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Cybelle Greenlaw, *The Representation of Monkeys in the Art and Thought of Mediterranean Cultures: A new perspective on ancient primates*. Oxford, BAR International Series 2192, 2011, Pp. v & 89, figs. 105, £28.00, ISBN 978 1 4073 0747 3 (Pbk)

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Greenlaw's publication covers a fairly large proportion of her doctoral thesis, submitted to Trinity College Dublin in 2004.¹ The representation of monkeys in the art and thought of the Mediterranean has been widely researched in specialised studies.² Nonetheless, what in my opinion makes Greenlaw's work stand out is the fact that she does not limit her research to a particular culture and chronological period. On the contrary, she is the only researcher to have produced a modern, comparative study discussing ancient primates in the Ancient Mediterranean as a whole, over the course of Antiquity, and in several media, from Archaeology to Classics. As a result, in Greenlaw's interdisciplinary and transcultural publication, ancient non-human primates are discussed in ancient Egypt, the Near East, the Bronze Age Aegean, the Greco-Roman World and the Greco-Roman Legacy. The discussion is based on the examination of iconographic, physical and textual evidence; and the main objective of the author is to provide a pioneering, critical insight into the study of ancient primates in the Mediterranean, while simultaneously explaining and amending some of the typological problems of previous publications in the identification of ancient primates.

In the introduction, Greenlaw draws a profile of the different species of non-human primates (e.g. the hamandryas baboon, the rhesus macaque, etc.). Not only does she number the physical traits of the different species, but she also discusses their habitude. Moreover, with the incorporation of illustrations, she assists the reader to distinguish between different species. Such a zoological approach is necessary as,

¹ Greenlaw, C. 2004. *Monkeying Around the Mediterranean: a New Perspective on Ancient Primates*. Dublin: Trinity College Dublin (Ph.D. Dissertation).

² See e.g. Phillips, J. 2008. *Aegyptiaca on the Island of Crete in their Chronological Context: A Critical Review*. Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften. Phillips' work ('the Ape Image', vol. I., 168-182) specialises in Egypt, Crete and particularly the transition of the ape image from Egypt to Crete.

in my opinion, the majority of readers with a background in the Humanities are not familiar with the scientific study of the behaviour, physiology and classification of non-human primates.

The first chapter examines the ways in which the Egyptians perceived non-human primates from the Predynastic to the Ptolemaic Period. The chapter covers a large part of the book (about 30 pages) and is based on an extended study of archaeological finds and textual material. The analysis is divided into separate themes, according to date, topic of study, and the religious or non-religious association of ancient primates: for instance, the baboons as deities and sun greeters in the Old Kingdom, and the correlation of Thoth with baboons in the New Kingdom. Such a grouping of information makes the discussion easy to follow and comprehend.

There is also a cornucopia of debatable issues presented in this chapter, from the consideration of non-human primates in tomb iconography, to the correlation of monkeys with deities, women, dwarfs, vessels and specific cosmetics. In particular, the extended examination of satirical and humorous scenes involving monkeys, lively and rich in iconographic and textual examples, stands out.

In the same chapter, Greenlaw takes a fresh approach to the role of baboons at a scene from the tomb of Khnumhotep at Beni Hasan. This scene, which is possibly the earliest 'monkey-harvester scene' in Egypt, shows three baboons eating figs on a fig tree, while two men collect fruit in baskets. Greenlaw (p. 18), contra Houlihan (p. 32-37), argues that the scene demonstrates that certain monkeys and baboons were trained to harvest soft fruit, since even in recent years, farmers in Thailand have been training macaques to harvest tamarinds and mangoes.³

The second chapter studies monkeys in Mesopotamia, the Levant and Anatolia. Via artistic and textual examples, Greenlaw demonstrates how the art and thought of the Near East were influenced by (and also affected) eastern and western sources. It is true that this chapter, which consists of just six pages, lacks a deeper, more extended analysis of the topic, but Greenlaw states that she only aims to give, in a

³ Houlihan, P. 1997. *Harvesters or monkey business?*, GM157, 31-4.

rather concise manner, the preparatory information for the exploration of monkeys in both Minoan and Greek iconography (discussed in chapter 3). In the Near East monkeys bore multiple roles: valued for their exotic character, they were linked to entertainment, music and female nudity; they were seen as supernatural creatures and demi-deities, and were associated with rituals of libations. Considering that monkeys may have undertaken similar roles in Egypt and the Aegean, this chapter, however brief, operates as a 'bridge' between the analysis in chapters 1 and 3, while it assists the reader to distinguish common patterns in the roles of monkeys within a wider Mediterranean perspective.

