

Katerina Carvounis: *A Commentary on Quintus of Smyrna, Posthomerica* 14. Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press 2019. LXVIII, 327 p. £ 90.00. ISBN: 978-0-19-956505-4.

In the landscape of Quintus studies, commentaries on individual books of the *Posthomerica* are still very welcome. So far, and to my knowledge, they now exist on book 1 lines 1–219 (Bär),<sup>1</sup> book 2 (Ferreccio and the online dissertation by Compagnolo),<sup>2</sup> book 5 (James/Lee),<sup>3</sup> book 7 (Tsomis and the online dissertation by Langella),<sup>4</sup> book 9 lines 333–546 (Ozbek in press),<sup>5</sup> book 10 (Tsomis),<sup>6</sup> book 12 (Campbell)<sup>7</sup> and now also on book 14 (Carvounis). Despite this fortunate increase of interest in recent years, several parts of the *Posthomerica* to date lack such attention, although at least some books have formed or are still forming the topic of doctoral dissertations. The present study by Katerina Carvounis partially dates back to her own DPhil dissertation from 2005 (*Transformations of Epic: Reading Quintus of Smyrna, Posthomerica* XIV. Diss. Oxford). That study already contained a partial commentary on book 14, but the work has been revised, completed and updated, so that the present publication covers the entire book.

- 1 S. Bär: Quintus Smyrnaeus ‘Posthomerica’ 1. Die Wiedergeburt des Epos aus dem Geiste der Amazonomachie. Mit einem Kommentar zu den Versen 1–219. Göttingen 2009 (Hypomnemata 183).
- 2 A. Ferreccio: Commento al libro II dei *Posthomerica* di Quinto Smirneo. Roma: 2014 (Pleiadi 18); M. Compagnolo: Commento al secondo logos dei *Posthomerica* di Quinto Smirneo. Diss. Venezia 2012 (available online: <http://dspace.unive.it/handle/10579/1218>; last consultation: 16/3/2020).
- 3 A. W. James/K. Lee: A Commentary on Quintus of Smyrna, *Posthomerica* V. Leiden/Boston/Köln 2000 (Mnemosyne Supplements 208).
- 4 G. P. Tsomis: Quintus Smyrnaeus: Kommentar zum siebten Buch der *Posthomerica*. Stuttgart 2018 (Palingenesia 110); E. Langella: Commento al libro VII dei *Posthomerica* di Quinto Smirneo. Diss. Milano 2017–2018 (available online: [https://air.unimi.it/retrieve/handle/2434/611610/1126342/phd\\_unimi\\_R11203.pdf](https://air.unimi.it/retrieve/handle/2434/611610/1126342/phd_unimi_R11203.pdf); last consultation: 16/3/2020).
- 5 L. Ozbek: La vicenda di Filottete, da Lemno a Troia: Quinto di Smirne, *Posthomerica* 9.333–546. Introduzione, testo, traduzione e commento. Pisa (in press).
- 6 G. P. Tsomis: Originalität und Rezeption im zehnten Buch der *Posthomerica*. Ein Kommentar. Trier 2018 (Bochumer altertumswissenschaftliches Colloquium 103).
- 7 M. Campbell: A Commentary of Quintus Smyrnaeus *Posthomerica* XII. Leiden 1981 (Mnemosyne Supplements 71).

To write a commentary on book 14 of Quintus Smyrnaeus poses a challenge. It is the last book of the late antique *Posthomerica*, an epic written in a remarkably Homeric language and style, and narrating the events between the end of the *Iliad* and the start of Odysseus' wanderings. As such, *Posthomerica* 14 not only creates closure (of its own poem), but also has the potential of giving an onset (in retroaction) towards the literary works of other poets. Homer's *Odyssey* and Vergil's *Aeneid* were obviously written before Quintus, but the episodes they chose from the Troy story are chronologically situated *after* the end of the Trojan War and, hence, after the end of the *Posthomerica*. Quintus's epic as a whole, and book 14 in particular, therefore face a complex engagement with the literary tradition. Such questions are not lost on Carvounis, whose commentary tackles the narrative function of Quintus's final book in detail. She presents a work that "primarily addresses points of lexicographic, stylistic, and literary interest, while also offering a range of notes and detailed introductions for each narrative episode to open up further interpretations of Book 14 in its literary context" (v). What lies before us is, indeed, a valuable new study on *Posthomerica* 14, as well as a rich reading guide for readers of Quintus.

