She informs her discussion by reference to three informative passages in Petronius' *Satyrica*, Lucian's *On the Hall* and the Elder Philostratus' *Imagines* (pp. 144–63). Here N. builds upon her earlier portfolio of work on the relationship between art and text, and how text can inform and reconstruct Roman methods of reading and interpreting mythological iconography (especially: 'Testing the Boundaries of Ekphrasis: Lucian *On the Hall*', *Ramus* 31 [2002], 126–35 & 'Absorption and Erudition in Philostratus' *Imagines*' in E. Bowie & J. Elsner [edd.], *Philostratus* [2009], pp. 322–42). N.'s application of Roman text is carefully done and avoids overly prescriptive readings based on passages in the literary record. She explains and demonstrates that the 'use made of images in literature and rhetoric can also help us to map out the interpretative possibilities' (p. 139). Nevertheless, it is clear that the nature of the literary sources (largely elite, well-educated men) will result in a bias towards

intellectualised interpretation. For this reason, N.'s reference to the character of Encolpius in Petronius' *Satyrice* is informative (p. 147). Encolpius understands the wall paintings he is viewing in relation to his own troubled love life. His subjective viewing, however, is promptly corrected by the poet Eumolpus who offers up a 'correct' and learned response. This encounter indicates the range of responses possible – an antidote to too neat and intellectual an understanding of Greek myth.

Having dealt with wall painting, N. moves on to an equally formidable corpus: sarcophagi. Her discussion understandably covers much familiar ground. She builds upon the excellent work already done in the field, most notably P. Zanker and B.C. Ewald's pivotal work *Mit Mythen leben* (2004, English translation 2012). However, the skill of this chapter, as in the rest of the book, lies in N.'s ability to deal with well-known case studies, recognising and interacting with large bibliographies of scholarship, while applying a fresh interpretation. In particular, her holistic approach of discussing sarcophagi in their broader funerary context results in a fuller understanding of the purpose of Greek myth in Roman sepulchral settings. In this chapter, N. demonstrates how Greek myth was utilised to express the virtues and status of the deceased while simultaneously offering a locus for grief and consolation for the bereaved.

In the final chapter N. returns to her overarching question of: why Greek myth? And, just as significantly, why not Roman legend or history? Here she brings her discussion into a historical context, describing how Greek myth, initially associated with conquest and foreign luxury, infiltrated Roman consciousness, providing a world of allegorical exemplarity. N. argues that in the Imperial Age Republican values and ideals as expressed through Roman history and legend became increasingly out of date. In contrast, Greek myth did not *belong* to a few notable, patrician families, but was open and relevant to Roman society. Here N.'s argument is particularly compelling and raises important questions for how we should view Greek myth in Roman contexts. However, though I am largely persuaded by this argument, I wonder if at times N. encourages too narrow and socially cohesive a reading of Greek myth.

To take just one example, we may consider N.'s discussion of the Medea sarcophagus in Basel (pp. 308–19). As originally argued by K. Fittschen, and accepted by N., the focus of this and other 'Medea' sarcophagi is the tragic death of Creusa, whose writhing form draws the eye of the viewer (Fittschen, 'Der Tod der Kreusa und der Niobiden', *SIFC* 10 [1992], 1056). However, N. argues for a need to understand more fully the other scenes, most notably those referring to Medea and the murder of her sons. N. proposes two readings of Medea's allegorical role: powerfully expressing the 'horror' of death, but also evoking the pain of the grieving mother (pp. 316–19). She describes Medea in this way: 'Yet her static pose also offers a suspension of the danger, and, apart from the sword, the image of a woman with children at her feet might also evoke a scene of loving motherhood' (p. 317). N. encourages us to see beyond the obvious unpleasantness of this story to reach a deeper, more nuanced understanding. N. consequently proposes a highly educated and learned patron, capable of complex readings. This is possible but we should be wary of too thoroughly explaining away the uncomfortable aspects of this myth. Can we ever read 'apart from the sword' and escape Medea's sinister role? There is no straightforward answer to this speculation, but this case study reminds us of the need to allow for multiple readings from the exemplary to the simplistic.

Similarly, depictions of mythological figures known for their sexually deviant relationships, for example the stories of Pasiphae's bestiality or Myrrha's incestuous love (both included in the wall paintings at the Villa of Munatia Procula, figs 4.15–16, pp. 189–94), cannot be explained fully as expressive of romantic marital love or symbolic of exemplary conjugality (pp. 338–42). As N. correctly asserts, the success of Greek myth

in Roman houses was, in no small part, due to the accessibility of these stories, suitable for not only extolling learning and status but also, I would argue, for the exploration of the most indulgent and taboo of human desires. To this end more licence should be allowed to non-intellectual ways of viewing and understanding. That is, we should allow room for the Encolpiuses as well as Eumolpuses of the Roman empire.

This is an excellent and thought-provoking book that challenges the reader to consider a more careful ‘reading’ of Greek myths in Roman contexts. This book is consequently essential reading for both specialists in the field and students of Roman art. Furthermore, N.’s study raises important questions about the utilisation of Greek myth in other parts of the empire and regional variation. For instance, how did people in Gaul use Greek mythology? How does this vary from findings in Rome and Campania? N.’s approach necessarily raises expectations and brings into question how we should discuss Greek mythological iconography across the empire at large.

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SCULPTURES FROM THE BLUNDELL COLLECTION

BARTMAN (E.) *The Ince Blundell Collection of Classical Sculpture. Volume III – the Ideal Sculpture*. Pp. xii + 385, ills, pls. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2017. Cased, £75. ISBN: 978-1-78138-310-0. doi:10.1017/S0009840X17002098

This is the third volume in a series of publications resulting from the Ince Blundell research project, begun in 1984 by the University of Liverpool and National Museums Liverpool. The project aims to re-catalogue and re-publish the entire Ince Blundell collection, last catalogued by B. Ashmole in *A Catalogue of the Ancient Marbles at Ince Blundell Hall* (1929). Put together by Henry Blundell between 1777 and 1809, this was ‘the largest collection of Roman antiquities in England’ (p. 1). Volume 1 in the series covers the female and male portraits, in two parts, and Volume 2 the ash chests (J. Fejfer and E. Southworth, *The Ince Blundell Collection of Classical Sculpture. Volume 1. The Portraits. Part 1. Introduction. The Female Portraits. Concordances* [1991]; J. Fejfer, *The Ince Blundell Collection of Classical Sculpture. Volume 1. The Portraits. Part 2. The Roman Male Portraits* [1997]; G. Davies, *The Ince Blundell Collection of Classical Sculpture. Volume 2. The Ash Chests and other Funerary Reliefs* [2007]). This volume devoted to the ‘ideal sculpture’ catalogues some of the best-known works in the collection.

B. planned to ‘illuminate this critical episode in the history of collecting’ (p. 1) through analysis of Blundell’s behaviour and thinking, applied to the marbles. She also wanted to rehabilitate the sculptures from the dismissive opinions of earlier scholars: ‘notwithstanding sometimes heavy restoration and a lack of provenance, Grand Tour statues like those from Ince provide a wealth of archaeological information relating to subject and typology, thereby enhancing our knowledge of ancient sculpture’ (ibid.). The catalogue and its introduction rise well to these challenges, providing a wealth of interest not only for Classical art historians and archaeologists, but also for scholars of the history of collections, reception and restoration.

The introduction begins by elaborating the story of Blundell’s collecting, which was summarised in Volume 1. B. draws on recent studies on collecting and the Grand Tour,