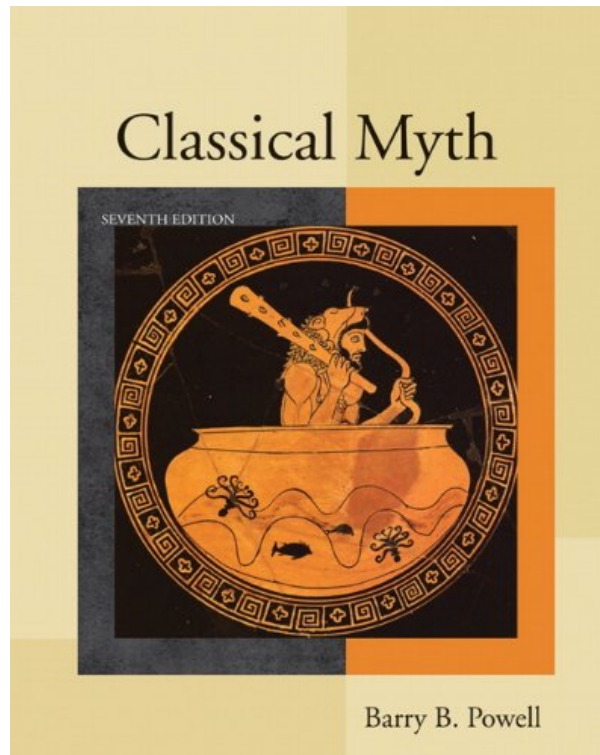


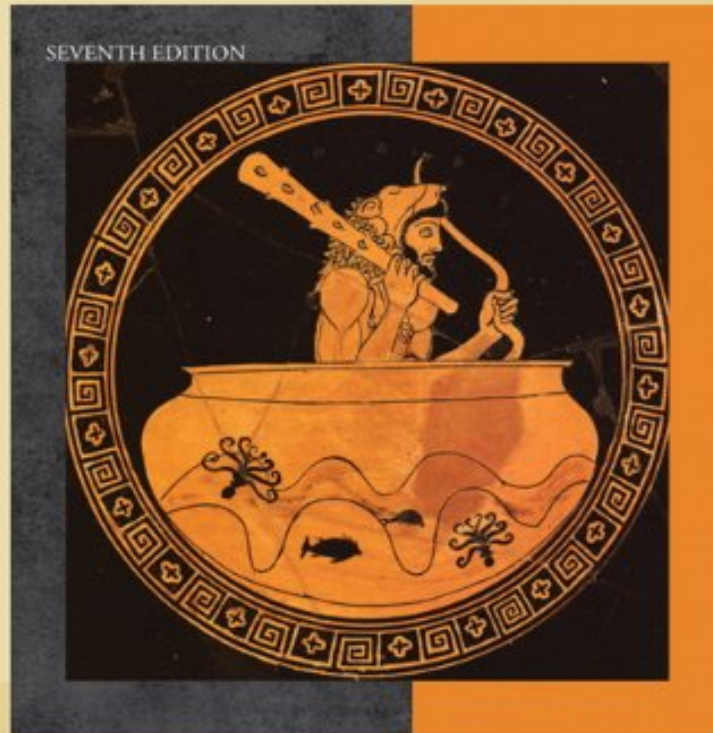
CLASSICAL MYTH (7TH EDITION) BY BARRY B. POWELL



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Classical Myth



Barry B. Powell

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About the Author

Barry B. Powell , after graduation from Berkeley and Harvard, taught at Northern Arizona University, then took a job at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, where he taught for 34 years. He is a master of many languages, both ancient and modern, and for many years taught Egyptian philology and culture at Wisconsin, in addition to courses in Classics. His book *Homer and the Origin of the Greek Alphabet*, which advanced the thesis that one man invented the Greek alphabet in order to record the poet Homer, has become a classic and changed the way we think about the origins of Western Culture. He has written many other books, including two novels and a book of poetry. His book *Classical Myth*, is the best-selling book on the topic, and is now in its seventh edition. His book *Homer* is the best-selling study of this author. *The Greeks: History, Culture, and Society* (second edition, with Ian Morris) is widely used in college classrooms. He is currently preparing a translation of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. He lives in Santa Fe, New Mexico, where he and his wife Patricia enjoy the company of their children and grandchildren.

