



# Rationalizing Myth in Antiquity

By Greta Hawes

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## Rationalizing Myth in Antiquity By Greta Hawes

The Greek myths are characteristically fabulous; they are full of monsters, metamorphoses, and the supernatural. However, they could be told in other ways as well. This volume charts ancient dissatisfaction with the excesses of myth, and the various attempts to cut these stories down to size by explaining them as misunderstood accounts of actual events. In the hands of ancient rationalizers, the hybrid forms of the Centaurs become early horse-riders, seen from a distance; the Minotaur the result of an illicit liaison, not an inter-species love affair; and Cerberus, nothing more than a notorious snake with a lethal bite. Such approaches form an indigenous mode of ancient myth criticism, and show Greeks grappling with the value and utility of their own narrative traditions. Rationalizing interpretations offer an insight into the practical difficulties inherent in distinguishing myth from history in ancient Greece, and indeed the fragmented nature of myth itself as a conceptual entity.

By focusing on six Greek authors (Palaephatus, Heraclitus, Excerpta Vaticana, Conon, Plutarch, and Pausanias) and tracing the development of rationalistic interpretation from the fourth century BC to the Second Sophistic (first to second centuries AD) and beyond, *Rationalizing Myth in Antiquity* shows that, far from being marginalized as it has been in the past, rationalization should be understood as a fundamental component of the pluralistic and shifting network of Greek myth as it was experienced in antiquity.

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## Rationalizing Myth in Antiquity By Greta Hawes Bibliography

- Rank: #2684296 in Books
- Published on: 2014-07-29
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 5.80" h x .90" w x 8.60" l, 1.09 pounds
- Binding: Hardcover
- 304 pages

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#### Review

"...[A] welcome contribution to the understanding of mythology in Greek antiquity. ... Hawes's book offers folklorists a rich glimpse into the reception of mythology in ancient Greece, in particular an examination of an early kind of interpretive strategy.... Hawes's study is a carefully researched and clearly written treatment of an understudied mythological phenomenon." --*Journal of Folklore Research*

#### About the Author

**Greta Hawes** received her Ph.D. in Classics from the University of Bristol in 2011, where she also held a British Academy Postdoctoral Fellowship. She is now a lecturer at the Australian National University. Her current research project looks at myth and storytelling in Pausanias's *Periegesis*.

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