

The last numbered chapter, 'The Afterlife of Homer', offers readings of the closing scenes of both Homeric epics. In the *Iliad*, Priam is said to find in Achilles a substitute son; in the *Odyssey*, Laertes regains his son; and both scenes derive additional depth from the imagery of *katabasis*. A discussion of Laertes' orchard issues in the conclusion that the ending of the *Odyssey* 'with the contrast between Agamemnon's gifts and Laertes' selfless care, perhaps also answers the question of what Achilles wanted from Agamemnon in *Iliad* 9. Not objects, but love ...' (p. 150). A lengthy concluding chapter leads from the aforementioned *Who Killed Homer?*, by way of a kind of pun, into a discussion of the biographical tradition about the death of Homer after his failure to solve a riddle. Four ways of reading that riddle are then adduced as approaches to the riddle of the *Iliad*: it speaks of desire found to be meaningless, of words understood too late, of the hero's isolation and of his fear of death.

The observations to be found in this volume are occasionally incisive but, largely unmoored as they are to previous scholarship, it is difficult to keep track of what is original here. Further, the book's findings are presented with a kind of breathlessness, evident in a fondness for rhetorical questions and imperatival exhortations, and they too often rely on tendentious, if not outright misleading, statements. Representative examples include assertions that, in the Greek camp, 'to utter any complaint against the chieftain is to risk death' (p. 6); that 'the gods can die' (p. 59, citing *Iliad* 5.385–91); that 'physical chains [were] suffered by Zeus' (p. 163, referring to 1.399); that it is a 'fashionable thesis that Homeric language is swift and easy to understand' (p. 170; cf. p. 29). There remains in addition the question raised by the title: to whom is this book intended as a reintroduction? If avowedly not a scholarly work, it is nevertheless characterised by chewy prose (e.g. 'Books 9 and 10 of the *Iliad* stage a disturbing, politicized version of this problematic, one associated with the essence of the political itself', p. 39), and by the assumption of deep familiarity with the Homeric poems and some familiarity with Homeric Greek. At least the jacket blurb (by L. Pratt of Emory University) is accurate: 'Buchan does not get mired in scholarly argument or in proofs of his own originality or authority'.

University of Florida, Gainesville

J. MARKS
jmarks@ufl.edu

BIRDS IN THE *ILIAD*

JOHANSSON (K.) *The Birds in the Iliad. Identities, Interactions and Functions.* (Gothenburg Studies in History 2.) Pp. 277, pls. Gothenburg: University of Gothenburg, 2012. Paper, SEK222. ISBN: 978-91-7346-712-4.

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This book is an apparently unedited Ph.D. thesis submitted to the Department of Historical Studies of the University of Gothenburg in January 2012: this may explain the frequent and often serious mistakes in the English *passim*, both in grammar and spelling, which occasionally obfuscate the meaning of the text.

J. investigates the role of birds in Homer's *Iliad* using four main categories of analysis: (i) ornithological aspects, (ii) the form of the birds' appearance within the poem, (iii) their interactions with other characters within the poem, and (iv) their functions. However, the thesis deals only with the 35 instances where a specific species of bird is mentioned – omitting any 'generalised' scenes in which birds are denoted in non-specific terminology (such

as ὄρνις or οἰωνός). This is because her first aim is to identify the specific species of bird(s) referred to, a task which J. notes is made almost impossible by the lack of specificity in those cases where birds are referred to using generalised terminology. The omission, however, seems a peculiar one to make in a book entitled *'The Birds in the Iliad'*, which might reasonably lead the reader to expect at least some discussion of the many scenes in which birds appear without detailed reference to species-specific characteristics or behaviour. This is particularly troublesome given J.'s three further aims (above); it is surely not only specific species of birds which may have interesting metaphorical meaning within the poem, or have significant interactions with its characters.

That J.'s more conceptual aims are thus somewhat impeded by her primary aim of 'identifying' the birds of Homer by species is even more of a shame when it is considered how precarious such an endeavour can be. D.W. Thompson (1895) is the classic Victorian authority on bird species in ancient Greek literature and culture and his glossary shows a constant sensitivity to the difficulties of confirming a direct correspondence between an ancient species of bird and one known to us today, often preferring to compare ancient birds with modern species rather than seeking to claim equivalence.

