

BOOK REVIEWS

Structure and History in Greek Mythology and Ritual. By Walter Burkert. Pp. xix + 226, bibliography, index, illustrations. Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1979. Price not given.

Reviewed by Wm. F. Hansen

Structure and History in Greek Mythology and Ritual is the most recent volume of Sather Classical Lectures, which the annual Sather Professor delivers at Berkeley. Folklorists will recall such earlier volumes as Rhys Carpenter's **Folk Tale, Fiction, and Saga in the Homeric Epics** and G.S. Kirk's **Myth: Its Meaning and Function in Ancient and other Cultures**. Some years are good and inevitably some are not so good, as I remember from my student days there; but most of the lectures become, in their published form, much cited books. In my judgment the present work, authored by Walter Burkert, Professor of Classics at the University of Zürich, is very good.

Burkert puts forth four theses about myth. First, it is multivalent; that is, it is not inherently limited to a single kind of significance. Second, the identity of a traditional tale lies in a structure of sense. Third, tale structures reflect basic biological or cultural action patterns. And fourth, less a thesis than a definition, myths are distinguished from other traditional tales by their having reference to something of collective importance such as social life or the universe.

Turning to ritual, Burkert argues for a biological approach. Ritual is a behavioral pattern redirected for demonstration, for communication. To understand the form and message of ritual, one must ask what the non-ritual function of the behavioral pattern is. For example, there is a species of monkey in which ithyphallic males act as guards. This is animal ritual in the sense that sexual behavior has been redirected to communicate to outsiders something like "potent protectors." The Greeks ritualized the same idea as a symbolic artifact, the herm, a pillar

with head and erect phallus, which commonly stood before Greek houses.

The two chapters on myth and ritual are followed by four chapters in which Burkert applies his ideas. He acknowledges that there are myths without rituals and rituals without myths, so that the two phenomena do not need each other. Indeed, he is less interested in studying a ritual with its attached myth than in analyzing various myths and rituals in which he can perceive more or less the same action pattern. One example will suffice here. In chapter IV, "Heracles and the Master of Animals," the author mentions the difficulty that scholars have had in discovering the origin of the popular Greek character Heracles. He rejects the Romantic viewpoint according to which Heracles is the projection of the Dorian Greeks (cf. myth thesis 1). In fact he discards Heracles himself as the nucleus of the stories in favor of certain patterns of action that have been attached to the name (cf. myth thesis 2), and chooses to pursue "one strand in the texture," as he says. The Heracles tales thus chosen have the same action pattern; namely, "going to the Beyond, fighting a monster, and returning with cattle" (p. 85). Analogues are pointed out in Greek, Roman, and Indic mythology, and the explanations of earlier researchers concerning them are declared inadequate. Burkert now describes the notion of a supernatural owner of animals, and the ritual in which a community suffering from famine arranges for its shaman to overcome the mistress of animals and so force her to set them free, making them available again to hunters. Thus the original, recurrent, non-ritual action was the hunters' quest for food; whenever it failed, it might be transformed into a symbolic quest for food in the form of a shaman's quest; and--certainly the weak link in the chain--the pattern of this symbolic action in turn underlies the Heracleian legends and their analogues (cf. theses 3 and 4).

Burkert writes clearly and interestingly, without either the obscurity of many structuralists or the arrogance that is found in Kirk's books on myth. His ample footnotes are a feast for the bibliographer. They reveal a very impressive range of reading--classics, archaeology, biology, folkloristics (Alan Dundes of Berkeley and Max Lüthi of Zürich

are thanked in the preface), and more. **Structure and History in Greek Mythology and Ritual** is a stimulating book for folklorists interested in myth, ritual, festivals, or semiotics.

Folktales of Egypt. By Hasan El-Shamy. Pp. lviii + 347, notes, bibliography, index of motifs, index of tale types, general index. Folktales of the World Series, edited by Richard M. Dorson. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980. Price not given.

Reviewed by Eren Giray-Saul

Folktales of Egypt, the long awaited addition to the Folktales of the World Series, is especially welcomed by scholars interested in a relatively neglected area of folklore scholarship: the Middle East. Dr. El-Shamy offers a fine presentation of the living folk narrative tradition in Egypt, fourteen years after the first mention of such a volume with the general editor of the Series. The author informs us that paucity of accurate texts available at the time, and his subsequent decision to use his own field data for the volume, caused the delay. The opportunity for such a compilation arose with the author's appointment in 1968 to the Center for Folklore in the Ministry of Culture in Cairo which sponsored field trips to collect the material. As a result, the volume is comprised of seventy texts chosen from among eight hundred narrative texts the author and his colleagues collected between 1968 and 1972.

The tales are taken from both rural and urban settings, and from both elite/intellectual and peasant or nomadic informants. The prevalence of "urban folklore" has long been established in American folklore scholarship, but Middle Eastern specialists will understand the need to investigate urban folklore in a culture area where the elite have often systematically denied the importance of a "folk culture." While many countries in Europe have expedited their folk narrative research through numerous archives since the late nineteenth century, Middle Eastern folk literature archives are rare and recent. El-Shamy's first