

REVIEWS

Mark Joffe and Joseph Krafczik. Perun, the God of Thunder (Studies in the Humanities 43). New York: Peter Lang, 2003. xiv + 118 pp. \$53.95 (cloth). ISBN 0-820441201.

It is hard to know what to say about this book. Serious Slavists and folklorists will be disappointed. It may be useful to the non-Slavist as a brief (eighty nine pages of text) survey of beliefs about the Slavic god Perun, thunder, fire, buried treasure, magic plants, ritual cleansing, and so on. It certainly lists at high speed just about everything that might by some Frazerian stretch of the imagination be linked with Perun. The problem with Slav deities is that there is little hard information about them. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, when possession of an ancient pantheon and a national epic mattered to national esteem, a great deal of enthusiasm and imagination went into supplying the missing biographical details from folklore and the free use of analogy with other cultures. This book, which claims that it draws its inspiration from Afanas'ev, is firmly in that tradition. Both the authors are Slavists by training and teach college courses in folklore, and the book does betray distinct traces of classroom simplification. It is not that one can point to much in particular and say it is incorrect (what can be wrong in folklore or mythology, except other scholars?), but it must also be said that the book is full of sweeping comparisons and unsupported assertions, selective use of unattributed etymologies (Vasmer is listed in the bibliography but not in the text or notes, like several other items), use of bogus, frivolous, or incompetent sources (the Velesova kniga is quoted several times without even a health warning, as is the worthless ABC-CLIO Encyclopedia of Russian Slavic Myth and Legend), uncritical use of other sources (the Prince Igor' story is discussed at some length as a twelfth-century epic with no mention that there are, at the very least, some questions about its textual integrity), failure to mention a whole range of relevant work (for example, no reference in the text to B. A. Uspenskii on the association of Veles and Perun with St Nicholas, although his book is mentioned in the bibliography, nor, at the level of bibliography of the subject, the standard serial bibliography Russkii fol'klor, or Kulikovskii's Bibliography of Slavonic Mythology). The book relies heavily on Afanas'ev and Rybakov, both eulogized in the preface, perhaps one reason why the opinions offered have distinctly old-fashioned flavor at times. Other sources are a rather haphazard selection, but on the plus side the authors do quote Linda Ivanits at several points.

The "Introduction" is a short and unexceptionable survey of the early history of Christianity among the South and east Slavs, and a quick introduction to the pantheon, if such it was, of the Slavs. The rest of the book is not arranged in chapters but in short topical sections. It takes us through the (few) references to Perun in the earliest Slav and other medieval texts, and an excursus on the etymology of the name (with none of the etymologies dated or sourced); through supposed analogs in other cultures (p. 13 "Perun in his various aspects is encountered among other Aryan religions"); through various aspects of Russian culture and belief, even "The Lamé Leg: A Short Digression" (with no reference to Carlo Ginzburg). The final eighteen pages, "Poetic Mythology Applied" (an arbitrary selection of examples limited to the Igor' tale and the works of Gogol' and Sologub), do not mention Perun. At \$53.95 this is not a bargain; for a third of the price students and interested

non-specialists can get Elizabeth Warner's Russian Myths (2002), which covers the same area of folklore and mythology far better.

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