

APOLLODORUS' *LIBRARY*  
AND  
HYGINUS' *FABULAE*

TWO HANDBOOKS OF GREEK MYTHOLOGY



*Translated, with Introductions, by*  
R. SCOTT SMITH *and* STEPHEN M. TRZASKOMA

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QUI NOS MULTA ET VIR ET PER LIBROS ADHUC DOCET.

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## PREFACE

Apollodorus and Hyginus have both been translated into English before, but never in their entirety in the same volume. Their appearance here seemed a logical next step after we had already produced translations of the bulk of these two authors for the *Anthology of Classical Myth* (2004). That book was designed to bring as many interesting primary sources before new audiences as possible; this one is designed to make two of the most important of those sources even more accessible by providing up-to-date and high-quality translations in an inexpensive volume. The *Bibliothèque (Library)* and *Fabulae (Myths)* ought to be read more widely both by those with a general interest in the subject and students approaching it in an academic environment. The only other English translation of Hyginus' *Fabulae*, that of Grant (1960), has some flaws and is out of print; that was our primary impetus. Apollodorus' *Bibliothèque*, though already published in several translations, seemed a natural partner.

In our English translations we have aimed above all at accuracy and clarity, although "accuracy" and "clarity" must be qualified. In some places there are serious questions as to what the Greek and Latin of Apollodorus and Hyginus mean or imply, but we hope that we have not intentionally rendered anything perfectly intelligible into gibberish or made our authors say things they never wrote. Neither of the works in question is of interest for its literary qualities, and we have not attempted to transform them into something they are not. If the translations often reveal a certain awkwardness, one can be quite sure that it is representative of the general qualities of their originals.

To the translations themselves we have added a General Introduction that treats the wider context and development of mythography in some detail; those more interested only in issues specifically related to the authors at hand can turn directly to the introductions provided for each, which follow the General Introduction. All of the introductory matter is geared toward the general reader or student but, we trust, not so much so as to be entirely devoid of interest to specialists.

Footnotes have been designed to provide immediate clarification on content, but in the interest of space we have not included full mythological notes—one can easily find full discussions of these myths in the many excellent handbooks available. To reduce the clutter of footnotes and cross-references, we have provided full indexes for the names, places, and authors cited, containing enough detail, we hope, to answer many questions that might occur to readers.

Technical and textual matters that will generally be of interest to a more limited audience have been relegated to endnotes (marked in the text by asterisks). In the *Anthology of Classical Myth*, where much of the translations originally appeared, we resolved to stick as closely to the texts printed in the scholarly editions on which



the translations were based (Frazer's for all of Apollodorus; Marshall's first edition for Hyginus). Here we felt no such compunction, but more than that, we keyed the first three books of Apollodorus to Wagner's critical edition instead of Frazer's Loeb (though the latter remains the basis for the combined texts of the epitomes of Apollodorus) and updated Hyginus to reflect Marshall's second edition. With the opportunity to comment more fully in our endnotes here, we freely consulted all available editions, not only accepting the conjectures of other scholars but also suggesting many of our own as we felt the need. In fact, we thoroughly revised our earlier translations and reconsidered the whole of both works, and there are as a consequence many deviations from our versions in the *Anthology*, most of them quite minor but several of great significance—all of them improvements, we hope. We have endeavored in the endnotes to document and provide rationale for every deviation from Wagner, Frazer, and Marshall, and we beg the indulgence of other scholars if we have missed any.

In terms of a division of responsibility, Trzaskoma translated Apollodorus, while Smith translated Hyginus, and we each provided the section of the Introduction devoted to our respective author. We carefully worked through each other's translations and introductions, however, and the improvements of the nontranslating partner are present on every page. The General Introduction was initially written by Trzaskoma but thoroughly revised and expanded by Smith. The indexes were a joint project, as were the footnotes and endnotes (it should be noted, however, that wherever only one of us is responsible for a textual conjecture discussed in the endnotes, this is indicated by our initials).

Like all books, this one is a product of more than just the authors whose names appear on the cover, and there are many people whom we must thank for their support, wisdom, and help during its preparation. In particular, we would like to thank Stephen Brunet, our colleague and collaborator in *Anthology of Classical Myth*, for his collegiality and useful discussions. Likewise, we extend our gratitude to our editor at Hackett Publishing Company, Rick Todhunter, who encouraged the project, and to the production staff that shepherded it to fruition. We would also like to thank Michelle Cain, the publisher's copyeditor, whose diligence saved us from many errors and inconsistencies. We should like to extend our gratitude to William Nelson, whose attractive and accurate maps add great value to the volume. Also thanks are due to the two anonymous readers, whose comments improved the Introductions.

The Dean's Office of the College of Liberal Arts at the University of New Hampshire generously provided funding to each of us in support of this project, as did the university's Center for Humanities and the Department of Languages, Literatures, and Cultures. The Graduate College of the University of New Hampshire facilitated much of the initial work on Hyginus with the award of a summer fellowship to Smith in 2005. In August, 2005 the Fondation Hardt pour l'étude de l'antiquité classique in Vandoeuvres, Switzerland, allowed us to work for a worry-free three weeks in an excellent library surrounded by brilliant and stimulating international colleagues. Our visit there was subsidized by the William A. Oldfather Research Fund at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Without this financial support the volume would not have been possible. Likewise, without the timeliness and efficiency

of the Interlibrary Loan Office of the Dimond Library, this project might have languished interminably.

We would also like to thank Piero Garofalo, our colleague in the Italian Program at UNH, for his invaluable assistance in acquiring the image of the bronze Chimera di Arezzo that graces the cover. Our thanks also to Daniela Selisca for the wonderful photo and permission to reproduce it, as well as to the Soprintendenza per i Beni Archeologici della Toscana for access to the piece in the Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Firenze.

