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FLORE KIMMEL-CLAUZET, Définir l'épopée en Grèce ancienne: contribution à une histoire de l'idée d'épopée d'Hérodote à Tzetzès (Littérature & Linguistique 7). Lyon: MOM Éditions 2024. 273 pp. – ISBN 978-2-35668-089-1 (print), 978-2-35668-152-2 (online) open access

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A rhetorical treatise *On the Four Parts of the Perfect Speech*, attributed to the bishop and teacher Gregory of Corinth (ca. 1070–1156) but probably composed in the thirteenth century, enumerates various model authors from whose work Byzantine writers and orators may draw stylistic inspiration. Its final section is dedicated to 'heroic poems': 'The Homeric ones are simply the best. In such things, you thus have Homer as a better model than all others; next [you also have] Oppian and the Periegete, Tryphiodorus in his *Capture of Troy*, Musaeus, and any other such poets.'[1] The common denominator of the poets on the list is thus a formal one, found in their use of the heroic metre (i.e., the hexameter) and their exemplary literary style rather than their subject matter.[2] While heroic poems thus do not need to be about heroes, poems about heroes do not need to be composed in the heroic metre: *Digenis Akritis*, often considered the only Byzantine epic, is written in the accentual fifteen-syllable verse widely used for narrative poetry in the later Byzantine period. Nevertheless, its poet directly places himself in the tradition of Homer and his poems on the valiant Greeks at Troy, arguing that he is 'not repeating the boasts or fictions and stories which Homer and other Hellenes falsely invented. For these events are not stories that are told nor boasting that is repeated but they are all completely true: let no one

1. *On the Four Parts of a Perfect Speech* 167–172, ed. WOLFRAM HÖRANDNER, Pseudo-Gregorios Korinthios, Über die vier Teile der perfekten Rede. Medioevo greco 12 (2012) pp. 87–131: καὶ ἁπλῶς ἄριστα τὰ Ὁμηρικά. Μεῖζον οὖν πάντων ἐν τοῖς τοιούτοις ἀρχέτυπον ἔχεις τὸν Ὅμηρον, εἶτα τὸν Ὀππιανὸν καὶ τὸν Περιηγητὴν, τὸν Τρυφιόδωρον ἐν τῇ ἁλώσει τῆς Τροίας, τὸν Μουσαῖον καὶ εἴ τις τοιοῦτος.

2. For a similarly broad take on epic poetry, see the recent Cambridge Companion to Ancient Greek Epic, ed. EMMA GREENSMITH (Cambridge 2024). The earlier Companion to Ancient Epic, ed. JOHN M. FOLEY (Malden MA 2005), instead focuses predominantly on heroic epic across cultures and centuries.

disbelieve that I am telling the truth about Akritis, famous Frontiersman.'[3] These two brief examples point to different ways in which ancient Greek epic – particularly that of Homer – was read and responded to in Byzantium, as well as to different ways in which epic poetry was conceptualised in varying contexts.

The question of how the concept of epic was understood from Herodotus in the fifth century BCE to John Tzetzes and Eustathios of Thessaloniki in the twelfth century CE is the subject of KIMMEL-CLAUZET's *Définir l'épopée en Grèce ancienne*. Both of the above-cited texts fall outside the scope of the book, owing not only to their late date but also to their lack of an explicit definition of epic. Considering the cultural authority ascribed to ancient Greek epic and the richness of scholarly and literary responses to epic poetry from the archaic period onwards, a comprehensive study on the idea of epic in the selected timeframe exceeds the scope of a single monograph. KIMMEL-CLAUZET therefore understandably limits her study to texts that directly discuss the defining qualities of epic; as a consequence, the broader understanding of and engagement with epic in the selected texts and their cultural contexts occasionally receive limited attention. KIMMEL-CLAUZET's corpus of forty-eight sources – intended to be representative rather than exhaustive – comprises well-known authors such as Herodotus, Aristotle, Plato, and Horace; Hellenistic and Imperial rhetorical treatises such as those of Demetrius, Dionysius of Halicarnassus, and Hermogenes; as well as ancient and Byzantine lexica, metrical treatises, rhetorical handbooks, and commentaries of various kinds, some of which have not been widely studied to date. Both Greek and Latin materials are included as belonging to the same Greco-Roman tradition of literary thought. By focusing on the definitions of epic as manifestations of critical theory and practice, KIMMEL-CLAUZET puts literary criticism centre stage without subordinating it to the canonical poems with which it is concerned and whose authors worked according to entirely different premises than those which the later tradition attributes to them. Her study, then, is a contribution to the history of Greek scholarship and literary thinking as much as the reception of epic poetry.

