THE BYZANTINE REVIEW

ByzRev 06.2024.069
doi: 10.17879/byzrev-2024-6021

BAUKJE VAN DEN BERG, Homer the Rhetorician: Eustathios of Thessalonike on the Composition of the Iliad (Oxford Studies in Byzantium). Oxford – New York: Oxford University Press 2022. xviii + 260 pp. – ISBN 978-0-19-286543-4

DOUGLAS OLSON – ERIC CULLHED, Eustathius of Thessalonica, Commentary on the Odyssey. Volume II: Commentary on Rhapsodies 5–8. Leiden – Boston: Brill 2023. xxvi + 511 pp. – ISBN 978-9-00-454870-1

• MICHAEL ZELLMANN-ROHRER, Macquarie University / Freie Universität Berlin (michael.zellmann-rohrer@mq.edu.au)

The scholar Eustathius (ca. 1115–1195) was lifted by his rhetorical skill, and by imperial patronage, from humble beginnings as a deacon and clerk for the patriarchate of Constantinople. Manuel I Komnenos made him court orator and teacher of rhetoric, and he later rose to the archbishopric of Thessalonike (ca. 1178). He found the time for a vast oeuvre, including hagiography, homilies, letters, and philology, commentaries on works from ancient Greek lyric (the epinician odes of Pindar) to Christian hymns (a canon of John of Damascus). His most extensive surviving exegetical works on ancient literature are on the Iliad and Odyssey. These *parekbolai* ('extracts' or 'excurses') are the lengthiest Byzantine commentaries on the Homeric poems to survive. Renaissance and early modern humanists continued to read them as exegesis, but Classicists have been chiefly interested in the otherwise lost readings of Homer and other ancient authors whom Eustathius cites; Byzantinists are increasingly paying attention to their contemporary context.[1] For Homer is the poet par excellence in Byzantium, without whom Byzantine education and associated literary culture, with its skein of allusions to him and other classical authors, can hardly be understood, and Eustathius is that rare thing, a serious scholar of Homer venerated as a saint.

His monumental commentary on the Iliad is approached by BAUKJE VAN DEN BERG in its first monograph-length treatment. She delivers on a promise to analyze the commentary as 'cultural and ideological text' (p.

1. A useful overview of the Eustathian corpus is the volume edited by FILIPPOMARIA PONTANI – VASILES KATSAROS – VASILEIOS SARRIS, Reading Eustathios of Thessalonike (Trends in Classics, Supplementary Volume 46). Berlin 2017.

1) in a twelfth-century intellectual context of 'creative engagement' with and cultural translation rather than 'slavish imitation' of the classics (p. 4). Eustathius is of special interest as a leading intellectual for reconstructing this cultural moment, and his career coincides with a peak in popularity of reading Homer under the Komnenians.

The 'rhetorician' in VAN DEN BERG's title alludes to Eustathius' own profession and goal in writing, in addition to his presentation of Homer as first and highest exemplar of the rhetorical art, with didactic intentions of his own. The Byzantine scholar is chiefly concerned with presenting the usefulness of Homer for his own students and for future rhetoricians, though he also engages in literary criticism, or analysis of poetry for its own sake (pp. 17–18). After an introduction on the life and works of Eustathius, the first chapter considers his own outline of a program of exegesis in the preface to the commentary. The risks and rewards of Homer are juxtaposed, as a text to pass by attentively and learn from for a greater good, but without lingering too long – Eustathius applies the Homeric metaphor of the Sirens, adopted as allegory for his own teaching – and certainly not to try to augment, as he alleges one Timolaus did by pairing each line from the Iliad with one of his own. Eustathius prepares under further metaphors of hospitality and cuisine – Homer too 'spices' and 'seasons' a dish, drawing in the 'gluttonous' reader – a selection of what is useful for prose-writers, and 'heals' (θεραπεύειν), under a medical metaphor, difficulties occasioned by myth. Entailed in this last operation is a defense of Homer from charges of blasphemy: his stories of the unbecoming conduct of the gods contain truths revealed by allegory, and myth in general, with its capacity to enliven, is the soul to the body of poetry.