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Comprehensive and scholarly, this well-designed text presents Greek and Roman myths in a lively and easy-to-read manner. The material has been rearranged to make it easier to find and the new edition has been streamlined. It features fresh translations, numerous illustrations (ancient and modern) of classical myths and legends, and commentary that emphasizes the anthropological, historical, religious, sociological, and economic contexts in which the myths were told. It also provides a cultural context so that readers can see how mythology has influenced the world and how it continues to influence society today.

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About the Author

Barry B. Powell, after graduation from Berkeley and Harvard, taught at Northern Arizona University, then took a job at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, where he taught for 34 years. He is a master of many languages, both ancient and modern, and for many years taught Egyptian philology and culture at Wisconsin, in addition to courses in Classics. His book *Homer and the Origin of the Greek Alphabet*, which advanced the thesis that one man invented the Greek alphabet in order to record the poet Homer, has become a classic and changed the way we think about the origins of Western Culture. He has written many other books, including two novels and a book of poetry. His book *Classical Myth*, is the best-selling book on the topic, and is now in its seventh edition. His book *Homer* is the best-selling study of this author. *The Greeks: History, Culture, and Society* (second edition, with Ian Morris) is widely used in college classrooms. He is currently preparing a translation of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. He lives in Santa Fe, New Mexico, where he and his wife Patricia enjoy the company of their children and grandchildren.

Most helpful customer reviews

29 of 29 people found the following review helpful.

No longer useful

By E. Chrol

I have taught mythology at the university level at various institutions for the more than a decade now. Indeed, when I first began was when the first edition of Powell came out. At that time it was quite useful as his prose is modestly engaging, and the large swathes of original material and the occasional illustrations he includes is quite useful.

However, as he has progressed through four editions and doubled his price (!), he has become less useful. To his credit, the online materials are good for the novice, and, as I previously mentioned, there is a fair amount of translated primary text. However, his deficits now outweigh his benefits. When Powell summarizes plots of texts in the middle of a longer excerpt, often his interpretation of events occludes what actually happens. As he has progressed through various editions, his own ideas are now more confident in his eyes and some of his more controversial claims which in the first edition were presented as "some scholars believe [historical situation] may have contributed to [textual effect]" are now presented as "[historical situation] caused [textual effect]." As another reader notes, some of his historical contextualizations are either suspect or absent. Lastly, the cost is prohibitive.

Now that I have learned a fifth edition is soon to be out and my students will no longer be able to purchase used copies, I have declined to order his book for this fall and don't foresee returning to him in the future.

39 of 41 people found the following review helpful.

The 3rd edition

By A Customer

The popularity of Classical Myth as a text for college classes is quite understandable; Classical Myth is a useful synthesis of textbook- and sourcebook-style material. The writing is engaging and the level of detail is appropriate--enough to challenge students but not so much as to overwhelm. Moreover, the third edition offers several significant improvements over the second edition. Let me share a few of the changes that jumped out at me:

The chapters on the Olympian gods have been re-organized so that chapter six covers Zeus and Hera, chapter seven covers the male Olympians, and chapter eight covers the female Olympians. In the previous edition, the logic of the division of deities was less clear--chapter six covered Zeus, Hera, Poseidon, Demeter, Hestia, Hades and Aphrodite; chapter seven treated Apollo and Artemis; and chapter 8 discussed Hephaestus, Ares, Athena, and Hermes.

There is also a new chapter, chapter twelve, entitled "Introduction to Heroic Myth." It is a short chapter which introduces students to the idea of the hero. Although the chapter is new, much of the material it contains is actually not new--it comes from chapter fifteen in the previous edition which was a discussion of myths related to Heracles. In my opinion, this chapter could usefully be expanded--it is quite short, and there is a great deal that can be said about the figure of the hero in myth and in interpretation of myth which is not said here.

