

Paul Curtis, *Stesichoros's Geryoneis*. *Mnemosyne Supplements* 333. Brill, 2011. ISBN 978-90-04-20767-7. Pp. xvii + 201. Leiden and Boston. \$ 133.00.

Curtis's book is divided into two basic parts, an introduction followed by a commentary. Placed between these parts is a new, revised text of the major fragments of *P. Oxy.* 2617 based on Curtis's own reading of the papyrus. Related texts which are to be found in Athenaeus and Strabo are included as well, all accompanied by a useful English translation. The apparatus, written in elegant Latin, gives a clear impression of the papyrus and of its emendations. Photographs of the papyri are provided.

In his Preface Curtis announces something “new and exciting”, namely, to consider Stesichoros's songs in the context of a cult. The religious context could provide an explanation for the fact that Stesichoros presents Geryon with a remarkable sympathy, for “sympathy felt for a fallen or unfortunate figure was an important feature of cult worship” (xi). Later in a detailed treatment Curtis seems more cautious.

In his introduction, the notorious question of how Stesichoros's works were performed is thoroughly discussed and the need for a new arrangement of the fragments explained. Before that, Curtis treats the archaeological evidence (9–19). He strongly opposes the view that Stesichoros's *Geryoneis* initiated the vast wealth of 6th and 5th century vase and cup paintings of the myth: “Such pursuits are futile” (10). In Curtis's view, the Geryon myth made its way into early Greek art as one of the common tales of terrifying monsters known to many nomadic cultures in the Near East. A detailed discussion of archaeological evidence follows the result of which is that “at least a hundred years before Stesichoros's version” the story was established in the Greek world (19). Many a title of Stesichoros's works confirm his interest in Herakles (21); his triumph over Geryon is considered by Curtis as “the arrival of the new order and the dismissal of fear and unfamiliarity which the monster embodied. (...) the Indo-European peoples in their wanderings must have felt similar fears all over Europe and Asia. This may help to explain the widespread diffusion of the triple-headed monster myth in the northern hemisphere” (22).

The mode of performance is as unknown as the genre(s) of Stesichoros's poetry. Curtis tentatively describes the songs of Stesichoros as “Epic Hymns’, i.e. choral odes, containing lengthy mythical narrative, that were performed at a festival” (23). Curtis considers the *Geryoneis* as performed by a chorus and eliminates arguments for a solo performance one by one (24–36). He rightly states “the sober reality (...) that nobody really knows how long these poems were (...)” (29). At great length Curtis refutes Page's (and Barrett's) attempt to reconstruct the order of the surviving fragments by predicting their place according to the metrical schema.

In his remarks on the cult of Geryon, Curtis turns again to the Indo-European heritage (38–44). The similarities between the Geryon story and early Indic-Iranian material have long been recognized, and Curtis adds his own collection of Eastern parallels as an appendix (177–179, partly in Devanagari, referred to in the commentary, e.g., on p. 129¹² or 142¹⁵). All that, however, boils down into cautious statements, and Curtis speaks of his observations as “very tentative” (44). The faint evidence for a Geryon cult in the West is gathered in a footnote (40¹⁵⁰), but it seems somehow odd to think of the *Geryoneis* as being performed at a festival in honour of

his killer Herakles (45). In his commentary on the poppy simile (S 15), Curtis's view on the 'sympathy for Geryon' theme is even more distanced (147): "The passage is believed by some (...) to invoke pathos and a sense of tragic loss for Geryon cut down in his blooming youth", and again (149): "The poppy simile (...) has led some to believe that Stesichoros presents Geryon in a sympathetic light. This idea is interesting and one that could probably be secured if there were another two or three lines following."

In the final chapter of his introduction Curtis returns to Page's reconstruction of the *Geryoneis* which he disregards. Page claimed that if the upper or lower margin of a fragment is preserved and the fragment's metrical schema is confirmed, it can be assigned to a particular column within the series of thirteen (33). A closer look had already revealed too many uncertainties (31–36). Page in his reconstruction relied much on Apollodoros's account of the Geryon-myth and used it as a template, but, as Curtis rightly stresses, Stesichoros's version was different from that of Apollodoros (63): "Stesichoros's appears to be a dramatisation of the myth, and Apollodoros's merely a synopsis." Confronted with a similarly sceptical discussion of the papyrus (59–61, e.g., the question whether all its fragments do belong to one single work), one feels the need to support Page and Barrett, two skilled and experienced scholars who did all they could to regain at least the broad outlines of a lost work.

Unfortunately, as Martin West put it, treasuries of sparkling, sinewy Stesichorean verse are at nobody's disposal, and as a result, things are seldom obvious with Stesichoros. Curtis in his introduction is well aware of these obstacles, gives a clear insight into earlier scholarly work, and offers innovative ideas. He acknowledges moving on slippery ground and being a bit bold, e.g., in a phrase like (45) "The likelihood of Stesichoros's *Geryoneis* as a song performed at some festival seems at least now feasible" or like (62) "There is nothing immediately objectionable to the idea that Stesichoros's works were written down and later sold as souvenirs after some performance (...). This certainly seems feasible (...)." It would be easy to dismiss phrases of this kind which even contradict Curtis's precision and acumen shown in evaluating other scholars' contributions. Working on fragmentary texts however will never proceed without discussing the probability of a proposal.

In the commentary-section each fragment gets a separate introduction. The commentary itself is well-informed. Much attention is paid to metre, rhyming (e.g., 110sq.), and stylization (e.g., 143 on the unpleasant sound of sigmas). Metrical schemes are included, varying supplements discussed, matters of vocabulary and style diligently judged (e.g., 106sq.). Curtis quite often hints at the scarcity of our knowledge (e.g., "problematic" 105, "nothing more than a guess" 112, "context is obscure" 114, "various supplements – none illuminating or helpful" 129, etc.) and tends even to become nihilistic (119): "One has to concede to the fact that the original sense of this fragment is probably lost forever." Paradoxically yet, with these lines Curtis introduces his carefully nuanced, profound, and serviceable notes which make for some interesting reading. A fine book.

GERSON SCHADE
FREIE UNIVERSITÄT BERLIN
gerson.schade@fu-berlin.de