

Bierl, Anton and Joachim Latacz (edd.). *Homer's Iliad: the Basel commentary. Prolegomena* (English edition translated by Benjamin W. Millis and Sara Strack and edited by S. Douglas Olson; first edition 2000). Berlin; Boston: De Gruyter, 2015. xviii, 284 p. \$182.00. ISBN 9781614517375.

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[Authors and titles are listed at the end of the review.]

In 2005 I was a Master's student in Oxford. One of the sessions in the obligatory 'Research Techniques' seminar series was on commentaries, and for that session I offered to give a brief presentation comparing the Cambridge *Iliad* commentary series to the volumes in the Basel *Gesamtkommentar* edited by Joachim Latacz.[[1]] What I had not fully thought through when I volunteered is that my peers, given their varied backgrounds, could not all be expected to read German. So, to allow for a fair side-by-side comparison, I found myself translating several pages of the Basel commentaries into English for my handout. The notes that I have dug up suggest that at one point in my talk I said that the Basel commentaries are '*in themselves* a very good reason to learn German'. With the appearance of the volume under review and the gradual publication of translated commentary volumes,[[2]] future students will no longer have to do so (at least not for this reason).

The *Prolegomena* form a companion volume to the commentaries, and consist of several introductory essays, glossaries, and indexes. The translation is based on the third German edition (2009), but has been updated throughout, particularly in the footnotes. The English version has an additional essay by Anton Bierl on 'New Trends in Homeric Scholarship'. The translated commentaries will also 'include supplementary information directed specifically at an Anglophone audience' (xiv).

First things first. Having tried my hand at a few pages myself, I can only express the greatest admiration for the achievement of Benjamin W. Millis and Sara Strack, the project's translators, and for S. Douglas Olson who leads their team. Olson's compliment to his collaborators in the preface, where he remarks that Millis and Strack 'have done a superb job of rendering the original German into clear, colloquial English that nonetheless allows something of the individual voices of the various contributors to be heard' (xv-xvi), is richly deserved. The volume in fact seldom betrays its German origin, at least in style.[[3]]

Of course, a review of a translated work of this kind should seek to assess more than simply the quality of the translation. To what extent does this volume, and the project of translating the *Gesamtkommentar* as a whole, meet a genuine need, and offer English-speaking users something that they will not find elsewhere? In spite of what I said to my fellow students in 2005, my answer is mixed. It is also slightly different for the *Prolegomena* than for the commentary volumes themselves (which, I should make clear, are not the focus of my review).

Some thoughts, then, about the project as a whole. The Basel commentaries have been received with near-universal acclaim,[[4]] and that they will now be accessible to a wider

readership is a very good thing. Yet questions must remain about how wide that readership will actually be. Professional scholars never had any justification to ignore the original German volumes in the first place (although some have); so the target audience is presumably students. For them, the commentaries will be in competition not only with the blue Cambridge series, but also with a growing number of smaller-scale texts in the 'Green and Yellow' series, as well as the Oxford commentaries on books 1 by Pulleyn and book 9 by Griffin.[[5]] Given this competition, several aspects may hamper the widescale adoption of the Basel commentaries: the lack of introductions to the individual volumes, the vast scale and comprehensiveness of approach, the complexity of design, and the prohibitive price. To be clear: I will in the future certainly advise my own students to use the commentaries when looking at individual passages, and recommend that libraries buy them.

Moving on to the *Prolegomena*: parts of this book deserve to be widely used as teaching resources. This is particularly true of the chapters dealing with factual matters. I know of no better brief presentation in English of Homeric grammar than Rudolf Wachter's overview (65-115), which covers phonology (with a suitable amount of attention for matters of historical grammar and dialect), word and stem formation, morphology, and syntax. Wachter's chapter, fuller in coverage than (for instance) the overviews in recent Green and Yellows,[[6]] can stand alone as an excellent basic reference text (it is frustrating, in that respect, that the reader is sometimes referred to a separate section with '24 Rules relating to Homeric Language', found in each of the commentary volumes but not reproduced in the *Prolegomena*). It may be noted that those without German and/or French who want an even fuller treatment are not given much help: the material is (rightly) heavily informed by, and constantly refers to, Chantraine's *Grammaire homérique*; reference works in English are not mentioned.

The grammar chapter is complemented by a concise, clearly organised discussion of metre by René Nünlist (116-21) and, at the end of a volume, a Homeric-Mycenaean word index compiled by Wachter (236-58), a nice addition 'meant to direct the attention of the reader of Homer to Mycenaean Greek' (236). Further factual chapters include a very helpful glossary of terminology used in Homeric criticism and narratology ('Homeric Poetics in Keywords', 164-76) by Nünlist and Irene de Jong,[[7]] and a chapter with short biographies of the main 'Cast of Characters of the *Iliad*' by Fritz Graf (on the gods, 122-39) and Magdalene Stoevesandt (on human characters, 140-50), supplemented later in the volume by a complete index of characters (204-35).

