

to produce offspring with mortals indicates that the two groups were envisaged as enough alike to be genetically compatible.

These reservations notwithstanding, there is no denying that shifting the emphasis from individual gods to the manner of their interaction throws much light on Homer's polytheism as a complex system of belief characterised by permanent tension and precarious balance, a system whose fluctuations affect both cosmic and social order. As far as the present reader is concerned, this is the main lesson of the book.

Tel Aviv University

MARGALIT FINKELBERG  
[finkelbe@tauex.tau.ac.il](mailto:finkelbe@tauex.tau.ac.il)

## THE BATTLE OF THE FROGS AND MICE IN ENGLISH

CHRISTENSEN (J.), ROBINSON (E.) (edd., trans.) *The Homeric Battle of the Frogs and Mice*. Pp. xiv + 198. London and New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018. Cased. ISBN: 978-1-3500-3594-2.  
 doi:10.1017/S0009840X1800135X

The mock-Homeric *Batrachomyomachia* (hereafter *BM*) is a fascinating work, and one in need of attention. T.W. Allen's OCT (1912) offers a text and a basic apparatus; M.L. West's Loeb (2003) has a text, an English prose translation and a brief introductory note. The only commentaries published in the last century have been those of R. Gleii, *Die Batrachomyomachie: Synoptische Edition und Kommentar* (1984), and M. Fusillo, *La battaglia delle rane e dei topi: Batrachomyomachia* (1988). As someone who has spent much of the last seven years working on the poem, I am delighted by any attempt to bring it to a wider audience. And C. and R. make clear from the outset that a wide audience is their goal: this book 'is an ideal fit for intermediate and early-advanced reading of Greek (from the secondary to graduate level)' (p. xi).<sup>1</sup>

It has five parts: an introduction, a Greek text, an English translation, a commentary and a glossary. The introduction sketches some key issues relating to the poem's composition and genre, although its coverage is uneven: it includes a detailed discussion of formulaic epithets in Homer, which has little relevance to the *BM*, while barely touching on important problems like the Archelaus Relief and the poem's ascription to 'Pigres the Carian' (both briefly and incorrectly summarised on p. 2). The glossary, at the other end, is full and helpful.

The real problems begin with the text. C. and R. offer a wholly new version of the poem, incorporating many of the lines that previous editors have deleted. (Most strikingly, they include 42–52, a bizarre and unmetrical digression that is unanimously regarded as Byzantine.) As a result, the Greek text they present is nonsense: a syntactical hash of duplicated phrases, sentence-fragments embedded in the middle of other sentences, verbs without subjects and metrical impossibilities (lest this be taken as hyperbole, cf. e.g. 98–100,

<sup>1</sup>I should make clear at this juncture that my own edition of the poem is in the process of publication with Oxford University Press. I shall not attempt to compare C. and R.'s work with my own, however, since their objectives are very different.

118, 229, 269 in the text). They claim that this ‘will encourage readers to consider [the interpolations] in depth and make some of their own editorial decisions’ (p. 4), which is laudable enough: but they provide none of the information required to make such decisions. There is no apparatus criticus; the problematic lines are not distinguished in any way from the surrounding text; the notes have no serious discussion of the arguments for or against a line’s inclusion. As a didactic exercise, this is like ushering a first-year medical student into an operating theatre, pointing at the anaesthetised patient and saying ‘Make him better’.

And yet C. and R. have clearly applied *some* editorial judgement. A handful of lines found in the earliest manuscripts have been omitted; conjectures by earlier editors have been adopted, although not marked as conjectures. The result is of no use to anybody. It is too scrambled to be read as a coherent Greek text, particularly by intermediate readers, but too heavily adulterated to stand as a ‘pure’ representation of the manuscript tradition and nothing outside it.

But there is worse to come. The *BM*’s convoluted transmission has saddled it with an assortment of lines outside the normal numbering sequence – 97a and so on. C. and R. have included many of these lines and then renumbered the text from scratch; the last line of the poem, usually 303, is now 315. This already renders comparison with other editions purgatorial. But – inexplicably and fatally – the commentary, which takes up more than half of the book, still uses the traditional numeration found in Allen, West et al. Line 97 is the last line of the poem where the text and the commentary match up. From that point on, the two streams diverge, until by the final scene ‘line 300’ (for example) is discussed in the note on line 287. A student who looks up line 300 in the commentary will find themselves reading about an entirely different bit of Greek and will have no way of working out where they ought to be looking, short of paging through the notes trying to pick out a word or phrase from the line they actually wanted to know about.

