

**Simon Hornblower, *Lycophron: Alexandra. Greek Text, Translation, Commentary, and Introduction***, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015, 656 pp., ISBN 978-0-19-957670-8, £120.00.

Simon HORNBLOWER'S [= H.] 2015 work, the third volume on Hellenistic poetry published by the Oxford University Press since 2012, following Callimachus' *Aetia* (ed. Anette HARDER, 2012) and Callimachus' *Hymns* (ed. Susan STEPHENS 2015; see Eos CIII 2016, pp. 163 f.), is a very broad yet comprehensive single-volume text featuring both an introduction and commentary to the text.

The book includes maps, illustrations and a prose translation. Unlike the Oxford editions mentioned above, H.'s commentary is provided under the main text and arranged into two columns, probably as a result of the extraordinary character of the *Alexandra*, known in ancient times as τὸ σκοτεινὸν ποίημα, "an obscure poem" (Suda s.v. Λυκόφρων) – a very complicated work in terms of language (neologisms, *hapax legomena*), subject matter (rare versions of myths) and style (numerous allusions, enigmatic style). In order to comprehend the poem, one has to constantly refer to the footnotes; therefore, two columns of explanatory text at the bottom of the page substantially improve the experience of reading.

Another point is that commentaries of such length sometimes take the form of an essay or polemic with other researchers of the *Alexandra*; sometimes a whole page is devoted to just a few lines, and at other times the commentary is spread over several pages (e.g. pp. 406–411). In such cases, the poem is completely lost from the reader's sight and replaced by a scholarly disquisition – this to the benefit of acquiring knowledge, but at the cost of impaired contact with the text itself.

The extensive introduction consisting of 120 pages refers mainly to the historical background but also tackles literary and philological issues. There are three problems that seem to come to the fore: (1) the sources and influences that shaped the *Alexandra* (pp. 7–38); (2) the issue of the authorship and place of the poem's origin (pp. 39–49; 114); and (3) the comparison of the epigraphic material with cult epithets in the poem, which greatly promotes understanding of the poem's historical and religious background (pp. 62–94).

The most controversial issue is the work's authorship. The *Alexandra* is not only "an obscure poem" but it also presents a continued challenge for researchers as regards its author. Consequently, their opinions concerning the problem appear to take three standpoints: (1) the author was Lycophron of Chalcis, a member of the Alexandrian Pleiad, belonging to the same literary environment as Callimachus, Theocritus, Apollonius, and Alexander Aetolus; (2) the author was Lycophron of Chalcis, but the text of the *Alexandra* was interpolated after some time; (3) the author was not Lycophron of Chalcis but someone who lived after him. The doubts about the authorship of the *Alexandra* stem from two passages on Rome (Rome's future grandeur at sea and on land: 1226–1230; an avenger who in the sixth generation after the death of Alexander will take revenge on the Greeks for the destruction of Troy: 1446–1450). Many researchers believe that the poet could not have foreseen the emerging power of Rome back in the mid 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC. H. supports the third option, claiming that the author is anonymous and the latest episode to which the poet refers in his work concerns T. Quinctius Flamininus, the alleged "avenger", defeating the ruler of Macedonia, Philip V, in 197 BC. This is not a new hypothesis. It had been promoted earlier, as the editor mentions (p. 37), by, among others, BELOCH, WILHELM, ZIEGLER, and also FRASER (who in 1979 changed his mind and came to the conclusion that Lycophron of Chalcis could not have been the author of the *Alexandra*). On the other hand, the contrary view was held by WILAMOWITZ, HOLZINGER and MOMIGLIANO, and the theory of interpolation was proposed by Stephanie WEST.

The main problem lies in the fact that while none of the parties is capable of providing a decisive argument for or against their position, certain hypotheses are presented which researchers of different views try to refute. Certain assumptions, however, made by H. do not seem to be fully convincing. Firstly, the issue of Hellenistic intertextuality, and especially that of the Alexandrian

poetry, is far more complex than it is assumed by the editor. Especially complex seems to be the problem of “synchronic allusiveness” or the situation where the poets created their works more or less at the same time, as it is practically impossible to precisely determine who was the original creator and who creatively transformed the motifs and scenes devised by the other (see e.g. episodes from the *Argonautica* by Apollonius of Rhodes [I 1207–1239; II 1–97] which should be compared with Theocritus’ *Idylls* 13 [*Hylas*] and 22 [*Dioskouroi*], respectively). Therefore, one may not say with all confidence, as the editor does (pp. 25 f.; 33–36), that the author of the *Alexandra* was inspired by, among others, the poetry of Eratosthenes, Moschus or Nicander of Colophon who lived a little later than Lycophron of Chalcis. It could have been quite the other way round: it could have been they who referred to his works.

