

as a pantomime. The popularity of pantomime across the Empire makes the thesis of interaction between Nonnus and Virgil particularly attractive. Even for resistant readers who will refuse to contemplate such interaction in the absence of specific echoes, at the very least it is intriguing that the Sileni of both Nonnus and Virgil end their performance in an elusive manner: the former by transforming into water and the latter by never completing his open-ended song (p. 172).

Strangely, H. Lovatt's 'Nonnus' Phaethon, Ovid, and Flavian Intertextuality' does not make more of the possible connection between the Greek and the Latin Phaethon traditions through the common link of pantomime, although this was pointed out briefly in Papaioannou's chapter (pp. 171–2). Instead, Lovatt argues for a certain 'kinship' (p. 179) between Ovid and Nonnus, with an emphasis on the two poems' focus on succession, playfulness, poetic *jouissance*, ecphrastic framings and creative reworkings of the tradition. Lovatt also sees Nonnus as close in spirit to the complex tactics of Flavian intertextuality (including tangential referentiality, reversal and ironic avoidance). The chapter is hugely erudite and poses a set of interesting questions (do differences 'reflect self-conscious correction or deliberate variation?' [p. 202]; 'what do we gain from reading Ovid and Nonnus together as part of the wider Greco-Roman literary tradition, alongside Flavian epic?'; and 'should we only privilege ancient readers?' [p. 203]), which will likely inspire further research.

The volume is carefully proofread; typos and other errors are minimal. Some material on the knowledge of Latin in the Greek-speaking world in the Imperial period is repeated across different chapters (pp. 11, 32, 57–8, 103) – this repetition might grate on those who will read the book cover to cover, but the reality is that most readers will read individual chapters rather than the whole. Taken as a whole, this volume offers new perspectives for the study of late Greek epic, increasing the complexity of the literary environment in which this poetry was written and received, and asking us to consider a more expansive and playful model of interaction.

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AMAZONS IN EPIC

BOROWSKI (S.) *Penthesilea und ihre Schwestern. Amazonenepisoden als Bauform des Heldenepos*. (The Language of Classical Literature 35.) Pp. x + 174. Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2022. Cased, US\$119, €99. ISBN: 978-90-04-47272-3.

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In a 1971 issue of *Greece & Rome* a scholar made a fascinating suggestion about the origins of the heroic Amazons. In what today would be considered racist language K.A. Bisset proposed that the mythical warrior women may have been inspired by Greeks encountering beardless men on the Eurasian steppes: 'My suggestion is that the legend derives from the first encounter of Europeans with a beardless small-statured race of bow-toting mongoloids. There is nothing especially original in the general idea' (p. 150). Bisset found this more plausible than the idea that women could be warriors,

arguing that the military prowess and breastlessness of Amazons in classical literature should 'make us highly suspicious' of the gender identity ascribed to them.

Even 50 years on, this article reflects a dominant strand of classical research on the Amazons, in which the heroic warriors are viewed as a figment of the Greek male imagination, created as a useful psychocultural projection of alterity, the threatening barbarian Other to the Greek male self. As M. Beard put it in a 2017 talk hosted by the *London Review of Books*: 'The hard truth is that the Amazons were a construct of the Greek, male, mythic imagination'.

This conviction has recently been challenged, most notably by A. Mayor's *The Amazons: Lives and Legends of Warrior Women across the Ancient World* (2016). In this study Mayor collects a variety of archaeological, literary and linguistic evidence to argue that the mythical Greek Amazons were based on historical counterparts living and fighting in Asia Minor and beyond. While Mayor's findings have been characterised as 'intriguing but not indisputable' (T. Eckhart, *The Classical Journal* 111 [2016]), her intrigue is shared by a new generation of scholars, who are re-examining the role and depiction of Amazons in classical antiquity, reappraising their literary function and socio-cultural significance in the light of gender and sexuality studies. B.'s volume must be counted among them and is a testament to the immense potential of combining Gender Studies and the Classics for a reappraisal of the Amazons and the discovery and deconstruction of prevalent biases and blind spots in classical criticism.

B. argues that established assumptions about Amazons as the (barbarian) Other to the (male) classical society do not hold up to a careful analysis of the most important heroic epics of Greek and Roman literature. Demonstrating that Amazons have made up a defining (if sometimes small) unit of epic poetry for more than 1,000 years, from Homer to Virgil, she argues that they cannot have been fundamentally strange to ancient culture.

