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The Heroes Of The Greeks



Synopsis

The heroes of Greek mythology - Achilles, Orpheus, Herakles, Oedipus and others - preoccupied the minds of the ancient Greeks no less than the gods themselves. This study uses original sources, archaeological findings and psychological insight to provide an account of the lives of these mythical figures. The narrative is complemented by illustrations from vase paintings and genealogical tables of celebrated and lesser-known mythical figures.

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Customer Reviews

This book has too much scholarly equipment to be pleasant to read in the way that Edith Hamilton's "Mythology" is pleasant to read. Kerényi tells us the variants of each story, and does not add to stories to make them more enjoyable to us. Thus, for example, in Kerényi's account of the hunt of Keryneia (hind=old female deer), much of the text tells us about the origin of the hind and the places through which the chase went, and the action amounts to Herakles chasing the hind for a year and then grabbing it when it was swimming across a river. Do not buy this book to read stories from, but rather buy it as a reference both to find variants of stories and as a reliable text to cite in your own writing. Everything Kerényi tells us is cited explicitly from ancient authors. Hamilton's book of mythology is enjoyable to read, but does not cite where each detail is from and therefore is inadequate for use as a scholarly reference. Mythology is a good region to prospect for ideas about how the world works. Some of these ideas are rich veins, like Herakles' fighting death, and some are lone nuggets, such as statements about Zeus making the sun rise in the west and set in the east when Thyestes becomes king of Mycenae rather than Atreus (III.VI). All, or at least almost all,

of the myths refer to places with names, and are a useful source to sort out ancient Greek ideas of geography and cosmology. In particular, we are told in the story of Perseus that the home of the Gorgons, near the Garden of the Hesperides, can be reached both from the west and from the east. There are also curiosities that may have significance, like assigning to Palamedes the creation of letters, numbered dice, and counting (like Dionysus being the first to make wine).

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