



Review

BRUCE LOUDEN  
HOMER'S ODYSSEY AND THE NEAR EAST

Cambridge/New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011  
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This review will necessarily be short. While Professor Louden's book is clearly a valuable study of the relationship between Homer's *Odyssey* and various Near Eastern literary genres, the absence of focus on Egyptian material renders a marked gap in the book's effective coverage of its chosen topic.

The book looks for parallels between the Homeric story and a wide range of Near Eastern materials ranging from earlier Mesopotamian, Ugaritic, and Aegean stories to those found in the Hebrew and much later Christian scriptures. This willingness to consider both earlier and later parallels from a wide range of geographic areas makes the absence of focus on Egyptian parallels all the more mystifying. Yet Egyptian parallels are given little attention. Ancient Egyptian material receives only three pages (60-63) in a section on Egyptian parallels, and most of the stress in this section is actually upon the story of Joseph in Egypt from the Hebrew Bible. This is not to argue what material is important to the author's design in his study, but the few paragraphs devoted to Egyptian stories such as that of the Shipwrecked Sailor and

the wanderings of Sinuhe seem to give short shrift to clearly important material.

The absence of focus on the germane ancient Egyptian material, beyond what sometimes amount to almost cursory glosses, is problematic in another way. The book avoids analysis of some of the important references to Egypt within the *Odyssey* – including direct interaction between its characters and Egypt, such as Helen's visit to the land and her close interaction there with Polybus and Alkandra (*Odyssey* 4.120), apparently Tausret and Siptah. This interaction is important as it stresses the Homeric interest in Egypt and raises the likelihood of influence from Egyptian genres, stories or motifs making its way into the Homeric weave.

All this is not to suggest that Professor Louden's book is not a fine study of the material it covers. It seems regrettable, however, that there is so little focus on Egyptian parallels and related material which doubtless could enrich our understanding of the interplay between Homer's *Odyssey* and the Near East.

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