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† (K.) Kilinski *Greek Myth and Western Art. The Presence of the Past*. Pp. xxii + 281, ill., colour pls. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013. Cased, £60, US\$99. ISBN: 978-1-107-01332-2.

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## GREEK MYTHS IN WESTERN ART

† KILINSKI II (K.) *Greek Myth and Western Art. The Presence of the Past*. Pp. xxii + 281, ills, colour pls. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013. Cased, £60, US\$99. ISBN: 978-1-107-01332-2.  
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On 6 January 2011, K., a historian of Classical art and archaeologist by training, Professor at South Methodist University, Dallas, passed away. The manuscript of the book under review, which at that time had already been accepted for publication, was seen through the press by K.'s friends and colleagues. For K., a specialist on Boeotian vase painting, the life and afterlife of ancient Greek myths and their visualisation was a field to which he had devoted a number of publications over the last three decades. This volume thus represents, if under sad circumstances, a culmination of his long-lasting involvement with a central aspect of Greek culture and its reception.

The aim of the book is made eminently clear by its title. It addresses the vast subject of images of Greek myths in western art from their beginnings in the early Greek world (almost) to the present day, and poses, at least implicitly, an ambitious question: which aspects stand out as the core aspects of the long and extremely varied story of form and content of these artworks? The book's anticipated audience for this rapid journey through three millennia of artistic production is, according to the blurb, everyone from scholars to students to 'aficionados of mythology', with this last phrase probably alluding to K.'s versatile language which avoids jargon as much as possible and includes many colloquial expressions: works of art which have escaped destruction 'stand the test of time'; the subtle integration of pagan motifs in medieval religious art means that 'Greek myth in a sense went underground' (p. 85); and the various free variations of the Vatican Laokoon lead one 'from apes to tapes to snakes' (p. 152).

Chapter 1 explores 'The Nature and Origins of Greek Myth' with a special emphasis on Near Eastern contributions to the formation of Greek mythology. Theoretical approaches to the nature of myth and to mythical thinking within Greek civilisation are only touched upon. K. follows Walter Burkert's definition of myths as 'tales applied' which means that their normally very graphic narratives are recited or visualised in order to convey a certain political, ethical or psychological message.

Chapter 2, 'Survival and Revival: the Motives for and Means of Myth Transmission', first demonstrates how the preservation of monuments depicting Greek myths depended on favourable circumstances and that often adaptability for reuse within a new context was a prerequisite for their survival, for example when gems were inserted into metalwork in the Middle Ages. This topic is integrated into a more general survey of the reception and adaptation of Ancient art in the Byzantine East, the Latin West and the modern era from the Renaissance onwards. This section encompasses a wide range of examples, from the sculptures of the Parthenon in Athens, the first travellers eager to study antiquities in Rome to the diplomats and dilettanti whose collecting habits greatly enriched European museums. The title of the second section, 'Variations and Adaptations', could serve equally as the subtitle for the entire book. The enormous 'elasticity' and 'applicability' of Greek myths is a phenomenon that K. illuminates from different points of view. Here, two main aspects are discussed in a more general way, as a prelude to the examples discussed in Chapter 4. First, the reader is informed about the changes of meaning a Greek myth could undergo under different cultural constellations; and second, there are the more complex variations when a certain mythical story is transformed or integrated into a new – pagan or Christian – narrative.

The first part of the third chapter focuses on two central aspects of mythical imagery, the fluent passage between mythical events and those of real life (or *Lebenswelt*), and a brief overview of another intricate matter, that of the various types of visual narrative. After some short remarks on the analysis of context as a means of deducing the meaning of images of myth the text returns to familiar questions and describes once again visual adaptations of Greek narratives through the ages and the metaphorical potential of individual characters, such as Marsyas, 'a symbol of mischievous curiosity' (p. 141), or Pegasus as mascot of British paratroopers. The chapter concludes with a quick run-through of mythical imagery in popular culture (TV, theatre and film).

For most readers Chapter 4, 'Iconography and Iconology. The Metamorphosis of Greek Myth', is probably the most rewarding part of the book. Thus far a great number of artworks have been mentioned rather than thoroughly described or analysed because they primarily served to illustrate some general aspect of the visual history of Greek myths. Only now are we presented with five case studies which give a thorough idea of the vitality that is characteristic for the timeless potential of these narratives: Danae and the Golden Rain, The Flight of Icarus, Circe the Sorceress, Perseus rescuing Andromeda and the Death of Actaeon. Here K. presents all kinds of media, from Greek vase paintings to contemporary artworks. To give two examples of his many fascinating observations: Danae could be seen – and depicted – as a woman who had, and had not had sex with Zeus, chaste as the Virgin Mary in one perspective, equipped with irresistible female attraction in the other. The story of Perseus whose timely appearance saved beautiful Andromeda from the jaws of the terrifying sea-monster was especially popular in ancient Roman and well known in medieval and early modern art, but it was not until the twentieth century, as K. suggests, that the true potential of this myth was fully exploited, when artistic creations like the film *King Kong* became an accepted means of dealing with the animalistic traits of humans.

