

CLASSICAL

Images and Insights

MYTHOLOGY

Second Edition



Stephen L. Harris & Gloria Platzner

Classical Mythology

IMAGES AND INSIGHTS

Second Edition



Stephen L. Harris

Gloria Platzner

California State University, Sacramento



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Preface



New to This Edition

The second edition of *Classical Mythology: Images and Insights* has been extensively revised to make readers' exploration of Greek and Roman myths easier and more enjoyable. Besides adding color photos of both ancient and modern art works depicting gods and heroes, we have included more of Ovid's tales of love, loss, and change, inserted pronunciation guides for all major terms and characters, and reorganized several chapters.

The new edition offers expanded coverage of the historical background of Greek myth, including its affinity with ancient Near Eastern narratives such as the Gilgamesh epic, fuller discussions of Hesiod, Homer, and the principal Olympian deities, as well as a more unified approach to the wine god Dionysus, his relation to Greek drama, and the concept of the tragic hero. Euripides's powerful drama of the irrational, the *Bacchantes*, is now integrated into the section on the Dionysian theater (Chapter 13).

Our portrait of the primal Great Goddess—a controversial deity whom many anthropologists believe dominated prehistoric European religion—appears earlier in the second edition, juxtaposing her legacy with the rise of Olympian Zeus and Hesiod's myth of the first woman, Pandora, whom the poet associates with humanity's decline from a primordial Golden Age. Both the hero and his nemesis, Death and the Underworld, receive expanded coverage, including the incorporation of Plato's "Myth of Er" into the discussion of Hades's subterranean realm (Chapter 9). Every part of the book has been revised to make connections between different myths and their continuing relevance to human experience clearer and more accessible.

In addition to a generally chronological survey of the art and literature embodying Greco-Roman mythology, this textbook includes individual chapters on several of classical myth's most influential concepts and divinities. Besides presenting the Goddess culture, with its natural cycle of life, death, and rebirth, the new edition offers further examination of the hero's self-defeating quest for eternal fame, including additional accounts of heroic descents to Hades's kingdom. The sections on Apollo and Dionysus, the two sons of Zeus who represent the polar opposites of reason and passion inherent in both humans and gods, have also been revised to emphasize further the paradox and contrarities that Greek myth expresses.

Because the Roman use of mythology differs significantly from the Greek, it is treated separately in Part 4. In "The World of Roman Myth," we examine the Roman tendency to adapt older Greek traditions to accommodate pragmatic national and political needs (Chapter 18). The contrasts between Aeneas (a paradigm of the ideal Roman citizen-soldier who sacrifices personal happiness to serve an empire he will

not live to see) and Homer's Achilles (a glamorous but self-absorbed hero who fights only for his individual glory) help to illustrate qualitative differences between Greek and Roman values reflected in myth.

The final chapter surveys modern works of art and literature that reveal the continuing vitality of Greco-Roman mythology in our own time. Classical gods and heroes, although transformed by inevitable changes in time and culture, not only survive but flourish in the creative imagination of today's poets, painters, sculptors, playwrights, composers, and filmmakers. The discussion of modern artists has been updated to include additional art forms, such as dance (illustrated in photographs) and recent poetry, such as a newly published mythological text by the Irish poet Eavan Boland. The entire epic sweep of myth's evolution from its ancient Near Eastern roots to its contemporary flowering in America and Europe is thus encompassed in this single illustrated volume.

A Combination of Analysis and Readings

Classical Mythology remains the only one-volume introduction to Greek and Roman myth that combines the critical analysis of myth with generous selections of primary sources, many presented in their entirety. In this text, students encounter Zeus and Athene, Heracles and Medea—along with a vivid array of other divinities, heroes, and heroines—via the same path traversed by the Greeks themselves—the epic poems of Homer and Hesiod and the plays of Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides.

Besides lengthy excerpts from Hesiod's *Theogony*; Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*; the Homeric Hymns to Demeter, Apollo, and Dionysus; Virgil's *Aeneid*; and Ovid's *Metamorphoses*—all in modern translations—this book presents the full texts of eight tragedies: Aeschylus's *Prometheus Bound* and the three-part *Oresteia*; Sophocles's two Oedipus plays; and Euripides's *Medea* and the *Bacchantes*. (Only the *Libation-Bearers*, because of copyright restrictions, is partly incomplete.)

Complementing the literary sources of Greek and Roman myth are more than 200 photographs of classical works of art depicting mythic characters and themes. *Classical Mythology* provides not only the poets' re-creation of their culture's traditions but also the painters' and sculptors' equally important insights into their mythical heritage. While reading Aeschylus's *Oresteia*, students can also study how Athenian vase painters, contemporaries of the playwright, responded to the drama's harrowing scenes of murder and revenge (Chapter 15). The adventures of Odysseus similarly inspired artistic renditions of the hero's struggles against gods and monsters (Chapter 12).

Pedagogical Features

To help students undertake their first systematic study of mythology, this book features several pedagogical devices. Each chapter begins with a "Key Themes" section that summarizes the main points discussed. All major names and concepts appear first in **boldface**, are given a pronunciation guide, and are concisely defined in an extensive glossary at the end of the book. The pronunciation guides also appear in

the glossary. (Although translators employ a variety of transliterations of Greek and Latin names, we generally use the standard anglicized spelling provided by the *Oxford Companion to Classical Literature*.)

Besides providing a critical analysis of the particular myth under consideration, each chapter features “Questions for Discussion and Review” and a list of “Recommended Reading” referring students to the most accessible resources for further study. To give students the most recent information on important scholarly publications about individual topics, we have updated the chapter-by-chapter bibliography that appears at the back of the book—an essential aid for preparing oral reports or writing papers on classical myth.

Many of the maps, graphs, and illustrations include captions offering mini-essays on a particular god, hero, or other mythological subject, providing an informative counterpoint to the textual material. Finally, *Classical Mythology* has an extensive index, making it easy for students to look up individual names, terms, and topics. We have made every effort to revise this textbook to make it as “reader friendly” as possible and hope that these features will enhance students’ enjoyment of ancient myths and their enduring relevance to our common human experience.

For instructors using the second edition, the publisher has issued a revised instructor’s manual that includes numerous sample test questions and answers, detailed outlines of material covered in each chapter, informational boxes, and suggestions for teaching.

Acknowledgments

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