Moreover, does not the opinion (shared by H.) about the poet’s extraordinary literary erudition, noticeable on the stylistic, thematic and lexical layer of the text (pp. 7–38), indirectly point at the person who, on the one hand, had full access to all kinds of literary sources, and, on the other, was active in the period of the most intense intellectual ferment, when the mere environment as comprised of outstanding individuals generated additional artistic impetus? Both of these conditions would rather point at Alexandria (and the first decades of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century) as the place housing the greatest library and home to a group of restless poets who every day simultaneously worked on editing many literary works; all the more that the intertextual game between the author of the *Alexandra* and other poets was not only played on the thematic layer or in the jugglery of motifs and episodes, but also in the deepest lexical layer<sup>1</sup>, which we now manage to read with the help of computer databases and search engines. Would it not, therefore, be tempting to assert that a poem that is so densely sown with references to other Alexandrian poets was the effect of everyday contact with other artists living in the mid 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC, with whom new ideas and new philological findings were shared *ad hoc*? It is worth mentioning that Lycophron of Chalcis worked “desk against desk” with Alexander Aetolus, who in his elegy, the *Apollo*, used prophecy as the way to transfer narration into the future tense. The same method of narration was applied by the author of the *Alexandra*.

Moreover, the argument that the date to which the poet refers to in his famous lines 1447–1450 is the year 197, when the Romans defeated Philip V at Cynoscephalae, does not seem to be fully convincing. H. assumes that the sixth generation after Alexander the Great mentioned in these lines could more or less live at that time, which makes the victorious commander, T. Quinctius Flamininus, the “wrestler-avenger”. It is, however, not clear why the author of the *Alexandra* should assume that human generation is 25 years, as H. does (p. 496), since ancient sources also suggest several other values: 40, 33, 30, or even 100 years.

Also the concept of the poem’s author being born in Locri (as supported by many references to this Italic city) does not seem to be convincing, as during that time the West was still attractive for the Alexandrian poets (mainly thanks to the historians Timaeus and Lycus) as a new and unexplored theme in poetry. For example, Callimachus devotes a relatively large portion of the *Aetia* to issues taken from the broadly understood Italic tradition (e.g. a long passage on Sicilian cities [frgs. 43–43a HARDER], a story of a Roman named Gaius [frgs. 106–107a HARDER] and a story of the tyrant Phalaris [frgs. 45–46 HARDER]). Apollonius, naturally, also describes the western *oikumene* in book 4 of the *Argonautica*, not to mention Theocritus, who placed his imagined bucolical world on Sicily. Certainly, Locri is often mentioned, but if H. himself claims that there is no evidence to support this hypothesis (p. 49), it has to remain in the realm of speculation. On the other hand, one may deliberate if the poet’s interest in Locri does not indirectly point to Lycophron of Chalcis as the author. Ancient sources indicate that the adoptive father of the poet (Suda s.v. Λυκόφρων), the

<sup>1</sup> See e.g. A.S. HOLLIS, *Some Poetic Connections of Lykophron’s Alexandra*, in: P.J. FINGLASS, C. COLLARD, N.J. RICHARDSON (eds), *Hesperos: Studies in Ancient Greek Poetry Presented to M.L. West on his Seventieth Birthday*, Oxford 2007, pp. 276–293.

historian Lycus, was born in Rhegium, a town situated not far from Locri. It is therefore possible that Lycophron stayed in Italy for some time with Lycus, maybe also in Locri, as it was, as H. puts it, “a cultured place in the Hellenistic period” (p. 48), attractive for Lycus and Lycophron, both men of letters. Having let our imagination run wild, we may also assume that it was exactly during that time when Lycophron had the chance to observe the Roman army growing in power, as in 282, just before the Pyrrhic War, the Romans established their garrisons both in Locri and in Rhegium and sent their warships to Thurii. Arguably, the growing threat posed by Rome to the Greek cities in Italy inspired the poet to insert the aforementioned passages into the text of the *Alexandra*, thus giving rise to so many doubts among scholars. Again, there is no irrefutable evidence to support this view, but there is also no argument that would definitely repudiate it.