Finally, we owe special thanks to our wives, Maggie Smith and Laurel Trzaskoma, who suffered many indignities as work on this book progressed, not least being forced to read drafts of the General Introduction. They indulged us with kindness and understanding, all the while reminding us that there can be such a thing as too much mythography.

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## GENERAL INTRODUCTION

### What Is Mythography?

Of the many gifts passed on to us from the Greeks and Romans, their myths are surely one of our most enduring and important cultural legacies. Because of the perennial appeal of these traditional stories about gods and heroes, modern audiences are exposed to a steady supply of mythically inspired popular and highbrow culture in a variety of media, from animated movies to operas. With surprising regularity, modern audiences also still turn directly to an ancient source for their myth. Somewhere in the world right now a play of Euripides is being staged, the appearance of new translations of Homer's epics can still cause critical and popular stirrings (and sell a lot of books), and visitors to museums gaze daily in rapt fascination at Greek and Roman sculptures and painted vases depicting mythical figures. Herein lies the rub: for all their beauty and importance, all those plays, poems, and artworks from the ancient world can be remarkably inefficient vehicles for imparting basic knowledge about the myths. But what is contained in this book—the two most important surviving ancient works of mythography (“writing *about* myth”)—was deliberately designed to do just that, to provide clear, straightforward accounts of the myths without pretense or adornment.

Before we get into what mythography is all about, let's back up just a moment. *What is the myth of Oedipus?* This is the sort of question that people ask us all the time because they are curious and because we get paid to talk about Greek myth. If you know someone like us, or have a friend who loves Greek myths, watch him or her carefully the next time you ask something like this. There will be an uncomfortable pause, eventually broken by a “Well . . .” or a good, long “Um . . .”. Your question, it turns out, is remarkably complex for two reasons. First, the word “myth” is notoriously difficult to define for scholars (we'll leave that controversy aside, but the definition most likely to be given by a layperson, “a false story,” is the one least likely to be given by a scholar who works on myth). Second, deciding what constitutes a myth is just as complicated because one myth might be told differently in various places, times, and contexts, and your acquaintance might be trying to decide which version to tell, which details to include, and what information to leave out.

Once the hemming and hawing is done, your question might be answered in a minute or two in a bare-bones account that glosses over most if not all the difficulties. Your other option is to go read Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus*, a Greek tragedy of some 1,500 lines of poetry, and gather the relevant information yourself; most of the relevant information is there, although you'll learn nothing about Oedipus' life after he blinds himself and leaves the city (for that you'd also have to read Sophocles' *Oedipus at Colonus*, an even longer play!). Which method is better? In most ways, of course, the second is. You will read one of the most influential and brilliant

literary works human endeavor has ever produced, for one thing. But if you are simply trying to satisfy idle curiosity, just following up on a quick reference to Oedipus in a book you are reading, or merely reminding yourself of the main outlines of the story, the first method, turning to a bare-bones account, is clearly superior in a variety of ways.

The problem here is not just Oedipus. The same essentially goes for all the hundreds of Greek myths. For example, the recent appearance of the film *Troy* made a lot of people curious about the Trojan War in Greek myth. Most of those people, of course, were not going to set aside a week to read through Homer's *Iliad* to learn more. Should people read the *Iliad*? Obviously they should—though we might be prejudiced in this regard since our careers revolve around trying to get people to read it! But should they read it just to answer their basic questions about the Trojan War? Most certainly not, and if they do, they would probably be mightily angry at whoever suggested they read more than 15,000 lines of poetry to discover one inescapable fact: the *Iliad* does not tell the whole story of the Trojan War. It doesn't even tell most of it, only a month or two toward the end of a ten-year war. Some of the most important features of the Trojan War tale have no place in it. If you are already something of a mythology buff, you might remember that the ultimate cause of the war was the goddess Strife throwing a golden apple (with "For the most beautiful" written on it) into the middle of a wedding reception to which she was not invited. Not in the *Iliad*. There's no Trojan horse, either, and the Trojan horse is a pretty big deal. And it is not just the big wooden horse that's missing from the end of the war. When the poem comes to a close, Achilles has not yet been shot (in the heel or anywhere else) by Paris, Paris has not yet been killed in an archery duel, Troy still stands, and Odysseus hasn't yet set off for his ten years of wandering before he can return home.

What we are getting at here is the problem we raised above: delineating a myth—that is, answering a question like "What's the myth of Oedipus?" or "What's the story of the Trojan War?"—is tricky business, particularly when it comes to Greek myths, since evidence for them comes from a complex literary and artistic tradition that spans almost two millennia. All the information about a myth has to be organized, the different versions evaluated for reliability and interest, the contradictory bits accounted for somehow (or smoothed over to give a better presentation), and a decision reached as to how much detail to include—the alternative is simply to collect all the ancient quotations that mention Oedipus and put them together in one place and let the person who asked the question sort it all out. For Oedipus, that would entail an enormous amount of material (including the two *Oedipus* plays of Sophocles in their entirety). For other mythical figures there might be nothing more than a few sentences.

