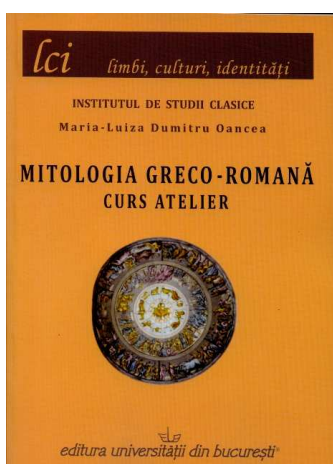


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The Greek-Latin Mythology between Theoretical Framework and Exegesis Models (Maria-Luiza Dumitru-Oancea, *Mitologia Greco-Romană*. Bucharest: Editura Universității, 2010)



As a result of the educational activities developed within a workshop seminar with the students from the Classical Philology Department of the Faculty of Foreign Languages, Bucharest University, the book of Luiza Dumitru-Oancea professionally introduces us to the fascinating land of the Greek and Latin mythology. This paper has a double value which refers to a scientific aspect and an educational one.

The first part of the paper emphasizes the theoretical concepts used by the author and her students in the theoretical analyses on the text. The first chapter presents the purposes of the paper, the working methods that she used and the structural framework of the theme approach. The basis of this theoretical framework consists of a synthesis of the debates regarding the connection between mythology and religion, and about

the control and coherence function within the reorganization and reinterpretation of the collective memory. The author shows that the determinants in defining these connections are the orality and writing, repetition and variation, memory and creation, based on a critical and constructive elaboration of a large bibliographical data.

The second chapter is focused on the analysis of the fundamental terms of the entire approach, *myth* and *mythology*, from the perspective of the Ancient Greek language (pp. 17-25), and in a strong connection to the terminological delimitations, based on the genesis of an Ancient Greek hermeneutics of the myth. An interesting aspect is the reconstruction of the semantic development of the word *mythos* starting from the idea of “rebellious speech”, “subversive speech”, as it is used by Anacreon, in his texts where the term is announced for the first time (under the compound form *mythietai* “revolted narrators”, ironically built according to *polietai* “people of the city”) and reaching the concept of “beautiful speech about Gods”, as it is used by Xenophon, who gives this term a close significance to *logos*, and from here we return again to the idea of “insignificant, improbable, revolting word”, as it is used by Pindar, Herodotus and especially by Thucydides (pp. 17-24).

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Regarding the mythology, understood as science of the myth interrogation, Maria Luiza Dumitru-Oancea identifies the first attempts of hermeneutics among the works of the first Greek logographers – Hecataeus of Miletus and Dionysius of Halicarnassus; they used to combine in their papers the narration with the interpretation of the related facts. By comparison with the methods of these two – who afterwards also made the theoretical distinctions between exegesis and interpretation – the following poets and historians have a different perspective: Xenophanes of Elea, Herodotus, Thucydides, and especially the philosophers, Plato and Aristotle. If the polemic between Xenophanes and Theogones of Rhegion could establish the moment when began the elaboration of the mythology without mentioning the word “myth”, Plato submits the mythologists to an indictment, in the dialogue *The Republic*, which approves the concept as speech about the myth; the philosopher uses for the first time the term “mythology” in a well-defined way, according to *The Republic*, 2377a, 4-5.

The myth includes, in its meaning, a persuasive and incantatory value, and the mythology entails a hand-made art, which the philosophers and poets have to take into consideration. Plato is, according to Luiza Dumitru’s researches, the one who uses for the first time the term “mythologem” with the meaning of “mythological story” (pp. 32-37).

For Aristotle the myth is an element of poetics, as he drafted it in its discourse, an oriented structure, an invention in the background of the traditional history.

Starting from such beginnings of mythology theorization, modern researchers have elaborated the well known mythocritical theories. In chapter third of the book, the author briefly presents the main schools and research orientations from the nineteenth and twentieth century’s: the philological, anthropological, ritualistic, functional, sociological, symbolistic, psychoanalytic, historical, structuralist, politico – sociological, narratological schools, the phenomenological orientation combined with historicism and hermeneutics (pp. 38-63).

