**Greek Myth Research Assignment**

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Prof. Clark

**Book 1:**

**Title:** The Origins of Greek Religion by Bernard Clive Dietrich

**Call Number:** BL 782 D5

**Table of Contents:**

1. Preface
2. Abbreviations
3. Beginnings in the East
4. Some older traditions in Minoan Crete
5. A Mycenean goddess of nature
6. A problem of continuity in the dark age
   1. Minoan peak cults in Cretan thought
   2. Apollo at Delphi
   3. Greek mythology in the Mycenean age
7. Bibliography
8. Indices

**Summary of Introduction:**

According to Dietrich, there is a certain amount of reluctance to accept the prehistoric and foreign influences/origins of Greek religion. This is understandable as we often have fragmentary evidence from Bronze-Age Greece. Despite being left with uncertain and indefinite information, this should not discourage us from placing classical Greek religion in its proper context.

Religion is a persistent force that binds a society together, despite political turmoil and natural disasters. The many aspects of Greek religion—rites, practices, gods, festivals—suggest this idea.

The study of Minoan and Mycenean civilizations is important in studying the origins Greek religion. Some works on these topics are now outdated; we have made advances in understanding Indo-European migration and Bronze-Age Greece since they were published; we now know for certain that Cretan and Mycenean Greeks borrowed traditions from Near Eastern cultures, for example.

Ultimately, this book’s purpose is to illustrate the fact that the development of religion was a slow a continuous process. Its intended audience/readers are university students studying Greek religion, Dietrich states.

**Main Summary/Response:**

Dietrich’s work, *The Origins of Greek Religion* focuses on Minoan and Mycenean culture, as well as the other influences that played a role on the development of Greek religion. It claims to be written for university students studying Greek religion, and this, offers more than a rudimentary introduction to the subject. Despite claiming to be a newer, more accurate work on Minoan-Mycenean migration and Greece’s Indo-European origins, I can see a sense of respect and acknowledgement towards older works on the same topic (such as Nilsson’s *Minoan-Mycenean Religion* *and its survival in Greek religion*) by Dietrich.

As it is written for a university-level audience, this book is not an easy read. It uses typical academic terminology and words specific to the field of study. And, being written in 1974, it uses some older words and phrases not common today. Examples of these include: *chthonic, psychostasa, Nebenform*, etc. Dietrich tries to make himself clear, though. Even though I do not have in-depth knowledge in Classical studies, I can understand the text’s message by looking at the context surrounding unfamiliar terms and by breaking down some words into their Greek root words. I found the topic of this book interesting and that motivated me into eagerly finish the entire chapter. I can imagine that other readers may not find this book enjoyable without inherent interest in the subject matter. This book is very informative and references additional reading material in almost every page, making it an important resource. I would definitely continue reading it and use it for any related essays in the future.

**Book 2:**

**Title:** The Sea in the Greek Imagination by Marie-Claire Beaulieu

**Call Number:** BL 795 034 B43

**Table of Contents:**

1. List of abbreviations
2. Introduction
3. Chapter 1 – *Hygra keleutha*: The Paths of the Sea
4. Chapter 2 – Heroic Coming-of-Age and the Sea
5. Chapter 3 – The Floating Chest: Maidens, Marriage, and the Sea
6. Chapter 4 – Dolphin Riders between Hades and Olympus
7. Chapter 5 – Leaps of Faith? Diving into the Sea, Women, and Metamorphosis
8. Chapter 6 – Dionysus and the Sea
9. Conclusion
10. Notes
11. Bibliography
12. Index
13. Acknowledgements

**Summary of Introduction:**

The sea played a major role in Ancient Greek culture. Coastal Greeks relied on the sea for sustenance, and for all Greeks, the sea was the source of news from distant lands. The sea allowed for commerce and trade, travel, and political exchange as well. Being such an integral part of daily life, the sea also heavily influenced Greek rituals and mythology. Some festivals involved throwing offerings into the sea, and many myths regard the sea (and its many associations) as a nurturing, caring mother figure. There is also an important relationship between empirical knowledge of the sea and these mythical, imaginary models of the sea. Which did the Greeks believe in more? Accounts and works by Herodotus, Pindar, Euripides, and many others show that the Greeks believed in both representations of the sea.

**Main Summary/Response:**

The first chapter explores the conception of the sea as a space on which to travel on. Rather than a boundary that constrains the land, the sea is described in Greek literature as an “immense, boundless space”. Beaulieu provides a great number of quotes (mostly from Homeric sources) to support this claim.The sea is often compared to different things such as marble, roads, and stone, and Beaulieu explores the significance of these associations. While the sea is essential and has many positive associations in Greek myth, we are also provided with opposing ideas. The paths of the sea, for example, are also associated with death and suffering. And in beings/gods associated with the sea (Pontos, for example), they are portrayed as “barren, salty, and bitter”.

This book seems to be written for a more general audience compared to Dietrich’s *The Origins of Greek Religion*. It does assume that the reader has some knowledge of Classical Greek texts as some sections reference a good number of them. It is an easy read, with more difficult words such as Greek loanwords (kourotrophic) being explained in simpler terms.