Another problem is evaluating all those sources. Is an earlier source better than a later one? Is a poetic source better than a prose one? Is a longer source better than a short one? More fundamental than such questions, however, is the very nature of *all* our sources for Greek myths. Myths are, at least in some scholars' minds, properly regarded as traditional stories that depend to some extent on oral transmission. In other words, myths are the stories that members of a society tell each

other, passing those stories along by retelling what they themselves have heard, all the while altering here, cutting there, even inventing entirely new stories or elements of stories. What we have from the ancient Greek world is, by contrast, a literary tradition, and that involves an entirely different sort of transmission. Is Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus* the same thing as the "myth of Oedipus"? Not really. Instead, it's just one very highly literary *version* of the myth. The myth, in turn, doesn't really exist at all. If you could gather everything ever written about Oedipus, and gather everything the ancient Greeks ever said about Oedipus, then you would have "the myth." That's impossible to do, of course, and certainly would not be very user-friendly, so when one puts forward the question "What's the myth of Oedipus?" to even the most knowledgeable and sophisticated scholar, we are likely to get something relatively straightforward and pithy after the initial hesitation. Somewhere in the back of his or her brain that scholar might be thinking, "How can I answer that when I don't know precisely what 'myth' means?" or "How can I possibly convey all the wealth of material we know about Oedipus?" but you're not likely to have to suffer through lengthy discussions of those questions. You'll hear about the oracles, the exposure of Oedipus, his unwitting killing of his father, his solution to the riddle of the Sphinx, his marriage to his mother, the discovery of his true identity, and his blinding himself. In short, in reply to a query like "What is the myth of Oedipus?" you will receive a reply that aims at simplicity, accuracy, and completeness balanced against brevity and practicality.

People have been asking questions in the form of "What is the myth of X?" for centuries. What is important to grasp here is that the Greeks themselves asked that question countless times. When an ancient wanted to know what Oedipus' story was, he did not go to a performance of *Oedipus Tyrannus*. That would have been as inefficient for him as reading the play would be for you. In many cases, he turned to a reference work that provided a simple, accurate, complete, brief, and practical account of the myth. He turned, in other words, to a work like those in this volume, Apollodorus' *Bibliothēke* or Hyginus' *Fabulae*. That is, he turned to mythography.

When consulting our works he would have found the following accounts of the Oedipus myth (Apollodorus' [3.48–56] is on the left, Hyginus', which is split into two stories, on the right):<sup>1</sup>

After the death of Amphion, Laios succeeded to the kingdom. He married Menoiceus' daughter, whom some call Iocaste and others Epicaste. They received an oracle not to have children (for their offspring would be a patricide), but Laios got drunk and slept with his wife. After boring through its ankles with pins, Laios gave the child to a shepherd to expose. But although

**66 Laios:** Laios son of Labdacus received a prophecy from Apollo warning him to beware death at the hands of his own son. So, when his wife, Jocasta, Menoeceus' daughter, gave birth, he ordered the child to be exposed. It just so happened that Periboea, King Polybus' wife, was at the shore washing clothes, found the exposed child, and took it in. When Polybus found out, because

1. One of the obvious differences is the spelling of the proper names. In the translation, introduction, and the endnotes of Apollodorus, we transliterate directly from the Greek, which often differs slightly from Hyginus' Latinized spellings.

the shepherd exposed it on Mount Cithaeron, some herders of Polybos, the king of the Corinthians, found the infant and brought it to the king's wife, Periboia. She adopted it and passed it off as her own. After treating its ankles, she called it Oedipus, giving this name because its feet had swollen. When the boy grew up, he surpassed his peers in strength. Out of jealousy they mocked him for not really being his parents' son. He asked Periboia, but was not able to find out the truth. So he went to Delphi and inquired about his own parents. The god told him not to travel to his country, for he would kill his father and have sex with his mother. When he heard this, he left Corinth behind, believing that he had been born from those who were said to be his parents. While riding in a chariot through Phocis on a certain narrow stretch of road he ran into Laios driving in a chariot. Polyphontes, who was Laios' herald, ordered Oedipus to get out of the way and killed one of his horses because of the holdup caused by his refusal to do so. So Oedipus became enraged and killed both Polyphontes and Laios. Then he arrived in Thebes.

Now, Damasistratos, king of the Plataians, buried Laios, and Creon son of Menoecus succeeded to the throne of Thebes. While he was king, a great misfortune befell the city; Hera sent the Sphinx, whose mother was Echidna and whose father was Typhon. She had the face of a woman; the chest, feet, and tail of a lion; and the wings of a bird. She had learned a riddle from the Muses, set herself up on Mount Phicion, and proposed it to the Thebans. This was the riddle: What is four-footed and two-footed and three-footed though it has but one voice? The Thebans had at that time an oracle that they would be rid of the Sphinx when they solved her riddle. So they gathered together often to search for what the answer was. And when they did not find it, she would snatch and devour one of them. After many had died, and last of all Creon's son Haimon, Creon proclaimed that he would give both

they had no children, they raised him as their own, naming him Oedipus because his feet had been pierced.

**67 Oedipus:** When Oedipus, the son of Laius and Jocasta, reached manhood, he was the strongest of all his peers. As they were envious of him, they accused him of not really being Polybus' son because Polybus was so gentle yet he was so brash. Oedipus felt that their claim had some merit, so he went to Delphi to inquire about his parentage. Laius was experiencing ominous signs that told him that death at his son's hands was near. So he too set out on his way to Delphi, and Oedipus ran into him on the way. The king's guards ordered him to make way for the king. Oedipus refused. The king drove the horses on anyway and ran over Oedipus' foot with the wheel. Oedipus grew angry and threw his father from the chariot, killing him without realizing who he was.

Upon Laius' death, Creon son of Menoecus took power. Meanwhile, the Sphinx, the daughter of Typhon, was running loose in Boeotia and destroying the Thebans' crops. She issued a challenge to King Creon: if someone solved the riddle she posed, she would leave the area; if, however, the person did not solve the riddle, the Sphinx said she would devour him. Under no other circumstances would she leave the territory.