Her argument is threefold: firstly, her analysis reveals that Amazons feature exclusively in battle scenes, which calls into question the equation of warfare and biological masculinity in ancient cultures. Amazons are portrayed as natural or heroic participants in battle, B. argues, which implies that warriorhood was not conceived of as a purely masculine category, but must be viewed as transgendered, in the sense of that it may have belonged to and been adopted by both men and women.

In an intriguing second step B. argues that warriorhood and heroism in the epics are also diverse in terms of ethnicity: there is no textual indication that the ethnic or gender alterity of Amazons was considered as a threat in epic poetry. Particularly instructive is the example of Camilla in Virgil's *Aeneid*, who has been frequently read as 'doubly Othered': not only a woman who is a warrior, but also a warrior who is a stranger, from the east rather than the west. Arguing against such interpretations, B. points out that Camilla is characterised in the same manner as archetypal male warriors such as Hector or Patroclus in the *Iliad* or Turnus in the *Aeneid*: imperfect, but certainly heroic. As such, B. argues that heroism in epic poetry is both transgendered and ethnically diverse.

In a final step B. underlines that Amazon episodes as a structural unit of epic poetry changed and developed over time, culminating in Quintus of Smyrna's *Posthomerica*, where all women are portrayed as suited to warfare, independent of their ethnic or racial identity: when the Trojan woman Hippodamia sees the Amazon queen Penthesilea ride into battle, she calls her fellow Trojan women to arms. The Trojan women are deterred only by their lack of training, not by an essential inability to fight.

B.'s meticulous analysis of the epics is as precise as it is convincing, making her study a profitable contribution to the re-evaluation of Amazons in particular and gender roles and heroism in classical literature more broadly. Her study is particularly strong where it highlights how previous interpretations of Amazons were informed by the biases of

their critics rather than firm textual evidence. These instances do not only rectify gender and ethnic biases exemplified by Bisset's 1971 article and still alive today, they also present moments of particular intellectual productivity, yielding new and fascinating insights into epics that have been the subject of extensive study for centuries. These passages are exemplary for demonstrating the productive potential of combining Gender Studies and the Classics to interrogate ossified conclusions and offer fresh perspectives to the field.

Considering the strength of her arguments, B. could have dedicated more space to the consequences of discovering the Amazons as a structural unit of the heroic epics and conceiving of warriorhood as transgendered as well as ethnically diverse. It strikes a sympathetic reader that her conclusions could have been more ambitious, foregrounding the vitality of her approach. It also seems remiss not to mention the curious absence of Amazons in the public reception of classical literature in the twenty-first century. Instead, B. focuses on the depiction of Amazons in the medieval era as a further avenue of research.

These are quibbles, however. B.'s book is a clear, precise and careful study that demonstrates the productive relationship between Classics and Gender Studies; with *Penthesilea und ihre Schwestern* B. has laid the groundwork for and made a valuable contribution to a reappraisal of the literary and social significance of Amazons in heroic epic and argues convincingly that heroism should be understood as both transgendered and ethnically diverse. It only remains to be hoped that colleagues and students will share her intrigue and continue her efforts, keeping the Classics open to new developments and fresh perspectives.

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DESCRIPTIONS OF CATABASIS

HERRERO DE JÁUREGUI (M.) *Catábasis: El viaje infernal en la Antigüedad*. Pp. 503, ills. Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 2023. Paper, €17.50. ISBN: 978-84-1148-208-0.

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If it is difficult to write a book on a subject as complex as catabasis, it is even more so if you aim to present scholarly research of more than two decades for a wide audience. Nevertheless, H.d.J. succeeds in this task. As announced in the preface, H.d.J.'s aim is to present a comprehensive study of the myth of the journey to the underworld that deals with the tradition from the Homeric poems to Christian literature. Catabasis is found as a recurring central topic in texts from different literary genres and historical periods; its interest lies mainly in the fact that it always involves an enquiry into a person's position in relation to the cosmos and nature.

In the first chapter, 'Preparativos', H.d.J. proposes a non-teleological and non-genealogical examination of the topic by analysing each literary source in itself, and not as an antecedent or reflection of another. He also includes a brief and clear *status quaestionis* of the bibliography on catabasis and the main lines of scholarly enquiry.