Indeed, in the third chapter Greenlaw refers specifically to the Aegean roles and adaptations of the monkey from Near Eastern, and particularly Egyptian art and thought. The Aegean evidence demonstrating the monkey image is grouped according to thematic units: seals and impressions, wall paintings, figurines, the 'squatting ape' beads and pendants, etc. Emphasis is placed on material from Crete. The chapter manifests originality and provides intellectual nourishment, mainly because Greenlaw suggests which exact species are seen on individual artefacts, while reassessing previous research when necessary. She also re-evaluates the list of species known to the Minoans and clearly distinguishes among the monkey and ape iconography on Crete, the Cyclades and the Greek Mainland, discussing the level of popularity of the image in these regions. The chapter is accompanied by a handy four-page synoptic table with key examples of artistic media from Aegean archaeological contexts showing non-human primates.

Particularly interesting is the discussion of the transference of the image of ancient primates from Egypt to the Aegean and the comparative analysis of art and thought of monkeys between the two cultures. Greenlaw correctly argues that the transferred (and often amalgamated) representations of monkeys and apes from Egypt to the Aegean can assist in the reconsideration of how religious these images were in Egypt itself. Additionally, she investigates reasons why Aegeans were selective in accepting certain aspects of iconography from Egypt (e.g. why monkeys are depicted sexless in Minoan art) and why certain iconographic aspects of monkeys may have been ignored or misunderstood in the process of transference. The issue

of transference of the ape image has also been approached by Phillips in 2008⁴ and although the author has not considered Phillips' work (and vice versa), to my mind, the two studies complement each other and they are worth being read together.

The analysis in the fourth chapter of the book, which focuses on the Greco-Roman world, covers a long period of time and a wide geographical area (from the Geometric period onwards, Greece, Egypt, Cyprus, Phoenicia, etc.). From my viewpoint, one of the most absorbing discussions in this chapter is that of the fables involving monkeys such as Aesop's Fables, and especially the way these fables have inspired works of art (some artistic examples are given). Moreover, ancient primates are discussed through Greco-Roman philosophy and literature (e.g. Aristotle, Pliny, Galen, etc.). There is also a reference to the connection between monkeys and Satyrs, which provides a sample of a well-debated topic. Again, the evidence that Greenlaw has considered is iconographic and textual.

The fifth chapter on the Greco-Roman Legacy, essentially the epilogue of the publication, negotiates the perception of non-human primates from the Early Middle Ages to modern times, including the view of the monkey as a *figura diaboli* in Christianity. By reading this short chapter the reader will realise how different the perception of non-human primates has been in space and over time.

After having read the book, I personally felt that there is something missing in the discussion. In my opinion, an extra chapter would complement the publication. A closing chapter in which the author 1) accommodates a summary of the main points raised in the book, 2) provides the major conclusions of her research, 3) concisely discusses all cultural case-studies as a whole; and 4) highlights (possibly with the help of an appendix or a diagram) the similarities and differences in the way non-human primates were perceived in the past and by different civilisations. I believe that Greenlaw will offer such a piece of academic work in the future and I am looking forward to reading it.

⁴ See note 2.

Another point I ought to mention is the fact that sometimes Greenlaw mixes archaeological material together with textual material without isolating the two groups of evidence – this is occasionally noticeable throughout the book and particularly obvious in chapter 4. The problem could be solved with some extra headings in each chapter, so that the context is better defined.

Otherwise the text reads nicely and the debate is captivating and easy to follow, especially since the discussion is accompanied by abundant, high quality black and white drawings. Greenlaw certainly succeeds in meeting her objectives. Her research contribution takes the discussion of ancient non-human primates in the Mediterranean one step further, while, at the same time, it marks the need for the re-evaluation of previously published archaeological and textual material. The publication is aimed at classicists and archaeologists, or even zoologists with an interest in the history of monkeys. However, since the ideas are well-explained and the author demonstrates great enthusiasm throughout the book, a more popularized and less academic version of it could also be enjoyed by anyone who has an interest in these animals.