However, J. does not allow enough for the fact that the words used to describe 'specific' species in the *Iliad* are often very generic terms themselves: for instance the term αἰετός (*Il.* 12.219ff.) is claimed to refer to the Short-Toed Eagle *Circaetus gallicus* on the grounds that it is carrying a snake, apparently a common prey of this bird. However, the snake in question is described by the poet as a 'monstrous, bloody snake' and is figured as a quasi-supernatural negative omen rather than a realistic description of an animal hunting its natural prey. To seek taxonomic exactitude on such a tenuous link seems inadvisable to say the least. Indeed, J. appears tacitly to recognise the difficulty of identifying a specific species from unspecific terminology, for elsewhere in the book she argues that the word αἰετός in the *Iliad* variously represents the Golden Eagle and Verraux's Eagle – again based on tenuous descriptive grounds such as a passing reference to prey or location. The assumption set out at the beginning of the book, that the poet of the *Iliad*, and his audience, would have had 'specific knowledge about birds and their behaviours' (p. 17), is never explicitly taken to the logical next step: it may (or may not) be plausible that an average ancient Greek countryman knew more species of birds by sight than we do today, but why should Homer have included these specific species in his poem? What poetic significance would it have? Why, in short, should it matter whether the eagle which makes the Trojans shudder with fear at *Il.* 12.208 is a Short-Toed Eagle or not? J. states convincingly that the birds in the *Iliad* may refer to 'conventions and ideas about social circumstances, hierarchies, historical allusions, cosmology and religion' (p. 45) but does not argue for any specific enrichment of meaning given by the identification of their species, a process which she devotes the bulk of the book to achieving.

These ornithological correspondences which come out of the extensive analyses of the 35 'bird-scenes' in the poem are set out in a large table in the work's denouement. Their plausibility is debatable since J. does not address in detail the problems with identifying ancient species with modern species of animals; it may well be that the eagle at *Il.* 8.227–52 is a Golden Eagle, but given that the only basis on which this is argued is the size of its prey and the metaphorical significance of the *Golden Eagle* as an appropriate bird in relation to Zeus, it may also very well be another sort of eagle (and so on).

To move on, then, from methodological issues to those of structure and content: after a brief introduction and a chapter on theory and method, the bulk of the book is taken up with detailed accounts of the 35 bird scenes within the *Iliad* where a bird is named by species. This central portion of the book is extremely methodical and thorough: J. takes each passage separately, quoting extensively from the *Iliad* in each case and giving a

full translation of each passage as well as a ‘background’ summary of what has happened before the events in which the bird(s) appear. However, some of the quotations are rather over-long (at pp. 107–8 over 60 lines of Greek are quoted containing one brief appearance of an eagle; frequently passages of 20–40 lines are quoted in full). The ‘background’ summaries which accompany each quotation are extraneous paraphrases of the poem’s content which readers could look up for themselves. The quotations are all followed by tables breaking down the ornithology, interactions and functions of each bird. These tables are somewhat repetitive, since in both the ‘ornithology’ and ‘interactions’ section they often paraphrase parts of the translation already given alongside the Greek as well as the ornithological information given in detail elsewhere; so at p. 121 the table tells us that the vulture ‘sprang out again and then possibly drew something out from a corpse and then possibly shrank back into a throng’. This is a near word-for-word account of the translation of this passage given at p. 120 and it appears a third time in the next section of the same table. The tables also include repetitive references to the *LSJ* entries on various words (for instance we are given the *LSJ* reference and the glossary entry from Cunliffe’s 1924 *Lexicon* for ἵρηξ on p. 126, repeated verbatim at pp. 137 and 187). Each table is followed by a ‘comments and interpretation’ section which sums up the scene and analyses the bird appearance in reference to the four indexes set up at the beginning of the book (ornithology, form, interactions, functions). It is these sections which are the most fruitful and original parts of the book, and it is a shame that they are crowded out by the over-extensive quotation, paraphrase and repetitive use of tabulation.

This book provides a very detailed and easily-referenced guide to the 35 given scenes concerning named species of birds in the *Iliad*; the ornithological identifications remain unproveable, based as they are on (often) vague descriptions of the behaviour, locale and appearance of the birds within the poem. Most importantly, despite a lengthy dissertation on the subject, it still remains unclear *why* we should be so keen to have a Homer (and an audience) who was an expert on birds and wished to include this knowledge in his poetry. This is not to say that J. does not identify many important functions of birds within the *Iliad* – but that these functions are not dependent on species-specific identifications. For instance J. argues that ‘birds in the *Iliad* offer a possibility to learn more about humans’ (p. 17) but it is not clear why we need to identify ornithologically these birds in order to learn more about humans within the poem. Expansion of the thoughtful discussions of the birds’ functions within the poem may have illuminated this point; however it is certainly useful to have drawn our attention to the similarities between these Iliadic birds and some modern species, which will undoubtedly inspire further work and discussion.

Winchester College

SARAH J. HARDEN
sjh@wincoll.ac.uk

A NEW TRANSLATION OF THE *ILIAD*

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M. is a poet and writer of fiction as well as a translator. He has previously translated the Epic of Gilgamesh, the Book of Job, the Bhagavad Gita and the Tao Te Ching.