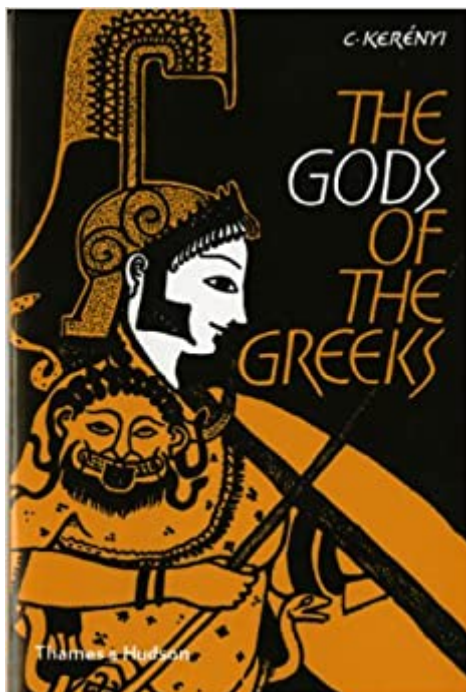


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The Gods Of The Greeks



Synopsis

Drawing on a wealth of sources, from Hesiod to Pausanias and from the Orphic Hymns to Proclus, Professor Kerényi provides a clear and scholarly exposition of all the most important Greek myths. After a brief introduction, the complex genealogies of the gods lead him from the begettings of the Titans and from Aphrodite under all her titles and aspects, to Apollo, Hermes and the reign of Zeus, touching upon the Affairs of Pan, nymphs, satyrs, cosmogonies and the birth of mankind, until he reaches the ineffable mystery of Dionysos. The lively and highly readable narrative is complemented by an appendix of detailed references to all the original texts and a fine selection of illustrations taken from vase paintings. 26 black-and-white illustrations

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Customer Reviews

“Learned, admirably documented, exhaustive.” - The Times Literary

“It most emphatically must be the book that many have long waited for.” - Stephen Spender

Clear, insightful, and written with a personable touch. This is a highly informative and interesting read. Kerényi presents not only the most well known and accepted myths, but the lesser known ones as well and discusses why and how they became part of the culture of mythology. I highly recommend!

It's an older book, but with lots of information concerning the Greek religion. I loved his book on and

titled Dionysus. He tells us about the Greeks as if he was simply telling you about his religious beliefs which makes it far more interesting. I recommend this book. The ancient Greek religion is far more complicated and interesting than it is given credit for.

This book is a collection of stories about the Greek gods taken from ancient writings. Reading Greek myths, especially to children, gives us the pleasant feeling of visiting a world where we aren't sure how things work. We also read Greek myths to get ideas of Greek cosmology and ideas about fate and for standard comparisons to use in writing. For example, when talking about avoiding two dangers it is common to refer to sailing between Scylla and Charybdis. One should at least know that when Odysseus faced these two dangers, he did not find a safe line between them but rather was advised by Circe to sail closer to Scylla, because Scylla would only kill a few of his sailors rather than Charybdis sinking his ship; Scylla snatched six sailors, one in each of her six heads (Odyssey 12.246). But this isn't Scylla's only appearance in extant Greek writings, and Kerényi gives descriptions of her by Lycophron and from Euripides' "Medea". Elsewhere Kerényi tells us from the "Orphicorum fragmenta" that a visitor to the Underworld should drink from the spring on his right hand, Mnemosyne (Memory) and not from the spring on his left hand, Lethe (Forgetfulness). Similarly, most educated people have some vague idea of Prometheus giving fire to mankind, and Kerényi assembles material about Prometheus from several sources. From Plato's "Protagoras" we are told that Prometheus's brother Epimetheus distributed abilities to mortals and heedlessly did not give man any protection from beasts, and then Prometheus stole fire from a temple of Hephaestus and Pallas Athene. From Hesiod's "Works and Days" we learn that Zeus withheld fire from mankind because Prometheus once divided a bull and gave Zeus the worse part. In Hyginus's "Astronomica" we are told that Prometheus took fire from Zeus's hearth at Olympus and hid it in a hollowed out narthex stalk. Oedipus's blinding himself means more when we know that being blinded was a standard punishment for having sex with a forbidden woman, such as Orion's rape of Oinopion's wife Merope. Reading Kerényi's book likewise gives substance to stories about Narcissus, Pandora, the Minotaur, the Four Winds, the Harpies, the Muses, the Sirens, the Sphinx, the Hydra, Medusa, Adonis, Nemesis, and others. Ancient Greek ideas about cosmology are presented to us by creation stories, which happen before the Olympian gods. Kerényi tells us that originally Chaos means simply "yawns" (namely, a yawning void), and that (I.2) "Originally there was no word meaning turmoil or confusion: 'Chaos' acquired this second meaning only later, after the introduction of the doctrine of the Four Elements." Even what may be casual numbers mentioned in stories give us some idea about how the ancient Greeks imagined the world. We are told (II.3) by Hesiod that after

