

R. Netz compares Archimedes and Liu Hui, and K. Chemla examines the historiography of mathematics (in nineteenth-century Europe) with specific attention to the value attributed to abstraction in classical Chinese mathematical texts; V. Lo and E. Re'em participate in a 'sensory turn' in history by calling our attention to the role of *aphrodisia* in theories of love, sex and the emotions; X. Liu, E. Margaritis and M. Jones develop an understanding of the social implications of food production and consumption in ancient Greece and China, drawing on both textual as well as archaeological evidence to underscore the origins of unequal access to food; and M. Nylan compares the manuscript culture evidenced by the libraries at Alexandria and the palace libraries of the Western Han emperor Chengdi.

The contributions this volume makes to a variety of disciplines as well as to the development and successful practice of comparative methodologies are not to be underestimated. It has the potential to serve as an indispensable handbook for both particular interests and general instruction in comparative studies.

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EARLY MODERN ENGLISH MYTHOGRAPHIES

HARTMANN (A.-M.) *English Mythography in its European Context 1500–1650*. Pp. xii + 283. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018. Cased, £70, US\$90. ISBN: 978-0-19-880770-4.

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This learned and insightful study analyses six key mythographies composed in Tudor and Stuart England, a genre often studied by scholars of Renaissance literature and of the early modern reception of classical antiquity as paratextual, auxiliary to original poetry and to editions of classical Latin and Greek literature. By contrast, H. proposes to interpret these diverse texts as a 'distinct group' worthy of sustained investigation, arguing in her introduction that English Renaissance mythographies were conceived as 'coherent works' that may be interpreted both as 'integrated wholes' and as belonging to a unified genre (pp. 1; 9). As H. admits, most early modern readers did not approach mythographies in this manner, instead treating them as texts that 'could be dipped into when and where needed' as source material for mythological fables themselves as well as for related ornamental matter such as epithets (p. 50). Although the book does not entirely succeed in proving that English mythographies are a cohesive genre (the material, organisation and underlying assumptions concerning the nature and origin of myth in these six works are simply too diverse to make the case that they belong to a single kind), there is much of value in H.'s analysis of English mythographic writings, both for scholars of Renaissance literature and culture and for Classicists interested in the early modern reception of classical myth, or in classical and early Christian expositors of myth including Fulgentius, Augustine and Ovid.

H.'s introduction provides both a summation and a critique of prior scholarship on Renaissance mythography, one especially attentive to Jean Seznec's classic *La Survivance des dieux antiques* (1940, translated into English in 1953 as *The Survival of*

the Pagan Gods: Mythological Tradition in Renaissance Humanism and Art). The most compelling dimension of her critique exposes the ways in which English mythographic writings of the Renaissance have been denigrated by prior scholarship as both derivative and eccentric, conforming at once too much and too little to continental specimens of the genre. H. also corrects the over-emphasis of Sez nec and other scholars by focusing on European mythographers active north of the Alps, including Jacob ('Philomusus') Locher, Jacobus Micyllus (Jakob Moltzer), Georg Pictorius and Johannes Herold, rather than on the more familiar Italians of the Cinquecento: Natale Conti, Vincenzo Cartari, Lilio Gregorio Giraldi. The introduction and opening chapter make a persuasive case that these German and Swiss mythographers, most of them active from the 1530s through the 1560s, are far more innovative than their Italian counterparts and also distance themselves much more from early Christian and medieval mythographic traditions. One might have wanted here a bolder explanation for this innovation, one perhaps rooted in the hermeneutic conflicts of the Protestant Reformation, but the volume is too disciplined and focused a study to indulge in any grand, sweeping claims.

Chapter 2 turns to England, where the book's focus remains for the remaining five chapters, two of which pair canonical Elizabethan poets (Spenser and Sidney) with contemporary mythographers (Stephen Batman and Abraham Fraunce, respectively) while the remaining three – on Francis Bacon, Henry Reynolds and Alexander Ross – examine the mythographic writings of each as aspects of more complex philosophical, religious or political agendas. Uniting each of these chapters is a sustained investigation into how three successive generations of English Renaissance writers come to understand the origin and use value of myth, both for the archaic cultures that invented it and for early modern Christians interested in adapting and transforming it.

