

## BOOK REVIEW

*The Aethiopsis: Neo-Neoanalysis Reanalyzed.* By MALCOLM DAVIES. Washington D.C.: Center for Hellenic Studies, 2016. Pp. xii +104 (+ pp.2 unpaginated index). Paperback, \$22.50. ISBN 978-0-674-08831-3.

This book is very useful for its ideal audience, but it is also odd—first, because that ideal audience is composed of people alarmingly similar to myself: the reader is familiar with Neo-analysis and aware of recent work but has not studied the older scholarship for a long time, is enthusiastic about the presentation of a skeptical but reasonable view of the issues, is very comfortable with German, and does not mind having an argument interrupted so that the author can provide extensive documentation, with more bibliography than the reader is likely to pursue. This is a fine audience (this representative learned a good deal and has rethought much), but it is limited. Others, although the book is short and the prose otherwise reader-friendly, may find it hard going.

The uninitiated may find even the title a bit perplexing. “Neo-analysis” is the approach that explains problems in Homer as the result of borrowing and adapting narrative themes from earlier epics (so the funeral of Patroclus could be based on that of Achilles in an earlier poem, whether that was the *Aethiopsis* or a *Memnonis*). Davies’ “Neo-Neoanalysis” is Davies’ term for this approach taken by more recent scholars who consider the possible influence of oral traditions rather than written texts.

The book is part of a series of CHS commentaries on the fragments of early epic, but there is only one certain fragment of the *Aethiopsis*. Hence this is not at all a conventional commentary. Instead, after a short introduction, the first chapter treats the theories connecting *Iliad* and *Aethiopsis*, the second art that may reflect the *Aethiopsis*, the third chapter Proclus’ summary, and a fourth chapter the “Fragments” (scare quotes in the original). A brief appendix considers the *Tabulae Iliacae*. The chapter on art is especially good, although surely nobody now imagines that vase paintings literally illustrate literary texts.

Throughout Davies is thoughtful, careful, and fair. He identifies a bad habit in Homeric scholarship (it goes back at least to the Analytic tradition, and sometimes to antiquity) of inventing problems so that solutions can be proposed. Sometimes,

perhaps, he reacts too strongly to this tendency. So he argues that there is no reason to suppose independent poems about Memnon and Penthesilea, since it appears that the two halves of the poem were thematically very coherent. He is right about their coherence, but it is likely, under the usual conditions of oral performance, that single episodes were often performed.

But the book is also odd for another reason. Davies is well aware that there has been much recent scholarship on the Epic Cycle, including the *Aethiopis*, but he has chosen not to address it here. The “Bibliography of Works Frequently Cited” includes nothing from the last ten years except the publications of M. L. West, to whom the book is dedicated. I feel very strange saying at once that a book is of very high quality and that it probably should not have been published in its present form. Not everything ignored is recent. I find it especially odd that on pages 17–18 Davies discusses whether the transfer of Sarpedon’s corpse to Lycia has any relationship to a possibly similar role for Sleep and Death in conveying Memnon. Nagy has argued that the narrative of Sarpedon’s death implies a cult.<sup>1</sup> I myself am not convinced by this argument, but it needs to be taken seriously, and it seems very strange that it is not mentioned when it is obviously relevant in a volume in a series of which Nagy is the editor-in-chief is disconcerting.

The chapter on art is particularly good, although I do not understand the argument on 69–70 about the Chalcidian black-figure amphora that shows the corpse of Achilles, with an arrow in the heel. Davies thinks that it is “preposterous” for Achilles to be wounded in the heel if he is not invulnerable, but this image also shows a wound in the torso, so it depicts an Achilles who has been shot through the heel but is not invulnerable.

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<sup>1</sup> G. Nagy, “On the Death of Sarpedon,” in C. Rubino and C. Shelmerdine (eds.), *Approaches to Homer* (Austin: 1983), 189-217 (versions of the argument also appear in other publications).