C. and R. insist that their translation is an aid to readers, not an artistic endeavour: ‘we have included a mostly literal translation of the poem retaining the same line numbers as our Greek text’ (p. xii). But it does not. The translation, like the commentary, uses the traditional numbering (although an error in the very final lines means it ends at 302, rather than 303). So the unfortunate reader cannot even turn from the Greek to the English looking for a translation, since beyond 97 the lines again fail to correspond. ‘Intermediate and early-advanced’ readers are being given Greek that does not make sense and a translation that does not match it.

The commentary, meanwhile, is inadequate. C. and R. are very interested in when the *BM* does or does not use Homeric phrasing, but are inconsistent in their observations. On line 16 they note that the word ξεινήϊα occurs five times in Homer, but not that the entire expression δῶρα δέ τοι δώσω appears at *Il.* 14.238. Many notes are pointless: the whole note on 142 reads ‘ἀλλὰ μάχεσθε: “But fight!” This seems like it might be typical of Homeric battle exhortations, but it is not’. Often a note restates the translation and nothing else. Sometimes a note contradicts what the translation says (e.g. on 95). Greek expressions ‘seem a bit forced’ (on 51, 60) or are ‘not exactly clear’ (on 98), without further comment.

For some issues I suspect the publishers should take the blame. Certainly the book seems to have passed through Bloomsbury’s hands without the slightest attention from a copy-editor or a proofreader. Typographic errors are everywhere, many of them serious (on p. 138 we read ‘for a the lacuna in th text’). Characters (‘Psiparchax’, p. 78) and scholars (‘Jacob Wackernagel’, p. 80) have their names misspelled. The presentation of Greek pings freely between typeset Greek, transliterated English and Latinised

English: ‘in Homer ἐπεύχομαι means “boast” or “threaten”’, but in the next note ‘in Homer, *aidê* indicates the action of a performing bard’ (p. 65).

The volume contains, in isolation, some interesting ideas. Parts of the introduction, such as that on the tradition of animal-fable, are useful despite their brevity. The translation is solid, with only a few errors, although it captures little of the poem’s mock-epic register (an epic hero who describes his father as *μυθεῖς ἐν φιλότητι* with his mother is *not* saying that he ‘had sex’ with her). Future scholars on the *BM* will need to take some of the commentary’s interpretations into account. But it is almost impossible to imagine this book being used in the way its authors wanted it to be used, and that is a terrible shame. The *BM* is a short, clever poem; its Greek is not particularly thorny, and its subject matter is entertaining. It seems to have been popular as a school text during the Byzantine period, and a good intermediate-level edition with concise and helpful notes would be a tremendous asset to modern students as well. This book could have been that edition. But the haste with which it seems to have been written and published, combined with the incomprehensible and uncharted chaos of its text, has resulted in a work which will only reinforce the popular impression of the *BM* as an obscure and haunted ruin best left to the textual critics.

Merton College, University of Oxford

MATT HOSTY  
[matthew.hosty@classics.ox.ac.uk](mailto:matthew.hosty@classics.ox.ac.uk)

## THE GREEK EPIC CYCLE

SAMMONS (B.) *Device and Composition in the Greek Epic Cycle*. Pp. viii + 263. New York: Oxford University Press, 2017. Cased, £55, US\$85. ISBN: 978-0-19-061484-3.

doi:10.1017/S0009840X18001658

Any book on the Greek Epic Cycle, despite the author’s skills and acuteness of analysis, suffers from a lack of evidence, which makes speculation an unwelcome but necessary guest to its argument. The critic inevitably needs to rely on Proclus’ *Summaries*, which are as much a blessing as they are a curse. On the one hand, as S. points out, they allow one to place the scarce and often unconnected surviving fragments of the Cycle within a broad narrative context. On the other they ignore poetic subtleties and nuances and have been traditionally thought to deprive the critic from valuable evidence regarding the poetic wealth of the cyclic poems. This lack of information in conjunction with the, often harsh, ancient criticism of the Cycle has led to a persistent understanding in modern scholarship of the poems as a poor imitation of the grandiose Homeric tradition. S.’s book aims to challenge this preconception by proposing that, despite the elliptical nature of Proclus’ account, the careful critic can identify underlying narrative structures, shared by the Homeric epics and the Cyclic poems. If such common structures can be shown to exist, S. argues, then the compositional technique of the poems will be revealed, helping us to understand and appreciate their poetic value. The book comprises six chapters and two useful appendices that discuss the nature and general context of Proclus’ *Summaries* and offer a translation for each of them.

S. begins by showing in his introduction that the Epic Cycle is an artificial term, coined in antiquity in an attempt to group under a common theme poems that were ‘individualised products of a shared, but highly volatile tradition’ (p. 17). In this sense, S. argues that the