

BOOK REVIEWS

KRITSKY, G., AND R. CHERRY. 2000. *Insect mythology*. Writers Club Press; San Jose, California. xiii + 140 pp. ISBN 0-595-15017-9. Paperback. \$11.95.

The role of insects in human culture is a subject of growing interest, and this book treats one of the most interesting elements, insects in mythology. Myths seemingly convey history, but actually represent natural history, and religious, philosophical, psychological aspects of culture. That insects should be important elements of myths is an idea that is quite foreign to modern western cultures, but nevertheless widespread when viewed from an historical and world-wide perspective. Kritsky and Cherry introduce the reader to several cultures where insects occur in myths, and provide insight that allows an appreciation of insects in ancient and diverse civilizations.

There are three major sections to this book: general mythology, old world mythology, and new world mythology. The first section points out that insect symbols are common. For example, ants and bees are often symbols of industriousness and organization, whereas grasshoppers represent destruction. Quite interesting is the observation that there are many parallels in mythology; cultures distant in time or geography often use the same insect symbols. The section on old world mythology consists of chapters on insect names derived from Greek and Roman mythology, insects in Egyptian mythology, insects in the bible, and cicadas in Chinese mythology. The section on new world mythology consists of chapters on insects in Mesoamerican astronomy, insects in the mythology of Native Americans, and mosquito origin myths.

Almost everyone will find something of interest in this little book. Personally, I've often won-

dered about the origin of some insect family names, so it was interesting to read about some minor Roman and Greek deities, and how their roles in mythology relate to the behavior and morphology of insects. Anyone teaching a course in introductory entomology or insect classification will find numerous tidbits of information to spice up lectures, and make those horrible, unpronounceable order and family names more appealing. The chapter on re-interpretation of the references to insects in the bible was also quite revealing, both because it reinforces the importance of locusts to residents of the Middle East, and because it highlights the tractability of the "gospel."

The major strengths of this little book are that it brings together a diverse set of very interesting literature, and provides an introduction to literature that is scattered and often overlooked. The major weakness is that it truly is a little book, and in most cases the reader hungers for more detail and explanation than is provided. Although some chapters have been published previously, this book brings them together in a concise and useful format. It is a reference that many will want for a quick, enjoyable read, and for a valuable instructional aid. Even if you do not engage in formal teaching, think of the conversational value of being able to explain why mosquito images appear on totem poles!

John L. Capinera
Department of Entomology and Nematology
University of Florida
Gainesville, FL 32611-0620