3. *Digenis Akritis*, Escorial 718–722, ed. and trans. ELIZABETH M. JEFFREYS, Digenis Akritis: The Grottaferrata and Escorial Versions. Cambridge 1998. For a similar idea, see Grottaferrata 4.27–32; for *Digenis Akritis* as heroic poetry, see most recently MARKÉTA KULHÁNKOVÁ, The Fates of Epic in Byzantium: Homer for a New Era. In: EMMA GREENSMITH (ed.), Cambridge Companion to Ancient Greek Epic. Cambridge 2024, pp. 400–421, esp. 406–417.

The book is divided into two parts. The first part (Chapters 1–4) explores the most common components of ancient and Byzantine definitions of epic, discussing ideas regarding the genre's name, form, and content. Chapter 1 concentrates on the often-ambiguous terminology used to refer to epic poetry and its poets. As the scholarly tradition engaged with epic poetry as written texts rather than orally composed and performed songs, references to the genre's melic dimensions had become uncommon already by the fifth century BCE. While most authors used the generic terms for 'poet' (*poiētēs*) and 'poetry' (*poiēsis*) when referring to epic, more specific terms such as *epopoiia* and the polysemic *epos* served to distinguish epic poetry from other poetic genres. KIMMEL-CLAUZET's careful analysis demonstrates that discussions of the genre's name are not ideologically neutral but reveal assumptions about the nature of epic poetry and its superiority over other poetic genres as well as all other modes of discourse.

Chapter 2 explores the formal features that ancient authors consider typical of epic poetry. The chapter's first part delves deeper into the implications of defining epic as hexametric poetry, examining ancient perceptions of the hexameter as reflecting ideas on the defining qualities of epic poetry. The chapter's second part explores ancient discussions of the mimetic and narrative dimensions of epic poetry, starting with Plato's *Republic* and Aristotle's *Poetics*, both of which profoundly impacted the later tradition. Strikingly absent from all definitions, KIMMEL-CLAUZET argues, are mentions of divine inspiration (a feature not exclusive to epic poetry) as well as oral composition and rhapsodic performance (with the exception of Eustathios). Here and elsewhere, it would have been interesting to involve to a greater degree the ideas on epic found beyond direct definitions in the wider context of ancient scholarship. Various texts reflect on the oral and performative dimensions of epic poetry, if perhaps not on oral composition. Ancient biographies, for instance, present Homer as a travelling bard who supported himself by performing his poems.[4] Stories of divine inspiration, divine assistance, or divine origins are also common in accounts of the lives of ancient poets, if not exclusively of those composing epic poetry.[5] Although not articulated in definitions of epic, these two aspects were nevertheless

4. See, e.g., Ps.-Herodotus, *Life of Homer*, esp. 9–16, ed. and trans. MARTIN L. WEST, Homeric Hymns, Homeric Apocrypha, Lives of Homer (Loeb Classical Library 496). Cambridge MA 2003.

5. See, e.g., MARY R. LEFKOWITZ, The Lives of the Greek Poets, 2nd edn. Baltimore 2012, *passim*.

part of broader conceptualisations of epic poetry (and ancient poetry in general – as so often, they are not easily distinguished).

In the book's third chapter, KIMMEL-CLAUZET argues for a gradual reduction of the typical content of epic to the exploits of heroes and deeds of war, often with edifying and exemplary force. The chapter discusses heroic exploits, the combination of divine and human affairs, and the presence of the mythical and marvellous as foundational elements of epic in ancient discussions, occurring with varying emphases and nuances in different contexts and different authors. This combination of the heroic and the supernatural, the historical and the mythical, is central to the definition found across the oeuvre of John Tzetzes, to which the book's fourth chapter is dedicated. KIMMEL-CLAUZET analyses the precedents and theoretical underpinnings of Tzetzes' four defining elements of epic: in addition to the hexameter and a special type of diction, he lists 'allegorical myth' (stories about the gods) and 'history' (the deeds of heroes) as characteristic of epic poetry. The chapter demonstrates how Tzetzes' unique definition is anchored in earlier scholarship (esp. the commentaries on Dionysius Thrax' *Art of Grammar*) and earlier discussions on the (pedagogical) value of myth, reflects common modes of reading ancient epic (esp. Homer), and ties in with the grammarian's task of explaining the language, myths, metre, and historical references in ancient texts. More than a definition of epic, then, Tzetzes articulates a programmatic statement on his approach to epic poetry as fleshed out in his exegetical works. His work thus exemplifies KIMMEL-CLAUZET's general observation that the pedagogical aims of grammarians and rhetoricians directly impacted their definitions of epic, particularly from the Imperial Period onwards.

