

J. SCHEID, J. SVENBRO: *The Craft of Zeus: Myths of Weaving and Fabric* (Translated by C. Volk). Pp. x + 226. Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1996 (first published in French, 1994). £25.50. ISBN: 0-674-17549-2.

In the grandiloquent hyperbole of the jacket blurb, this is a 'dazzling commentary on Greek and Roman myth and society' and a 'lively and lucid book [which] defines the logic of one of the central concepts in Greek and Roman thought—a concept that has persisted, woof and warp crossing again and again, as the fabric of human history has unfolded'. There are three main sections, somewhat preciously entitled 'Peplos', 'Chlaina', and 'Textus', dealing respectively with political, conjugal, and poetic representations of weaving and fabric; and each section has two chapters, one on Greece and one on Rome.

The introduction explains the layout in terms of intent to examine different uses of the same metaphor (in itself perfectly sensible), utilizing the different capacities of the authors, a Hellenist and a Latinist, in an approach described (p. 2) as comparative or 'comparativist' (in itself potentially illuminating). There is a rather inconsequential justification of the term 'myth' rather than 'metaphor' in the subtitle; and some dubious special pleading that, myth being a simple 'proposition', non-linguistic association of categories may be 'as stable as if it had a basis in language' (p. 3). Finally, we are assured that the authors were 'opting for a relatively concise essay over an erudite tome' (p. 5). There are nevertheless forty-eight pages of notes, two appendices, and an index; and the presentation if not erudite is certainly not popular either.

There is much that is unexceptional in this collection of material; but only those who share the *parti pris* (for 'logic' *passim* read 'structure' or 'structuralism') of S.&S. are likely to applaud their conclusions. The fact that weaving metaphors are common in Greek language and literature, and that they tend to recur in certain contexts, is obvious. But a concatenation of similar figures in different authors of different dates and genres cannot be regarded as indicative of a repeated identical figure. For the dangers of the method, with its shifting sands, see the acknowledgement of a different interpretation by Loraux (p. 173 n. 12); for an attempt at justification, see p. 39.

Chapter 3, 'Aphrodite *Poikilothronos*: Epithets, Cloaks, and Lovers', may be treated as paradigmatic. The epithet *Poikilolothronos* (Sappho 1) is interpreted (p. 53), without mention of the variant *ποικιλόθρονος*, to mean 'with decorated flowers', i.e. 'with a dress of decorated flowers', *pace* 'the prestigious dictionary by Liddell-Scott-Jones'. After criticizing Page's disregard 'as if it were an issue of unspeakable menace' (p. 54) of this sense, which is indeed a *possible* one, the discussion shifts to robes and dresses used as nuptial coverlets. (Here S. might have learned from H. L. Lorimer's succinct and factual account of similar usage, *Homer and the Monuments*, pp. 372–5.) Little attention is paid to context in this indiscriminate trawling for material: on S. *Tr.* 540 (cited, but without line number, on p. 73 and p. 196 n. 102), the scholiastic comment, not noted, already tells us the obvious; and in Plato *Smp.*, cited on p. 72, the point is that Socrates does *not* succumb to Alcibiades' charms. Throughout, disparate material is juxtaposed: a fragment of Democritus, DK B 154 ('as Democritus asserts'—what of our source?) and a poem from the Palatine Anthology, *AP* 9.372 (perhaps from the early Imperial period) are aligned, p. 128.

The appendices are outlined (p. 5) as discussion of 'two additional and important areas of study, biology and atomism . . .'. Appendix A is merely a collection of (some) instances of expressions relating to 'body tissues' or the concept of histology; Appendix B on Lucretius concludes that 'The poetics of the poem are but the poetics of the world itself: cosmos and poem obey the same principle, participating in the same logic of "textual" interweaving'.

Throughout Greek is transliterated, and there are some inaccuracies, e.g. on pp. 13 and 85. The translation does not read well and frequently jars, as 'in antique thought' (p. 171 n. 1). Anyone who is surprised by the subtitle, having regarded Athena as patron of weaving, should turn to p. 183 n. 121 for some novel information on this topic. Despite its place in the series 'Revealing Antiquity', little seems to be revealed by this book.

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