The rest of the book considers three aspects of Eustathius' analysis and presentation of Homer in three respective chapters. Homer's skill (δεινότης) is the first focus (ch. 2): how and why did the poet-rhetor structure a plot in which a ten-year war is presented through fifty days? The Catalogue of Ships is selected for emphasis: Eustathius accepts it without question as part of the original Homeric work (as he generally takes pains to refute ancient attempts to trim spurious matter from the poems), in which the poet overcame various difficulties of subject matter. Skillfulness for VAN DEN BERGH is 'the ability to make the best choices in order to produce the most effective, attractive, and economic composition with many opportunities for the display of rhetorical virtuosity' (pp. 72–73). The categorization of functions of Homeric 'techniques' is sometimes debatable: why, for example, according to the table at p. 75, are 'duels' the only source of

‘[u]nexpectedness, surprise, and novelty’ and not ‘erroneous questions’, a technique eventually said to involve invention, expansion, and broadening the audience’s experience (pp. 92–93)?

The poem’s plausibility (πιθανότης) is the second focus (ch. 3). As has been pointed out, Eustathius in fact seems to place more weight on this concept, or at least mentions it far more often, than δεινότης.[2] The scholar defends Homer as historically reliable, in specifically rhetorical terms: ‘corroboration’ (κατασκευή) directed against the ‘refutation’ (ἀνασκευή) of his critics. John Tzetzes did take up a similar defense against Dio Chrysostom (for him, rather ‘shit-’ [κοπρόστομος] than ‘golden-tongued’ [χρυσόστομος]), but I do not find any expression in his work close to VAN DEN BERGH’s ‘father of lies’ (p. 104). Although for Eustathius Homer is not just truthful but a positive lover of truth (φιλαλήθης), he deliberately puts his plausibility at risk in content and expression. Terms like τολμηρός and αὐθάδης are to be read rhetorically, not morally (as VAN DER VALK). The poet’s skill, subject of the previous chapter, is what helps him to remain within the limits of the plausible. At the center of the chapter is a case study of Priam’s plea to Achilles, which Eustathius defends from the insults of Zoilus and other ἐπηρεασταί; their epithet indicates more forceful invective than VAN DEN BERG’s rendering ‘hairsplitters’ (p. 135) suggests. Here the closing of Hector’s wounds is a daring portent (τέρας) within acceptable generic limits, and the role of Hermes, for example, is subject to both mythical and allegorical interpretation. Among the latter, when Eustathius refers the god’s role to ‘the star’ (so VAN DEN BERG), he means more specifically ‘the (wandering) star’ or planet Mercury, ‘as it also oversees (ἐπιστατοῦντος) these actions’: stealth and making friends (ἔλαθέ τε καὶ ἐφιλιώθη) fall under the areas of human life subject to Mercury’s astrological influence, as also theft in his commentary on Iliad 24.25–30, according to ‘those whose opinions tends towards the heavens’ (οὐρανογνώμονες). This astral line of interest in Eustathius, following among others the woman exegete Demo (whom he cites, e.g., on the binding of Ares in Iliad 5.386–387 as the ‘stations’ of Mars’ anomaly of motion), would repay further study.

The two strands of skill and plausibility are brought together in the final chapter (4), in which Homer’s use of the gods illustrates both qualities. VAN DEN BERG takes the opportunity for a sustained comparison

2. So the review of MICHAEL PASCHALIS, Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies 48 (2024), pp. 192–194.

of Eustathius' approach to ancient and Byzantine discussions from philosophical and theological perspectives that touch on this question, such as Palaiphatos, whom he cites with approval, and the Byzantine revival of interest in allegorical interpretation, as applied to Homer by John Tzetzes, who however tends to take the process further than Eustathius (e.g., into meteorology, on the reconciliation of Zeus and Hera). Gods are versatile and 'powerful devices' (p. 152) in a narratological sense, capable of allegorical use, practical use to resolve difficulties of plot, and pure entertainment, as '[s]ometimes myth is just myth, a fictional story for the audience's pleasure and amazement' (p. 154). The approach of Eustathius is characterized by its construction of Homer as both useful to and *working just like* contemporary authors of twelfth-century Byzantium, and a masterful teacher such as Eustatius himself would hope to be.

VAN DEN BERG provides a series of by and large persuasive close readings of a still not often closely read author. The book is especially valuable for its clear-eyed explanation of the technical terms of rhetorical exposition used by Eustathius, and for setting him in dialogue with the ancient and late ancient scholia on Homer and in the wider tradition of rhetorical and grammatical handbooks. Three appendices give annotated translations of the preface to the Iliad commentary and shorter discussions of the use of similes (on Iliad 2.87–93) and invocations of the Muses (Iliad 1.1). There are occasional faults in the presentation of the Greek text (e.g., p. 26, read πολιτικὸς φιλόσοφος; p. 35, παντὸς Ἰλιάς; p. 69, μυθικὴ τερατεία), and translations that may be questioned (e.g., p. 133, ἀήρ is once 'air' and once 'sky' in the same passage [on Iliad 16.300]; pp. 112–113, πιθανός is better 'plausible' than 'persuasive', 'disaster' is rather free for βαρύ, and τὸ τῶν Ἀργείων πρωτόθετον Ἄργος is not 'the archaic Argos of the Argives' but an explanation that 'Argos is the origin', in both the literal and grammatical senses, 'of the Argives'). Rendering δοκεῖ … οὐ πιθανόν as 'it is hardly plausible' (pp. 134–135, on Iliad 24.685–688) makes Eustathius say the opposite of what VAN DEN BERG argues that he means: the implausibility is only *apparent* ('it seems … implausible').