It is worth bearing in mind that Tzetzes' notion of 'history' refers not only to the exploits of heroes in general but also to the Trojan War more specifically. Byzantine chroniclers, such as John Malalas in the sixth century or Constantine Manasses in the twelfth, dedicate significant space to the Trojan War as an important event in world history. KIMMEL-CLAUZET, moreover, emphasises the absence from the definitions of epic of *plasma* or 'realistic fiction', a third category commonly found in ancient literary criticism in addition to history and myth. However, outside the context of definitions of epic *stricto sensu*, it can be found in broader conceptualisations of (epic) poetry, as is the case in Eustathios' commentaries on Homer.[6] Eustathios' and Tzetzes' ideas on (Homeric) epic have re-

6. See esp. ERIC CULLHED (ed. and trans.), Eustathios of Thessalonike: Commentary

ceived much attention in recent scholarship, which is largely missing from KIMMEL-CLAUZET's bibliography.[7] In general, the bibliography includes almost no research published after 2019, when the study was submitted towards obtaining a *habilitation à diriger des recherches* at Sorbonne University.

The three chapters of the book's second part (Chapters 5–7) are dedicated to three thought patterns underpinning the definitions of epic explored in the previous chapters: comparing and contrasting, searching for origins, and listing illustrious representatives. Chapter 5 returns to the previous observation that epic tends to be defined only when it is placed in relation to other types of discourse, and other types of poetry more specifically, which often leads to essentialising definitions of the genres. The chapter delves deeper into the opposition between epic and lyric, similarities and contrasts between epic and drama, and the affinities of epic with various prose genres, chiefly historiography and oratory. KIMMEL-CLAUZET underscores once again how epic is frequently considered with regard to its use as a school text in grammatical and rhetorical education. Relevant to her discussion of epic's rhetorical dimension, however, may be not only Hermogenes' definition of epic as panegyric in verse and of Homer as the best panegyrist (as discussed in the chapter), but also the broader 'rhetoricisation of literature', particularly acute from the Second Sophistic onwards, that made rhetoric the overarching framework for all literary production, including poetry.[8] It is within this context that Eustathios, for instance, considers the *Iliad* an encomium on Achilles, deems Homer the best of all orators and a model of all types of rhetorical discourse (as Tzetzes does too), and analyses Homeric poetry in Hermogenean terms. Although this rhetorical aspect does not feature in Eustathios' brief definition of epic poetry and was not exclusive

on Homer's Odyssey, vol. 1: On Rhapsodies A–B (Studia Byzantina Upsaliensia 17). Uppsala 2016, pp. 27*–29* open access. See also BAUKJE VAN DEN BERG, Homer the Rhetorician: Eustathios of Thessalonike on the Composition of the Iliad (Oxford Studies in Byzantium). Oxford 2022, pp. 47, 87.

7. In addition to PAOLO CESARETTI's seminal Allegoristi di Omero a Bisanzio (Milan 1991), Tzetzes' ideas on the importance of allegory in Homeric epic, for instance, have been discussed in, e.g., CULLHED, Eustathios of Thessalonike, pp. 30*–33* and ADAM J. GOLDWYN, Theory and Method in John Tzetzes' Allegories of the Iliad and Allegories of the Odyssey. Scandinavian Journal of Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies 3 (2017) pp. 141–171 open access.

8. On the rhetoricisation of literature and its corollary, the 'literaturisation' of rhetoric, see, e.g., LAURENT PERNOT, Rhetoric in Antiquity. Trans. W. E. HIGGINS. Washington DC 2005, p. 197.

to it, it informed his idea of and engagement with epic to a considerable degree.

