

COMMENTARY ON THE *HOMERIC HYMN TO
HERMES*

SCHENCK ZU SCHWEINSBERG (J.-M.) *Der pseudohomerische Hermes-Hymnus. Ein interpretierender Kommentar.* Pp. 314. Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2017. Cased, €72. ISBN: 978-3-8253-6599-8.

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Commentaries on the *Homeric Hymn to Hermes* seem to be like proverbial buses: scholars waited for decades, then along came A. Vergados, *The Homeric Hymn to Hermes: Introduction, Text and Commentary* (2013), and the work under review, which derives from S.'s Ph.D. at Mainz; my own commentary is at long last with the editors of the 'Cambridge Orange' series. (I add that last clause not as advertising, but to indicate my starting point as a reviewer.)

S.'s subtitle raises the question of what an 'interpretierender' commentary is to be contrasted with. One possible answer is that this is not a philological commentary. Manuscripts are barely mentioned. S. uses M.L. West's Loeb edition (*Homeric Hymns, Homeric Apocrypha, Lives of Homer* [2003]) as her base-text, and although she occasionally diverges from it in her lemmata and explains these divergences, many other significant textual problems receive little or no discussion (e.g. in vv. 82, 168, 339, 346, 437; the alternative lines transmitted as marginalia at 288, 366 and 563 are not mentioned). S. suggests two new emendations. However, τιμῆς for τέχνης in 166 is unmotivated, and line 568 is completely rewritten (ὄμφιπολεῖν ἵπποις τε καὶ ἡμιόνους ταλαεργοῖς) merely to avoid a lacuna, introducing in the process a harsh asyndeton, three short dative plural endings (to which the hymnist had a particular aversion) and an implausible tacit switch of addressee. Linguistic explanations often lack any parallels to back them up, leading to errors such as the interpretation of περ as ὥσπερ in v. 299, οὐ ... καὶ ποτε as 'And ... never' in 385, ἐπαίνει as 'bring cheer to' in 457, or any of the three accusatives of respect claimed in 86, 152 and 460.

In her preface, S. speaks of wanting to keep the book to a reasonable length and to slice through scholarly debates of secondary importance (p. 9). As such, she was justified in many (though not all) cases to favour literary interpretation over too much philology. I certainly gleaned several useful insights from the commentary, and first-time readers of the *Hymn* will gain many more. For example, I had also taken v. 174 to allude to *Iliad* 1.324–5, but had missed S.'s nice point that the disastrous consequences of Agamemnon's threat there ('If he doesn't give [Briseis], I'll ...') could be applicable to Hermes' overblown threat to become a crime boss operating outside of Zeus's control. The commentary also contains, especially near the start, several moments where S.'s real joy in the topic shines through in exuberantly digressive footnotes – such as on the context behind Roscher's interpretation of Hermes (p. 86 n. 177, p. 106 n. 222), ancient approaches to reconciling lunar and solar calendars (p. 93 n. 188), and heat-regulation in Peloponnesian tortoises (p. 120 n. 244).

However, interpretatively too there are some shortcomings. As with linguistic points, so there is a widespread lack of parallels to contextualise rhetorical tropes, legal procedures, attitudes to oracles and many other cultural features. Often S. cites a dictionary definition instead of discussing the *Hymn*'s most difficult and therefore interesting words. In examples such as 56 παραβόλα or 485 ἐργασίην, controlled polysemy seems to me one of the hymnist's central strategies for replicating and so honouring Hermes' rhetorical virtuosity; when S. favours ὀλβιέων to βουκολέων as an emendation in v. 167, she cites the

polyvalence of the latter ('herd, look after, cheat') as a con rather than a major pro. Lines 118–37 are treated as a straightforward sacrifice, 522–3 as a reliable oath of friendship and 531–2 just as Hermes' messenger-staff. These and other simplifications reduce the interest of the *Hymn* and underplay (especially) French scholarship, such as L. Kahn's *Hermès passe* (1978) and D. Jaillard's *Configurations d'Hermès* (2007) – two of the most insightful studies available, neither of which is cited anywhere. Other notable absences include W. Furley and J. Bremer, *Greek Hymns* (2001), and C. Nobili, *L'Inno omerico ad Ermete e le tradizioni locali* (2011).

S.'s most radical claim is that the *Hymn to Hermes* is Hellenistic. Unfortunately, the justifications given (pp. 35–50) are far weaker than S.'s normal argumentative standards. The claim that the *Hymn* contains several words of Hellenistic date is unsupported. Broad similarities of narrative technique in the *Hymn* and Apollonius 3.106ff. are discussed as a dating criterion, without even a mention of the common view that Apollonius here was influenced by the *Hymn*, though S. seems to accept other instances of influence on Apollonius (p. 28 n. 52). Aetiologies are noted to be a favourite in Hellenistic poetry, but also a typical feature in the other – Archaic – *Homeric Hymns*. The *Hymn's* allusions to both Homer and Hesiod are taken to point to a late date, but without acknowledgement, for example, of Choerilus' specific allusions to the *Iliad* in the fifth century or of recent studies of Hesiod's influence in that period. The fact that numerous scholars have argued for careful reuse of the *Hymn* and its phrasing in Sophocles' *Ichneutai* is not mentioned when that play is discussed (p. 70). Instead we are told that the myth's suitability as a satyr-play plot is a reason to think that Sophocles came first – but, as S. knows, Alcaeus' *Hymn to Hermes* proves that the myth is far older.

With these points in mind, I think the book will be of most use for new readers of the *Hymn*, using it cautiously alongside other scholarship, and primarily for guidance on the logic and interrelationships of particular passages, rather than for linguistic or historical points. Indeed, S. implies that she includes students among her audience (p. 9), and it must be mainly for them that she provides a long introduction to ancient lyres (pp. 117–21) and a detailed paraphrase of the *Hymn's* central section (pp. 172–4). However, this is not a commentary targeted mainly at students, given the tendency not to translate passages of Latin and Greek.

The book is handsomely produced, though the press seems to have refused (except on one occasion) to print diaeresis on iota where needed, and around 60 typos suggest they could have provided better copy-editing support. However, I found only three corrigenda worth noting here as potentially confusing: on p. 159, Schneidewin proposed a lacuna before v. 110, not 111; on p. 178, at *Il.* 9.372 Achilles is talking to Odysseus about Agamemnon, not to Agamemnon about Odysseus; and on p. 278 'mit (ἄμῃ) ... und zwar mit (ἠδ' ἄμῃ)' was presumably supposed to say 'mit (Gen.) ...' etc, since ἄμῃ only appears once in the text and does not explain the genitives.

University of Nottingham

OLIVER THOMAS
oliver.thomas@nottingham.ac.uk