When the king heard these conditions, he made a proclamation throughout Greece. He promised to grant his kingdom and his sister Jocasta in marriage to the man who solved the riddle of the Sphinx. In their desire to be king many came and were devoured by the Sphinx. Oedipus son of Laius came and solved the riddle, upon which the Sphinx threw herself to her death. Oedipus was given his father's kingdom and, not knowing who she was, his mother as wife. By her he fathered Eteocles, Polynices, Antigone, and Ismene.

Meanwhile, Thebes was stricken with a crop failure and a shortage of grain because of

the kingdom and Laios' wife to the man who solved the riddle. When Oedipus heard this, he solved it, saying that the answer to the riddle spoken by the Sphinx was a human being, because a person is four-footed as an infant carried on four limbs, two-footed when grown up, and in old age takes a staff as a third foot. Then the Sphinx threw herself off of the acropolis, and Oedipus both received the kingdom and unwittingly married his mother. With her he had sons, Polyneices and Eteocles, and daughters, Ismene and Antigone, though there are some who say that the children's mother was Euryganeia daughter of Hyperphas.

When what was hidden was later revealed, Jocaste hanged herself in a noose, and Oedipus put out his eyes and was driven out of Thebes. He laid curses on his sons because they watched him being banished from the city and did not come to his aid. He came with Antigone to Colonus in Attica, where the sanctuary of the Eumenides is, and sat down as a suppliant. He was received as a guest by Theseus and died not long afterward.

In about 600 words, both Apollodorus and Hyginus give perfectly competent answers to anyone who wonders what the myth of Oedipus is, and they cover essentially the same material. But there are differences too, usually matters of detail. For instance, Apollodorus gives the Sphinx's riddle, but Hyginus does not. Apollodorus describes how Jocasta killed herself, but Hyginus does not mention her death at all (though it can be assumed). On the other hand, Apollodorus leaves out the story of Jocasta's father entirely and is quite vague about how the whole sordid affair came to light, while Hyginus describes it in some detail, even giving the name of the servant who exposes the infant Oedipus and recognizes him as an adult. Such differences are to be expected given the nature of the process: boiling down multiple, often conflicting, sources into a single account. Apollodorus even occasionally allows different details to emerge; for instance, many who are familiar with the Oedipus myth or even the Freudian Oedipus complex might be surprised to read in Apollodorus that some Greeks thought that the mother of Oedipus' children was not his own mother Jocasta, but a woman named Euryganeia!

Oedipus' crimes. When he asked Tiresias why Thebes was plagued with this, he responded that if a descendant of the Sparti was still alive and died for his country, it would be freed from the plague. Then Menoecus, Jocasta's father, threw himself from the city walls to his death.

While all of this was going on in Thebes, Polybus died in Corinth. When Oedipus heard this, at first he took it badly because he was under the assumption that it was his father who had died. But Periboea informed him that he was adopted, and at the same time the old man Menoetes (the one who exposed him) recognized from the scars on his feet and ankles that he was Laius' son. When Oedipus heard this and realized that he had committed so many horrible crimes, he removed the brooches from his mother's dress and blinded himself. He then handed his kingdom over to his sons to share in alternate years and went from Thebes into exile with his daughter Antigone as his guide.

## Mythography and the Study of Myth

From the brief examples of the Oedipus myth above, you can glimpse the nature of mythography and what ancient mythographers were aiming at: *retelling or*

*paraphrasing* myths to capture their essential features, or at least their essential plots, and provide a reliable version without embellishment. To this we should add that there is a second kind of mythography, concerned with *interpreting or analyzing* myths to explain their origin, function, inner logic, hidden meanings, and so on, but since Apollodorus and Hyginus are predominantly engaged in the first type, we will only lightly touch on this kind in the course of our discussion. Both sorts of mythography, however, share one overriding feature: they approach myths from an external and essentially nonartistic perspective in an attempt to make sense of them.

Because of this conscious detachment from the subject matter, mythographic works never did and never will compete with the vivid and imaginative creations of the great poets—such as Homer, Sophocles, or Ovid—and have therefore been relegated to a second-class existence. Up until recently few of the mythographic works that have survived from antiquity had been translated into English. And while many people at least recognize the great names of Homer, Sophocles, and Ovid, few have heard the word “mythography” or understand the genre of writing associated with it, and even most professional classicists would be hard pressed to come up with more than a couple of ancient mythographers off the top of their head. The two names most likely to occur to those classicists are Apollodorus and Hyginus, an indication of these writers’ importance.

To be sure, mythography will never appear on anyone’s top ten list of great achievements from the ancient world, but that does not mean that it is of limited value in the modern study of myth. On the contrary, we rely a great deal on ancient mythographers precisely because they were not trying to enchant or entertain but organize and simplify. To take the works translated here, the *Bibliothēke* and the *Fabulae* attempt to organize and recapitulate the entire vast array of stories that constituted what the ancients thought of as the body of Greek myth (there is nothing of what we might call Roman myth in the former, and precious little in the latter, though it is written in Latin). This project in and of itself was impossible, of course, in works as brief as these, but Apollodorus makes a more credible job of it than many modern equivalents, and Hyginus would perhaps appear at least a little more successful if the text of his work had not suffered so much in coming down to us (more on this in the introduction to the *Fabulae*). These writers’ testimony is invaluable, not least because of their attempt to be exhaustive.

