

WILLIAM HANSEN: *Ariadne's Thread: A Guide to International Tales found in Classical Literature*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca N.Y. 2002. Pp. xviii + 548. \$ 49.95  
ISBN 0801436702

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This substantial and ambitious survey sets out to present, in magisterial fashion, the available links between international folktale tradition as embodied in the Aarne-Thompson (*AT*) index and analogous material from classical antiquity. Hansen adopts a similar strategy to this reviewer's in *Fairytale in Antiquity* of two years previously: a digest of modern variants of a tale, oral where possible, followed by a consideration of variants found in classical writers. In a few cases Hansen has been novel and adventurous, but in most cases he has drawn on a solid repertoire of fairly accessible connections, and has made good use of previous research both in classical and in folklore scholarship, of which he has an enviable mastery. His treatment of the 'Threefold Death' tale (*AT* 934A) could scarcely be bettered (pp. 431-435). Whereas this reviewer had concentrated on a few familiar favourites, often struggling with unrewarding configurations of fragmentary variants to find incomplete traces of *Snow White* or *Red Riding Hood*, Hansen has for the most part 'played safe' and stuck to the nearly incontrovertible on a much broader front, including the whole range of folk- and fairytale evidence, including 'Aesopic' materials and jokes and anecdotes. 'Playing safe' seems an entirely appropriate course in what will deservedly become a standard reference work. But it is a pity that much material where speculative or provisional solutions are the only ones available will now be allowed to go unnoticed.

Hansen acquits himself quite well in relation to Cinderella (*AT* 510A), where he knows the version with the slipper test in Strabo and Aelian, unearths a rare 'divine' variant in Hyginus (*Astronomia* 2.16), and at least mentions the tradition on Rhodopis in Herodotus: but nothing of the *Redende Namen* Charaxus or Hephæstropolis in the last, relating to helpful tree/fish and ash motifs familiar since Cox or Rooth. And it is now implausible to claim that the tale is first found in its entirety in 9<sup>th</sup> century China (p. 85). The most complete single ancient version is that in the Hellenistic romance

*Joseph and Asenath*, containing ashes, change of clothes, divine helper/fairy godperson, and ‘brideshow test’, with implication of handmaidens as rivals, and with the foot-test in reverse: the heroine volunteers to wash Joseph’s feet as a sign of wifely submission.

There are times when Hansen’s innate caution and commonsense serve him less well than he deserves, and a major opportunity is missed. For example, he offers several German variants of the story of the boys who play at butcher and pig, activating a chain of disasters (*AT* 2401). The main ancient version he supplies is from Aelian, *Varia Historia* 13.2, the story of Makareus (pp. 83f). This contains an initial motif seldom available as more than a hint in the modern examples he cites, that the father of the children has committed some dreadful crime (sacrilegious murder in a temple) which causes divine vengeance to overtake him in form of a whole chain of murder and suicide. But in reporting Aelian’s version Hansen accidentally misses out a tiny detail that might have taken him in a further and different direction: he forgets to tell us that the wood from the altar that the distraught mother uses to kill the child who has killed his brother is half-burnt (ἡμίκαυστον). Had he done so the alert reader would have thought of Meleager, killed by his mother after murder of a brother or uncles over a pig (the Caledonian Boar), by burning the remainder of a log that is in that case a magic life-token. This in turn would have given a new take on Meleager himself: because his father Oeneus had failed to sacrifice to Artemis, he is punished with the near extinction of his wider family in a whole chain reaction of misfortunes.

A similar case occurs when Hansen is dealing with the Trojan horse (*AT* 854, The Golden Ram) (pp. 169-176) – ingeniously and rightly he invokes the device as an early analogue of the story where a youth is set the task of gaining access to an inaccessible princess by means of a golden ram, stag or the like, that is taken in behind her defences and brings about her seduction, or in this case restoration to the seeking husband. But Hansen’s parallel falls short this time of the interesting beginning of the modern tale: a man is set the challenge after he has annoyed the king with the arrogant notice that ‘money can buy everything’ or the like. This does not strike us as immediately associated with the tale of the Trojan horse, though the previous history of Epeius might bear further investigation. But it could well have featured in a much more appropriate parallel ancient tale: in the story of Danae she is made pregnant by no less than a shower of gold itself – capable of interpreta-

tion as an embodiment of 'every woman can be bought'. But more specifically the rape of Danae was attributed not only to Zeus but also to Proetus, sometimes confused with his grandson Anaxagoras, as both names are associated with the exorcism conducted by Melampus (the latter in Pausanias 2.18.4). Anaxagoras can mean simply 'king of the market-place' and so fits very neatly the description of the man who declares that everything can be bought.

Sometimes too oriental parallels are not pushed as far as they might be. Hansen is good on the tale of the donkey in Demosthenes (pp. 77f.) and the history of the proverb *περὶ ὄνου σκιᾶς* (pp. 77f.); the tale revolves round the judgement: does someone hire a donkey only, or does he hire the shadow as well? There is a good parallel in James Morier's *Hajji Baba of Ispahan*, where a barber's shop story orally told in a Persian market-place revolves round whether the barber has bought the wood carried by a donkey or whether he has bought the wooden saddle as well. Again, in dealing with the sorcerer's apprentice, Hansen notes the papyrological evidence (p. 38 n. 5) for spells to summon a *daimon paredros*; but does not go further and mention the Egyptian tale in the Satne Khamwese Cycle about Nanefkerkeptah, who steals a book of spells and so causes the death by drowning of his son, wife, and self.

This review could go on: but it is rather a measure of the book's *embarras de richesse* that the many further marginalia might be better presented in article form elsewhere. Where Hansen fails to provide information he is at least a stimulating catalyst to those who wish to go further. His chief service is in the sheer critical mass of solid results. If anyone still doubts the continuity of connexions between ancient and medieval-and-modern popular storytelling they should now be convinced: Hansen removes any excuse for ignoring the ancient heritage of traditional tale, or for assuming that folk and fairy tale in general are as young as the late medieval world.