

How feasible is it to establish cross-cultural influence and the adaptation of myths between cultures? Investigate one or two case studies to consider this question.

Although a direct definition of what exact a Myth is, and how this term is, in its details, different to a just a story, has been an active debate amongst academics for nearing the last 100 years, possible further [Gentile , J.S]. However, one thing that can be agreed on is that myths are a direct result of culture. Holding and reflecting the societal values of the culture that told them. However, an idea is brought forward of cross-cultural influence onto mythology, the idea that elements of myths (or in some cases perhaps the whole myth in its entirety) could be shared from culture to culture. But how feasible is this as an idea. Well, it vastly depends on what myths and cultures are in question. Looking at Greek and Roman cultures, this idea of a shared mythology is very clear, large elements of each culture's mythology is shared. However, this is not so clearly the case with other mythology, such as with the British Arthurian mythology, the argument is far less strong for cross-cultural influence however that's not to say that it's completely absent.

Furthermore, the adaption of these myths between cultures can possibly highlight the cultural differences. How it is that a myth created by one group can be changed to fit the cultures of another.

Firstly, one of the most obvious examples of cross-cultural influence on myths and mythologies is undoubtable seen within the large cross over and shared influence with Greek and Roman mythology, for example the Roman Hercules and the Greek Heracles myths. The myth held cultural importance within both societies, this can be seen with its common appearance within art, such as with



Figure 1 Heracles depicting in a Pompeii wall painting [Pompeii in Pictures]

Pompeiiian wall paintings and its appearance on Greek Vases.

The two versions of the myth are extremely similar, each telling the story of the hero completing the twelve labours. However, this shared myth is not without its differences, perhaps the most obvious of these are within the names of the characters and places within the myth, each version of the myth have different names that more reflect the cultures in which they are told, for example the father of Heracles within the Greek, is Zeus and for the Roman Hercules father is named Jupiter, each being essentially the same character, God of the sky and fulfilling the same role in the story. Although this change seems minor it clearly shows how myths will be altered to better align with the new host culture. Similarly, the locations within the story also change, notably in the Roman version of the story the tenth labour place in Italy [Lesso, R] localising the myth.

Greco-Roman mythology is a fine example of cross-cultural mythology; the similarities and cultural adaptations are clear and it's fair to say that in at least some areas in myth, cross cultural influence did happen in abundance.

Although cross-cultural influence is clear in Greco-Roman mythology, could it still be a part of a mythology where it is far less obvious for example Arthurian legend. These British myths on the surface seem to be completely independent in their stories, characters and themes, however upon close inspection this doesn't appear to be completely the case.

Cultural influence in Arthurian myth is less obvious and more of a nuanced topic. Although there are no obvious examples it is not without debate one of such debates claims that the myth dates back to much older Celtic mythology.

Gretchen Koenig's Thesis titled "The Influence of Celtic Myth and Religion on the Arthurian Legends" explores this topic in great detail. Koenig claims that many of the characters in Arthurian legends are reimagining of older Celtic Gods adapted to fit the new culture.

Koenig suggests that early versions of Arthur stories such as the ones from the Welsh Mabinogion are thematically similar to the early myths of Gwydion. Furthermore, they claim that Morgan Le Fay is a later formation of Morrighane, the Celtic God of Death and war.

However, this is not without debate. Tichelaar in 'King Arthur's Children' claims that Arthur being a later form of Gwydion is "not likely" citing an overall lack of evidence. Claiming the similarities are far too broad to be an example of cross-cultural influence.

One idea as a possible reason for this is the idea of a shared cultural memory, both Celtic mythology and the later Arthurian myths share geography and in some areas a people as well. But then again the evidence for this is thin and it is currently impossible to prove. However, there is also the idea that this is just coincidence, patterns will emerge in anything if you look hard enough.

Koenig also puts forward an idea of the large cultural change within the Celtic cultures during the myth's lifespan, being the change between Paganism to Christianity, suggesting this is a means for the myths to survive when faced with vast cultural change.

Although this cross-cultural influence based of Celtic myth is debated it is clear that at least some form of cultural sharing happens with this mythology, and that can be seen within the cultures of Britain, with one of the possible earliest Arthurian texts coming from a Welsh Poem "*Y Gododdin*" from around the year 829. But the Myth became a large part of both Welsh and Anglo-Saxon cultures. With the myth taking shape spanning locations across of both Wales and England. However, this example of cross-cultural influence is relatively minor.