The Odyssey commentary awaits its turn for similar treatment. I did not find an explanation of why VAN DEN BERG preferred the Iliad; perhaps it is simply the temporal primacy of the events narrated in it. She acknowledges in any case that for Eustathius the Odyssey is the 'poem that demonstrates the poet's powers to their fullest extent' (p. 36). However that may be, the accessibility of the Odyssey for further study of this kind has now been increased by the work of CULLHED and OLSON.

The first volume of their project to edit and translate the work into English appeared in 2022, covering books 1–4,[3] and the installment under review adds books 5–9. Unlike the Iliad commentary, which is available in the modern critical edition of VAN DER VALK,[4] the Odyssey commentary required recourse to the editions of MAJORANUS (1542–1550) and STALLBAUM (1825–1826), and neither commentary had been translated into a modern language. The methodological principles set out in the first volume continue to be followed: the text is based on a new, systematic collation (confirming, e.g., the conjecture of SCHNEIDEWIN [1846], κορικώτερον against MAJORANUS, κομικώτερον, on η 84–133, p. 292). As the work has survived in two twelfth-century manuscripts recognized as the author's autograph copies (P = Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Gr. 2702; M = Venice, Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, Z. 460) of a single lost exemplar, the principle editorial difficulties are sorting out the recycling of older quires, and subsequent authorial interventions in the text. Otherwise, the editors offer a conservative presentation. Even autographs can suffer corruption, and some lacunae have been left unrestored, as ζ 130–138 (p. 202), where I might suggest <ἐντὸς> γενέσθαι τῆς πόλεως in addition to the editors' proposals <εἴσω> or <ἱκετης> (sic) in the apparatus. Eustathius wrote ἔσω (not εἴσω) γενέσθαι τῆς πόλεως once elsewhere (*On the Capture of Thessalonike* p. 86 KYRIAKIDIS), but also ἐντὸς τῆς πόλεως … εἶναι in the Odyssey commentary itself (on δ 48).

The three apparatus give indications of explicit citations, tacit adaptations of other sources, and the variant readings of the manuscripts or their errors, respectively, keyed to page and line numbers in the edition of MAJORANUS. At p. 32 (on ε 87) κηρύκιον / κηρύκειον (sic) is placed in the main text without an entry in the apparatus: I missed an explanation of this convention, which might be assumed to represent authorial variance in spelling, but the notation does not capture the details; P, which I was able to check, has κηρυκειον with ϊ entered above the line over ει; similarly ἐπισκύσαιτο / ἐπισκύζοιτο and ὀργισθείη / ὀργίζοιτο (η 298–310, p. 344), where P, at least, conversely gives the reading coinciding with the second in each pair above the line. In the entry on 1550.5 ἔριθος (p. 172), 'M' has presumably fallen out after ἔρυθος, as has something else in the entry on 1577.54 (p. 328): the natural place for the variant ἐξισωσαίμην is at the end of Odyssey 8.212, where the poem has ἀθερίζω, but the resulting

3. For a review, see DONALD J. MASTRONARDE, BMCR 2023.11.38.

4. MARCHINUS VAN DER VALK (ed.), Eustathii archiepiscopi Thessalonicensis commentarii ad Homeri Iliadem pertinentes. Leiden 1971–1987.

line would be unmetrical without further intervention. In the apparatus to 1579.39 (η 244–297, p. 336), the reading of P is not γυναξι but γυνᾶιξ(ι) (sic, with ξ¨ above the iota).

The edition introduces no new system of section or page-line numbers, besides marking the Odyssey line numbers in question at the head of each lemma and the page numbers in the editions of MAJORANUS, to which the entries in the apparatus are keyed, and STALLBAUM. These references are useful, reflecting the standard methods of citing the commentaries in previous scholarship, but as the MAJORANUS page-line numbers are noted only every five lines and do not correspond one-to-one with the lines of the new edition, referring to this fine new edition is less convenient than it deserves to be. A new numbering would have been especially useful in cases like p. 208, where the note in the apparatus on 1556.36 leaves it unclear, without consulting MAJORANUS, which of two instances of τό on the current page is meant.

