

## BOOK REVIEW

*The Meaning of Meat and the Structure of the Odyssey*. By EGBERT J. BAKKER. Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013. Pp. xiii + 191. Hardcover, \$90.00. ISBN 978-0-521-11120-1.

In this remarkably concise book, Bakker illuminates in several dimensions the importance of meat consumption as a theme in the *Odyssey*. Ranging widely across the epic and drawing also on the *Iliad*, he blends the evidence of close readings with the results of anthropological and historical investigations into ancient hunting and farming cultures, as well as narratological approaches to myth; employed in concert, these approaches yield a good sense of what is typical and what is distinctive in the *Odyssey's* world.

The first three of the book's eight main chapters lay the groundwork for the three central chapters focused on episodes during Odysseus' Wanderings. However, in a Prologue, which explains the book's organization and rationale, Bakker suggests that scholars interested in his position in oral-formulaic debates begin with his Epilogue, where he addresses the methodological issues raised by deriving thematic significance from formulaic repetition within the *Odyssey*. Here, Bakker lucidly illustrates how the same phrase applied to different situations implicitly judges them to be similar, the more restricted phrases placing higher on what he terms a "scale of interformularity". This notion of 'intertraditional' poetry encompasses the formulaic grammatical coding of epic speech habits, at one end of the range, and 'quotation' of particular epic speakers at the other; it is, as Bakker notes, compatible with Nagy's idea of the Homeric poems as products of re-composition in performance. The Epilogue whetted my appetite for considering the examples in the context of Bakker's main argument.

The first chapter engagingly focuses on the interlocking of narrative levels, *epos* and *oidē*, ("matrix narrative" and embedded utterance) in the *Odyssey*, which explains the proem's mysterious focus on the *atasthalia* of Odysseus' companions in eating the Cattle of the Sun. In Odysseus' performance of his Wanderings for the Phaeacians, several formulaic repetitions of the voice of 'Homer' in the *Odyssey*

and *Iliad* underline how Odysseus is in a position to outdo a poet. This beautifully expressed discussion should become required reading for students.

Bakker next reviews the poem's ambiguous perspectives on *nostos* as he brings together the 'Homecoming' and 'quest' sequences from Propp's analysis of narrative functions and reveals their overlap in the *Odyssey's* use of the quest as building block within the ultimate object of Odysseus' return. Versions of the 'quest', contracted or expanded according to need, successively overlap, and figures in individual tales also productively recall others at a distance, thickening the texture of Odysseus' adventures across the Otherworld and Ithaca.

The third 'background' chapter, navigating slightly more bibliography, compares and contrasts the presentation of the "equal banquet" in the heroic society depicted by the *Iliad* with that of the *Odyssey*, observing how the act of feasting becomes in the latter 'marked' as good or perverse. Reviewing evidence for the uses of cattle in the real world, Bakker reveals it to be in stark distinction both with the unproblematic abundance of meat-consumption in the *Iliad* and the equally unreal extremes of abundance and taboo presented in the 'Otherworld' of Odysseus' Wanderings, which in turn frame the Suitors' consumption of Odysseus' own vast but limited wealth in down-to-earth Ithaca.

Chapters 4–6 successively treat the episodes of the Cyclops, Circe and the Cattle of the Sun as case-studies of abundance and/or taboo in meat-eating. Several points in these chapters were more briefly outlined in Bakker's contribution to the 2006 Fondation Hardt collection *La poésie épique grecque*, ed. F. Montanari and A. Rengakos (1-39). Chapter 4 begins and ends with verbal parallels between the Cyclops episode and the climax of the situation at Ithaca; it compels particularly in finding grim links between the suitors trapped in Odysseus' hall and the hero's escape from the Cyclops' cave. In between, Bakker builds on Burkert's reading of the Cyclops as a Master of Animals to expound the ironic combinations of traditional elements of both 'nature' and 'culture' in this episode.

The following exposition of the Circe episode is more dense, the fruits of its ideas emerging more clearly in Chapter 6 on the Cattle of the Sun. Bakker looks for archaic *comparanda* to the Neoplatonic interpretation of the Companions' transformation into swine as a kind of "rebirth"; he then identifies in various cultures ideas of continuity between humans and animals, as well as parallels for Circe as "Mistress of Animals"; and he suggests that a motif of death and rebirth explains Circe's juxtaposition with the *Nekyia* of Book 11. Somewhat scattered observations on connections with the feasts of the Suitors are developed in Chapter 6, in which

Bakker suggestively aligns the roles of Helios and the returning Odysseus through both astronomical and cultic frameworks. The Companions' fateful feast on Helios' immortal herds (intriguingly resonant of self-contained farming units in the real world) is then shown to correspond to the Suitors' consumption of Odysseus' animals, with hints of Helios' threatened revenge hanging over their feast.

The penultimate chapter takes up the old question of the *Odyssey's* theology. Discussion of human-divine interaction, focusing especially on the guilt of the Companions, concludes that Odysseus' difficult *nostos* is an unresolved compromise between the plan of Zeus and the wrath of Poseidon, and positive and negative representations of Odysseus himself. The final chapter expands Bakker's 2010 article on the semantics of the *gastēr* in the *Odyssey*. Its argument, inspired by the work of Pucci, fruitfully draws on the *Iliad* as Bakker explores the relationships between *gastēr* and the *thumos* and *menos* usually associated with heroes. Two indices round out the book and the footnoting is generally a model of efficiency. Overall, this is a richly suggestive book that will repay rereading.

HELEN VANNOORDEN

*Girton College, University of Cambridge, hav21@hermes.cam.ac.uk*