In short, anyone interested in Greek myth profits through an understanding of the mythographic writings that survive from antiquity, and those of Apollodorus and Hyginus most of all. A modern anthropologist working in a contemporary culture might have access to live retellings of stories in an ongoing mythical tradition to help put his or her analysis in a wider context. We, unfortunately, have absolutely no such access to the myths of the Greeks and Romans, so we use all the evidence at our disposal, from dramatic productions (perhaps a Greek tragedy), to references found in other works (say, Aristotle’s discussion of that Greek tragedy in his *Poetics*), to artistic representations (for instance, a painted Greek vase showing a scene from the play). Works of mythography—with their discussion, categorization, paraphrase, and interpretation of myths found scattered in the rest of ancient literature—are immensely valuable witnesses. If the myths and the justly famous literary tellings of



those myths are among the most important parts of the artistic and cultural legacy that has come down to us from the Greeks and the Romans, we ought not to despise what the ancient mythographers wrote about them, and we have much to learn by looking at the mythographers' explicit and implicit criteria of inclusion, what they find most important when summarizing, how they attempt to reconcile variants or relate two different myths, and their place in transmitting myth in the wider culture.

In a more basic way, we often rely heavily on mythographers for the very content of the myths. In most literary works we usually do not get narration of a myth in its entirety but rather incomplete references or passing allusions, and in many instances we have no literary versions of a myth at all, either because none was ever produced in antiquity or because, like so much ancient literature, it was lost. It is mythographers who continually fill in the details or give the entire scheme of a story. The debt we owe the mythographers, and Apollodorus and Hyginus above all, can be seen in scholarly footnotes and source citations in just about any book having to do with Greek myth. Just to give one example, Timothy Gantz's invaluable *Early Greek Myth: A Guide to Literary and Artistic Sources* (The Johns Hopkins University Press: Baltimore, 1996), though particularly concerned with finding the earliest attestations for myths and their details in the tradition, cites for specifics our two authors over and over despite their late dates (at least seven centuries after the earliest surviving Greek literary works).

## Modern Mythography

What makes the undervaluation of ancient mythographic works more surprising is that modern books paraphrasing or interpreting myths—corresponding to the two kinds of mythography discussed above—enjoy great popularity, not to mention robust sales. We generally do not call these modern books “mythography” (or their authors “mythographers”) because we use the term in a restricted sense, to refer specifically to ancient writing about myth. There are differences, of course, between ancient and modern mythographers, but most of these stem from the obvious fact that ancient mythographic works were written for ancient audiences, and their requirements and tastes were different from our own. But the basic impulse, method, and execution remain the same.

Examples of modern mythography are not hard to find. In the United States Thomas Bulfinch's *The Age of Fable* (1855) and Edith Hamilton's *Mythology* (1942) were both designed for comprehensive retelling of myths in a form palatable to contemporary American audiences and have captivated generations. In fact, though these two venerable volumes have had many imitators, they still sit perched atop the heap—to give an indication of their enduring popularity, as this General Introduction was being written, they occupied the top three slots in sales rankings in the category of “Mythology, Classical” at the website of the bookseller Barnes & Noble (two different printings of Hamilton hold the top two places). As time goes on and both the audience for Greek myth and our understanding of the ancient world change, new treatments will no doubt strive to displace these by recapitulating the

myths in new and different forms, just as Bulfinch and Hamilton pushed aside their predecessors, and just as Apollodorus and Hyginus varied in how they approached their task. Sometimes the authors of this sort of book attempt to provide interpretation as well as paraphrase, but they often date themselves quickly as scholarship and society evolve. Robert Graves' *The Greek Myths* (1955), for instance, has not held up as well as Bulfinch and Hamilton, mostly because of the rather idiosyncratic interpretations woven throughout the book. It remains to be seen whether more recent efforts at paraphrasing will stand the test of time. The best of these in English, Richard Martin's *Myths of the Ancient Greeks* (New American Library: New York, 2003), an excellent overview, adds evaluative comments in a responsible but light-handed way.

No less numerous are modern interpretive books on myth, which investigate the nature and origins of myths; their place in ancient thought, literature, and religion; and even their continued relevance to the contemporary world as narrative models or as stories with hidden, deeper meanings—witness the phenomenal success of Joseph Campbell's books. Some of these are written by specialists for other scholars, some for use in classrooms (where courses in classical myth are often some of the most popular on campus), and some for consumption by the public. Of those in English directed at a nonspecialist audience but written by scholars, G. S. Kirk's *The Nature of Greek Myths* (Overlook Press: Woodstock, NY, 1974) and Fritz Graf's *Greek Mythology: An Introduction* (The Johns Hopkins University Press: Baltimore, translated from German in 1993) are the best examples. Broadly speaking, we might say that these modern treatments correspond reasonably well to ancient mythographic works of this second sort—that is, those interested in providing interpretation and evaluation, not paraphrase—but the resemblance between ancient and modern examples of this type of mythography is not nearly as close as that of the other kind. Since the act of interpretation is tied so closely to contemporary intellectual currents and there is a vast gulf between those of antiquity and today, modern scholarly analysis of myth and ancient interpretive mythography are very different enterprises, sharing only a common intent.

## The Development of Mythography

What unites the two different strains of ancient mythography? Above all, both are fundamentally concerned with bringing order to the chaotic Greek mythical traditions handed down by oral, literary, and artistic traditions. This is immediately obvious in the interpretive works, but it should not be forgotten that behind the apparently simple task of retelling there is an attempt to take incomplete, contradictory, and often remote traditional stories and produce an account of Greek myths that is at once reasonably comprehensive, reasonably consistent, and reasonably accessible. Although it is impossible here to provide a comprehensive treatment of mythography, a brief survey of the main developments and some of the more important mythographers is worthwhile, if for no other reason than because the *Bibliothèque* and *Fabulae* are products of this long and rich tradition.