Such panoramic perspective of the theories regarding the development and analysis methods of the myths is both necessary and difficult, because the representatives of trends of analysis often change their options, undertake and develop ideas, tools and work schedules from different schools: they sometimes form part of several groups, at the same time, elaborating plans of interpretation suitable for different approaches. Of course that the presentation realized by the book’s author, herein mentioned, has selected only certain contributions and aspects of the activity of the one or the other, among the representatives of the modern mythocritique, because a complete description, even focused on main ideas, would represent a strong research of history of the field. What is included in this preliminary chapter is adequate and enough for the reader to be prepared to understand and appreciate the exercises of interpretation of mythical messages from the relevant texts analyzed in the second part of the book.

Before starting the “practical” part of her study, Maria Luiza Dumitru-Oancea adds to her theoretical perspective, a chapter dedicated to the Greek Latin mythology. The main orientations of the complex Greek mythography are the following: elaboration of the old popular sources in the writings of Strabo and Pausanias; historicist tendency of improvement of the genealogies with beginnings lost in mythical times; euhemeristic approaches of preserving the legendary customs in collections or anthologies (thematic or general), and at last, the trend of summaries and handbooks of the Greek culture during the Roman times. On the other hand, the few anthologies and collections, but especially the

literary, philosophical, historical, religious adaptations of the highbrow texts of the Latin profane and Christian authors, such as Ovidius, Propertius, Valerius Flaccus, Augustinus, Lactantius, represent the Roman history of the genre. Besides the data regarding the history of these aspects, the author clarifies problems of the myths' classification – according to the criterion of the story/mythologem origin, the narrative genre (short story, etiological anecdote, and popular story), the main characters' typology, the main subject, etc. The references are predominantly excerpted from the Greek mythological background, much more generous, more ideational gradated and based on more symbols than the Latin one. In this context, the author ends the theoretical framework of the study with a compared analysis of the mythology's peculiarity, in the two ancient cultures. The title of the subchapter, which rather constitutes the center of the entire book, is expressive: *Mythology vs. Mythistory or Greece vs. Rome*. According to a current opinion from the specialized literature, the author determines the connection between the cultural paradigm of the two nationalities and the peculiarity of the myth's development within the geographical – historical space of them, with the following meaning: the Greek mythology uses the ethical and esthetic values of the myth in order to explain the divine ambit, of nature and cosmos, meanwhile “the Romans have a historicized mythology, specialized at the highest level” (p. 89).

The fifth chapter, and the last one, occupies a larger space in the book, compared to the other four chapters brought together (pp. 92-124 vs. pp. 9-91). Here we find remarks upon the representative texts of the mythologies of the two nationalities, selected at a first level, according to the subject criterion – cosmogonic myths (with texts from Homer, Hesiod, Apollodor and Ovidius) and their literary corollary – the myth of the Golden Age (with texts from Hesiod and Ovidius). Afterwards, the election of the interpreted texts follows the nature pattern criterion of the explained facts, and the criterion of the characters of the events (see the difference between myth/ heroic cycles/ short stories/ anecdotes). Eleven of seventeen selected texts approach aspects of the heroic cycles. A theoretical preamble, an etymological incursion into the *heros* word development and a presentation of the heroic cult from the historical perspective precede the analyses of some key-texts from the works of Homer (*Iliad and Odyssey*), Apollonius of Rhodes (*Argonautica*), Vergilius (*Aeneid*). The hermeneutic value is greater because of these large components of the myth that correspond to different models of approach of the commented representative texts. These are approached from the perspective of the history of mentalities, symbology, literary theory, history of the ancient institutions.etc.

A selective bibliography, an index of proper names and another one of terms from the meta-language of the field, complete the scientific characteristics of this book, which makes it an enjoyable and educational reading.