When it comes to the text itself, H. often follows the edition by SCHEER (1881, <sup>2</sup>1908) and HOLZINGER (1895), also in terms of punctuation. HURST/KOLDE’s book (2008) is far more economical in the use of commas and full stops when compared to H.’s edition (and also that by SCHEER and HOLZINGER), who try to introduce some sort of order to the chaotic flow of Cassandra’s talk. The proposition of HURST/KOLDE, on the other hand, is to imitate the heroine’s “stream of consciousness”, which brings the text closer to the original as well as to the modernist narrative techniques. It may not make the poem any easier to read, but in the abundance of other difficulties, this seems to be a minute problem.

H. maintains that “the text provided in this book is intended as no more than a companion to the commentary. The app. crit. is far from registering all variant readings (for these see Mascialino or Hurst/Kolde)” (p. 113). At this point the editor indicates in a footnote four “obvious slips” which were found in the edition by A. HURST and A. KOLDE and adds by means of *praeteritio*: “my app. crit. silently corrects these” (p. 113, n. 322). Also, H. seems not to agree with the lessons selected by HURST, who often preferred a *lectio difficilior*.

The text of the *Alexandra* as edited by H. also requires some corrections. Below is the version of the latest edition followed by a correct variant:

at 20 for χερνάδος read χερμάδος // at 25 for φαινοῦσαι read φαίνουσαι // at 49 for οὐδαίαν θεάν read οὐδαίαν θεόν (about Persephone; H.’s version seems to be acceptable as the gender of the noun is consistent with the gender of the adjective, however, firstly, the form of θεόν was retained in Mss.; secondly, a female deity may be described in Greek in the masculine with a feminine article [ἡ θεός]; and thirdly, at this point Lycophron engages in a dialogue with Apollonius of Rhodes and Theocritus who use similar forms to describe the chthonic goddesses who were equally as dangerous as Persephone and, importantly, were identified with her: Rhea and Hecate [see A.R. I 1102: δεινὴν θεόν; A.R. III 1213 δεινὴ θεός; Theoc. *Id.* 2, 36: ἄ θεός]) // at 62 for ξυνευνετοῦ read ξυνευνέτου // at 77 the situation is quite contrary, as H. follows HOLZINGER and not Mss. and LSJ, and uses the form of κυνοσφάγου instead of κυνοσφαγούς (dictionary form: κυνοσφαγής) // at 80 κακλάζων read καχλάζων // at 125 λίτας read λιτάς // at 146 δαίσασθαί read δαίσασθαι // at 147 δοίω read δοιῶ // at 150 βλάστοντα read βλαστόντα // at 227 μοίρα read μοίρα // at 328 ράϊσει read ράισει // at 340 πύρσον read πυρσόν // at 349 λαίνου read λαίνου // at 361 ἦ read ἦ // at 387 στενου read στενοῦ // at 536 πρευμένης read πρευμένης // at 545 ὠκριώμενοι read ὠκριωμένοι // at 556 πλεῦρ’ read πλεῦρ’ // at 618 ἐκβάλλων read ἐκβαλών // at 657 φίλον read φίλων // at 676 φόρβαδες read φορβάδες // at 679 Κταρός read Κτάρος // at 818 πλάσταισι read πλασταῖσι // at 855 εὐμαρίδας read εὐμαρίδας (an exception, see Herodianus, *De prosodia catholica* I 99) // at 1027 νήσον read νῆσον // at 1074 Ἄμφισσαν τε read Ἄμφισσάν τε // at 1152 Γυγαῖα read Γυγαίᾳ // at 1161 Σίθωνος read Σιθῶνος // at 1177 κλάγγαισι read κλαγγαῖσι // at 1192 Ὀφίονος read Ὀφίωνος // at 1372 στρωφωμένη read στρωφωμένη // at 1385 κόρη read κόρη. The lapses mentioned above are usually correctly written if cited in the commentary.

H. brightens the darkness designed by the author of the *Alexandra* to obscure his poem. This is achieved by a very extensive commentary to the text, relating to the subject matter, history, religion

as well as literary structure. An indispensable value of the introduction and commentary is that they confront the text with epigraphical material, which proves that the religious reality depicted in the *Alexandra* was close to that of a cult reality. However, a more inquisitive reader should also refer to other editions, e.g. that of MASCIALINO (1964) or HURST/KOLDE (2008), due to the very limited critical apparatus offered by H. The same two editions or some of the editions published earlier, e.g. by HOLZINGER (1881) or SCHEER (1881, <sup>2</sup>1908) would be recommended to read the text itself.

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