Considering that the underlying impulse of mythography is to make sense of what seems at first intractable, we ought not be surprised that we can trace mythography back to the sixth and fifth centuries BC. During that period thought was being revolutionized in many ways as the Greeks began to search for rational and consistent explanations for everything from natural phenomena to the various aspects of human society, leading to the development of early science and new forms of critical literature. Much of this new literature began for the first time in Greek culture to be written in prose—as opposed to poetry—and prose became the normal mode of expression for these pursuits in the centuries to come. The two most important literary genres to arise from this ferment were history and philosophy, but right alongside them arose mythography, which similarly attempted to organize and explain the world in rational ways. In fact, mythography, even if it has not fared as well in esteem or interest among later generations, nonetheless shares more than a general intellectual background and outlook with its more prestigious cousins—it often overlaps them and is intertwined with them, particularly history.

That overlap is sometimes so strong when it comes to history that perhaps initially we ought to think of mythography not as a separate genre of writing but as one differing only in the kind of material the authors were working with. Let us turn for a moment to Herodotus' *Histories* (written in the mid-fifth century BC about the Persian invasions of the 490s and 480s), often regarded as the first history proper—in fact, the word “history” (“inquiry”) in that more limited sense derives from Herodotus' opening sentence. The work begins by giving a striking and fascinating version of the origins of the conflict between Greece and Persia, or more broadly, between Europe and Asia. Persian storytellers, Herodotus reports, say that the struggle can be traced back to the events recounted in some of the most famous of Greek myths—those of Io, Europa, Medea, and Helen—which are linked into a chain of reciprocal abductions that increasingly raise tensions between East and West. Herodotus then declares that he will not analyze these stories, but rather begin his account with the earliest individual he himself *knows* to have harmed the Greeks in a way and at a time that were connected directly to the later conflict, King Croesus of Lydia (a historical king in what would today be western Turkey, who reigned from around 560 until 546 BC).

Thus Herodotus implicitly recognizes categories that we might think of as *pre-historical* and *historical*, but the first member of the pair might just as easily be thought of as *mythical*. What is most interesting here for a discussion of mythography is not just that Herodotus treats something mythical at the start of his history, or that he relays Persian accounts (which he very well may have invented), but the particular form these accounts take. His original audience knew the stories intimately, but even today they are not unfamiliar: Zeus, in love with the mortal Io, princess of the Greek city of Argos, lures her away from home and transforms himself into a thundercloud to hide his dalliance with her; Zeus again, this time disguised as a bull, abducts the Phoenician princess Europa and carries her off to Crete; Medea leaves Colchis in Asia with Jason when the Argonauts bring the Golden Fleece back to Greece; and Paris takes the Spartan queen Helen back home with him to Asiatic Troy, an event that directly leads to the Trojan War. But Herodotus

relays very different forms of these stories. Phoenician traders kidnapped Io. As pay-back, some Greeks abducted Europa. It might have ended with that tit-for-tat, but the Greeks then practically guaranteed a further decline in international relations by carrying off Medea. The Greeks refused to make recompense, so Paris resolved to commit an equally brazen act and took Helen. At this point, open warfare erupted, creating a grand East versus West conflict that Herodotus saw as directly connected to the Greek versus Persian wars of his own day.

What we have here in Herodotus is nothing less than mythography, or at least a particular type of mythography—rationalizing—that exists later as a distinct and separate form, best known from the writings of Palaephatus, whom we will discuss briefly below. The basic method of rationalists is to remove all supernatural elements from a myth in order to transform it into something entirely ordinary, or at least something somehow explicable by common sense about what constitutes normal cause and effect. The underlying assumption is that myths as they have come down to us are the products of successive misunderstandings (and distortions intentionally introduced by storytellers or poets) that have metamorphosed perfectly normal events into fantastic tales of gods, heroes, magic, and monsters. And Herodotus is not the only historian to engage in rationalizing of myth; as we will see below, the few fragments that remain of his predecessor Hecataeus also show signs of rationalizing.

Herodotus' own attitude toward the mythical and divine is complex, not least because of his habit of attributing mythical stories to other people and begging off fuller discussion of his thoughts of such matters. A generation later, the attitude of the historian Thucydides, who wrote an account of the Peloponnesian War between Athens and Sparta, is crystal clear. His absolute rejection of anything mythical as a secure basis of determining fact makes him widely regarded as the first practitioner of objective history. Nevertheless, Thucydides too began his history by engaging with the mythical. Why? Because, simply put, he had to. As with Herodotus and the history of warfare between Europe and Asia, Thucydides could see in his analysis of developments in Greece a reasonably clear dividing line between an earlier time from which evidence was primarily in the form of mythical accounts and a later time in which there was a multitude of different kinds of evidence. Both kinds of evidence could be subjected rigorously to rational evaluation, but only the application of such methods to the evidence from the later periods was properly history, for only in that case was there enough context to permit strong confidence in the results. Still, the basic point here is that myths, when critical methods were applied to them, could reveal something useful to the historian in the ancient world, and when it comes to the early history of Greece—the history of Greece, that is, before history was invented!—the strongest evidence was the content of the myths passed down from previous generations.