Some sections touched upon relationships between Greek and PIE language and culture. This piqued my interest and made it an enjoyable read. I saw many quotes and passages referenced in the original Greek text, so (if and when I can read Greek) this would make the book a good source to use in future essays since I would have access to information that would have been lost in translation. Another feature that I liked about this text is its niche subject matter. I imagine that few sources focus strictly on the role of the sea in Greek mythology, so this would be an important resource on that topic.

**Book 3:**

**Title:** Greek Folk Religion by Martin P. Nilsson

**Call Number:** BL 781 N5

**Table of Contents:**

1. Foreword
2. The Countryside
3. Rural Customs and Festivals
4. The Religion of Eleusis
5. The House and the Family
6. The Cities; The Panegyreis
7. Legalism and Superstition; Hell
8. Seers and Oracles
9. Illustrations
10. Index

**Summary of Introduction** (By Arthur Darby Nock)**:**

According to the foreword by Nock, this book contains lectures delivered in the US between 1939-40, on the topic of ancient religion (Eleusis). He writes, that the key to understanding the role of Greek religion is to realize its involvement in day-to-day life. It is impossible to study Greek poetry and philosophy without acknowledging their background in religion at a popular level.

Nock holds that Nilsson has a great understanding of the subject matter, with in-depth knowledge of literary and monumental evidence. From the book’s title and Nock’s introduction, I think that this book will focus on Greek religion of the countryside. Nilsson is quoted by Nock: *“I wanted to find out what it was in which the peasant on the farm, the shepherd on the mountains, and the town-dweller believed*.” (Nilsson vi-vii)

**Main Summary/Response:**

Nilsson says that the study of Greek religion has progressed along two major fields of study: the study of ‘primitive’ or precursor to the ancient religion, and the study of the literary expressions of Greek religion.

With these topics come misconceptions that must be addressed. Firstly, even rural areas of ancient Greece were influenced by its popular culture, and that Greek religion as a whole should not be classified as ‘primitive’. Secondly, works by ancient Greek writers and philosopies are not to be valued over the more popular/widespread aspects of Greek religion. These philosophical ideas, Nilsson writes, made hardly any impression on the development of Greek religion.

Throughout this chapter, the importance of the countryside and pastoral settings in the development of Greek religion is explored and emphasized. Nilsson gives a general overview of the beings and creatures believed to inhabit these locales, and mentions rivers, woods, mountaintops, and the myths, gods, and beliefs associated with those places.

This book appears to have been written for a more general audience, and does not use too many technical or Greek words. However, it is an old text, and the outdated wording/phrases have made it slightly less-accessible to us today. Despite having an interesting, illuminating, and informative content, the book is outdated and I probable would not use it for any future essays. The subject matter is not too niche, either, so I would be able to find updated sources on the same topics.

**Book 4:**

**Title:** The Greek Way of Death by Robert Garland

**Call Number:** BL 795 D4 G37

**Table of Contents:**

1. Preface to the Second Edition
2. Preface
3. List of Illustrations
4. The Power and Status of the Dead
5. Dying
6. The Funeral
7. Between Worlds
8. Life in Hades
9. The Special Dead
10. Visiting the Tomb
11. Conclusions
12. Chronology of Greek Burial
13. Glossary
14. Notes
15. Bibliography
16. Supplementary Bibliography
17. General Index
18. Index Locorum

**Summary of Introduction:**

Greek attitudes towards death has been consistent throughout antiquity. However, the study of this topic has been problematic and complicated due to subjectivity and bias from researchers. Garland writes, that the study of death is especially susceptible to culturally determined assumptions. Furthermore, he says that *“… the literary allusions to death and the afterlife are, with the exception of Homer, piecemeal at best.”* (Garland ix-x)

The study of Greek attitudes to death continues to revolve around its demographic, socio-economic, and political aspects, rather than on the religious beliefs associated with it. It reveals insights into ideas of kinship, self-identity, and other issues among the ancient Greeks. Unfortunately, according to Garland, death is only a peripheral subject in many important works on Greek religion. Perhaps, he surmises, that death (and passage into the underworld) is treated as a private matter in Greek culture. Of course, the war dead are exceptions to this notion.

To close the introduction, Garland presents us with a series of questions of ongoing debate and research: Did Greek attitudes change over the course of time? If so, what criteria can be applied to establish this fact? To what extent did new attitudes and beliefs replace previously existing ones and to what extent did the latter co-exist beside the former? There are many more questions posed to us, and while they will not be given a conclusive answer, I think that Garland will address these later in the text.

**Main Summary/Response:**

In beginning to delve into the Greek ideas towards death, Garland references Homer, who characterized the dead through their lack of *menos* or strength, and their lack of full command of their faculties. This, he explains, is why they are unable to influence any earthly affairs. He notes a similarity with the characteristics of the Greek dead, and the typical inability to act freely in dreams. He continues to elaborate on this idea, and to flesh out the characteristics of the dead in Greek myths. Not only does he cite literary examples (Aeschylus’ *Persai*), but he also references archaeological sources, too (*lekythoi* or Attic oil-flasks).

