MEAT IN THE *ODYSSEY*

BAKKER (E.J.) *The Meaning of Meat and the Structure of the* Odyssey. Pp. xiv + 191. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013. Cased, £55, US$90. ISBN: 978-0-521-11120-1.

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B.'s volume is a highly engaging study on the symbolic value and religious importance of meat in the *Odyssey*. B. suggests that the theme of meat-eating comprises one of the 'unifying forces' in the poem, and adduces detailed and convincing evidence – both literary and linguistic – to support his argument (p. ix). In his eight chapters, B. explains the significance of both aristocratic feasting and humble meals, but focuses on 'problematic feasting' that includes the episodes of the Cyclops, Circe and the Cattle of the Sun, in addition to the mass slaughter of the Suitors at the end of what was essentially a three-year banquet involving the systematic plundering of Odysseus' herds (p. xi). Throughout, B. examines the relationship of meat consumption to civilisation and to the divine, particularly when that consumption occurs in transgressive contexts.

In his first two chapters, B. lays the groundwork within which he will discuss the significance of feasting. Chapter 1, '*Epos* and *Aoide*', deals with tensions between the *aoide*, or 'matrix narrative' – that is, the entire poem – and the *epos*, or 'embedded utterance', with specific reference to Odysseus' tales within the overall narrative. Important here is B.'s discussion of the proem, with its seemingly odd emphasis on the Cattle of the Sun episode, and its connection to Odysseus' initial conversation with Alcinous, which also emphasises the deaths of the Companions: *epos* and *aoide* are interdependent in both content and language. In Chapter 2, '*Nostos* as Quest', B. continues his examination of the 'complex interplay' between the stories of Odysseus and of the poet (p. 13), reviewing the narrative typologies proposed for the *Odyssey*, such as the Aarne-Thompson tale-type of the 'Homecoming Husband'. B. notes that none of these typologies fit the *Odyssey* well enough; for example, 'Usually, there is only one villain-suitor … but at Ithaca the villain has been multiplied into a crowd', and 'usually the returning husband has been as chaste as his wife during his absence', but Odysseus has not (p. 14). B.'s objections seem odd. There is no need to straightjacket the entire *Odyssey* into one particular tale type; moreover, the characteristics B. cites apply to *later* folktale versions of the 'Homecoming Husband', and his interpretation of them indicates a too-stringent reading of what are simply folktale variants (also, B. does not use Uther's 2004 update of Aarne-Thompson). Ultimately, B. proposes his own narrative typology, based partially on Propp, and partially on an analysis of the semantic range of the Greek term *nostos* and the relationship of *nostos* to the concept of a completed quest.

Chapter 3, 'Meat in Myth and Life', provides background on the importance of meat in heroic society 'as symbolic capital' critical to the economy in the way meat is divided and distributed and consequently confers status on characters as lofty as Agamemnon (in the *Iliad*) and as lowly as the 'beggar' Odysseus (pp. 37, 40). Feasts – which centre on meat – allow a community to reaffirm its cohesion as well as to maintain its relationship with the gods. Yet feasts can also be problematic: they can be an occasion for argument, disrupt into a brawl, or even provide an opportunity for assassination. It is within such contexts that B. situates the Suitors' transgression, which, 'Besides being a moral outrage and a social and political crime of the first magnitude', is also 'a major violation of religious custom' (p. 47).

The book's three central chapters examine in more detail the extensive relationships between Odysseus' Wanderings and the situation at Ithaca. Although B.'s observation

that 'the Wanderings provide essential exemplars for the crimes committed in Odysseus' house in his absence', is not new (p. 35), his particular focus on the significance of meat certainly adds an interesting new angle to the scholarly discussion of these adventures. Chapter 4, 'Of Hunters and Herders', focuses on the Cyclops episode, reminding us that both the *aoide* and *epos* endow the Suitors 'with clear Cyclopean qualities' in terms of their meat consumption and lack of hospitality (p. 54), while also pointing out that Odysseus himself will play the role of Cyclops when punishing the intruding Suitors, evidenced not only by plot similarities but also by repetition in the Greek, as both Odysseus and the Cyclops enact 'the master's return' (p. 69). In Chapter 5, 'Feasting in the Land of the Dawn', B. continues to explore the theme of eating and 'being eaten' (p. 75), focusing principally on the Circe episode which, like that of the Cyclops, begins with Odysseus' men hunting for food. Their metamorphosis into swine may allegorically reflect their gluttony, but B.'s discussion of the connection between humans and pigs, with its references to cannibalism, suggests that 'Circe's actions have not only laid bare man's nature as an eating animal, but have also drawn attention to the dangers of eating' (p. 87). The chapter ends with an interesting and detailed comparison between Circe and Eumaeus juxtaposed with a comparison of the Suitors to swine. B. connects Chapter 6, 'The Revenge of the Sun', with Circe by stressing solar symbolism and its seasonal connection with 'the return of the king' (p. 97). Circe's father Helius is himself 'an important owner of livestock' (p. 101), and sacred cattle were not unique in Greek mythology or actual religious practice though, importantly, they were distinguished from meat animals in that they were not to be sacrificed or sold. The verb σίνομαι ('harm'), used in the warning to Odysseus and his men against touching the Sun Cattle, also 'seems formulaic in inscriptions dealing with prohibitions' concerning land and the animals on it (p. 102), and connects Helius' cattle with the importance of real-life herds. The Companions' devouring of the Sun Cattle thus becomes not just a transgression in a sacred sanctuary and a perversion of the heroic feast, but a depletion of non-renewable economic resources, a recklessness that would resonate with the poem's audience and that helps explain why the Companions meet with such a severe punishment.