Although the volume does not radically change our understanding of why early modern writers were fascinated, and also at times repelled, by classical myth, the discrete readings of individual mythographers offer valuable and new insights into their own particular applications of mythography. Focusing on Stephen Batman, clergyman and manuscript hunter for Archbishop Matthew Parker, whose 1577 *Golden Booke of the Leaden Goddess* has not unjustly been dismissed as 'mad' (p. 55) by later readers, Chapter 2 persuasively illustrates the heresiological dimensions of Batman's mythographic writings, especially in his culminative attack on sectarian groups such as the Family of Love and the Anabaptists. Less convincing is the latter half of Chapter 2, an interpretation of the Bower of Bliss episode in Book 2, canto 12 of Edmund Spenser's *Faerie Queene* (1590), partly because the hermeneutics of discernment used to link Spenser to Batman is in fact a common characteristic of many mythological poems and works of mythography from the period, but also because the interpretation of Batman roots him so firmly in ecclesiastical debates particular to the late 1570s. (I cannot help but think that Spenser's 1579 *Shepherd's Calender* would have made a better companion text.) The pairing of Fraunce and Sidney in Chapter 3 is far more compelling, as are that chapter's discussions of insignias and *imprese* as examples of the 'image-making process' that H. locates at the heart of both writers' method of inventing fables (p. 100).

The final three chapters offer far richer intellectual context for their interpretations of three key seventeenth-century mythographers, beginning with Bacon, whose *De Sapientia Veterum* (1609, translated in 1619 as *The Wisdome of the Ancients*) is very perceptively placed in conversation with other works by Bacon concerned with the origin of poetry, the *prisca theologia* and the *prima philosophia*. Two especially valuable passages in this chapter are H.'s exposition of what Bacon understands by 'paraboli cal poetry' or wisdom (p. 143) and her detailed (and to me, entirely new) discussion of early readers

and early translations of Bacon's mythography (pp. 156–61), a section that lays the groundwork for further research on the reception of Bacon across seventeenth-century Europe. With Chapter 5, H. turns her attention to Henry Reynolds, whose 1632 *Mythomystes* is interpreted for its fluctuating and, at times, murky debts to both neo-Platonism and Pythagoreanism, especially that of Iamblichus, in order to establish how and to what extent Reynolds understands pagan myth as a precursor of Christian truth. This chapter concludes with a marvellous reading (pp. 190–201) of Reynolds's account of the Narcissus and Echo myth that explicates Reynolds's transformation of his classical and Renaissance sources while also demonstrating his hermeneutic methods as an interpreter of ancient myth. Equally successful is the book's final chapter, on the prolific Scottish writer and controversialist (and early translator of the *Koran*) Alexander Ross, which interprets his several mythographic writings in light of his views on civil theology, on ceremony, and on heresy and idolatry. The final two chapters in particular are exemplary scholarship on minor figures worthy of greater attention for their pivotal role in the re-interpretation of classical mythology and pagan religion in the decades leading up to the English Civil War, and it is thus not surprising to find far greater attention paid, in these two closing chapters, to the ways that myth could be wielded to support conflicting political ideologies and doctrinal positions.

Methodologically, the book is a happy mixture of close intertextual reading, a bit of book history and a good bit more reception theory, with an introduction that might serve some Anglo-American readers as a useful introduction to the distinct critical discourse of German reception theory. Throughout, H. is attentive to the ways in which classical mythology, for its Renaissance readers, is thoroughly mediated by early Christian and patristic writers, Augustine especially. The work is largely free of typos and errors of fact, although the reference to the philosophical dialogue between 'the emperor Augustus and the philosopher Epictetus' (p. 66) erroneously translates from the Latin title (*Altercatio Hadriani Augusti et Epicteti philosophi*), since the Stoic philosopher's purported interlocutor in this fictional work is the early second-century CE emperor Hadrian, and not Augustus, who lived a century earlier.

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LESSING'S *LAOCOON* IN CONTEXT

LIFSCHITZ (A.), SQUIRE (M.) (edd.) *Rethinking Lessing's Laocoon. Antiquity, Enlightenment, and the Limits of Painting and Poetry*. Pp. xxxiv + 411, ill. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017. Cased, £80, US\$110. ISBN: 978-0-19-880222-8.

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One way to step into the astonishingly vibrant, multifaceted, unsteady world of late eighteenth-century German thought is to join the narrator of Gotthold Ephraim Lessing's *Laocoon* (1766) on what he characterises as that project's casual 'stroll' (opening of Chapter 20) – a sequence of observations and polemics that turn out to engage philology, aesthetics, archaeology, philosophy and psychology and that have irritated and inspired in the two and a half centuries since their first publication. If the text has both delighted and maddened its readers, this has undoubtedly had something to do with the question of whether – or rather, how – to take its wanderings seriously. In his preface,