Garland continues to explore the ways the dead are characterized in Greek myth and literature, as well as in traditions and rituals. For example, he writes that the Greek dead are often perceived as disagreeable and irritable, rather than malevolent. And to support this idea, he provides examples from the Odyssey as well as from the traditional Greek festival *Antheseria*. Despite their lack of *menos* or agency, the dead are seen to be messengers at times. Garland cites the use of *katadesmoi* (curse-tablets) and explains that the dead were sometimes useful deliverers to chthonic deities.

I found this book to be an interesting read. I hadn’t encountered much material before that heavily focused on the ancient Greek attitudes and conceptions about death. I liked the use of literary, archaeological, and cultural examples to support the various claims made in the book. A lot of Greek terminology was used in the book and oftentimes, they are only explained/translated once. Missing that translation made me confused upon seeing that unfamiliar word later in the chapter.

Overall, this seems to be a good resource as it covers a ‘niche’ topic in the study of Greek myth, and it seems to cover that topic well. It also looks at all facets of death, not only in its role in myth and cultural perceptions, but also looks at physical aspects such as burial, tombs, and artifacts. I would be inclined to use this as a resource for future essays.

**Book 5:**

**Title:** Myths of Hellas by Carl Witt trans. Frances Younghusband

**Call Number:** BL 781 W55

**Table of Contents:**

1. The Beginning of All Things
2. The Golden Age
3. Prometheus and Epimetheus
4. Deucalion and Pyrrha
5. The Rape of Persephone
6. Marpessa
7. Artemis
8. The Giants Otus and Ephialtes
9. Engymion
10. Io
11. Danaeus and Aegyptus
12. Phaethon
13. Salmoneus and Sisyphus
14. Bellerophon
15. Daedalus and Icarus
16. Europa and Cadmus
17. The Building of Thebes
18. Semele
19. Dionysus
20. Melampus and Bias
21. Tantalus. Pelops
22. Nioble
23. Meleager and Atalanta
24. Admetus and Alcestis
25. Perseus
26. Heracles
    1. The War with the Teleboae
    2. The Birth and Youth of Heracles
    3. The Madness of Heracles, and his First Six Labours
    4. The Last Six Labours
    5. The Murder of Iphitus and the Vengeances of Heracles
    6. The Marriage of Heracles with Deianira and his Death
27. The Quest of the Argonauts
    1. The Golden Fleece
    2. The Journey to Colchis
    3. The Fight for the Golden Fleece
    4. The Journey Home
    5. Medea’s Revenge
28. Theseus
29. Oedipus
30. The Seven Against Thebes
31. The Epigoni
32. Eros and Psyche

**Summary of Introduction** (By Arthur Sidgwick)**:**

Sidgwick writes of the success the original version of this book had in Germany. It was first presented and written in German by Professor Carl Witt, and was popular due to the skill and simplicity in which the stories were delivered by Witt.

He then tells us of the merits of studying Greek myths, especially the benefits it has on young children. He says that children would welcome these stories, and the Greek myths add some variety to the usual tales told to them at the time. Furthermore, reading simpler versions Greek myths at an earlier age would make understanding the original versions at a later age an easier task. He uses Euripides’ Alcestis as an example.

Sidgwick hopes that this book—written for children—will be enjoyable, and that its readers can get the elements of culture and that it may serve as preparation for later studies.

**Main Summary:**

Witt starts the book with the first chapter, entitled ‘The Beginning of All Things’. I think that he arranged the chapters in a rough chronological order, so that the children reading it will find the book ordered much like other storybooks that they have read. This version of the Greek creation myth is very different from Hesiod or Apollodorus. It is also more simplified, with many genealogies and other details omitted or not elaborated upon like in the original works. For example, Ouranos and Gaea’s offspring were not all named. The ‘Chasm’, which we have discussed at length in class, was simply explained as a ‘huge dark mass called Chaos’. Overall, the stories presented in the book were simpler versions than the ones we have read, as these were intended for children.

The next chapter is entitled ‘The Golden Age’, and is very brief. Despite its short length, it seems to contain all the important details of this story, such as the blissful, happy state of man at the time, the bountiful nature of the earth, and the Homeric state of death (in which those who have ‘had enough of life’ fell into a deep sleep).

The rest of the book seems to be of the same format, retelling most of the popular Greek myths that we know, as well as some of the lesser-known ones. The accessibility of this text is peculiar; being originally written over a hundred years ago, it uses some older vocabulary that some children and older readers may not readily understand. At the same time, the way the sentences are phrased and constructed remind me of storybooks, which make it easy to follow the ongoing narrative of the story. It is an adequate resource for those who are simply interested in the stories of the myths. But being abridged and heavily simplified, I would not use it for any research essays in the future.

**Works Cited:**

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