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2017

Reviewed Work(s): The Anatomy of Myth: The Art of Interpretation from the Presocratics to the Church Fathers by Michael W. Herren

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Citation

Edmonds, Radcliffe G. 2017. "Reviewed Work(s): The Anatomy of Myth: The Art of Interpretation from the Presocratics to the Church Fathers by Michael W. Herren." *Phoenix* 71. 3/4: 397-402.

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Callimachus. When discussing *Homeric Hymn to Ares*, attributed by some to Proclus, van den Berg argues (*pace* West)² that it lacks any trace of technical Neoplatonic vocabulary (although it does exhibit a longing for peace and a fear of madness found in other late pagan texts) and he sides with those who believe that the hymn was deliberately inserted into the Homeric collection in late antiquity. Gianfranco Agosti concludes this section, positing that a corpus of the *Hymns*, quite like the collection seen in medieval manuscripts, already existed in the fourth and fifth centuries c.e. Poets of the period liked to sprinkle in phrases and epithets from them for coloring. While Christians had their own tradition of hymnography, Agosti offers several examples of Christian hymns “usurping” a narrative structure from a Homeric hymn when celebrating the true religion.

No manuscripts of the hymns from the Byzantine period survive; nor are there explicit references to them. In Part IV, Christos Simelidis explores the difficulties in looking for borrowings; he also discusses John Eugenikos’s inclusion of the *Hymns* with the *Iliad* and not within a hymnic corpus (see Bessarion, below) while Andrew Faulkner considers the *Hymns* in the context of Theodorus Prodromos’s praise poetry of twelfth-century historical events. In Part V, Oliver Thomas lucidly delineates two Renaissance approaches, one placing the *Hymns* within the tradition of pagan Greek theological poems, the other, initiated by Bessarion, placing them at the end of Homer’s works. The latter prevailed. M. Elisabeth Schwab skillfully discusses the *hAphrodite* in the context of Poliziano’s *Stanze per la giostra*. Next, in a masterful chapter, Nicholas Richardson examines the *Hymns* as seen through the eyes of three English translators, one of whom, George Chapman, was the first to translate the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* into English. Years later, turning to the *Hymns*, the *Batrachomyomachia*, and *Epigrams* ascribed to Homer, Chapman writes in 1624 that the work he was “borne to doe is done” (epigram at the end of *The Crowne of all Homers Workes*, line 1). Richardson also discusses William Congreve’s *Homer’s Hymn to Venus* (1710) and Shelley’s *Hymn to Mercury* (1820). Andreas Schwab ends the volume with a look at Johann Heinrich Voss’s (1826) German translation and commentary of the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* (discovered in 1777), which Voss regarded as “the oldest memorial of holy bonds” (quoted by Schwab [356]).

While much of the study of the *Hymns*’ reception in the ancient world is speculative, posing the question of their reception in the context of archaic art, Hellenistic and Augustan poetry, and prose from the imperial period and late antiquity stimulates rich observations both about the *Hymns* and the later compositions. When the question of reception is on firmer ground from the Renaissance to the 1820s the chapters in this volume are even richer.

BOSTON UNIVERSITY

STEPHEN SCULLY

THE ANATOMY OF MYTH: THE ART OF INTERPRETATION FROM THE PRESOCRATICS TO THE CHURCH FATHERS. By MICHAEL W. HERREN. New York: Oxford University Press. 2017. Pp. xi, 231.

HERREN EXPLAINS HIS TITLE from the etymological sense of “anatomy,” as the cutting up of myth to see what is inside, and his work intends to trace the different kinds of anatomies of myth, the kinds of interpretations made of myths from the time of Homer

²M. L. West, “The Eighth Homeric Hymn and Proclus,” *CQ* n.s. 20 (1970) 300–304.

to the early Christian period. There is certainly a need for a good scholarly analysis of techniques of myth interpretation, but this book, alas, is not that, nor does it even take advantage of the recent developments in the scholarship on mythography and allegoresis to position interpreters within the larger context of myth collection and interpretation.

