

towards the view that in actual fact many ancient readers did not juxtapose Virgil and Homer in isolation? There is abundant evidence to show just how aware readers of Virgil were of the fact that the Virgil–Homer story is inextricably woven into the matter of the influence of Homer on Sophocles, Callimachus, Apollonius Rhodius, Ennius and so on. W. knows all this very well, of course. By drawing attention so lucidly to important parts of the evidence and bringing it all together so neatly in the telling of a fascinating story, W. has made a fine contribution that should stimulate further thinking about the large questions surrounding the reception of Homer in Augustan Rome, the different strategies employed by critics in thinking of him as a Homeric poet, the impact of Virgil on Latin literary criticism, and the ancient practice of *synkrisis* as applied to one of literary history's most brilliant and influential twosomes.

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THE GODS IN HOMER

PIRONTI (G.), BONNET (C.) (edd.) *Les dieux d'Homère. Polythéisme et poésie en Grèce ancienne*. (Kernos Supplément 31.) Pp. 257, ill. Liège: Presses Universitaires de Liège, 2017. Paper, €25. ISBN: 978-2-87562-130-6.

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Long past are the days when Homer's gods were collectively dismissed as 'Götterapparat', an expedient literary device frequently employed in the epics without at the same time endowing them with a religious dimension worthy of consideration. Once unthinkable, expressions such as 'Homer's religion' or 'Homer's theology' have risen to scholarly respectability, and Homeric gods have come to occupy a place of honour in discussions of ancient Greek polytheism (see e.g. J.N. Bremmer and A. Erskine [edd.], *The Gods of Ancient Greece. Identities and Transformations* [2010], or E. Eidinow, J. Kindt and R. Osborne [edd.], *Theologies of Ancient Greek Religion*. [2016]). Still, it is rare even today to dedicate a collection of essays exclusively to the subject of Homer's gods as a religious phenomenon. It is precisely what this volume does.

This is the first of the two planned volumes (the second instalment will also appear as a *Kernos* supplement) based on conferences held in 2015 and 2016 in Rome and Madrid, respectively. 'L'ambition de ce livre, comme nous l'avons dit', the editors write in the programmatic introduction, 'est d'inaugurer une lecture "polythéiste" de récits homériques, capable de faire émerger les interactions profondes entre la dynamique narrative et le réseau dense de puissances divines qui sont appelées à y intervenir' (p. 13). What a polytheistic reading of Homer amounts to can be boiled down to the following four points:

- (a) The Homeric poems are incomprehensible without the gods.
- (b) Homer's main concerns are theological; the heroes and their fates are of secondary importance.

- (c) Anthropomorphism does not reflect the Homeric gods' essence, but is only one of the forms that they can assume.
- (d) It does not make sense to present the gods in isolation from each other or fully to individualise them: Homer's gods are, above all, 'puissances divines' (a term that is consistently applied throughout) characterised by fluidity and lacking in permanent identity.

The introduction is followed by nine essays that address various aspects of Homer's construction of the divine. In the opening chapter, 'Visibilité, invisibilité et identité des dieux', M. Bettini challenges the idea of divine metamorphosis, arguing that it is based on an erroneous presumption that the god undergoing this process is possessed of a specific original form. Proceeding from a meticulous analysis of Homer's terms for invisibility, Bettini arrives at the conclusion that what is generally conceived as 'metamorphosis' is in fact a constant play of illusion triggered by forces whose identity cannot be categorised in clear and unambiguous terms. 'C'est précisément dans la multiplicité et variété du tissu identitaire, dans la capacité d'être, de manière sérielle, plusieurs, et non pas un seul – soi-même et autre que soi-même – que réside le privilège des dieux' (p. 41).

Sensual perception of the divine is the subject of A. Grand-Clément's contribution, 'Des couleurs et des sens: percevoir la présence divine'. The manifestations of the divine are multisensory, involving hearing, smell, touch and, above all, sight. The descriptions of theophanies are rare in Homer, but the formulaic epithets of gods provide rich supplementary material. Not surprisingly, the colour most frequently associated with gods is that of gold. Most of this, however, does not reach the perception of mortals, which emphasises once again the limits of Homeric anthropomorphism.

G. Pironti, in 'De l'éros au récit: Zeus et son épouse', deals with the dialectical confrontation between Zeus and Hera. The confrontation finds an especially rich expression in the so-called Dios Apatê of Book 14 of the *Iliad*, where it involves an additional divine power, represented by Aphrodite. This is Homeric polytheism at its most effective. 'En relisant cette scène en clé polythéiste', Pironti writes about the episode where Aphrodite gives Hera a band that contains the power of love, 'il est possible de l'entendre une véritable rencontre entre deux puissances divines, Aphrodite et Héra, où les pouvoirs de l'une sont temporairement octroyés à l'autre' (pp. 68–9).

The second section is focused on the relationships between Olympus and earth. In her discussion of divine assemblies, 'Les dieux en assemblée', C. Bonnet emphasises the supreme position of Zeus, who orchestrates the interaction between the Olympians and re-establishes harmony in their multifaceted community. The human assemblies are a mirror image of the divine ones: in both cases, what is at stake is the issue of power.