It is not easy to make an overall judgement of this book. It works excellently as an introductory text for those not yet familiar with the visualisation of Greek myths, by describing general phenomena in the systematic part (Chapters 1 to 3) and by using the case studies to explain the astonishing range of visual representations and the no less astonishing variety of meanings one single story could convey in antiquity, in medieval times and in the modern era. The book, thus, aptly demonstrates the lasting vitality of Greek myths and conveys the ideas encapsulated in them, and this apparently was K.'s main purpose. The volume is lavishly illustrated (32 colour and 75 black-and-white reproductions), and yet, there is some irony in the fact that while reading a book on ancient myths the reader should, ideally, be permanently online in order to look up the many works described or in most cases only named as examples in the text but not illustrated. At times one has the impression that K. could not refrain from presenting the result of years of collecting mythological 'examples'. The book works less well for the more specialised reader whom K. apparently also had in mind – the vast bibliography lists many titles in German, French, Italian, even some in Spanish, Dutch and one in Polish; nevertheless, given the enormous amount of literature, lacunae are inevitable. Many important aspects dealt with in the volume (origin of Greek myths, forms of visual narratives, approaches to interpretation among others) have been analysed more thoroughly in other recent publications conceived for a similar audience (including books by the same publisher). Debatable, at least, is K.'s general approach. Whereas many classicists accept, with or without regret, that the Classical tradition is rapidly losing its impact on today's culture, K.'s narrative is replete with untiring optimism. Everything is wrapped up in a warm 'humanistic' cloud. This is authentic and legitimate as a personal statement but hardly

an appropriate assessment of the actuality of the Classical world, at least not from a German perspective.

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## ROMAN VISUAL CULTURE

POLLINI (J.) *From Republic to Empire. Rhetoric, Religion, and Power in the Visual Culture of Ancient Rome.* (Oklahoma Series in Classical Culture 48.) Pp. xxiv + 550, ills, maps, colour pls. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2012. Cased, US\$60. ISBN: 978-0-8061-4258-6.

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In this book P. presents a series of studies that arise from a mixture of conferences and previous publications. Pieces previously published elsewhere, however, have been revised and updated (and in one case translated into English). Although most of the chapters focus on the late Republic or Augustan period, one struggles to see an overall theme or sense of development within the book as a whole. The chapters very much remain individual studies, which are summarised again in the conclusion without any discussion of how they might relate to each other. That said, the individual chapters offer a clear and insightful view into Roman visual culture. P.'s discussion and presentation of the material is accessible to undergraduate students or those with less expertise, while being of interest to the broader academic community.

P. begins with a study of Roman Republican wax masks and their influence on veristic portraiture. This chapter is a revised version of a paper published in 2007 (in N. Laneri [ed.], *Performing Death*, pp. 237–85). P. explores the display of wax masks and their role in Roman memorial culture, drawing upon anthropology to suggest that these masks had a 'religio-magico' role in Roman society (p. 25). He traces the origin of this particularly Roman tradition to the struggle of the orders and suggests that wax masks were invented as one method through which the patricians could demonstrate superiority over their plebeian counterparts. The exploration is detailed and well-illustrated, providing an excellent explanation of the contexts and roles of these masks, as well as the mechanics behind their production.

In the second chapter P. traces the increasing alignment of Roman individuals with the divine, with his discussion encompassing the Republican period to the reign of Trajan. Here P. emphasises the need for scholars to distinguish between official and non-official media, as well as direct and indirect representations. P. observes that the direct associations with the divine that occurred during the Republic were abandoned by Augustus, who preferred more indirect allusions, in keeping with his position as 'first among equals'. Emperors after Augustus then increasingly have a more direct association with the divine, culminating with the reign of Trajan, where the mixing of human and divine is accepted in official media.

P. then turns to a consideration of the deification of Roman leaders, starting with Julius Caesar. A detailed discussion of the cult statue and temple of Caesar is followed by a broader consideration of the representations of deified emperors during the early principate. Here, as elsewhere, the variety of evidence used in the discussion is impressive. One very minor point: in his discussion of the radiate crown (pp. 151–2) P. might have mentioned that the monetary reforms under Nero meant that the radiate crown was