Instead, this study tells a teleological story of myth interpretation as the gradual liberation of humankind from the tyranny of religion, led by a few bright lights from classical antiquity who pierced the veil of obfuscation that myth drapes over people trying to figure out how the world really works. The “new atheists” and Dawkins in particular are held up as the natural culmination of this centuries-long struggle that begins for Herren with the Pre-Socratics.¹ His story, interestingly enough, ends in defeat, with the triumph of dogmatic Christianity in the fourth century c.e., but he promises a sequel leading from late antiquity through the Renaissance and into the Enlightenment.

Herren claims “the exposure of the most authoritative works of the ancient Greeks to public criticism and discussion was a decisive step to creating the open, pluralistic society we in the Western nations enjoy today” (viii). He does not, however, actually argue for this thesis by tracing the reception of these practices and ideas through the ages into the formation of the modern Western nation states; it is rather put forth as an article of faith. In the chapters, Herren goes through the evidence for the practices of public criticism of authoritative works in antiquity to show that the practices that he assumes to be the foundation of the Western open society did actually exist before the paradigm shift to theism ushered in by Plato brought about the closed societies of Christian theocracy. Although it is not in the bibliography, the long shadow of K. R. Popper’s *The Open Society and Its Enemies* (London 1945) looms over this book, whose publication after long gestation was prompted, Herren notes (ix), by the attacks in Paris in 2015. The open society of the West appears to be under attack by closed and theocratic societies, so the roots of Western exceptionalism, it seems, must again be brought forth and celebrated.

Herren sees three paradigms for the understanding of myth: poets, *physis*, and *theos*, corresponding to the Homeric archaic period, Pre-Socratic philosophy in the classical period, and Plato and Christianity. These three paradigms involve three different models of the origin of myths: the authorship model, the evolutionary model, and the revelation model (5). For Herren, the practices of critical reading, developed in the *physis* period and surviving even into Christianity, sowed the seeds of the modern Western open society.

Herren provides a discussion of the paradigm of the poets in the first two chapters, sketching a broad overview of Homer and Hesiod and the authority of their poems. The shift from oral to written culture plays a big role in the story of the rise of criticism of the poets and their authority. In the following chapters, Herren traces the development of the *physis* paradigm, which seeks to explain the cosmos by principles instead of persons, relegating myth and its narratives of anthropomorphic deities to an earlier stage in the evolution of human thought. Herren notes that, although these innovative thinkers “rattled the authorities,” the persecution of intellectuals was not much worse than a little book-burning and an execution or so, due to the fact that “there was no real ‘religious

¹R. Dawkins, *The God Delusion* (New York 2008); for the “new atheists,” see J. E. Taylor’s 2010 entry in the “Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy,” <http://www.iep.utm.edu/n-atheis>, referenced by Herren in his bibliography.

right' like that found in America today," and no sacred scriptures or prescribed creed (60–61).

For Herren, the next step is "Plato's attack on poetry," which "presented a quandary for legislators and educators in his day," and which he compares to groups of parents going not just to school boards but "to pastors of churches or teachers in Bible schools and demanding that large swaths of text in the Bibles used by the children be blacked out" (69). Here the anachronisms of Herren's approach reveal his distortions of the texts and their historical contexts, as for instance his implication that education in Plato's Athens involved a modern-style state-regulated curriculum determined by legislators, rather than a hodge-podge of different teachers relying on their personal appeal to win the attention of a mostly aristocratic clientele.

Herren shifts back to the pre-Socratics to discuss the rise of allegory, which explains the controversial poets as meaning something other than the literal sense of their poems, either elements of some physical theory or events from history. He discusses the rise of the theism model with the reception of Plato in the philosophic schools, leading to a discussion of allegory in Cornutus and Heraclitus in the following chapter. While this discussion actually gets into more substantive detail about the nature and practice of interpretation than the treatment of any of the other thinkers, it remains more superficial than the analyses of these authors provided by other scholars (e.g., Dawson or Boys-Stones).² He has some kind words for Plutarch, whom he sees as disregarding the literal truth of the myths for the ethical truths conveyed by the stories.

Plutarch's own use of myth is shouldered aside for praise of Apuleius' fable of Cupid and Psyche, which Herren sees as a brilliantly composed fable that enacts philosophical ideas in symbolic form (he ignores the significance and form of the rest of the novel). Symbolic allegoresis in Porphyry and the Tablet of Cebes (and, with a leap of several centuries, Capella's *Marriage of Philology and Mercury*) leads to the Jewish and Christian uses of allegory for reading sacred scriptures, and Herren usefully distinguishes "substitutionist" allegory, in which one term replaces the literal meaning of the text, from "symbolic," in which the literal meaning indicates the allegorical without being replaced by it. This symbolic practice allows the authority of the text itself to be preserved while at the same time conveying a meaning that is morally and theologically acceptable.