C. Pisano, in 'Iris et Hermès, médiateurs en action', draws a comparison between the roles of the two divine messengers – Iris (who appears in the *Iliad* but never in the *Odyssey*) and Hermes (who appears in the *Odyssey* but only once in the *Iliad*). She arrives at the conclusion that while Iris' role is restricted to that of *angelos*, that is, a spokesperson (*port-parole*) who transmits Zeus's messages verbatim, Hermes assumes a much more complex role of envoy (*kêrux*) who is able to take initiative in delivering messages with which he has been entrusted.

V. Pirenne-Delforge, in 'Le rituel: communiquer avec les dieux', discusses the forms of ritual communication with gods present in the Homeric poems, addressing them in the order of growing complexity – the prayer, the sacrificial offering, the temple. The paradoxical situation with the temple of Athene at Troy as depicted in *Iliad* 6 – a temple that is supposed to protect the city is in fact dedicated to a deity who purports to destroy it – illustrates what she sees as an inbuilt tension of representation of the divine in the context of

polytheism: ‘En outre, ce passage montre bien que la perspective “olympienne” de l’action des dieux dans l’épopée transcende forcément les particularismes qui caractérisaient les panthéons des cités’ (p. 149).

P. Payen’s ‘Conflits des dieux, guerre des héros’ opens the section dedicated to war. It stands apart in that it takes Homer’s anthropomorphism for granted: while the gap dividing mortals and immortals is insurmountable, men are also close to the gods in that they resemble them in their appearance (see esp. pp. 155, 160). War, which forms the core of the Homeric poems, is perhaps the most conspicuous feature that men share with the gods. War is above all a social institution, and in the Homeric poems it serves as a filter through which men’s relations with the gods are analysed and plotted.

According to D. Bouvier, ‘Le choix d’Aphrodite et les causes de la guerre’, although it is true that the ancient Greeks, like all polytheistic societies, did not have the idea of religious war, this is not to say that war as understood by the Greeks has no religious dimension. The very existence of war deities, such as Ares, Polemos and Eris, testifies to the contrary. The analysis of the failed truce between the Achaeans and the Trojans depicted in *Iliad* 3 shows that, while the human participants are both capable and willing to end the war, its recommencing is the sole responsibility of the gods. This is because the gods follow their own trajectories, which do not necessarily coincide with those of the mortals. ‘Les hommes étaient d’accord, mais, au niveau divin, les relations et les tensions sont si complexes que leur consensus ne devient possible qu’au prix de la guerre chez les hommes. C’est un aspect inquiétant du polythéisme mais une explication de la guerre chez les mortels’ (p. 199).

Analysing word by word the gnome $\rho\acute{\epsilon}\iota\alpha\ \theta\epsilon\acute{o}\varsigma\ \gamma\prime\ \acute{\epsilon}\theta\acute{\epsilon}\lambda\omega\nu\ \kappa\alpha\iota\ \tau\eta\lambda\acute{o}\theta\epsilon\nu\ \acute{\alpha}\nu\delta\rho\alpha\ \sigma\acute{\alpha}\omega\sigma\alpha\iota$ (‘If he wishes, a god may easily save a man even from afar’), put in the mouth of Athene-Mentor at *Odyssey* 3.231, M. Herrero de Jáuregui, in ‘Quand un dieu sauve’, discusses the issue of the Homeric gods as saviours. Ultimately, only gods act as saviours in Homer. Their acts of salvation are not conditioned by the individual’s piety but derive from the gods’ will. In every act of salvation performed by a major god, the last word belongs to Zeus. However, Zeus does not act arbitrarily: rather, his decisions express the consensus among the gods. As distinct from his sexual liaisons, Zeus’s acts of salvation do not require anthropomorphic epiphanies. Finally, although from time to time Homeric gods act as saviours, there are no saviour gods in Homer: the gods of this category, such as Asclepius or the Dioscuri, are conspicuous by their absence. ‘Pour des raisons idéologiques ou esthétiques . . . Homère donne à voir que la protection divine n’est pas permanente, immuable, ou mécanique’ (p. 225). This attitude finds an additional expression in the fact that the terms *sôtēr* and *sôtēria* never appear in the Homeric poems.

While a fresh assessment of the role of Homer’s gods as religious rather than purely literary agents is undeniably welcome, one may wonder whether the reaction has gone too far. Indeed, it is difficult to avoid the impression that certain arguments in the book proceed from the assumption that the Homeric poems are indistinguishable in any important way from Hesiod’s *Theogony*. Small wonder that rather often than not such ‘Hesiodisation’ of Homer results in approaching his gods as cosmic elements and forces rather than as anthropomorphic individuals. This kind of approach comes close to the allegorical reading of the Homeric poems as practised by ancient interpreters. This is not to say that anthropomorphism in Homer cannot be problematised in an interesting and thought-provoking way. Yet, the sweeping dismissal of it strikes one as counter-intuitive. It should not be forgotten that, as R. Buxton reminds us, the shape that Greek gods, Homeric gods included, resume after the metamorphosis is invariably anthropomorphic (R. Buxton, ‘Metamorphoses of Gods into Animals and Humans’, in Bremmer and Erskine, *The Gods of Ancient Greece* [2010], pp. 89–90; see also A. Henrichs, ‘What is a Greek God?’, *ibid.*, pp. 19–39). It should also not be forgotten that the very ability of the gods

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.

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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.
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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).¹

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,

¹I 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.