

RESEÑAS  
REVIEWS



RICHARD B. RUTHERFORD (ed.), *Homer. Iliad book XVIII*, Cambridge Greek and Latin Classics, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019, xiii+261 pp., \$30.99, £ 23.99 (pb), ISBN 978-1-107-64312-3.

This exemplary commentary begins with a clearly written Introduction that is designed to meet the reader's most natural interests and therefore to cause him or her to want to read the *Iliad*. It begins with discussions of the main characters of Book XVIII: Achilles, Hector, and the gods, and then offers a detailed treatment of the passage describing the shield of Achilles. It continues with a discussion of the language and style of epic poetry and then of important narrative elements: e.g. the role of the narrator, of speeches, and of similes. Finally, it offers a necessary introduction to epic metre, grammar, and syntax, before describing the textual tradition.

Rutherford's opening essay argues that Achilles' decision to return to battle after the death of Patroclus and Hector's decision to remain in the field once Achilles has reappeared are centrally important for the plot of the *Iliad* up to Book 22 (2). Rutherford compares Achilles' new, more complex, anger against Hector and himself with his previous anger against Agamemnon (4-5) and then discusses Achilles' fate more generally: his status as the son of a mortal and a goddess, and his fated (?) short life span (6-7). Finally, Rutherford describes Achilles' role in the final books of the *Iliad*, bringing forward (among many other things) the long shadow cast by his impending death (8-9).

Hector's death made the fall of Troy inevitable (8). The essay on Hector compares him with Achilles, contrasting his mission to defend home and family to Achilles' quest for glory and his life in human society to Achilles' isolation (10-11). As a mortal, Hector does not stand alone, but needs his army and Troy's allies; his foolish decision to stay in the field once Achilles has returned to the battle (and together with this to ignore the limitations set by Zeus on his advance against the Greeks) is likewise fully human. He is ignorant of the fatal consequences; in contrast, when Achilles returns to the battle, he fully understands what he is doing (13).

Rutherford's essay on the gods begins with an overview of their nature and role in the *Iliad* as a whole. It describes the family, or court, of the gods, and makes some trenchant remarks about their nature: the gods are not omniscient, and can lose track of things or also deceive one another (14); they may at times passionately participate in the Trojan War, but also turn away in indifference (15). A nuanced presentation of the irresolvable questions about Zeus's status and the character of fate follows (16-17). Turning to Book

XVIII, Rutherford outlines the three ways in which the gods appear: as the addressees of prayers or sacrifice, as communicating directly with human beings, and as communicating among themselves (18). Thetis, Iris, Athena, and Hera visit Achilles and/or intervene to affect the balance of the war in Book XVIII; the most prominent passage in which we see the gods on their own is the passage in which Thetis visits Hephaestus to request Achilles' new armour; as Rutherford points out, in this scene the poet 'vividly imagines a divine society' (20), with all of its wonderful apparatus and graceful courtesies.

These essays, written in plain language and offering the fruit of many years' acquaintance with the Homeric poems, introduce students to the main themes and characters of the *Iliad*; the subsequent essay on the shield of Achilles goes into much greater detail on a single passage. After describing how the shield passage fits into the *Iliad*, Rutherford defines ecphrasis (22), outlines the scenes represented on the shield, and argues that an ancient audience would have been able to visualize both the unfolding scenes and the shield as a whole; he offers a simple map of the shield on page 192.

The description of the shield of Achilles is by far the longest ekphrastic passage in the *Iliad* and has engendered an industry of interpretation; Rutherford discusses the main species. Historicizing interpretations tried to apply the description to specific places and situations (25–26). Cosmic allegories treated the shield as 'a metaphorical representation of the universe' (26). Admirable is that Rutherford finds the kernel of perceptiveness that motivated these two modes of interpretation, which are generally so foreign to us. Turning to more modern approaches, Rutherford explores interpretations that focus on the relation of the shield to the plot of the *Iliad*. Focusing in particular on the shield's 'city at peace' and 'city at war', he argues that they function in a way similar to similes, throwing the light of comparison and contrast onto the poem's main events and characters from a more remote and generic perspective (27). In the subsequent sections, Rutherford brings forward Hephaestus, the maker of shield, as an artist comparable to the poet and to other creative artists inside the poem, and as god-creator of the shield, which reflects 'a god's perspective on human life' (31). He emphasizes Hephaestus' and the poet's creative ingenuity in bringing the shield alive with sound, colour, and movement. A final section on the influence of this passage concludes by summing up its attraction: the shield of Achilles offers 'a vision of human existence, freed from specific legends and locales, without didacticism or moralizing' (34).

If I have dwelt on these first sections of the Introduction, it is because a reader of this review might easily remain unaware of their value for students and for all who think about the *Iliad* if their conventional topics were simply listed. It is one thing to write an essay on Achilles, and another to write a good one, as I think these essays are; they are both efficient and suggestive.

The Introduction concludes by discussing Homeric language and style, starting with a description of their historical background. Rutherford touches on Homer's high style and the role of generic scenes (never exactly repeated: 38-40). Next he treats narratorial reticence and other narrative devices, in particular what I would call discrepant awareness, but what Rutherford calls epic irony, by which he designates the poet's means of giving the reader more insight into the future than the characters; retrospective comments and foreshadowing also receive attention (40-45). Reflections on the relation of speeches to the narrative (including some useful reminders about distinguishing between public and private discourse) and the relation of the similes to the narrative conclude the section on Homer's narrative art.

Finally, the necessary practical means of getting at the poem: metre, grammar, and syntax, are clearly explained and furnished with many useful examples (50-66), before the concluding section on the textual provenance of this particular commentary (66-70). Rutherford explains particular difficulties of establishing a text of Homer and describes the philosophies of recent editions; he bases his commentary on West's edition (70), with a few alterations that are explained here and also in the lemmata.

The lemmata themselves are clear, helpful, and not overstuffed with information and observations. Short essays introduce characters or situations; opaque passages and difficult words are sometimes translated; Rutherford also parses some unfamiliar verb forms. A strong feature of the lemmata is that they consistently set words, linguistic usages, or themes and characters into historical context and the context of the larger poem.

An appendix on Gilgamesh and Homer, in which Rutherford argues that direct correspondences between Homer and the Babylonian poem should not be sought, while at the same time the common roots and psychologies of the poems are recognizable (231-36), follows the lemmata. The volume concludes with a rich bibliography and two indices: a thematic index and an index of selected Greek words.

Overall, this reviewer found the commentary both pleasant and useful: the lemmata offer a great variety of remarks without getting in the way of reading the poem, the introduction is thoughtful and well-organized, as I have tried to show; the materials that support student readers are careful and thorough. The volume thus offers a pendant to Irene de Jong's 2013 commentary on *Iliad 22* in the same series; together, the two commentaries make for an excellent introduction to Homer.

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