The end of Herren's story (myth?) comes with the establishment of Christianity as the official religion of the empire in the fourth century, which Herren portrays as the establishment of the closed society of a dogmatic theocracy. He writes, "For those who believe in freedom of religion, free expression, and the separation of church and state, the fourth century had to be accounted one of the worst centuries in human history, perhaps *the worst*" (165; Herren's emphasis). He sounds a note of hope at the end, however, by suggesting that the Christians' adoption of pagan anatomies of myth set up the eventual destruction of their "theocratic edifice" (169).

Herren's account of allegory is brief and schematic, aimed at undergraduates rather than experts in classics, literature, or the history of religion. His breezy generalizations and witty style certainly suit such an audience, but a responsible teacher should seek

²D. Dawson, "Pagan Etymology and Allegory," in *id.*, *Allegorical Readers and Cultural Revision in Ancient Alexandria* (Berkeley 1992) 23–72; G. R. Boys-Stones, "The Stoics' Two Types of Allegory," in *id.* (ed.), *Metaphor, Allegory, and the Classical Tradition: Ancient Thought and Modern Revisions* (Oxford 2003) 189–217.

elsewhere instead of leading unwary students astray with this distorted teleological account of the interpretation of myth.³

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CLASSICAL GREEK OLIGARCHY: A POLITICAL HISTORY. By MATTHEW SIMONTON. Princeton, New Jersey, and Oxford: Princeton University Press. 2017. Pp. xvi, 355, 1 map.

THE WORK UNDER REVIEW is the first full-length monograph on the subject of Greek oligarchy since the publication of Leonard Whibley's *Greek Oligarchies* in 1896. The subtitle reveals that the historical phenomenon of ancient Greek oligarchy will be examined through the lens of modern political science theory.

The long first chapter, "Problem, Background, Method" (1–74), lays the groundwork for the rest of the book in a series of sections. Section 1.0 looks at the "Problem of Oligarchy," asking first why it has been neglected and misunderstood by historians. Then, rejecting the view that oligarchy was inevitable, the author instead advances the opinion that it was exceptional, a manifestation of authoritarianism that evolved as a specific response to *demokratia*. He states that it was not designed to be popular with the masses, which leads him to the question why in that case it succeeded for so long in the classical and Hellenistic Greek world, which, in his view, became steadily more and more democratic. His answer is that it survived through institutions, which he will examine through the recent political science theory of "New Institutionalism." This theory holds that effectively designed institutions enable unpopular authoritarian regimes to coerce and control unsympathetic populations.

Sections 1.1, "From Archaic Regimes to Classical Oligarchy," and 1.1.1, "Elite and Demos in Archaic Sources," put forward the view that classical oligarchy was different from the elite (he prefers this label over aristocratic) regimes of the archaic period. He argues that, while classical oligarchy was an attack upon the participation of the demos, archaic regimes had complex constitutional structures of councils, magistrates and assemblies, in which the demos, although dominated by the elite, did have a function. Only when the growth of democracy in the late sixth and early fifth centuries signaled an increased role for the demos in political affairs, did the elite feel threatened and *oligarchia* result.

Section 1.1.2, "The Emergence of Democracy," analyses the three conditions for the breakdown of elite regimes in the archaic period and the emergence of democracy: 1) the times were bad enough for the demos to risk attempting a change; 2) members of the elite were for one reason or another alienated enough from their fellows that they were prepared to break ranks and lead the revolution; 3) members of the demos felt ready for a mass movement, as a result of increased wealth and urbanization.

Section 1.1.3, "Early Elite Reactions to *Demokratia*," argues against the view that *oligarchia* was a late fifth-century concept, and reinforces the author's argument (stated

³Perhaps L. Brisson, "Aristotle and the Beginnings of Allegorical Exegesis," in *id.*, *How Philosophers Saved Myths: Allegorical Interpretation and Classical Mythology* (tr. C. Tihanyi; Chicago 2004) 29–40.