In Chapter 7, 'The Justice of Poseidon', B. adds a new perspective to the argument that Odysseus' interactions with the Cyclops led to the doom of his crew. Much attention has been given to Polyphemus' prayer, but B. takes a closer look at Odysseus' subsequent sacrifice of the Cyclops' ram to Zeus and tries to address the problematic aspects of this scene raised by previous scholars, such as why the Companions were not punished until much later. The Companions were not at fault in the Cyclops episode, but Zeus must appease Poseidon by granting at least part of Polyphemus' prayer – and so Zeus later traps the men on Thrinacia at a point when Odysseus' leadership, which failed them on the Cyclops' island and became increasingly less effective, is at its nadir and the crew is now 'unified in opposition' to their captain (p. 127).

B.'s final chapter, 'Remembering the *Gaster*', contextualises hunger and looks specifically at uses of this word in the poem and how the term plays a key role in the 'interformulaic' aspects of the poem. Here B. acknowledges his debt to the detailed work of P. Pucci on this topic, including the contrast between *thumos* and *gaster* and the restricted use of the latter term to describe lower class people, such as beggars, characterised by hunger – as Odysseus is upon his arrivals at Scheria and Ithaca. But B. demonstrates a connection between *gaster* and *thumos* via *menos*, and thus a linguistic connection between Odysseus as wandering beggar and hero simultaneously.

In the epilogue, perhaps anticipating scholarly objection to his reliance on the interpretation of formulaic repetition as highly significant to linking episodes (as opposed to being simply a basic characteristic of the oral tradition), B. successfully addresses the poetic and

semantic problems raised by his method. B.'s concise study, clearly written despite the occasional heavy reliance on technical linguistic arguments, is an enjoyable, useful and important addition to the vast field of Homeric studies.

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HELENS

BLONDELL (R.) *Helen of Troy. Beauty, Myth, Devastation*. Pp. xviii + 289, ills. New York: Oxford University Press, 2013. Cased, £10.99, US $29.95. ISBN: 978-0-19-973160-2.
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This excellent volume takes the reader on a tour with Helen of Troy, as she journeys from the Archetype (Pandora) through her complex identities in the *Iliad*, the *Odyssey*, the *Oresteia*, the lyric poets, Herodotus' *Histories*, Gorgias' *Encomium of Helen*, Euripides' *Trojan Women* and *Helen*, and finally Isocrates' *Encomium of Helen*. The book is descriptive in its focus, and shows that Helen, 'who is a concept, not a person' (p. xi), occupied roles that are important both in themselves and also for understanding the works in question. For me, its greatest value is in the fresh perspective it brings to familiar works; one may occasionally find B.'s arguments for Helen's importance overstated, but her readings are thoughtful and coherent.

The first chapter, 'The Problem of Female Beauty', forms a fitting and logical introduction to a book on Helen of Troy, whose beauty was her main attribute, and also introduces the book's feminist point of view. It describes Greek views that a beautiful woman was a beautiful evil (p. 3), subject to sexual passion (p. 10) and likely to be tricky (p. 17). Since the Eros her beauty provoked was thought to cause men to disregard moral and legal restrictions (p. 4), a beautiful woman was likely to undermine a man's most Greek attribute, namely his self-control (cf. p. 49). Because of this threat, women were subject to social constraints (pp. 22–3), and although virtuous women were self-abnegating and self-policing, they were never free of blame, since modesty itself was a provocation of male desire (p. 25).

Chapter 2, 'Helen: Daughter of Zeus', discusses how the figure of Helen encapsulates and even overwhelms these ideas: usually considered to be the daughter of Zeus and Leda (p. 29), in Greek mythology the divinely beautiful Helen was paired with weaker men, such as Menelaus and Paris, who cannot claim control over her person (pp. 31–3). She becomes the cause of the Trojan War when Paris abducts her, but also the cause of the continued fighting when the Trojans will not give her back. At the same time, her beauty is divine and validates a war in which men fight and die for glory (cf. esp. pp. 59–60).

Chapter 3, 'Disarming Beauty: the *Iliad*', elaborates on this theme, arguing that Helen is the most substantial female character of the *Iliad*. A comparison of Helen and Achilles (pp. 53–4), a discussion of blame in the *Iliad* (Helen blames herself, but the male warriors, for whom war, like Helen, is an irresistible 'beautiful evil', do not p. 59) and a discussion of her isolation from other women (pp. 66–7) begin the chapter. It concludes with a perceptive reading of the passage in which Aphrodite compels Helen to rejoin Paris in their bedroom. B. makes a thought-provoking argument that the scene re-enacts Helen and Paris's elopement from Sparta, and that it reflects both the compulsions of that situation and also Helen's original agency (pp. 71–2).