The essay chapters translated from the original are 'Commenting on Homer: From the Beginnings to this Commentary' (1-26), 'Formularity and Orality' (39-64) and 'The Structure of the *Iliad*' (151-63), all by Latacz, as well as a brief 'History of the Text' (27-38) by the late Martin West. These chapters are more obviously in competition with material offered elsewhere in Companions.[[8]] What the chapters by Latacz, in particular, offer English speakers, in contrast and addition to such Companion chapters, is a sense of the important work done in the modern period in continental Europe, particularly Germany. Thus, the chapter on commentaries (justifiably) extols the virtues of Ameis-Hentze-Cauer (which served as the basis for the Basel series), while the chapter on orality discusses at length the work of, among others, Wolf, Geppert, Hermann, Curtius, Ellendt, and Düntzer — all predating Parry and Lord (who are of course also

given a proper full treatment). Such reminders are important, and the chapters are all informative and insightful. Yet I am not sure that they can supplant the Companions: in the chapter on formularity and orality, for instance, there is no discussion of the implications of oral theory for composition on a larger scale than verses (i.e. type-scenes and story patterns) — an important feature of the comparable Companion chapters.[[9]] (Type-scenes, incidentally, do receive ample treatment in the commentaries themselves.)

The new addition to the translated volume is an essay by Bierl on ‘New Trends in Homeric Scholarship’ (177-203), which seeks to ‘clos[e] the gap’ (178) between the original edition’s presentation of the state of the art of Homeric research in 2000 and more recent developments.[[10]] The chapter’s final section (‘Further Topics and Related Themes’, 195-203) does a good job of summarising a great deal of recent work on the <i>Iliad</i>, touching on such themes as myth, ritual, hero cult, near-Eastern influences, metanarrative reflection, and memory. The first few sections are devoted to developments in oral theory and the Homeric question, many of which actually predate 2000. Bierl subscribes enthusiastically to Nagy’s evolutionary model and ‘multitext’ approach. As he himself points out (186 n. 2), this puts him at odds with the discussion of the history of the text given by West earlier in the volume (and, I think, with Latacz’s discussion in ‘Formularity and Orality’). It is arguably a good thing that such different approaches are reflected within a single volume, but the risk of confusion is great. A clearer exposition of the differences would have helped to elucidate the current state of the discussion, and whether Bierl’s favoured approach actually ‘mediates long-standing debates’ (191) and ‘merges with the unitarian approach’ (194). By the same token, Neoanalysis is mentioned several times in the chapter and the book as a whole, but its tenets never outlined in any detail.

One final quibble. I am a great fan of cross-references and the use of typography to help readers, but the extremely elaborate design of this volume and the series, with its overlapping systems of abbreviations, its four different ‘levels’ of text in the commentaries with alternating Greek, transliteration, and translation, is damaging to user-friendliness. Even someone who has read the user manual may get confused at times: ‘CH.’ in small caps means ‘Chantraine’, while ‘CH’ in all caps refers to Stoevesandt’s chapter on human characters (one of several examples where an abbreviation is not readily transparent); ‘P’ (not superscript), used several times in Bierl’s essay to refer to the glossary of critical terms, is not in the list of abbreviations. The keying of lemmata to ‘Richard [sic] Lattimore’s popular translation’ (xiv)[[11]] — the German fascicles with text and translation are not being translated — is understandable, but means that students may have to shift constantly between at least three books.

The Basel commentary series stands as a magnificent achievement in Homeric scholarship, and whatever the reservations and doubts expressed above, the English translation is a welcome addition.

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Notes:

[[1]] The series was in its infancy in 2005, with only the first two volumes and the *Prolegomena* published. A further eight commentary volumes have since appeared, under the editorial management of Latacz and Anton Bierl; the eleventh is due later this year. The series will then cover books 1 (reviewed at BMCR 2001.09.01), 2 (reviewed at BMCR 2005.08.16), 3, 6, 9, 14, 16, 18, 19, 22, and 24. The project was introduced to readers of BMCR by Latacz himself at BMCR 97.07.12.

[[2]] Apart from the *Prolegomena*, the translated commentaries on books 3 and 6 have appeared; book 19 is due this year. The promised pace of publication is 'approximately three new volumes ... per year' (xiv): it is too early to assess whether that projection, which seems optimistic, is realistic.

[[3]] The use of wider letter spacing (for names) feels out of place in an English volume, however.

[[4]] See, in addition to the BMCR reviews mentioned in n. 1, e.g. Willcock in *CR* 52 (2002) 229-31 and 55 (2005) 229-31.

[[5]] S. Pulleyn, *Homer: Iliad, Book One* (Oxford 2000); J. Griffin, *Homer: Iliad, Book Nine* (Oxford 1995). Recent Green and Yellows are B. Graziosi and J. Haubold (ed.), *Homer: Iliad Book VI* (Cambridge 2010); I.J.F. de Jong (ed.), *Homer: Iliad Book XXII* (Cambridge 2012); several further volumes are planned.

[[6]] Cf. e.g. De Jong (n. 5) 29-33; A.M. Bowie (ed.), *Homer: Odyssey Books XIII and XIV* (Cambridge 2013), 29-54. Both refer to Wachter's original German chapter.

[[7]] Full disclosure: Irene de Jong has been my academic supervisor and colleague.

[[8]] E.g. I. Morris, B. Powell (eds.), *A New Companion to Homer* (Leiden 1997); R. Fowler (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Homer* (Cambridge 2004).

[[9]] See e.g. J.M. Foley in Morris & Powell (n. 8), 154-8; M. Clark in Fowler (n. 8), 134-7. There is no direct counterpart in such works to Latacz's history of commentaries, although the Morris-Powell volume has chapters on the reception of Homer in antiquity and the scholia.

[[10]] In the process much important recent literature is cited; I missed a reference, however, to A. Kelly, *A Referential Commentary and Lexicon to Iliad VIII* (Oxford 2007).

[[11]] This error is actually one of very few I found: proofreading and production are of a high standard.