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## Aristotle's lost Homeric problems: textual studies

Robert Mayhew, *Aristotle's lost Homeric problems: textual studies*. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2019. xxiii, 224 p.. ISBN 9780198834564. £60.00.

### Review by

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Aristotle's *Homeric Problems* has enjoyed the sporadic attention of classicists.<sup>[1]</sup> Mayhew's monograph claims to (re)evaluate the standard collections of the fragments of Aristotle and to locate others, providing a fuller understanding and interpretation of Aristotle's *Homeric Problems*. The book contains ten chapters, three indices and one appendix.

The greatest advantage of this book is that it places Homeric fragments in the framework of ancient Homeric scholarship, connecting what is known of the content of the fragments of the *Homeric Problems* to pre-Aristotelian scholarship, other works by Aristotle on Homer, and also Aristotle's *History of Animals*, *Rhetoric*, and *Poetics*, thus shedding new light on all texts under discussion.

The studies are grouped into three parts. The first (Chapters 1-3) covers the relationship of Aristotle's Homeric fragments to the Homeric scholarship that preceded it, deals with Aristotle's comments on Homeric scholarship in his *Poetics*, and also provides evidence concerning the possible titles of Aristotle's work on Homer. This constitutes a reappraisal of Heitz' edition of Aristotle's fragments (1869). The second part (Chapters 4-6) examines the context of quotations from and allusions to Homer in Aristotle's *History of Animals*, *Rhetoric*, and *Poetics* 21. Part Three (Chapters 7-10) consists of four case-studies on selected fragments.

The first three chapters provide worthy preliminary studies, such as the analysis of two fragments included in the edition by Heitz (1869: fr. 188 and fr. 208) but not included in the editions of Rose (1863/1870/1886) or Gigon (1987), and a discussion of the significant evidence for the titles and subtitles of Aristotle's lost work on Homer. The first chapter on pre-Aristotelian scholarship develops the argument that background and historical context are necessary for an understanding of Aristotle's approach to Homer. Mayhew makes a convincing connection to *Poetics* 25, which provides a general idea of how Aristotle proceeded methodologically in his *Homeric problems* (pp. 9-23). Also convincing is his discussion of Aristotle's textual approach and consideration of the issues in context (although mostly from the perspective of ethics). However, early allegorical exegesis of Homer was certainly not the only approach found in pre-Aristotelian scholarship. Furthermore, our evidence on the prosodic commentaries of Hippas of Thasus and Stesimbrotus of Thasus, the semantic speculations of Hippas of Elis, and in particular the Homeric studies of Antimachus of Colophon and his 'edition' of Homer should be central to imagining the framework and context in which Aristotle's analysis of Homeric poetry took place.

[2]

The following three chapters explore quotations from and allusions to Homer in Aristotle's *History of Animals*, *Rhetoric*, and *Poetics*. This spins out into reflection on whether Homeric passages were the subject of debate or discussion in antiquity, whether such discussion about particular passages corresponded to Aristotle's aims and methods in his lost *Homeric Problems*, and finally whether such inquiries into Homeric passages provide the reader with a hint as to the ways in which Aristotle might have solved aspects of the Homeric 'problem'. Thus nine Homeric quotations from the *History of Animals* taken together provide evidence for the content of the *Homeric Problems* and give the reader further insights into Aristotle's 'scientific' approach to work with the epic text.<sup>[3]</sup> While the material itself and the interpretation of the Homeric quotations in Aristotle's *History of Animals* remains promising, Mayhew's conclusions are less so. 'Aristotle respected and revered Homer' (p. 74), Mayhew concludes: a somewhat obvious statement given, for example, Hunter's the recent study on the ancient reception of Homeric epics (missing in the references).<sup>[4]</sup>

Chapter 5 analyses the evidence from Aristotle's *Rhetoric*. It first focuses on the accounts of mixed emotions such as lamentation (*Rhet.* 1.11, 1370b25-9 quoting *Il.* 23.108 = *Od.* 4.183), anger (*Rhet.* 1.11, 1370b10-12 quoting *Il.* 18.109 and *Rhet.* 2.3, 1380b20-5 referring to *Od.* 9.500-504) and indignation (*Rhet.* 2.9, 1387a32-5 quoting *Il.* 11.542-3). The second part of the chapter deals with Homeric passages quoted in book 3 of Aristotle's *Rhetoric* in accounts of linguistic style, especially epithets, asyndeton and repetition, and metaphors (*Rhet.* 3.11: 1411b30-1412a10 and fr. 146 Rose = fr. 370 Gigon). The important argument developed in this chapter is that the relationship between the *Homeric Problems* and the *Rhetoric* was in fact very close, and that Aristotle's study of metaphor in Homer influenced his *Rhetoric* and his *Homeric Problems*.