So the Greeks, at the beginning of critical inquiry, faced a past that was entirely mythical. That is not to say that it was a fictional past, but a past that contained fiction and truth in various proportions and that was to differing degrees subject to rational analysis. It is really no surprise, then, that historians were occupied with myth. The entire body of Greek myths could not simply be ignored or swept away—no society can wave a wand and have its past disappear—but myths could be made

the object of study in an attempt to understand that past. Herodotus and Thucydides did not develop their attitudes about and methods of analyzing myth in a vacuum, but very little remains of their contemporaries and immediate predecessors. We consider Herodotus and Thucydides historians because they were concerned primarily with events on *this* side of the dividing line between mythical prehistory and history. There were early writers—mythographers—concerned solely or overwhelmingly with events on *that* side of the divide. Although we have only meager fragments of their work, it is clear that there was essentially no difference between what a mythographer did and what a historian did—there was merely a difference of material—and the same individual might just as well be both.

## Important Early Mythographers

The two most important early figures in prose mythography, Acusilaus and Hecataeus, are excellent illustrations of this. Before their time, the cataloging and organization of Greek myths was done entirely by the same poets who were creating and transmitting them. The best-known example, of course, is Hesiod. His *Theogony* not only tells the story of the creation of the gods but is arranged such that genealogical connections provide a framework. So too the *Catalog of Women*, a later continuation (perhaps not by Hesiod) of the *Theogony*, which traces the lineages of the great heroes. But the perspective is entirely internal—it is organization subordinated to artistic intent and storytelling—in such works as this. The prose mythographers, by contrast, wrote from the outside looking in. Acusilaus flourished just before the Persian Wars that broke out in the early fifth century BC. Later Greek tradition sometimes identifies him as “the first historian,” but the subject matter of this work, to judge by the surviving fragments, was solely mythical: the origin of the gods, Heracles, the battle of the gods and giants, the children of Deucalion, and so forth. Perhaps this is an indication that the ancients were not so rigorous about making the distinction between mythographers and historians as we are. Later generations applied two titles to this book, *Histories* and *Genealogies*. The organization, to judge by the latter title and by the surviving fragments, was strongly based on lines of descent—just the sort of organization Apollodorus was to employ centuries later. The scope, like Apollodorus’, was broad, covering the origins of the gods down to the various legendary heroic myths, and so it is perhaps not surprising to find that Apollodorus cites Acusilaus by name several times (though this does not mean he read Acusilaus directly; he may have been working with intermediary sources). Since there is only the slightest trace of interpretation present in the surviving fragments (see *fr.* 32 Fowler), perhaps Acusilaus was mostly interested in reconciling the conflicting genealogies present in the contemporary oral tradition and inherited from the earlier poetic tradition, and that was method enough to be revolutionary. Acusilaus, then, was clearly one of the originators of the first sort of mythography we have delineated, namely, that which aimed at organization and recapitulation.

Hecataeus was active perhaps just a decade or two after Acusilaus and personally involved in the Ionian revolt that led to the Persian Wars. He too, like Acusilaus, is

called by some ancient authorities the “oldest historian.” He was famous in antiquity for his *Journey around the World*, a geographical survey that treated the known world, and, more importantly for us, a work variously known as *Histories*, *Genealogies*, or *Heroology*, which survives in thirty or forty fragments. Like Acusilaus’ *Histories/Genealogies*, Hecataeus’ book traced myths via lines of descent, even connecting them to the contemporary world. But he was not just interested in mere recapitulation of family trees embellished by stories, valuable as that activity was. His opening sentence is justly famous: “Hecataeus the Milesian says this: I write what follows as it seems to me to be true, for the stories [*muthoi*] of the Greeks, as I see them, are many and laughable.” A few of the fragments reveal that this skepticism flowered into outright rationalizing, which influenced Herodotus and others. For instance, Hecataeus evidently thought the three-headed Cerberus, canine guardian of the underworld, was beyond belief, and he explained away the creature as a “terrible serpent” known as the “hound of Hades” from the fatal effects of its venom (*fr.* 27 Fowler). Most of the fragments do not, however, contain such strongly defined tendencies, even when the material is as unbelievable as Cerberus. More often found is a kind of contrarianism that does not blossom into rationalizing. When Hecataeus disagrees about the number of sons of Aegyptus: “there were, as Hesiod had it, fifty of them, or as I do, not even twenty” (*fr.* 19 Fowler). Fifty sons are simply too many to believe. This interest in the “truth” behind myths and their origins pointed the way toward the second type of mythography, the interpretive, and may explain why Apollodorus never refers to Hecataeus as an authority. Although most of the fully surviving mythographers (who are many centuries later) belong clearly to one type or the other, there is no inherent reason why a mythographer should be interested only in summarizing or interpreting but not both. In fact, it is obvious that at the early period they could be comfortably mingled within the same work.

Pherecydes, who was writing around the second quarter of the fifth century BC, is the mythographic authority cited most often by Apollodorus, and even Hyginus, whose text contains far fewer source references, names him in *Fab.* 154. Pherecydes’ work, like that of the other early mythographers, is fragmentary, but it was obviously of tremendous influence. The surviving fragments reveal several characteristics that would have commended him to later authors: a straightforward and lively style that can be glimpsed in the longer fragments, an admirable and detailed comprehensiveness, and a knack for presenting the stories smoothly. The overall organization of the work is difficult to grasp in its current state, but genealogy was a prime focus here too. Once again, we find an early mythographer straddling the lines of myth and history (Pherecydes is referred to by later sources as both a genealogist and a historian), and one of the notable features of his writings was an attempt to tie the mythical genealogies into contemporary ones. One fragment, for instance, traces the lineage of the fifth-century Athenian politician and general Miltiades step-by-step back to the son of Ajax, one of the heroes of the Trojan War.