In an extensive introduction, Carvounis first tackles a few hazardous questions about the *Posthomerica*. One issue is the date of the epic. General consensus places the work in the third century AD, which Carvounis endorses. She devotes several pages to embedding this discussion in a broader discourse about the assumed cultural-historical background of the *Posthomerica* (XXII–XXVI). Our attention is particularly drawn to three manuscript fragments. Despite their differing contents, all are somehow related to the third century AD. As such, they serve as wide ranging illustrations of the literary panorama of Quintus's (alleged) time (XXVI–XXXIII): the *Vision of Dorotheus* (author possibly related to Quintus?), Calliope's consolation of Thetis (also a scene in the *Posthomerica*; was Quintus a potential source of inspiration?) and Lycurgus and Locrian Ajax (shared motifs?). These "glimpses of [...] the dynamics of poetic composition in Q[uintus]'s literary-historical context" (XXXIII) offer us rare insights in the cultural world of an author that is, as a historical person, not much more to us than a ghost.

Carvounis' introduction further covers the changing reputation of the *Posthomerica* throughout centuries of readership (XVII–XIX; also the appreciation of individual scenes is later taken into consideration: e.g. Helen's appearance before the Greek army, 38), its possible sources and models (extensively:

XXXIII–LXV) and reflections on the place of book 14 at the end of the epic and its closure (LXV–LXVII). Perhaps more than for any other book of the *Posthomerica*, it is important to explore *both* the relation of this final book to other literary works (especially the epics that chronologically follow upon the end of book 14) *and* to explore how it hails back to the earlier books of Quintus's own epic, of which it narrates the end. All in all, the introduction solidly embeds book 14 in its larger literary context (internally as well as externally) and cultural context (diachronically and synchronically). This wide-ranging focus continues in the line to line commentary.

Carvounis draws on the Greek text of Vian 1969 (still the standard version). This edition of book 14 is printed in its entirety after the introduction.<sup>8</sup> Carvounis does not provide a translation of her own, but refers to the various new translations of the *Posthomerica* that have been published in recent years (VII).

The commentary is neatly arranged on the level of layout, with clear subdivisions and indications on top of each page of the poem lines discussed. At the beginning of a new section or subsection, there is room for a brief overview of its contents, which keeps the reader at pace and helps us to navigate. Book 14 is discussed in three large parts: Helen's return to the Greeks, the sacrifice of Polyxena and the storm in the return journey of the Greeks. Each is in turn subdivided in thematic sections with their own introduction, followed by detailed line to line commentaries. Overall, and besides the indispensable lexical and metrical information, the commentary strongly focusses on the text's narrative aspects. An example is the important structural observation about the contrast, within book 14, between the father-son reunion (Achilles-Neoptolemus, LXVI) and the mother-daughter separation (Hecuba-Polyxena, 35).

Coherence is characteristic of Carvounis' approach to the *Posthomerica* on several levels. First, on the text-internal level. Book 14 is presented as a strongly functional part in the entirety of the *Posthomerica*. The narrative unity of the epic has not always been taken for granted (e.g. the analytical approach

8 F. Vian: Quintus de Smyrne, La suite d'Homère, Tomes I–III (texte établi et traduit par F. Vian). Paris 1963/1966/1969. Second edition 2003 (Collection des Universités de France. Série grecque).

of Appel),<sup>9</sup> but is solidly established in recent decades. Carvounis endorses this view: “in adapting his models, Q[uintus] also distributes elements from within these models across one or more books of the *P[ost]H[omerica]*, drawing attention to the internal unity and structure of his epics” (XXXVI). For the last book of the *Posthomerica*, this focus is essential. As mentioned above, Book 14 creates closure (LXVI). Much of what happens here cannot be fully understood without taking into account the events in previous books. Carvounis serves the reader detailed overviews of (main but also minor) characters’ earlier appearances in the epic (e.g. Epeius [61–62], Ganymede [159], Hecuba [165–167]) to help us understand the full implications of their current role and characterization; similarly so for a few remarkable narrative features which reach their climax in book 14 (e.g. banquets [74], summary/victory songs [76–78], laments [144], anonymous speakers [257]).