Chapter 6 discusses ancient and Byzantine reflections on the origins of epic poetry, which are often equated with the origins of the hexameter. These reflections frequently involve aetiological myths (esp. the story of how the hexameter was invented when Apollo combated a monstrous serpent at Delphi), a search for the first inventor (e.g., the Pythian priestess Phemonoe, who expressed her oracles in hexameters), and etymological explanations of the different terms used to refer to epic (e.g., *epos* is derived from *hepomai*, 'to follow', as the events follow the oracles). These discussions of its origins highlight the religious dimension of epic poetry as well as its status as the first and oldest form of poetry. Etymological thinking, so KIMMEL-CLAUZET concludes, played a central role in definitions of epic poetry, as ancient authors often confused the origin of the name and the origin of the genre, with the perceived meaning of the words conditioning the presentation of the birth of the genre rather than the other way around. Taking KIMMEL-CLAUZET's interpretation one step further, one can consider such etymological explanations 'repositories of cultural information': in their 'mnemonic capacity', they preserve cultural conceptions of the genre of epic poetry and its origins.[9]

In antiquity, authors rather than texts embodied genres: when ancient scholars discuss the definition of epic, they commonly mention at least one illustrious representative of the genre. The book's final chapter discusses this author-centric understanding of epic poetry by exploring the different poets endowed with defining importance for the genre. Unsurprisingly, Homer is mentioned most frequently, often together with Hesiod as another canonical poet (along with Panyasis, Pisander, and Antimachus) or with Orpheus as another founding father of epic (along with Linus and Musaeus).[10] KIMMEL-CLAUZET presents the anonymous poets of the Epic Cycle, often

9. On this function of ancient etymological thinking, see INEKE SLUITER, Ancient Etymology: A Tool for Thinking. In: FRANCO MONTANARI – STEPHANOS MATTHAIOS – ANTONIOS RENGAKOS (eds), Brill's Companion to Ancient Greek Scholarship, vol. 2: Between Theory and Practice. Leiden 2015, pp. 896–922; citations from p. 918.

10. On such ancient and Byzantine lists of canonical authors, including those of epic poets, see also GUGLIELMO CAVALLO, Παραδείγματα: Le liste degli autori greci esemplari dall'antichità a Bisanzio. Berlin 2024. On Tzetzes' special interest in Orpheus, see VALERIA F. LOVATO, La ricezione di Odisseo e di Omero presso Giovanni Tzetze e Eustazio di Tessalonica. PhD diss., Lausanne – Turin 2017, pp. 194–202. Tzetzes considers various aspects of Homeric poetry to be indebted to that of Orpheus, who, in his view, may have been Homer's teacher.

criticised for their lack of poetic quality or originality and primarily of interest for their mythological content, as a counter-model proving that merely writing about heroic matters in hexameter verse did not make one a true epic poet. As the discussion throughout the book has repeatedly demonstrated, however, Homer's ambivalent status – at once the quintessential epic poet and irreducible to one genre – frequently complicated definitions of epic, blurring the boundaries between epic and poetry in general.

While the book's thematic approach allows for tracing the history of individual aspects, it at times leads to repetition and fragmentation, as different parts of each source text are discussed across the various themes. This is partly remedied by the extensive general conclusion that synthesises the book's main observations for the different periods and highlights how the definition of epic never remained static but evolved across the centuries. KIMMEL-CLAUZET emphasises the important – original – contribution of Byzantine scholars such as Eustathios and Tzetzes, in line with the premise formulated in the book's introduction that later texts should not be mined only for what they preserve of earlier – lost – traditions but should be regarded as valuable sources in their own right. Considering recent and ongoing work on Byzantine scholarship and literary thought, one may hope that, in the future, this will be a matter of course that requires no explanation.

KIMMEL-CLAUZET's close analysis yields many insightful observations on the individual texts to which this summary does no justice. Its broad chronological scope enables her study to trace the changes and constants in ancient thinking on epic and reveal the plurality of the tradition. Its diachronic analysis unravels the genealogical entanglements of the different texts and their ideas, taking each source as a node of earlier traditions and contemporary concerns. The appendix of the book presents French translations of all forty-eight source texts, many translated into a modern language for the first time. KIMMEL-CLAUZET's work thus offers a rich case study in ancient Greek literary thought and will be a resource for scholars and students interested in ancient literary criticism and scholarship, as well as the long history of reading and thinking about ancient Greek epic.

Keywords

Greek epic; literary theory