the defeat of the Titans by the Olympian gods, "The vanquished were enchained and thrown into Tartaros, which is as deep below the earth as the earth is below the sky. An anvil dropped from the sky falls for nine nights, and on the tenth it reaches the earth; and likewise it falls nine nights and days from the earth, and on the tenth it reaches Tartaros." We also find particular lengths of time in myths. Kerényi cites (VIII.4) from Plutarch's "Moralia" and Aelianus's "Varia Historia" the story of Apollo atoning for a "great year" for killing the dragon Delphyne, and Kerényi states that the "great year" here means eight years, and before was called an "ennaeteris", which meant nine years. Kerényi also writes that Prometheus received the same punishment as Tityos (XIII.4): Prometheus is bound in chains and has a pillar through his middle, and an eagle devours his liver, which regrows daily. "At the end of Aeschylus's lost tragedy, Prometheus the Bringer of Fire, it was stated that the Titan was bound for thirty thousand years. In those days this meant the world's longest period." To understand Greek ideas about fate and Nature before the philosophers we must read myths. The Moirai (Fates) are in one account (III.1) the daughters of Themis and Zeus. The Iliad 8.68 asserts that even Zeus cannot change what the Fates decide. Kerényi tells us (VI.4) that "The word themis means in our language a law of nature, the norm of the living together of gods and of being generally, especially beings of both sexes." One god who enforces the order of nature is Nemesis (VI.6): "The name means righteous anger, which is directed against those who have violated order, especially the order of nature, and have disregarded nature's law and norm. Should Themis be disregarded, then Nemesis is there." The order of nature is also enforced by Zeus, who kills Asclepius for resurrecting Hippolytus (VIII.6). Before reading this book I was not aware of the "Homeric Hymns", and I was introduced in the citations to other writers, like Aelianus, Apollonius of Rhodes, Pausanias, Diodorus Siculus, Apollodorus Mythographus, Aratus, and Solinus. A complaint about the book is that because it is written in the form of someone telling stories, the author is not able to step outside the stories to talk about the sources he uses. Kerényi only uses ancient sources, and even if he doesn't want to rely on secondary sources, it would be useful to the reader to suggest further reading of books related to Greek religion.

I admit I was expecting something else. This book is like a very-very brief summary of the most important myths, but it gives you an overall but good idea and it always says where you can find the bombastic original text ^^ (and another good thing is that it gives the various versions of the same myth; the occasional insight of the author is also good). All in all good, I do not regret it, it is like a quick but good scan.

Excellent book on the greek gods. Author does a fairly good job of telling the many stories behind the gods. You can get a little lost reading it though.

This is a good, solid summary of Greek Mythology. It does not try to oversimplify or codify. It is not a book for those who want pleasant stories; it is a book for those who want some flavor of what it was like. Nor does he bowdlerize; The stories are crude and beautiful and a challenge to those still inhibited by the nonsense of "paganism" and "heathens." He does, however, have a point of view that really intrudes only in the introduction. His privilege. Otherwise, you're in the company of a fine scholar and a fine writer.

I use this book as my "go to" for great research on ancient Greece. In all of my research I've found his to be some of the best around. Warning: this is not a book you read for story.

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