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Ken Dowden, *Zeus*. London, Routledge, 2006. Pp. xxvi & 164; 3 black & white maps and 14 black & white illustrations. £50 hardback; £12.99 paperback. ISBN: 0-415-30503-9 (Pbk).

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Zeus is one of the first books to have been published in the new Routledge series 'Gods and Heroes of the Ancient World'. This series aims to provide a 'thorough and accessible, as well as scholarly introduction' to different characters from ancient myth, and, by the standard set in *Zeus*, it certainly appears to be doing so. These books are not just biographies of each god or hero, but attempt to place the characters within ancient pagan life, from myth to cult to art, and beyond – to their reception in the modern day.

Can all this be covered in one 164 page book? *Zeus* manages it very well. Despite the broad approach, this is still a relatively in-depth study of the king of the gods, ticking all the boxes the series sets out to cover. Dowden admits that he did have to write the book three times, in three different orders, but the final copy certainly makes this seem worthwhile. The book takes the reader from the origins of Zeus – both in myth and etymologically – to cult and the role of Zeus in the order of society, to the appearances of Zeus in ancient art and literature. Rather than being in strict chronological order, this segmented layout allows each section to be discussed fully, without flipping back and forth.

As well as the encyclopaedic and expansive approach, the aim is also to cater for many different types of reader, from the general reader to students and scholars of Classics. As such it contains a brief chronological table, as well as three different maps. This is helpful for the newcomer to Classics as well as more advanced readers, neither of which would need to either look up this information or double check their knowledge in another book.

However, on occasion some prior knowledge is required. For example, while this book does not purport to retell the myths of Zeus, the brief summary given (pp. 5-6) is truncated, starting with Zeus as a baby and leading straight into the defeat of Kronos. While a full biography is not required, it would have been helpful for a reader new to the Greek myths to be aware of the point at which Zeus 'grew up', as the current description leaves the image of the baby Zeus defeating the Titans.

At other points, in an attempt to make the book 'accessible to all' and so define any 'complex' terms, I wonder whether the balance has swung slightly too far in the other direction. While often the flow of reading is unhindered by the explanations of the words (such as aetiological=explanatory p.31), occasionally the inclusion of a definition will jar the reader. Was it really necessary to define 'genealogies' as 'family trees' (p.40)? I found myself at times searching through the text for any 'hard' words which had not been defined, rather than actually reading it. Also, I take issue with the Series Foreword (by Susan Deacy) which states that 'epithet' means 'surname' (p. x). If a reader is unsure as to the meaning of this word then describing it as a 'surname' will simply confuse matters further, especially when, on the very same page, the gods are listed as having multiple epithets depending – correctly – upon their relevant function and attributes rather than their parentage.

Other than these minor points, the book is helpful for readers of all levels. Names and epithets are transliterated and translated for non-Greek readers, and there is good cross-referencing throughout the text to point the reader to other relevant points. There is a brief overview at the end of each chapter, clearly summarising it and clarifying the key points raised. These work as mini-abstracts, and cement the book's use as a handy reference tool.

For the more advanced reader, this book's broad yet in depth approach means that it can be used as a primer for many different research topics regarding Zeus. So many different aspects – such as myth, cult, art, reception – are covered, along with a section on further reading, that it can be used both as an introduction to Zeus or as a reference guide. While Dowden admits that the book is a little light on archaeological information, the wealth of information regarding Zeus' role in society more than makes up for this. Among other things, I found the linguistic history behind Zeus, Jove & Jupiter interesting (although this book is mainly about Zeus there is a small amount about Jupiter): information which would not normally be covered in a book on myth.

This series sets out to provide 'a route into understanding Greek and Roman polytheism in the twenty-first century' (p.xi), and *Zeus* certainly supplies this, whether to a newcomer to Classics, or an advanced researcher looking for something more up to date and (literally) lightweight compared to the previous significant study of Zeus: A. B. Cook's three volume work. I am certainly looking forward to reading other books in the series; so far books on Medea, Prometheus and Dionysos have been published, while titles such as *Athena*, *Diana*, *Apollo* and *Oedipus* are in the pipeline, all of which promise the same fresh approach as Dowden's with *Zeus*. Although it would be nice if a series felt that it could be new and modern and still use capitalisation on the front cover.