Although the cross-cultural influence on Arthurian is appearing to be minimal and activity debated, one of the main points for this idea of a cross-cultural influence is seen more in a thematic approach, a myth template as such. When taking a step back and viewing these myths through a blurred lens more patterns between myths between different cultures can be seen. When this is done similarities can even be seen between the Herakles/Hercules myths and the stories of Arthurian legend.

On the broadest sense each myth tells the story of a hero journey, a story with a divine purpose. Both myths also contain stories of married women being tricked by men discussed as their husbands, furthermore both heroes end up killing their children in some way, with Hercules going mad and killing his family and Arthur fatally wounding Mordred at the battle of Camlann.

Why this is, is something that is being actively debated, one explanation to this was put forward by Puhvel in his book "*comparative mythology*" He suggests an idea of a shared pre-historical religion, of which's these mythological templates originate and though thousands of years had morphed into the myths we know today. He suggests why theses myths from seemingly unconnected cultures share themes and story elements is because they ordinate from the same story. Although this would act as an explanation for this phenomenon it is not with vast criticism. However, if t these thematic similarities proof of seemingly unconnected societies having long forgotten relationships, sharing stories is impossible to tell.

On the other side of the debate is the idea of human nature. Human beings want to see stories about a hero's journey, characters that face struggles. That these stories developed independently from one another and their similarities are just a result of the independent societies all being human and that innate human desire for certain story elements. This can still be seen in how these certain story elements are still in stories created in the across the world in the modern day, such as the hero's journey.

However, both of these explanations are the two extremes of the scale. It is more likely that the one possible that the true answer lies somewhere in the middle, cross-cultural influenced undoubtable happened but a large element of coincidence can also be at play here.

However, another point to make towards the idea of cross-cultural influence on myth is that these myths, despite their age are still massively culturally relevant, these stories are still being changed and altered to fit into different cultures to this day.

For an example a famous modern telling of a Heracles myth is Walt Disney's 1997 animated "Hercules", and this itself is a great example of cross-cultural influence on mythology. The Heracles myth has been massively altered and adapted by a culture which is both geographically far and cultural distance for the society that formed the myth. As with the original romanisation of the myth, names have been altered to better fit a North American audience such as Megara being called a more western sounding Meg and Heracles himself being called by his roman, and more culturally recognised, name while a large amount of the cast retains their Greek titles such as Zeus and Hades. Furthermore, the story undergoes a large number of changes to be more fitting with the morals of the story's new host culture. Showing how modern American culture has been

influenced by the ancient Greek myth and how it has been adapted as a result.

This can also be seen with Arthurian Myths which has had a large number of modern retellings especially within Britain, from large and popular productions as the BBC's '*Merlin*' to small Welsh audio dramas such as Tin Can Audio's '*Camlann*'. The myths still remain culturally relevant even after 1000 years and vast amounts of cultural change. A very prominent example of this is with the cult classic comedy '*Monty Python and the Holy Grail*' a film that has been described by the BBC as "a British Classic". This Arthurian adaptation is wildly inaccurate to both the medieval era it supposedly set in and the original myth. However, the changes made to the story are similar to the changes made to the Heracles myth when it became Romanised, such as changed place names, the Monty Python film adds a reference to "*the Chicken of Bristol*", with Bristol not appearing in any capacity in the original myth. Similarly with character names, although maintain some of the original names such as King Arthur, Sir Galahad it also changes names such as naming one of the knights 'Sir Robin the Not-Quite-So-Brave-as-Sir Launcelot' which not only fits its new modern British culture but also helps fit with the comedy theme of the retelling. This in itself is just another example of cross-culture influence and adaptation on myth. Modern British culture is vastly different from that of its past and this past culture still influences the modern stories being told.

It is clear that some elements of cross-cultural influences have affected the mythologies of certain societies, although some more than others. Myths from vastly different cultures can appear to share themes and story features although the reason for this is debated. But this cross-cultural influence of ancient mythologies is not just a historical thing as is still happening to this day within modern media and similar adaptations are occurring to better align these myths with their new cultures.

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