Finally, lists of key terms have been added at the end of each chapter, an addition which may be useful to students.

However, I have a few quibbles with aspects of the previous edition that still appear in the third edition. Let me offer two general reflections and then one very specific objection.

First, although Powell does use footnotes, they generally only gloss material that may be confusing for students. Like many other authors of textbooks on mythology, he usually doesn't indicate from what source or sources the various parts of the myths he is describing come. Of course, his text isn't intended for serious scholarly use and most scholars no doubt know where to turn for more detailed information. But students who want to track down the original sources will often be left in the dark by Powell's presentation of the myths. Since, however, I don't believe I've ever seen a handbook of mythology that noted sources in this way, Powell really cannot be faulted for his decision.

Second, Classical Myth is, like all handbooks of mythology, selective. Powell generally focuses on the most important and famous variants of the myths he discusses. This is quite appropriate for a textbook, but it is also somewhat deceptive. Students may come away with the erroneous impression that an established "canon" of Greek myth existed. I think a few more examples of variant versions of myths would help students appreciate that the stories that appear in Classical Myth represent only a few versions of the many disparate, often contradictory, stories of the gods and heroes that were told by the Greeks.

Finally, getting down to specifics, in the chapters on the Olympian gods, Powell asserts confidently that "by the sixth century...a body of twelve Olympian gods and goddesses had been recognized." He admits that the list was somewhat flexible--sometimes Dionysus replaces Hestia. But for the Greeks, the list was not nearly so fixed (back to my objections about creating a false sense that there was a mythological "canon"). It is clear, both from the text in chapter six and from the accompanying chart, that Powell includes Hades as one of the Olympians. This perplexes me- as far as I can tell Hades was not usually included among the Olympian deities at all. According to Eudoxus, a student of Plato, the twelve are Zeus, Hera, Poseidon, Demeter, Apollo, Artemis, Ares, Aphrodite, Hermes, Athena, Hephaestus, and Hestia. In other words, Eudoxus omits Hades and prefers Hestia to Dionysus. (Chart 6.1, which lists the Olympian deities, has undergone some revision from the previous edition; chart 6.1 in the second edition, properly I think, omitted Hades. But in the new edition, Hades has been added to the chart, with the result that thirteen deities appear in bold, not twelve, adding to the confusion.)

Just a few more minor quibbles: the Orphic material still appears in the chapter on death rather than in the chapters on creation where, I think, it more appropriately belongs. And Powell's enthusiasm for the Greek alphabet--which seems somewhat idiosyncratic to me--is still apparent, though less so than in the previous edition in which he referred to the "limitations inherent in prealphabetic writing." I think the Hittite Telepinus myth should be included--or at least mentioned -among the myths on the Great Goddess. And finally I would particularly like to know the origin of the claim that temple prostitution occurred at Cythera. Overall, however, I like Classical Myth, and I do feel that the third edition is an improvement over the second. Using Classical Myth and, perhaps, a few inexpensive paperback editions of Hesiod and Greek plays, it's possible to teach a class on Classical Mythology. By collecting the myths from other cultures--especially the Eastern myths--Powell has taken a lot of hard work out of teaching this subject. I also find the companion website constructed by Prentice Hall to be an amazing resource--well designed, well executed, and most comprehensive.

10 of 10 people found the following review helpful.

Not recommended

By Paul M. McDermott

Nothing much has been changed from the seventh edition, except for a new preface and the correction of some typos. I believe it's a scam by the publisher to extort more money out of college students.

What the publisher provides in the way of auxiliary materials for the instructor is piss-poor.

I agree with Martin's criticism of Powell's including the passage about the Iranians and that awful "300" film that made Persians look like effete aliens. I also am puzzled why Powell holds on to the outdated theory that the Etruscans moved to Etruria from Asia Minor.

I have been forced to use Powell involuntarily in my college classroom. I believe Oxford's Classical Mythology by Morford, Lenardon, and Sham is a better textbook.

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About the Author

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