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Der pseudohomerische Hermes-Hymnus. Ein interpretierender Kommentar

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This is a published version of a dissertation submitted to the University of Mainz in 2014. It falls into two unequal halves: an introduction to the *Homeric Hymn to Hermes* (hereafter *HHH*), pp. 15–80, and a lemmatised ‘interpretative commentary’, pp. 81–291. The volume ends with a detailed bibliography; there is no index.

The introduction is subdivided into six sections. Section I discusses the nature of archaic Greek hymnody, and the origins and structure of the *Homeric Hymns* as a corpus. Sections II and III cover the date and genre of *HHH*, respectively. Section IV is a brief discussion of the status of ‘Homer’ in relation to the *Hymns*. Section V looks at the mythological content of *HHH*, primarily the motif of cattle-theft; Section VI focuses on Hermes himself, in his roles as inventor, thief and trickster, persuasive speaker, and comic figure.

One obvious omission here is any discussion of the text itself: its manuscript tradition is briefly mentioned at the end of Section I (pp. 30–1), apparently for want of anywhere better to do so, but there is no serious examination of the poem’s transmission or of its treatment by past editors. On the whole this is fair enough: textual criticism is not a focus of the volume. The author uses the text of West’s 2003 Loeb edition, with a handful of adjustments. Annoyingly, however, she does not reproduce that text. *HHH* is not a long poem, and given how much space here is taken up with reprinting lengthy passages from other Greek texts (see below), it is hard not to feel that the book’s utility could have been easily and substantially boosted by not forcing the reader to have West’s Loeb open in the other hand.

Section I touches briefly on a range of topics, some more relevant than others: the summary of the ‘prooimion’ question is clear and useful; the quotation of Plato’s definitions of hymnody in *Rep.* and *Leg.* is less obviously needed. As other reviewers have noted, it is strange to find no mention at all in this section of Furley and Bremer’s *Greek Hymns* (2001). Section II is both the lengthiest

section and the least satisfactory. The author's argument that *HHH* is a Hellenistic composition is an unusual and interesting one, requiring much more support than it receives. She makes three basic points:

i) the poem's presentation of gods as humanised and humorous characters is reminiscent of Alexandrian poetry, and specifically of the opening to *Argonautica* Book 3;

ii) the poem's status as 'eine einzige Aneinanderreihung von Aitiologien' (p. 49) is again reminiscent of Callimachus and friends;

iii) the poem's vocabulary often deviates from that of other early Greek epic.

None of this stands up to even casual scrutiny. Entertainingly flawed and 'realistic' depictions of the gods are already present and correct in Homer. All three of the other long *Homeric Hymns* are equally obsessed with aetiology, to the point that Apollo in particular can barely sneeze without accidentally founding a shrine. The point about vocabulary might be revealing if it were fully explored, but instead we are given an arbitrary list of six words that do not appear in Homer, told that 'viele der neuen Wörter sind hellenistisch' (p. 36), and then hurried along before we can ask questions. Which ones? Certainly neither σύμβολον (cf. A. Ag. 8) nor περιφραδής (cf. S. *Ant.* 348). There is no exploration of *why* a comical story about a baby who steals cows might be forced to introduce some words foreign to the *Iliad*.

Section III, on genre, is extremely brief and distracted by epyllion. Section IV is misleadingly titled 'Homer – Autor des Hermes-Hymnus?'; the author has no intention of suggesting anything of the kind, and instead talks sensibly about the relationship between *HHH* and the Homeric poems. Section V compares the story of Hermes stealing cattle to two other versions, those found in Sophocles' *Ichneutae* and the *Bibliotheca* of Apollodorus, but ends on an unsatisfying note: we are simply told that *HHH* has some things in common with both versions, which is not particularly surprising. Section VI, finally, is a useful summary of Hermes' traditional roles in mythology and literature.

The commentary itself is good. The author spends much of her time on explaining the Greek: this is in keeping with her mission statement for the book, which is to focus on giving (in Norden's words) 'die mir richtig erscheinende Erklärung' (p. 9) rather than summarising the views of other scholars. Parallels, either of content or of form, are kept to a minimum. Often she falls back on quoting a dictionary definition, usually *LfggrE*, to explain a particular word.

Longer explanations are provided where they help to clarify the action of the poem, e.g. in the discussions of the lyre (pp. 116–120) and the syrinx (p. 275). Plunges into textual criticism occur unpredictably: sometimes we are given detailed analysis of a problem, e.g. on the lacuna at 567–71, but elsewhere a variant reading is simply reported without comment. The overall impression is of the poem's meaning being expounded to a class of advanced Greek language students, by a teacher who sometimes lets personal interest sidetrack her into musing on the text. Scholars who feel that footnotes should not appear in lemmatised commentary will be driven absolutely wild: there are 403 here, and page 120 has two lines of 'main text' perched precariously atop forty-three of solid footnote.

This volume will be very useful to German speakers who want some assistance in understanding *HHH*. It will also have things to offer specialist scholars on the poem, although these will probably be small suggestions and modifications rather than big new ideas: the only really new direction the author attempts is the Hellenistic date, which is unlikely to convince anyone without substantial reinforcement. Its one serious failing is the lack of a text and translation, which would have made the book a fully self-contained starter's guide to *HHH*: this omission makes it especially annoying that, for example, three entire pages (pp. 42–44) are taken up by a quotation *and translation* of seventy-four lines of the *Argonautica* to no very obvious purpose. Why spare your readers the trouble of going to find a copy of Apollonius, and yet force them to go and find a copy of the poem you are actually helping them to read? Nonetheless, the author has produced a work which will serve very well as part of a larger tool-kit: with this volume, plus West's text and Vergados' 2013 edition, a scholar will be admirably equipped to explore this strange and fascinating poem for themselves.

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