Chapter 6 deals with the evidence from *Poetics* 21, which treats a classification of kinds of names/words with a view to analysing tragedy and epic poetry. These are classified according to quantity, i.e. whether simple or compound (1457a31-b1), according to usage or form (1457b1-1548a7), and according to gender (1458a8-17). The classification according to usage and form serves as evidence for a connection to the *Homeric Problems*: thus standard words are contrasted with *glottai* (I find Mayhew's translation 'foreign words' for *glottai* problematic; 'loan/rare/strange words' would work better). Words (1457b3-6), metaphors (1457b6-33) and ornaments (1457b33), made up/created words (1457b33-5), lengthened and shortened words (1457b35-1458a5), and altered words (1458a5-7) are brought into focus here. At the end of the chapter a significant piece of evidence from Strabo (Strab. 13.1.36 and fr. 162 Rose = fr. 402 Gigon) is discussed. Here, through examples from Homer and others, Strabo considers the practice of poetic abridgement, some of which corresponds to Aristotle's discussion of the same examples in *Poetics* 21 (κρί<κρίθη, δὴ<δῶμα from Homer and ὄψ<ὄψις from Empedocles). Strabo examines five examples from Homer, two being the same as Aristotle's in the *Poetics* 21. This suggests at least that Aristotle and Strabo might have shared a common source, and Mayhew suggests the treatment of such examples in the *Homeric Problems* as a plausible possibility for what Aristotle may in fact have discussed, abridgement being part of the solution to particular Homeric problems.

The last four chapters represent four case-studies on select fragments. Chapter 7 discusses Aristotle's treatment of the meaning of τάλαντον in *Il.* 23.269. Achilles announces prizes for the five charioteers, and some ancient scholars found problematic the granting of two talents of gold as a prize for fourth place (as this would be worth more than each of the other prizes). Mayhew considers four early manuscripts: F (*Scorial.* Ω I.12 (509)), T (*Lond. Bibl. Brit. Burney* 86), B (*Marc. gr.* 821 *Venetus* B), and A (*Marc. gr.* 822 *Venetus* A). In all probability, Aristotle raised or discussed the problem why Achilles awarded the greatest prize to the fourth place. He proposed the solution that the talent in Homer is not a definite measure (Schol. T: φησὶν οὖν Ἀριστοτέλης οὐκ εἶναι τὸ τάλαντον ὀρισμένον τότε τοῖς παλαιοῖς). Mayhew elaborates further on this Homeric problem and its solution in connection with Aristotle, *Poetics* 25 discussed above. He claims that of the five kinds of criticism that Aristotle listed at the end of the chapter, the relevant one here is that Homer is being contradictory. Aristotle argues that one should look at the many different meanings of the word, and pick the best one in context, and that that would solve the problem (pp. 139-40).

Chapter 8 is noteworthy in itself. The evidence from Aristotle and Aristarchus on the (metaphorical) meaning of κέρας in *Il.* 11.385 is discussed. The chapter has been published already elsewhere;<sup>[5]</sup> it is a pity, however, that Mayhew just reprinted this piece, without reworking the very same precious material (Schol. T *Il.* 11.385f.; Schol. *Ge. Il.* 11.385; Eustathius *Il.* 11.385 (3, 218.2-5) in order to use it in a more constructive way, connecting it to Aristotle's *Homeric Problems* and to the content and structure of the book. An important conclusion for this argument would be that in all probability Aristotle discussed the meaning of κέρας in this line, although we do not know Aristotle's actual interpretation. Another piece of evidence concerns κέρας in *Il.* 24.81: both Aristotle and Aristarchus thought that this should be interpreted literally to mean a small pipe made of horn to protect the fishing line. The texts discussed in this chapter are neglected fragments of Aristotle's *Homeric Problems*. These should definitely be included in the next edition. Although these texts do not necessarily come from the *Homeric problems*, their provenance might be any work by Aristotle where he discussed such texts. Thus the term *Homeric Problems* should be used conventionally to denote Aristotle's fragments on Homeric epics.

Chapter 9 discusses the *Theomachy* and in particular the argument over *Il.* 21.284 in *POxy* 221, col. xiv.27-32 with regards to the river Scamander and Poseidon and Athena who were willing to encourage Achilles without really offering help. This constitutes significant evidence for the provenance of this discussion from Aristotle's *Homeric Problems* and also for Aristotle's generally 'anti-allegorical', or non-allegorical, critical methodology. The fragment does not appear in the editions by Rose or Gigon or Breitenberger; thus this discussion will constructively enlarge future edition. Further, three texts dealing with *Il.* 21.388-90 are compared: those of Aristotle, Chamaeleon, and Anonymus in the margins of the Byzantine 13th century manuscript *Genavensis* gr. 44.