The editors have 'normalized' (p. vii) accents on enclitics, but a few oddities remain. Examples are p. 32, on ε 87–91, ἐρωτήσεως τε (read ἐρωτήσεώς τε) and p. 304, on η 84–133, οἷα περ (read οἷά περ). In the last lines of p. 172 (on ζ 32–40, 56–73), one suspects τοῦ δὲ δὲ ἐφοπλίζειν is a misprint for τοῦ δὲ ἐφοπλίζειν, which a check of P supports.

The translation also facilitates a more expansive reading for those whose Greek does not match that of Eustathius. The result should encourage a synoptic perspective of the kind exemplified by VAN DEN BERG's work, and a sense of the interests of Eustathius himself. The rhetoric and pedagogy that kept him employed are attested in abundance. There is constant attention to the situational appropriateness and potential occasions of application for Homeric verses, to cite directly (e.g., ζ 221–223 is 'a modest man's speech'; the speech of Odysseus discussed in ζ 149–185 is useful for panegyrics on women, among whom we can imagine contemporary ladies of Byzantium) or to transform (e.g., into a proverb: εἰπεῖν παροιμιακῶς, ε 174, pp. 52–53), and practical advice on vocabulary-building (e.g., words for clothing and skincare in ζ 224–226). Eustathius even composes his own epic lines in the service of adaptation for contemporary use, then comments further on his own composition, as in a speech of Calypso modified to acknowledge the power of a supreme god (ε 165–170, p. 52), apparently to suit contemporary Christian tastes.

Beyond these concerns of craft, the second volume of the Odyssey commentary offers much that seems personal to Eustathius. There are further

reflections of his astral interests – e.g., the astrological doctrine of the 'climacteric years' (κλιμακτῆρες), again citing Demo, on θ 267–360, and discussion of 'natal astrologers' (γενεθλιακοί)[5] on η 197–198 – as well as extensive and substantially original digressions on onomastic-based interpretation, the names of the Phaeacians related to ships and the sea (ε 162–164, at pp. 52–53; ζ 100–118, p. 194; η 153–171, p. 318; θ 111–117, pp. 380–381) and that of Arete as 'significant' (ἐπώνυμος, φερώνυμος, η 53–66, pp. 270–273). Eustathius pays attention to contemporary linguistic developments, as 'Italian nationals' (ἐθνικοὶ Ἰταλικοί) are credited with a βερτέρη that preserves the Homeric ὑπερτερία 'wagon-box' (on ζ 32–40, 56–73, p. 174; cf. the citation of a Λατινικὸν λεξικόν 'Latin lexicon', ζ 100–118, p. 196), and the ancient βαῦνος (in its sense, according to him, of an in-ground hearth), is said still to be current in Greek (on ζ 305–309, p. 254), and to culture, as the ancient practice by which guests sat upon the ground upon entering a room is continued 'among the Latins' (παρὰ Λατίνοις: η 153–171, p. 316).

Despite the capitalization of God throughout the translation, awkward in cases such as the lemma θ 165–185 where the Phaeacians look at Odysseus 'as if he were a God' (pp. 393, 397), there is little that is explicitly Christian about the commentary, even if moral factors are brought to bear in places such as the Calypso speech already mentioned. 'I claim to be' (p. 149) for εὔχομαι εἶναι (on ε 445–453) captures the Homeric sense, but it is difficult to imagine Eustathius and his audience separating the phrase from prayer, and εὐχή is indeed rendered 'prayer' in Eustathius' subsequent words on the passage. Ancient fragments, in any case, are frequent, among which Eustathius draws heavily on Athenaeus, cited fondly as 'the Deipnosophist' (e.g. η 84–133, p. 288). Others await identification: the editors leave unlocated, for example, the misogynistic sentiment of 'one of the ancients' cited by Eustathius on ζ 63 (p. 182), on the metaphorical death of a newlywed husband (οἴμοι· χθὲς ἔζη). The 'healing' of problematic myth in Homer does not entail squeamishness about obscene content in other ancient sources, as in the references to sex in ἐρείδειν (η 84–133, p. 282; σκωπτικός there is a milder 'mocking' than the editors' 'abusive'), κέντρον (ζ 320, p. 256), and μανιόκηπος (η 84–133, p. 296).

