ANTONINUS LIBERALIS AND THE STORY OF PROKRIS*

BY

JOHN DAVIDSON

Despite the growth of interest in Greek myth in recent years, comparatively little attention has been paid to Antoninus Liberalis1), whose name is attached to that collection of mythical narratives, written in Greek and generally involving metamorphosis, tradition-ally believed to have been composed during the reign of the Roman emperor Antoninus Pius (AD 137-161). The narratives are, however, well worth serious consideration, not least on account of the somewhat unusual twists often given to the characters featured in them. The present study will investigate Antoninus’ portrayal of the enigmatic figure of Prokris, daughter of Erektheus and wife of Kephalos, in the light of presentations of her found in our other surviving ancient literary sources2).

*) I would like to acknowledge the helpful comments made on earlier versions of this paper by, among others, Richard Sorabji, colleagues in the Department of Classics at Victoria University of Wellington, and members of the Otago Classical Association.


2) For Attic vase painting illustrations of Prokris with Kephalos, see LIMC Vol. VI, Kephalos, 26 and 28. E. Simantoni-Bournia gives a useful discussion and bibliography there (s.v. Képhalos). T.B.L. Webster, Monuments Illustrating Tragedy and Satyr Play², Institute of Classical Studies, Bulletin Supplement 20 (London 1967), 151, tries to tie the two illustrations already mentioned, along with other pictures of a solitary Prokris (or at least a Prokris type female hunter) to Sophokles’ tragedy Prokris. Pausanias (10.29.6), in describing a painting by Polygnotos, refers to the juxtaposition of Prokris and a certain Klymene whom Kephalos married after his first wife’s death. For an informative, illustrated discussion of various aspects of the Prokris and Kephalos stories in visual art and drama from the Middle Ages and Renaissance, including depictions of the death of Prokris, see I. Lavin, Cephalus and Procris. Transformations of an Ovidian Myth, Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes 17 (1954), 260-87. The same author, in the same number of that journal (366-72), also offers a fascinating survey (under the title Cephalus and Procris: underground Transformations) of further written medieval and Renaissance versions of the tale.

Prokris cannot, of course, in any sense be regarded as a major figure in Greco-Roman myth\(^3\). However, in the limited ‘stage time’ allotted to her in the sources she is made to play a wide range of female roles. Interest in this aspect of her has tended to be overshadowed in the past by concentration on the wider Prokris/Kephalos story\(^4\) or on particular literary treatments of it, especially those by Ovid\(^5\), and on attempts to flesh out the sketchier or totally defective sources and to establish source interrelationships\(^6\). It may perhaps be considered risky to single out the figure of Prokris herself, to some extent ‘divorcing’ her from Kephalos in the process. The advantage of such an approach, however, is that it can best throw the spotlight on many of the assumptions and beliefs about women held by Antoninus and by the other poets and mythographers who featured or at least made reference to Prokris in the course of their work.

Our strategy will be to survey the main associations of the Prokris figure and outline what is known about early treatments of her story, before considering the version in Antoninus. We shall then discuss other post-fifth century versions and attempt to draw some conclusions. No attempt will be made to establish a hierarchy of

---

\(^3\) Reference does not even seem to be made to her by Mary R. Lefkowitz, *Women in Greek Myth* (London 1986).

\(^4\) The discussion of J.E. Fontenrose, *Orion: The Myth of the Hunter and the Huntress* (University of California Publications in Classical Studies, Vol. 23; Berkeley, Los Angeles and London 19811), 86-111, does focus to some extent on Prokris herself, though it is more concerned with Kephalos and the story pattern. Fontenrose also offers a comparative analysis of the main sources, a survey of similar or related stories, and some useful interpretative insights.


\(^6\) See e.g. the entry in *RE* which includes an ingenious if entirely speculative reconstruction of the interrelationship of the various sources (especially Sophokles’ *Prokris* and the accounts in Hellanikos, Pherekydes and the scholiast at *Odyssey* 11.321 based on Pherekydes), a similarly speculative linking of the Prokris story to other supposedly germane stories (with particular emphasis on the supposed ‘Thessalian connection’), and an attempt to date Sophokles’ *Prokris* through reference to contemporary historical events.