Chapter 10 is the last of these case-studies. Aristotle's naturalistic and non-allegorical interpretation of *Odyssey* 12 draws attention to three episodes, the Sirens (fr. 359 Rose = fr. 290 Gigon), the Wandering Rocks and the doves that could not fly by or through them (Photius *Bib.* cod. 190, 147a3-6), and the Cattle of Helios (fr. 175 Rose = fr. 398.2 Gigon; fr. 175.2 Rose = fr. 398.1 Gigon; fr. 175.3 Rose = fr. 398.3 Gigon). Importantly, Mayhew argues that the fragments should be seen in the context of the rest of Aristotle's work on Homer, and this suggests that Aristotle did not interpret Homer allegorically, but mythically and physically, whilst Eustathius transformed Aristotle's scientific or naturalistic interpretation of Homer into allegory. To ascribe to Aristotle allegorical interpretations is to obscure rather than clarify the essential nature of what he is doing in his *Homeric Problems*: defending Homer according to rational principles of literary criticism, but without relying on allegorical interpretation.

Weaknesses of this monograph include the absence of an introduction and of an epilogue or conclusion where the whole argument could be (re)formulated. The book ends too abruptly. The random selection of words for discussion can also grate. One appendix deals with the term τάλαντον, used in texts in collections of the fragments of Aristotle discussed in Chapter 7. It is not clear why only these fragments deserved an appendix. The reader gets a feeling that this study is in fact a mosaic of studies of various years stitched together, there is no clear *roter Faden*. My vague guess is that the clue to selection is chronology, and that Mayhew deals with pre-Aristotelian suppositions in the first part, Aristotle's work on Homer *in toto* in the second, and evidence for Aristotle's discussion of Homer in the third. Finally, there are dangers in referring to Aristotle repeatedly as 'Homer's defender'. Rather, Aristotelian interpretations of Homeric poetry contribute to his broader thoughts on language, scholarship, and criticism.

Despite these oversights, this study constitutes an exciting and a much appreciated contribution to the study of Aristotle's and ancient Homeric criticism. As a useful resource for scholars and students it will serve as a milestone for further studies in this field.

### Notes

[1] E.g. H. Hintenlang, *Untersuchungen zu den Homer-Aporien des Aristoteles*. Diss. (Heidelberg, 1961); B. Breitenberger, 'Literaturwissenschaft, Sympotisches, Poesie', in *Aristoteles, Fragmente zu Philosophie, Rhetorik, Poetik, Dichtung*, eds. H. Flashar, U. Dubielzig, B. Breitenberger (Darmstadt, 2006), 289-437; E. Bouchard, *Du lycée au musée. Théorie poétique et critique littéraire à l'époque hellénistique* (Paris, 2016), 58-68, 78-83, 251-316.

[2] E.g. N. J. Richardson, "Homeric professors in the age of the sophists, Ancient Literary Criticism", ed. by A. Laird (Oxford 2006), 62-86 (=1975, *PCPhS* 21, 65-81); V. Matthews, *Antimachus of Colophon: text and comm.* Mnemosyne: supplements 155 (Leiden, 1966).

[3] *HA* 3.3, 513b24-8 and *Il.* 13.545-7; *HA* 3.12, 519a18-20 and *Il.* 20; *HA* 6.20, 574b29-575a1 and *Od.* 17.326-7; *HA* 6.21, 575b4-7 and *Il.* 2.402-3 and 7.313-15, *Od.* 19.418-20 and 10.19-20; *HA* 6.28, 578a32-b5 and *Il.* 9.538-9, *Od.* 9.190-1; *HA* 7(8).28, 606a18-21 and *Od.* 4.85; *HA* 8(9).12, 615b5-10 and *Il.* 14.289-91; *HA* 8(9).32, 618b18-30 and *Il.* 24.315-16, and *HA* 8(9).44, 629b21-24 and *Il.* 11.552-4 and 17.661-3.

[4] R. Hunter, *The Measure of Homer: The Ancient Reception of the Iliad and the Odyssey* (Cambridge, 2018).

[5] As mentioned in the copyright acknowledgements, "Two notes on Aristotle and Aristarchus on the meaning of κέρας in the *Iliad*", in *Hyperboreus. Studia classica* 22 (2016), 139-49.