The (in)consistency of Quintus with Homer – but also Vergil – is a second aspect of coherence on which the commentary focusses. On more than one occasion, Carvounis illustrates how the *Posthomerica* not only adopts a markedly Homeric style, but also structurally engages with *Iliad* and *Odyssey* – Quintus’s own epic is hemmed in between both. For the *Iliad*, this approach need not surprise. Ever since Quintus opened with: “when godlike Hector had been vanquished by the son of Peleus and the pyre had consumed him and the earth had covered his bones”,<sup>10</sup> scholars have dissected the notion of the *Posthomerica* being a sequel to Homer’s *Iliad*. Carvounis quotes Genette to explain the relation between *Iliad* and *Posthomerica*: “this continuation feeds on repetition or, at the very least, on rehashing the same material – not that it returns to the same incidents but that it thinks fit to continue them through a long series of similar incidents” (XXXIV). However, Carvounis also shows that fresh touches can still be added to this ever-lasting investigation: e.g. the death of Patroclus and Achilles’ wrath over Briseis are posited as precedents for current situations by Quintus (XXXIX); the role of Xanthus in both epics (55); a contrast is noted between Zeus’ refusal of a safe journey home in *Posthomerica* 14 and his consent in *Iliad* 1 towards Thetis, both by – not – nodding (75); the reversed characterization of Antenor and Theano (157);

9 W. Appel: Grundsätzliche Bemerkungen zu den ‘Posthomerica’ und Quintus Smyrnaeus. In: *Prometheus* 20, 1994, 1–13.

10 Translation from N. Hopkinson: *Quintus Smyrnaeus. Posthomerica*. Edited and translated by Neil Hopkinson. Cambridge, MA/London 2018 (Loeb Classical Library 19).

the destruction of the Greek wall, anticipated in the *Iliad* and now carried out (271–273).

Perhaps even more important for book 14, and to date understudied with relation to the *Posthomerica*, is the *Odyssey*. Carvounis' commentary reveals welcome spaces for comparison and (possibly) parallel: e.g. the victory songs in *Posthomerica* 14 in relation to Demodocus' and Phemius' performances in the *Odyssey* (77–78); the reunion of Helen and Menelaus compared to that of Penelope and Odysseus (e.g. 52, 83–84, 96), or the characters of Helen and Penelope more generally (84); Penelope's dream and that of Neoptolemus (138), the reality vs. the later account of the Greeks' departure from Greece (160), the petrification of Hecuba and of the ship of the Phaeacians (167), Odysseus' and Locrian Ajax' struggles with the sea (251–252), the gods' disposition at the end of the *Posthomerica* compared to the beginning of the *Odyssey* (282).

The power relation of Zeus and fate in the *Posthomerica* and particularly in book 14 (where the matter is most explicitly raised) is a much-debated issue. As Carvounis points out, Zeus only speaks twice in the *Posthomerica*; once in Book 2 and here in Book 14 (he grants his daughter Athena's request, 197). Moreover, one of the main events in *Posthomerica* 14 is an apocalyptic storm designed as retribution for the impiety of certain humans. One relevant question is if the gods are indeed the highest authority in Quintus's universe, or (as is more or less suggested in the epic) if even Zeus has to submit to fate. Another is the difference in divine morale (or difference in focus thereon) between Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, and how Quintus deals with this as an intermediary between both (e.g. the relation between *Iliad* and *Posthomerica* [XL–XLII]). Book 14 may well serve as a “bridge between the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*” in this regard (LXVI). Specifically, Carvounis considers the power of the divine in *Posthomerica* 14 against that of the same gods in the *Odyssey* (e.g. 196, 282), which offers perhaps one of the best illustrations of the potential of continuity between both epics – after all, what happens at the beginning of the *Odyssey* could – or should? – be caused at the end of the *Posthomerica* in narrative chronology. A similar point is made for Vergil's *Aeneid*. Carvounis states that “for readers of the *P[ost]H[omerica]* familiar with the *Aeneid*, this final divine exchange on Olympus and the destructive storm unleashed upon the Greeks draws attention to the position of the *P[ost]H[omerica]* not only as a sequel to the *Iliad* and a prequel to the *Odyssey*, but also as a belated ‘pre-text’ for *Aeneid* 1” (188) and, more generally, that “the *P[ost]H[omerica]*

also invites readers to reflect upon the continuation of the Trojan myth through its Vergilian strand” (LXV).

The Latin question (does Quintus actively engage with Latin works, such as but not limited to Vergil and Ovid?) repeatedly resurfaces throughout the commentary. The matter has evoked heated debates in the past, but Carvounis takes an unpolemic and well-documented stand in this discussion. She starts from the three arguments that have casted doubt over an engagement between the *Posthomerica* and Latin sources: scarce evidence for teaching of Latin in the East in Quintus’s time, the difficulty of finding cross-linguistic verbal echoes, and the possibility of a common Greek source (LVII–LVIII). Carvounis explains that there was at least “interest in reading Vergil’s works both in translation and (even at a more rudimentary level) in Latin” in Quintus’s era; she points out common features between the *Posthomerica* and the *Aeneid* and underlines that we should look further than the divergences between the two texts; shared details are worth exploring further (LVII–LXV; quote LXII). Overall, however, to explain her position is not an intention *an sich* for Carvounis; it is mainly instrumental for her specific commentary analyses, where the Latin reference texts are (refreshingly) not treated with more hesitation than the Greek ones (e.g. Vergil and Quintus about Sinon [70], or about Aeolus [206, 210, 222]; repeatedly also Ovid, e.g. 121, 129, and others).

