

**James J. CLAUSS, Martine CUYPERS, Ahuvia KAHANE (eds.), *The Gods of Greek Hexameter Poetry: From the Archaic Age to Late Antiquity and Beyond*, Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 2016 (Potsdamer Altertumswissenschaftliche Beiträge 56), ISBN 978-3-515-11523-0, 458 pp., €69.00.**

Greek mythology has been defined as a vast collection of tales and semihistorical legends mixed with folktale themes and enlivened by poetic invention. A new book has been published in order to shed light on the last and by no means the least important part of this multi-faceted phenomenon. At first sight it looks like a post-conference volume, which it is not. It started in 2013, when Marios SKEMPIS began organising a multi-authored book on the gods in Greek hexameter poetry. He could not finish his project, and he handed over the undertaking to those who finally edited the new work. In the preface we read that the contributors were partly invited to participate, and partly solicited to fill in gaps.

The book covers an enormous amount of poetic output. Two dozen contributors discuss Greek hexameter poetry from the archaic period to late antiquity. Hesiod is amply treated; there are chapters dedicated to *Theogony*, *Catalogue*, and *Shield*. The same goes for Homer; there are papers on the *Iliad*, the *Odyssey*, the *Homeric Hymns*. And the longest paper in the volume relates in detail the gods in Cyclic Epic. The book's following part contains chapters on Hellenistic poetry: Apollonius' *Argonautica*, Aratus' *Phaenomena*, Callimachus' *Hymns* and *Hecale*, and finally Moschus (we read not only about his *Europa* but are also informed about the much less well-known *Eros the Runaway*, the "wanted man"). Then we arrive at imperial poetry: not only the "post-Homeric" poets, i.e. Quintus of Smyrna, Triphiodorus, or Colluthus, are to be found. There are also chapters on Nonnus (to be precise, one and a half) and on Eudocia, the *Argonautica of Orpheus*, the *Sibylline Oracles*, and on the *Cynegetica*, early but erroneously attributed to Oppian. In addition, there is a brief epilogue on the reception of some of these texts among the Romans and by some modern authors. Two big themes are treated in this short section (Homer's gods and Virgil's *Aeneid*, and the gods in Ovid's *Fasti*); then we read about Tennyson, and finally about Derek Walcott and Alice Oswald. This last part, entitled "Beyond the Greeks", is the least comprehensive, and some may look in vain here for their beloved poets or poetry. But we get a near-comprehensive survey in the three preceding parts on archaic, Hellenistic, and imperial poetry.

It is hardly possible to relate, let alone judge, the contents of volumes of this size. Most companions that have been published since the end of the preceding century are equally difficult to evaluate. Instead, a few observations may indicate to the reader what he or she may expect. The following remarks concern the form and relate to the contents of the chapters, some of which are ground-breaking, perhaps even seminal; others sound familiar, being characterised by a broad sweep, while again other texts are minutely finished, brilliant miniatures.

First, their form. Due to the fact that some contributors are senior colleagues while others are considerably younger, the individual chapters differ greatly from each other in their approach. It is obvious that some have already worked extensively on their subjects, while others are at the beginning or at an early stage of their academic career. However, something else can be observed. Some papers focus more on ancient texts than others do. The authors of these papers, which are thoroughly written, start their argument by citing from ancient sources. The chapter on Sibylline oracles by Jane LIGHTFOOT may serve as an example; it contains, for instance, a dozen pages on Euhemerism, giving insight into things one had no notion of before. One may also single out Adam BARTLEY's elegant paper on Artemis' quadriforme nature in "Oppian", i.e. Hellenistic, traditional, oriental, and imperial.

Other contributors, however, begin differently by discussing modern secondary literature. This is stimulating, it goes without saying, but the process may confuse a reader unfamiliar with the subject itself. Moreover, a few of the authors are also given to modish parlance, a mannerism that does not necessarily make their argument more convincing. Time and again, unstructured paraphrasis, void of attraction, fills many pages, but there is no disputing matters of taste.