The translation's goal is 'to be simultaneously as true to the Greek original

5. The translation has 'the determining of horoscopes in later authors' (p. 323), but τούς … γενεθλιακούς must refer to people (i.e., γενεθλιαλόγοι), those who cast and interpreted horoscopes.

and as clear as possible' (p. viii). There are occasional awkward phrasings that seem to serve neither fidelity nor clarity. For 'embark miserable me in my fatherland' (p. 331, on η 222–225), the ship metaphor is misleading: what Odysseus wants is first to embark on a ship, then disembark on Ithaka. At other points, it seems possible to achieve more fidelity without sacrificing clarity: an example is the collapse into 'princess' of several periphrases in which Eustathius emphasizes both the youth and royalty of Nausicaa, one of which (on ζ 2–47) misses the etymological figure in which Odysseus is led 'to the royal home … by the royal young woman' (διὰ τῆς βασιλικῆς νεάνιδος … ὑφ' ἧς καὶ εἰς τὰ βασίλεια δώματα ποδηγηθήσεται).

On ζ 149–185 (p. 218), I did not find a rendering of ἡλίου in ἠρέμα ἡλίου ἀνῆκε. In fact P (not reported in the apparatus) reads ἡλίῳ here, which I suspect is correct, a parallel construction to ὅπερ Ἀπόλλωνι ἀνεῖται ἡλίῳ in the same sentence. Thus Homer 'subtly presented the well-born, royal girl as consecrated to the Sun by means of the shoot on the Delian palm tree' rather than 'merely elevated [her] a bit'. In the same lemma, the translation ('in human unions; because most people fight against the yoke') gives no help in spotting the pun in ἐν ταῖς κατ' ἀνθρώπους συζυγίαις· οἱ πλείους γὰρ ζυγομαχοῦσι (p. 220). Rather against the poetic mastery that Eustathius imputed to Homer, as VAN DEN BERG illustrates extensively, is 'misused' (p. 173) for καταχρηστικῶς (on ζ 20–38) as opposed to 'against regular usage'; elsewhere, Eustathius defends ungrammatical expressions as serving a poetic function, to convey emotional effect (ζ 149–185, p. 214). He does not, however, recuse criticism entirely: the editors' rendering that an 'improperly applied' (ἀκύρως τεθέν) choice of words with respect to Penelope is 'distracting' (παρέλκει: ζ 128–129, p. 200) seems inevitable.

When Eustathius paraphrases the simile of a father whose recovery is welcomed by his children, the predicate construction could be rendered more precisely than 'but then God set him free from his trouble, and this is welcome' (p. 147). Better 'but then God set him free as one welcome', to his children, for ἀσπάσιον δ' ἄρα τόν γε θεὸς κακότητος ἔλυσεν (on ε 394–389). For πολυπενθής (η 234–242) 'who has had much grief' might have been preferred to 'who has endured much' (p. 333), which is too easily conflated with πολυπαθής; ἰδίως καλουμένη (on η 319–326), translated 'eccentrically designated' (p. 349), expresses the proper name of the place (Epeiros) rather than any eccentricity; σὺν τῷ εἶναι ναυτικοὶ καὶ ἀγαθοὶ ἦσαν (on η 319–326) is 'were, along with being men of ships, also good men' rather than 'were good men in connection with their naval abilities' (p. 352), and γέρας εἴτε τέλος τοῦ εὐεργετεῖν τὸ κλέος εἰπών (on η 331–

333) is not ‘by referring … to glory as a gift of honor or an end’ (p. 355) but ‘by referring to glory as a prize or aim of doing good’; σεμνύνει, subject Alcinous and object Odysseus (on θ 204–213), is not ‘speaks solemnly to’ (p. 405) but ‘exalts’ or ‘honors’.

There are some minor typos and inconsistencies, not unexpected in a translation of a work of this size involving two modern collaborators and an ancient author with a rather repetitive style. For example, ἐς ποταμοῦ προχοάς is once ‘into the mouth of the river’ and once ‘into the outpouring of the river’ in the same passage (ε 165–170); δολόεσσα is first ‘wily’ then ‘crafty’ in the same lemma (η 234–242); σπουδαῖος is ‘decent’ (η 298–320) but later ‘serious’ (η 317–318).

The price asked by Brill, however, is considerable (€ 180). Although it has fallen from that of the first volume (€ 262), the cost of the projected six volumes for the complete work risks being prohibitive. That, and the criticisms made above, should in no way detract from the gratitude due to the editors for this painstaking and useful labor, and from the hope for its continuation.

Keywords

Homer; Iliad; Odyssey; commentary; Eustathius of Thessalonica