Generally, the commentary engages with a broad spectrum of literature (as is confirmed by the index of passages). Carvounis’ main interests besides Homer and Vergil include Hesiod (important for the Titans [245]; but also for “Zeus’ power over the fortunes of men” [65] and the concepts of Aidos and Nemesis [189]) and the ancient tragedies. Aeschylus’ *Agamemnon*, Euripides’ *Troades* and *Hecuba* (among others) and a few lost tragedies from Sophocles (e.g. *Locrian Ajax* and *Nauplius Pyraeus* [218]) form thematic precedents for several characters and episodes described in *Posthomerica* 14, such as the sorrow of the Trojan women, the (informal) judgment of Helen (her character is intertextually discussed at length in the introduction [XLVII–LI; also 83–86]) and the sacrifice of Polyxena (151–152); also here, Latin authors are included as options worth considering (e.g. Seneca’s *Troades* and *Agamemnon* [129, 172, 219–220, 242]; even Accius’ *Chytaemnestra* [242]).

Quintus’s relation to the Epic Cycle remains doubtful, but is thoroughly considered in the introduction (LII–LVII). Later or contemporary literature is brought into the discussion from time to time, such as Triphiodorus (e.g. XXII–XXIII and often), Musaeus (e.g. 47) and Nonnus (e.g. 47 and often).

Popular scenes, important concepts and characters are compared across traditions (e.g. Sinon [68–72]; the afterlife of Achilles [98–100]; Polyxena [100–102]; the reception of Homeric dream scenes [103–104]) to better illustrate how Quintus engages with them.

In this light, it cannot be underestimated how Carvounis equally notes scenes in the *Posthomerica* that are unique (or contain original innovations). Book 14 alone counts several cases: e.g. the scene where the Greek army receives Helen (LXVI), the ‘morning after’ celebrations of the Greeks (67); Quintus’s version of the death of Ajax (241) and Hecuba’s double transformation (166). By pointing these out, Carvounis underlines the merits of Quintus as a poet in his own right: “in many respects [...], the *P[ost]H[omerica]* is envisaged as being part of a larger story, for it is openly presented as a sequel to the *Iliad* and, to a lesser extent, as a prequel to the *Odyssey*. At the same time, Quintus seeks to offer a self-contained epic” (XL).

As a whole, this commentary combines an interest in broader themes and the structural composition of the epic with close readings that add new insights in the working of the poem on the inter- and intra-textual level. One field in which both of these elements converge, is the study of Homeric similes (XLII–XLVIII; examples include the animal imagery for Polyxena and Hecuba [35]; the poppy in *Iliad*, *Aeneid* and *Posthomerica* [57]; the peculiar image of the olive-mill [132–133]). Carvounis pays extensive attention to the multiple ways in which these style features generate additional meaning by engaging with other similes or passages elsewhere in or outside the *Posthomerica* (e.g. the reworking of a simile in *Posthomerica* 1 according to the Homeric scholia [XXXVI–XXXVII]).

On the level of bibliography, Carvounis aptly embeds her own commentary in the studies of earlier works on other books (e.g. Ferreccio [33], Campbell [61]). Her explicit engagement with commentaries on the other books again reminds us that such a level of coherence is still partially missing in Quintus scholarship, but that steps in the right direction are being taken. Even if secondary literature from after 2017 is only sporadically integrated into her work, due to the advanced editorial stage of the manuscript at that time, Carvounis has made an effort to mention several publications from after that date and even sporadically refer to them where possible.

All in all, the lexical aspects of this commentary are strongly amplified by various interests regarding the narrative composition of book 14, including

engagement with other literary texts (Greek *and* Latin) and the structural coherence of the poem (e.g. character evolution and reputation, similes, the sense of closure in book 14). This is a valuable addition to Quintus studies, and indispensable for scholars of book 14 and for those who are more generally interested in the relation of the *Posthomerica* with the *Odyssey*, *Aeneid* or Greek *and* Roman tragedy. As much as a user-friendly tool for readers of *Posthomerica* 14, this book provides new, original insights in the study of Quintus's poetics; food for thought for – hopefully – many future studies.

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Empfohlene Zitierweise

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