

Classical Myth

Lifelong Learning course

Douglas Kenning



recommended resources for Greek myth

Original Sources

Hesiod, *Theogony*, the earliest and definitive work on myths of Creation up to mankind.

Homer, *Iliad*, *Odyssey*, the greatest stories ever told, allegorical of every variety of human relationship, is resonant with Sicilian geography. Good prose translations by E. V. Rieu, W.H.D. Rouse, Walter Shewring, and new translation by Stanley Lombardo. Best translations in verse are by Robert Fitzgerald and Robert Fagles.

“Homeric Hymns”, especially those to Apollo, Demeter, Hermes, Aphrodite. Not really by Homer, but very early works of religious worship, also defining the nature of the Gods. Thelma Sergeant is the best translation.

Pindar's odes, especially, “Olympian 1”, “Pythian 4”, “Pythian 8”, “Nemean 6”, “Isthmian 8”.

Greek Drama. Aeschylus (*Oresteia*, *Prometheus Bound*), Sophocles (*Antigone*, *Oedipus Tyrannus*, *Oedipus at Colonus*, *Ajax*, *Electra*), Euripides (*Alcestis*, *Medea*, *Hippolytus*, *Electra*, *Iphigenia in Tauris*, *Bacchae*). Most of the classic dramas used mythic tales, which the dramatists assumed the spectators already knew by heart, as one would expect in a religious ritual.

Ovid (Publius Ovidius Naso) 43 BCE-17 CE. *Metamorphoses* weaves various myths into a fast-paced, fascinating story, with lively and passionate characters. Ovid came from an age and social class very secular, urban, and worldly. He was not a believer, but rather a mythographer, a collector and editor of mythic stories. Still, *Metamorphoses* has been the best-known source of Roman mythology through the Middle Ages and Renaissance until our times, inspiring many poets, painters, and composers. I like the Penguin translation by Mary Innes, but the lively new American translation by Charles Martin likely will become the definitive text.

Apollodorus (a.k.a. Pseudo-Apollodorus), 1-2C CE, was a Roman, like Ovid, and even further removed from the myths when they actually lived. But he was a

faithful scholar-collector of what were to him already ancient myths. His *Bibliotheca* (Library), called "the most valuable mythographical work that has come down from ancient times".

Plutarch (1-2C CE,). One of our most important sources for Greek and Roman biography, his *Life of Theseus* is especially important for that story.

Secondary Sources

Greek Mythology, by Fritz Graf (Johns Hopkins 1993). Considered by scholars and university teachers the definitive modern introduction to Greek myth, history and influence.

The Complete World of Greek Mythology, by Richard Buxton. This is perhaps the best clearly written current introduction for the general reader. He is perhaps informational, not so much telling the stories as talking about the stories. Still, the splendid pictures weave myth right into art history.

Robert Graves is not recommended for this kind of class. He makes stuff up.

The Greek Way, Edith Hamilton (1930). This is old, no longer a favorite of scholars, but remains a classic. In translating myth for us now, in being our Ovid, she helped define for the 20C why the Greeks continue to fascinate us in the West.

The Gods of Olympus, by Barbara Grazios, is a good history of the major Olympian gods, and their role in Western Civilization from their first appearance to modern times.

Gods and Heroes of Ancient Greece (Pantheon Fairy Tale and Folklore Library) Gustav Schwab. Perhaps the best easy-reading edition for young people.

D'Aulaires' Book of Greek Myths by Ingri d'Aulaire and Edgar Parin d'Aulaire (1992). The best for kids.

website:

<http://www.theoi.com> -- the most useful site for basic Greek myth and story

Psychology and Myth:

Ancient Greece, Modern Psyche: Archetypes evolving, ed. Virginia Beane Rutter, Thomas Singer.

Joseph Campbell's *Occidental Mythology* has long been a favorite of mine. Though dated and not scholarly, it is brilliant.

The Wisdom of the Myths, Luc Ferry. Mingling ancient myth with philosophical musing, Ferry looks at ancient myth's power in modern lives.

General:

website:

<http://www.mlahanas.de> -- all things Hellenic--ancient, medieval, modern

Greek religion in context and influence:

The Religions of Man, Huston Smith. The best, clear, single volume I know on comparative religions

The World's Religions, Ninian Smart. Less erudite, but clear and simple for ready reference.

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