Hellanicus of Lesbos, another fifth-century mythographer of importance, is never named by Apollodorus as an authority, but scholars have identified a few places in the *Bibliothēke* where material derives ultimately from him (particularly the section on Trojan genealogy). The fragments of his many works, though quite

numerous (thereby attesting to his importance as a source for later authors, who cite him frequently), do not allow us to form a judgment with certainty. Still, it is clear that Hellanicus treated myth in what might be said to be a complete fashion, covering almost every major region and lineage of the Greek world, and that his work was of particular importance for his treatment of the myths of Athens, as well as for Troy and the Trojan War, including events such as Aeneas' flight after the city's fall. A contemporary of Herodotus, and often mentioned together with him, Hellanicus was also a figure of tremendous importance for the development of the writing of history. In particular, his interest in establishing secure chronologies gave a firm foundation to dating the events of Greek history. That interest in establishing systematic and consistent chronology seems to have carried over also into his mythographic works. Intriguingly, his *Atthis*, the first attempt to tell the entire history of Athens, involved arranging prehistorical (i.e., mythical) "events" into a coherent narrative, after which followed more securely attested historical data in a seamless whole. Although his style does not seem from the fragments to have been anywhere near as appealing as Pherecydes' or Herodotus', his encyclopedic mix of breadth and detail, as well as his reliability, meant that his work was later mined continually as a source.

Theagenes of Rhegium, a fifth-century BC scholar who worked on the Homeric epics, is traditionally credited as the first intellectual to analyze poetry allegorically by discerning beneath Homer's descriptions of gods references to the interaction of the elements of the physical world. Allegory of that sort, as well as moral and ethical allegory, became tied up intimately with larger developments in Greek philosophy, and so mythography developed a philosophical side. The earliest mythographer we know to have taken a consistently allegorizing approach is Herodorus (fifth to fourth century BC), who seems to have been primarily interested in heroic myths. The story of Heracles' holding up the sky in Atlas' place was an allegory of Heracles' mastery of astronomical knowledge. That same hero's famous lion skin was not to be taken literally; the lion skin, rather, was the impenetrable "noble purpose" that Heracles armored himself with by practicing philosophy. Herodorus seems to have been tremendously innovative, and in addition to allegory we find rationalism as well as skepticism of the most basic premises of the traditional stories. For instance, Herodorus, after carefully studying the myths of Heracles, seems to have come to the conclusion that there were at least eight different men named Heracles. The myths about the hero, he thought, resulted from the conflation of all of them combined with deliberate allegorizing on the part of poets and storytellers as well as the obscuring effects of time and misunderstanding.

In the fourth century BC Asclepiades of Tragilus in his *Subjects of Tragedies* (*Tragodoumena*) systematically studied the myths that were found in the plays of the tragedians. He is cited by Apollodorus twice, both times as the source of minor variants—not surprising, since Asclepiades was interested both in retelling the versions of myths found in tragedy, as well as discussing how these intersected with the earlier accounts of epic and lyric. As the tragedies, particularly those of Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides, attained the status of classics during their lifetimes and immediately thereafter, Asclepiades became a valuable source for many later



writers on myth. In roughly the same time frame, another scholar, Dicaearchus, produced *hypotheses*, or “summaries,” of Greek tragedies, which supposedly also evaluated the innovations of Sophocles and Euripides in their use of myths. Although these do not themselves survive, we do have other, later *hypotheses*. Despite being little more than summaries, they are of immense value in the case of tragedies that are now lost. If they formed a coherent collection in antiquity, as seems to be the case, that would have been a quite valuable mythographic source, and some scholars see just such a source behind some of Hyginus’ *Fabulae*.

## Hellenistic and Imperial Mythographers

The conquests of Alexander the Great in the late fourth century BC fundamentally altered the Greek world. Greek culture, language, and ideas spread over a vast area, all of which was already inhabited by other civilizations, some of them of tremendous sophistication and prestige (one thinks particularly of Egypt). The subsequent era of Greek kingdoms thriving in non-Greek areas has become known as the Hellenistic (“Greekish”) Period. Greek political and cultural dominance around the Mediterranean and in the Near East produced a vital culture with strong interests in its Greek past. It is not surprising, therefore, that the Hellenistic Greeks defined the idea of the preceding period as the Classical Age and devoted tremendous energy to studying the literature and myths of earlier times. Great centers of learning arose in Alexandria, Pergamum, and other important cities, and these in turn led to a newly professionalized scholarly class that took the Greek world to new heights of science, history, and other intellectual pursuits. When the Romans conquered these Greek kingdoms (the last, Egypt, fell in 31 BC) and incorporated them into their empire, these pursuits continued, albeit sometimes in changed form. Mythography shared in all these developments, representing, as it did, the study of one of the most important cultural elements the Hellenistic Greeks and Romans inherited from the ancient civilization of Greece.

With Palaephatus we finally come to an author whose work survives in a reasonably full state of preservation. We cannot date this author with any precision, but he may be as early as the fourth or third century BC (and thus would have lived at the very beginning of the Hellenistic Period). His *On Unbelievable Things* (*Peri Apiston*) has come down to us not in disconnected fragments but in a (possibly abridged) form consisting of fifty-two entries (the last several are not genuine and look little like the others). Each of these introduces a myth, usually a well-known one, and then goes on to explain the “real story” behind it. The technique is everywhere insistently rationalizing, and Palaephatus relentlessly strips the miraculous and supernatural from the story and replaces it with everyday occurrences. The results are sometimes absurd since the miraculous is often traded for the quotidian but utterly improbable. One is shocked to learn that Medea’s killing of Pelias by convincing his daughters to boil him was nothing more than a spa treatment gone horribly awry. The collection also contains a preface with a clear programmatic statement of purpose explaining its author’s intellectual stance: myths are distortions of certain



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