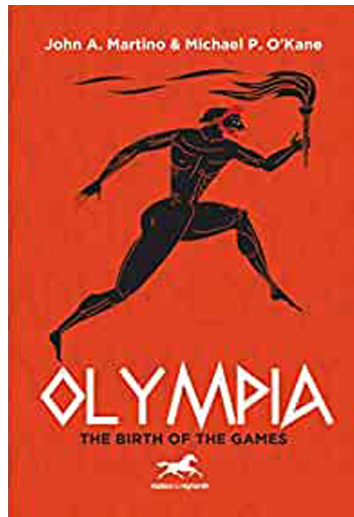


Olympia: The Birth of the Games

Martino (J.A.), O’Kane (M.P.) pp. 266. Las Vegas, NV: Histria Books, 2021. Cased, US\$29.99. ISBN: 978-1-59211-096-4

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I assumed that a book with the title *Olympia: The Birth of the Games* would be another of those volumes targeted primarily at students of, say, GCSE Classical Civilisation. But, no: it is a novel. Written by two academics (they like their frontal adverbial clauses!), it tells the story of the young peace-loving priest Pelops who witnesses the vividly-described horrors of war between rival Greek cities, gets involved in machinations between Sparta and Carthage, pursues and rescues his kidnapped girlfriend Hippodamia,

recovers from being poisoned by his father and in the end triumphs in the horse race at the first Olympiad. Quite a set of experiences!

The authors’ interests certainly contribute to the more belligerent aspects of the narrative. (*inter alia* Michael O’Kane is ‘a keen student of the art of boxing’ and John Martino is a disabled veteran of the Australian Defence Force who wrote his PhD on martial violence. He is also ‘an avid archer’ and an ‘Alfa Romeo enthusiast’. The latter was probably of minimal assistance in writing this book!)

In the course of the story, we meet some well-known characters from the ancient world. Queen Dido is on the throne of Carthage, Homer pops up from time to time, Tantalus is Pelops’ father and the chief priest of Olympia, Menander is a Spartan spy, Lycurgus is the son of a Spartan king, and Rameses (who sadly becomes Ramses at one point) is an Egyptian prince. Saul and Goliath have minor roles to play. Ares (when not being Aries) rules the early chapters.

The narrative is vivid and strong (quite gory in places) but sometimes the language seems rather stilted and the dialogue unrealistic. The authors are very determined that people should not just speak: in the course of a typical couple of pages we find ‘cried’, ‘shouted’, ‘asked’, ‘snarled’, ‘added’, ‘declared’, ‘exploded’, ‘snorted’, ‘announced’, ‘stammered’ and ‘barked’.

There is a preface by the President of the Olympism for Humanity Alliance who sees this book as ‘a source of inspiration and a platform for the imagination, hope and global action’. We’ll see!

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Aristophanes: Frogs

Meineck (P.) (ed., trans) Pp. viii + 170. Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, 2021. Paper, £10.99. ISBN: 9781-647920067

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Having taught Greek theatre in some guise or another since starting my teaching career in 2011, I was interested to read Meineck’s edition of the *Frogs* to see if it offered anything new from those I have read before. While I do not pretend to have read a multitude of different translations of the *Frogs*, I was not disappointed with this version and feel it does offer a different approach to others available.

To begin with the more common points, the introduction contains all a student or teacher would need to fully understand the play. Firstly, the reader is provided with a clear and concise historical and cultural background to the play spread over 15 pages. This also includes sub-divided information on all the conventions of Old Comedy including festivals, the theatre building, masks, costumes, props, music and staging. Secondly, Meineck provides the reader with a 36-page character information list. While this goes beyond what is needed for A Level, with my teaching hat on I found this to be a really useful resource for students of all abilities in my classes for three reasons; firstly, it provided them with clear general information on who the character was; secondly, their wider cultural significance such as their use in other literature and art; and finally, analysis of their role in the play, including some specific scene analysis.

With regards to the presentation of the translation there are several features that were useful; firstly, the translator has opted for footnotes as opposed to endnotes or regular pages of sidenotes. While this will be down to the reader’s personal preference, I felt that this approach allowed for a greater flow to the reading of the play, as the reader can still make quick reference to any additional support needed without having to flick to the back of the book or get distracted by lengthy pages of analysis on every other page. The footnotes themselves are relatively concise, and when combined with the introduction and character list information, contain all that is needed to understand the text.

Looking at the translation itself, the vast majority stays true to existing editions of the play and is accessible to readers of all abilities. I think there is one clear difference in this edition compared to others – what Meineck has done with the chorus. In his own words he has ‘chosen a more radical method than perhaps other translators ... that is, to capture the essence of the idea of parody and transpose the ancient lyrics onto contemporary popular music’. To give an