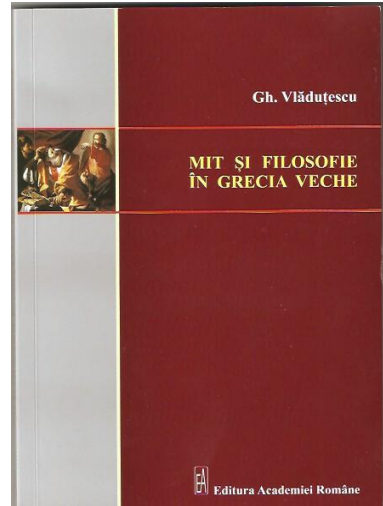


***Re-Significating the Dyad
of Greek Mythology and
Philosophy***

Adrian Muraru



Gh. Vlăduțescu, *Mit și filosofie în Grecia veche / Myth and Philosophy in Ancient Greece*. Bucharest: Romanian Academy Publishing House, 2014, pp. 208

Inquiring closely into the dynamic interplay of Greek mythology and philosophy, the book of Gh. Vlăduțescu covers a metaphysical journey in the quest of meaning by a spiritual – and not literal – reading of many enigmatic allegories belonging to the Hellenic world.

The subject is well chosen and timely, as any bibliography dedicated to it says; the relationship between myth and philosophy during the first ten centuries of the European philosophy is relevant, as the discussion about the intricate relationship between *mythos* and *logos* seems to be endlessly fruitful. The classical reader is everywhere in the book, the author being a distinguished Professor of ancient philosophy.

The tensions between the myth and the *arkhé* - to be found through the history of the philosophical search – are exposed in the Foreword. It follows “Achilles’ shield”, the first chapter that offers an inspiring commentary on the Homeric works, trying to identify the possibility of philosophy as a second reflection on *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. The long voyage, the returning to civilization, made by Odysseus “From Troy to Ithaca” leads to the discussion of “*Outis* as *prósopon*” – the hero’s changing condition of “nobody” and “person” (pp.17-18).

The second chapter, “Oedipus and the great crisis of conscience”, proposes a parallel reading of the Parmenidean allegory of the soul and tragic story of Oedipus. The “Echoes of the anthropogenic myths” relate various scenarios to the Pre-Socratic philosophers (Anaximander, Empedocles, Anaxagoras, Pythagorean thinkers, Heraclitus, etc.) insisting on the continuity ‘between mythical thinking and the philosophical thinking’ (p.45).

The chapter entitled “The Elements” encompasses a discussion on the physical elements (water, air, fire, earth) and short pieces focusing on the Seven Sages / ‘Seven Wise Men’, the Orphic cosmogonies, the Creative Word, treating the movement “from Hestia to *ousia*” and that “from Dike to *dike*” in their metaphysical meaning; no less, the passing of ‘mythical arithmology’ into ‘*arithmetical* philosophy’, continuing with the “theme of Odysseus’ choice” and “the enigma of Empedocles”. It is noteworthy that this chapter includes many non-Greek myths, related to the Greek ones and to the Greek philosophers.

An important sequence is dedicated to a lengthy discussion of the Plato’ use of myths, questioning whether there are ‘two Platonisms’, a ‘mythical’ Platonism and a philosophical one. The myths Plato uses are classified: A. metaphysical myths, B. anthropological myths, and C. political myths (pp.83-115).

The sixth chapter, “*Philo mythos, philosophos*”, analyses the two figures connected by the ancient literature. Then, in “Mythifyings ... [and] Demythifyings”, the author emphasizes some projected philosophers as such; broadly, the mythical figures of the philosophers are to be found within the entire Antiquity, from Pythagoras to Proclus.

Wondering “False story?”, Gh. Vlăduțescu stresses upon the Hellenistic interpretation of the myths (pp.141-144), opening the question of “Myth and utopia” and that of the legend’s strength face to the historical reality; the legend maintaining itself “like a metahistory” (p.155). Finally, the chapter “Myth and Plotinus’ metaphysics of the One” is a natural end for the volume.

Instead of an epilogue, the author proposes us a “mythical geography” based on Pausanias’ writings (pp.165-172). Five extended “Complementary notes”, connected to some sections of the book, debate the rise of the individuality in certain myths (Prometheus, Medea), noting the priority of the poetic works on this respect (1), the Aristophanes’ treatment of the myths (2), the relationship between myth and history (3), the Proclus discussion on evil (4). The fifth “complementary note”, linked to the Foreword, brings some glimpses

on the Christian attitude towards myths; actually, a resignificated approach of myth, considering the teachings of Paul the Apostle, Justin Martyr, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, and Gregory of Nyssa.

The bibliography of *Myth and Philosophy in Ancient Greece*, disposed in seven sections, reveals the intentions of the author: the first four sections are dedicated to the 'classical' writers or thinkers, the fifth to the ancient Christian books, the sixth to the lexica and dictionaries dedicated to the Ancient world, and the seventh to the secondary bibliography. It should be noted that the Bibliography is a selected one: some of the bibliographical items are only mentioned in the previous sections of the book (see, for example, the Alain Michel work quoted at p.129, or Pauly-Wissowa reference, on the next page).

The myths are chosen from an immense area, from India to the Mediterranean shores, and they are mentioned in various writings between 1500 BC till 500 AD. As one can see the titles of the chapters, Professor Vlăduțescu particularly refers to the Greek and Roman myths (the myths connected to the Middle East are also heavily referred to); the main interest is in the Ancient - Mediterranean centered - philosophy, from Thales of Miletus to Neoplatonist Proclus.

The discussion relies upon the possibility of a philosophical meaning inextricably embedded in the ancient myths. Therefore, the volume is not dedicated to the birth of philosophical thought through myth, but to the mythical structures reflected in various philosophical doctrines.

Due to the own essence of the myths, it is difficult to get a coherent, comprehensive classification of them. It is obviously the original manner of the author to structuring a complex content, within an insightful analysis; Gh. Vlăduțescu revealing himself as a veritable 'Delian diver'. The style of the book is elegant, duly influenced by the classical reading, and it becomes eloquent, as claims the very dyad myth-philosophy.