

**M. Fantuzzi and C. Tsagalis, edds., *The Greek Epic Cycle and its Ancient Reception: a Companion*.** Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015. 9781107012592. \$195 (HB) \$156 (eBook). xii +678.

I usually greet a new Companion with mixed feelings. Although I often consult them in fields at the boundaries of my own (Biblical studies, for example), I share the widespread worry that they have excessively proliferated. For the Epic Cycle, though, the format seemed ideal and the need genuine, and the list of contributors for this volume is splendid.

However, the topic exacerbates the standard difficulties of writing for such collections. Nobody wants to read a dull and bland account of a controversial subject, so authors must have a defined position, and ideally they also want to say something new. At the same time, the reader is usually not a specialist, and needs a reliable guide, one that is scrupulous in presenting all the evidence. And if the account is not both brief and lucid, the volume is not doing its job. The blurb on the back cover of this book says that it “provides the scholarly community and graduate students with a thorough critical foundation for reading and interpreting them,” and that is a fair description, and a warning. Those planning to work on archaic Greek epic, whether students or experienced scholars, should skim the chapters by those whose publications they already know well and read the rest, at least the first four hundred pages or so. However, I would be uneasy about recommending some chapters to many whom I see as frequent users of Companions—an undergraduate or to a colleague in English who taught Homer in translation and wanted to learn about the Cycle.

The editors seem to have decided to map the territory, recruit the finest scholars available, and let them have their say. The map is very reasonable: a first group of chapters addresses the origins of the Cycle and the meaning of “Cycle.” Two clear contributions address the relationships between Homer and Cyclic poetry (Finkelberg and Kullmann), followed by Bernabé on Language and Meter, Rengakos on narrative technique, Konstan on humor and irony, and Carpenter on “The Trojan War in early Greek Art” (a very rewarding discussion of Trojan images in their contexts, though not entirely relevant to the Cycle itself) The second gives a chapter to each of the poems. The last addresses ancient reception, with a paper by Fantuzzi on “The aesthetics of sequentiality” and chapters on Ibycus/Stesichorus, Pindar, tragedy, Hellenistic poetry, art, Virgil, Ovid, Statius, the novel, and imperial epic. I especially valued the chapters on Pindar (I. Rutherford) and tragedy (A. Sommerstein).

The first section, on the origins of the individual poems included in the Cycle and the creation of the Cycle, is very informative. The editors’ introduction is very rich in information, but does not entirely clarify what the disagreements are and how the reader could judge among them. So it is first-rate as a reminder for those who have studied the Cycle before, but not perhaps an ideal guide for those who have not. Burgess opens with a sharp distinction between Homerocentric and Systemic models

that I don't find helpful, but the chapter becomes fair and nuanced as it continues. Nagy summarizes his positions very briefly, citing himself—a reader unfamiliar with his arguments would find it hard to follow. Foley-Arft runs through a variety of oral epic traditions to conclude with a brief polemic against Burgess' and Tsagalis' treatments of "motif transference"—I do not find this contribution very successful, because it moves too quickly for those not already familiar with the points debated and does not add much for those who are. West is predictably transparent but simply reiterates his own published views. Finkelberg, unlike Foley-Arft, supports motif transference, and it is frustrating that the term is not indexed.

The second section is mostly excellent. Many of these chapters are potentially valuable even for an undergraduate, and I would especially recommend Currie on the *Cypria*, Rengakos on the *Aethiopsis*, Kelly on the *Ilias parva*, Finglass on the *Ilious persis*, and Danek on the *Nostoi* as both informative and accessible, although all these chapters are very good. The others are just as valuable, but harder going—D'Alessio on *Titanomachy*, Cingano on *Oedipodea* and *Epigoni*, Torres-Guerra on *Thebaid*, and Debiasi on *Alcmeonis*.

Tsagalis' otherwise excellent chapter on the *Telegony* illustrates a occasional problem in the volume: starting on p. 382, he (convincingly) argues that the presence of a son of Odysseus named Arcesilaus in the *Telegony* indicates a Cyrenean background. But his summary of the poem has not named Arcesilaus, and while the chapter discusses the probability that Odysseus had a second son by Penelope and that Ptoliporthes and Arcesilaus are alternate names for the same character, it does not give the evidence that the poem contained a character named Arcesilaus. The reader who did not know the issue already, or did not have one of the editions at hand, could be bewildered. This is not a pervasive problem, but it is not unique.

In the last section, it is very hard to know where later authors or artists are using the Cycle directly and where the transmission is indirect, the contributors are both clear and honest about the difficulties. M. Squire's treatment of the "Tabulae Iliacae" is especially intriguing. It made me think, though, that we need a thoughtful and thorough study of what the different aesthetics based on the Cycle could be. These poems were famous both for following a story in simple chronological sequence, and for being very episodic, and how those interact in reception deserves more attention.

There are other matters that some readers will doubtless wish had received fuller attention. Why did Heracles' first sack of Troy not receive a Cyclic treatment? Since "notional epic" (the entire story of which any performance is a part) is important in considering the Cycle's origins, it would be useful to have some real study of how traditions generate them when all performances are partial—which surely means how stories were and are transmitted outside formal performance. Others will have their own unanswered questions, but the volume addresses so many that it would be petty to complain.

Inevitably, contributors disagree with each other, and inevitably there is repetition. Some chapters cross-reference helpfully, but many do not. Small errors of English idiom are found in most of the chapters by contributors who are not native speakers, but nothing is likely to cause serious difficulty.

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