

BOOK REVIEW

Voices at Work: Women, Performance, and Labor in Ancient Greece. By ANDROMACHE KARANIKA. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014. Pp. xi + 300. Hardcover, \$59.95. ISBN: 978-14214-1255-9.

Work songs and everyday songs must have graced the silence of the ancient Greek world. These song traditions, however, are faded or only partially visible, much like the paint on ancient Greek marble statues. The aim of Andromache Karanika's book is to enliven work and everyday song in ancient Greece by presenting and analysing the vanishingly small evidence we have for these songs (only a "few verses ... survive," 221) within the larger context of ancient Greek poetry. Because of the scarcity of actual work songs, Karanika expands her investigation to encompass literary scenes of women and work, and literary versions of work and everyday songs. Karanika also asserts a particular interest in female work and work songs, where she claims we can "hear voices of actual women in a continuum of oral tradition" (17). Furthermore, she argues, sometimes more successfully than others, for "intergeneric" connections between the "oral traditional material" (182) of work songs and epic, lyric, lament, ritual, and magic (among others) through both form and narrative (19, 21–22).

Before turning to the fragmentary evidence for work songs, Karanika investigates the "kind of poetic activity [which] accompanied women's work" and "how ... the theme of female work [is] reflected in ancient Greek poetry, and how it permeate[s] early Greek poetics" (1). The first two chapters examine female work and work songs in the Homeric epics, reflecting on Helen, Andromache, Calypso, Circe, Penelope, and Nausikaa. The chapters rehash scholarship about these figures and are compromised by two considerations. First, although we know that Calypso and Circe sing while they attend their looms, we don't know what they sing; Helen, Andromache, and Penelope do not sing and work. Nausikaa and her girlfriends sing and dance, but we have no idea what they sing, despite the author's dubious assertion that the simile comparing Nausikaa to Artemis (*Odyssey* 6.99–109) is their song, "a hidden hymnic performance" (58), in gesture to Swift's *The Hidden Chorus: Echoes of Genre in Tragic Lyric* (Oxford, 2010). Second, all of the women examined in detail in epic are goddesses, semi-

goddesses, or elite women. Although Karanika later briefly examines “narratives” and “storytelling” which may accompany elite female activities (180–81), she doesn’t explicitly articulate the difference between these elite songs and the work song we see for repetitive manual labour (see 12–13 for some recognition of differences between elite and slave female work).

In Chapter Five, Karanika introduces two fragments which are both work songs and also spoken by women; the book’s organization and impact would have been strengthened by an earlier presentation of these “few verses”. The two fragments are simple: *πλείστον οὔλον οὔλον ἴει, ἰούλον ἴει* “send a large sheaf, a sheaf, send a sheaf” (Athenaeus 14.618d-e, 153) and *ἄλει, μύλα, ἄλει* “grind, mill, grind” (Plutarch *Moralia* 157e = *Carmina Popularia* PMG 869, 145). Athenaeus’s threshing song is “one of few authentic vestiges of female peasants’ threshing song” (153; see also 154). The fragments would seem to afford little opportunity for analysis, although the author does attempt to create links with magic and “ritual” through their employment of the imperative (144–145, 150–151), an argument about work songs which runs through the book.

The author’s case for an oral work song tradition is awkwardly presented. Discussions of two strikingly similar passages about fetching water are in different chapters and separated by about twenty pages: *Elektra* 56 (*φέρουσα πηγᾶς ποταμίας μεέρχομαι* “carrying [a vessel] I go to fetch river water”, 92) and Anacreon PMG 385 (*ἔκ ποταμοῦ πάνερχομαι πάντα φέρουσα λαμπρά* “bearing all the shining things/clothes, I return from the river”), the latter “most possibly a female work song” (113). Arguing for the passages together as work songs, or stylized representations of work songs, would strengthen the author’s contention that both are part of “a well-known tradition” of work songs (114; see also 93).

Elektra’s “displacement and change of status” (90) imbues her speech with language similar to lament (98, 99), allowing the author to highlight “the work-song tradition’s obvious connection with the genre of lament” (94; see also 91). The inclusion of work song language within *Elektra*’s tragic laments forms part of the author’s argument for generic flexibility in Greek poetry. This connection between work song and lament also leads to tantalizing observations about two named work songs which arose from laments for heroes who die violently and young, evoking a similarity to Achilles (132): the Linos song mentioned in the Shield of Achilles in *Iliad* 18 (118–119, 127) and the Lityerses song, “embedded” (204) in *Idyll* 10 of Theocritus, who “stylizes a tradition of work songs” (211). A lament for the figure of Linos or Lityerses which is transformed into a ritual work

song and is arguably part of a work song oral tradition presents interesting opportunities which are not available from the threshing or grinding songs; I wish the author had pressed the interconnecting oral traditions of epic and the work song more fully.

In pursuit of women and song, the author also touches upon lullabies, children's games and songs, the origin of iambic meter, dance, and political (or at least social) commentary in work songs. The length of some of these excursions distracts from the stated focus on work songs and women. The illumination of the presence of everyday songs in ancient Greek life, however, makes this volume a valuable contribution.

INGRID HOLMBERG

University of Victoria, ingrid@uvic.ca