Second, the contents. As already mentioned, great classical themes are treated. Important figures such as the Zeus of the *Iliad* (and his divine entourage) or the Poseidon of the *Odyssey* are treated as it is proper for them (by Jim MARKS and Richard P. MARTIN, respectively), while the gods in cyclic epic are elaborately as well as skilfully treated by Christos TSAGALIS. The chapters are of varying sizes, though. While few exceed 20 pages, some are considerably shorter. Being more inclined to browse through these, a curious reader is more than once surprised by the stimulating insight to be gained, for instance, on double motivation – another great classic, this time observed and analysed (by Laura MIGUÉLEZ-CAVERO) in Triphiodor. Once belittled as one of “the last irregular heartbeats of a moribund culture”, Triphiodor appears now in a very different light. A breath of fresh air frees us from long-established aesthetic clichés. Other papers are equally inspiring. One also feels rewarded, for instance, while reading Ivana PETROVIC about Callimachus’ hymns as a group. Opposed to the maladjusted Homeric Olympian family, a subject of a pleasant caricature in the eyes of an intellectual as early as Xenophanes, Callimachus’ hymns depict harmonious and ordered family life – an image that seems to correspond to the Hellenistic ideal of kingship, as the circumspect author rightly states.

As can be guessed from these brief remarks, an impressive array of themes emerge in this work. The volume, however, neither covers all Greek hexameter poetry nor discusses individual poems exhaustively. Thus, the book may well serve as a starting-point for further research, as the editors intend it to be. What is missing, though, is a continuous discourse, a kind of constant narrative, in short, a narrator who organises the material. In this respect, the monograph by D.C. FEENEY, *The Gods in Epic: Poets and Critics of the Classical Tradition* (Oxford 1991), more than once cited in this book, set a good example, then in his times. Now we hear from a variety of learned voices, who time and again seem to live in worlds quite apart from each other. Surely, this reflects modern scholarship. Luckily, as a sort of introduction to this ever-interesting panorama, the editors provide the reader with abstracts of what is to come. Covering a highly informative 17 pages, their concise remarks are most welcome to those who wish to see in an instant whether the volume is of any use for their particular purpose. And indeed, the editors convincingly contextualise what their contributors have to say. Many more modern companions should begin in the way this book does.

If non-epic texts had been included, the work might have become indigestible. It is a pity, however, that we are never told how gods and goddesses interact in non-epic texts, i.e. texts composed with the aid of other metrical schemes than the dactylic hexameter. Time and again, this absence is a bit annoying, since texts such as Sappho’s so-called hymn to Aphrodite (fr. 1) or Alcaeus’ prayer, for instance, to the Dioscuri (fr. 34) invite comparison with epic texts on various levels and for many reasons. Their light-heartedness, their openly displayed assurance of the poetic “I”, their smooth “easy-goingness” single them out. Of course, lyric as opposed to epic may always appear like that. Furthermore, it is attractive simply because it looks more “authentic”, or at least, lyric texts pretend to be less distanced, thus encouraging a mis-reading. Yet, a chapter on these literary techniques might have been of use to some readers. Had this volume been dedicated to one epoch only, it might have been feasible to include all relevant texts, whether they were written in epic metre or conceived as lyrical texts. Perhaps someone could create such a volume one day, too.

Not only in lyric but also in epic texts, a remarkable closeness of men to the gods characterises the world of Greek myths, an essential fact that the book’s concept somehow neglects, or does not highlight. Again, this is a pity, because from the first book of the *Iliad* this closeness forms a central and defining part of the human-divine relationship. From the *Iliad* onwards, the gods’ influence ranged from psychological encouragement to physical assistance, but we read little about this aspect. Recently, a rather popular journal such as “Le Point” dedicated a single issue to these aspects,

a fact that illustrates their importance. Published last summer, “La Grèce et ses dieux” united texts such as the *Homeric Hymn to Apollo* and even extracts from Colluthus in translation. Explained by scholars, they became accessible to a wider public.

Poets were attracted by this closeness, became attached to it, reworked it again and again (as Homer does in his repeated encounters between Achilles and Thetis). They did so because it gave them the chance to make their characters move on from one stage to another. Some poets even send their heroes on an emotional journey, from which, for instance, Achilles never returned, while Orestes made it *in extremis*, both being guided by divine forces. Moreover, it is highly entertaining to observe how poets differ in their treatment of their heroes, is it not? How cool, for instance, Orestes’ madness may seem in distant Aeschylus, and how equally intensely the audience must have felt it in Euripides. Of this we do not hear much either.

Having said that, however, one must not forget that even such a well done book as this cannot treat everything we need to know to fully appreciate its theme. Reading this book, one simply wishes for more of the same, high quality.

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