

### BOOK REVIEW

*Aristotle As Poet. The Song for Hermias and Its Contexts.* By ANDREW L. FORD. Pp. xx + 243. New York: Oxford University Press, 2011. \$50.00. ISBN 978-0-19-973329-3.

Aristotle as poet? Who knew? Even among professional classicists, surely only a few. Andrew Ford shows us, however, that Aristotle's two complete surviving poems—most importantly a song of a single stanza in dactylo-epitrites (*PMG* 842), but also an epigram accompanying a statue he dedicated at Delphi (Page *FGE* 31-32), both honoring Hermias, the mid-4<sup>th</sup> cent. tyrant of Atarneus in the Aeolis—are well-worth knowing. Indeed, as Ford brilliantly demonstrates, they offer a unique window onto poetic production and reception in the classical era, in particular the importance not just of the initial occasion for which a poem was composed in determining how an audience would understand it, but also how shifting circumstances of re-performance over time could alter generic expectations and open the door to different, sometimes violently opposing interpretations of the works. In Ford's able hands, these become paradigmatic texts, through which he provides us with an object lesson in how to read a Greek poem.

The tyrant Hermias had been a student in Plato's Academy when he befriended Aristotle. Following Plato's death in 348/7, Hermias invited Aristotle and his associates to settle at Assos, part of his territory, and make that the base for their philosophical school. Friendship blossomed into patronage and even kinship, since Aristotle married what different authors variously describe as Hermias' niece, adoptive daughter, or concubine. The connection with the philosopher was, however, to have deadly consequences for the tyrant since the king of Persia suspected that—influenced by Aristotle's close ties to the Macedonian throne—Hermias was abetting Philip of Macedon's plans to invade Asia Minor (cf. Demosthenes' *Philippic* 4.32). Consequently, around 341 BC the Persian king used a ruse in order to capture Hermias, had him tortured and ultimately—though unable to extract any information from him—killed. With his dying words, Hermias is said

to have asked that his “friends and companions” be told “I have done nothing unworthy of philosophy” (Callisthenes in Didymus, *On Demosthenes*, P. Berol 9780, col.6.15-16).

But if his connection with Aristotle and Philip proved fatal to Hermias, it also secured his enduring memory. Aristotle’s nephew, Callisthenes, wrote a prose eulogy of the tyrant, an extended piece of which is transmitted in citation. And Aristotle himself, as we have seen, composed not just one, but two poems about him, both of which survive. These were, as Ford puts it, part of “the battle to define Hermias” (50), since among his contemporaries the tyrant was a lightning rod, inspiring both fond devotion and passionate loathing (cf. already Didymus, *On Demosthenes*, P. Berol 9780, col.4.59-64). Enemies condemned him as a non-Greek slave and eunuch who killed his master, usurped his power, and tried to pass himself off as Greek in competing with chariots at the Olympics. When Aristotle, by contrast, exalted his friend’s ἀρετή in song following Hermias’ painful death in 341 BC by likening it to that of such mythic heroes as Herakles, the Dioskouroi, Achilles, and Aias, and saying that the Muses would “grow [Hermias] into immortality” (ἀθάνατόν τέ μιν ἀυξήσουσι Μοῦσαι v.18), the song quickly became a source of contention. Thereon hangs the tale.

No sooner had his protector, Alexander the Great, died in 323, than Aristotle became the target of a politically motivated trial prompted by anti-Macedonian sentiment, in which he was indicted for impiety (ἀσέβεια) on the basis of that very song celebrating his father-in-law/friend, which we hear was sung daily at convivial gatherings in the Lyceum: he had—so the accusation—written a paeon (D.L. 5.4, Athen. 15.696 a-e) or hymn (D.L. 5.5) “in honor of Hermias” (εἰς τὸν Ἑρμείαν παιᾶνα Athen. 15.696 b; τὸν ὕμνον ἐποίησεν εἰς τὸν ... Ἑρμείαν D.L. 5.5), that is, he had blasphemously celebrated the tyrant *as a god*. Others would define the song as a *skolion* (that is, a song appropriate to the symposium, thus Athen. 15.696 b) or encomium, whose praise of Hermias stayed in the bounds of what was appropriate for a mortal. Whatever the merits, Aristotle had to flee Athens to avoid prosecution (D.L. 5.5).

Ford makes a good case that we should consider Aristotle’s song “a landmark in the history of Greek literature, because it is one of the very first lyric poems for which we have substantial evidence—in some cases going back to contemporaries—for how and where it was composed, performed, and received.” (xii). His book, consequently, is “an attempt to see a lyric ‘in the round’”, which he hopes “may be a useful case study for the more frequent occasions when evidence is lack-

ing to trace a poem's background in detail." (xii). The author constructs his synoptic view of the poem over the course of nine chapters, playing (I suspect) on the Muses' number, since the book culminates in a meditation on the song tradition's "power of perpetuating fame ... symbolized in the Muses" (164). The Muses bestow their gift on Hermias in response to his ἀρετὰ πολύμοχος (v.1), the toilsome virtue that acts as the presiding spirit of the poem.

I offer here an overview of the book's chapters and their topics. Chapter 1, "The Text", lays out our sources for the song of Hermias together with a preliminary reading. Chapter 2, "History and Context", explores the historical background and circumstances of its composition. Chapter 3, "Performance and Occasion", examines the epigram accompanying the statue Aristotle is said to have dedicated at Delphi in Hermias' honor and the epigrammatic polemic it provoked in response by Theocritus of Chios (*SH* 738). Here, Ford shows how genre and performance-context were intimately linked in ancient poetry ("the genre of a Greek poem was effectively the same as the occasions for which it was appropriate", 28) and how Greek songs often envision an ideal occasion for their own performance. Chapter 4, "Performance and Context", considers possible contexts in which we can imagine the lyric song for Hermias being performed. Thus, the report in the eulogy of Hermias by Aristotle's nephew, Callisthenes, that the tyrant directed his dying words to his "friends and companions" plausibly suggests an original audience limited to an intimate circle (51); yet re-performance as envisioned in the song itself, and the use of the song at trial, reveal that contexts of the poem's reception quickly changed – and its potential meaning along with them.

In the course of the following Chapter 5, "Genres of Poetry", the book pivots from occasion to the song's more formal, text-internal characteristics. Ford here addresses the big question, to what genre did the song for Hermias belong? This question was crucial for the prosecution's case against Aristotle, as for the defense, and ancient sources answered it in different ways. Ford here proposes a relatively fluid "situation generic", in which "a song is what a performer can persuade a given audience to call it on a particular occasion" (88), yet he ultimately views this as being in tension with certain irreducible conventions that mark specific genres (89–90). Chapter 6, "Kinds of Hymn", looks to the internal characteristics of Aristotle's song in attempting to define its generic markers, setting it beside comparable lyric poems such as Ariphron's *Paeon to Hygieia*, Pindar's hymn to the Graces in *Olympian* 14, and the *Homeric Hymn to Gaia*. In Chapter 7, "Ethos", Ford perceptively teases out the rhetorical *ethos* of the song's speaking persona. As he puts it, "almost

every word of Aristotle's song has ethical force when one appreciates that it is arguing for a vision of what is *kalliston*." (114). The song thus serves a protreptic function, aiming to instill in its audience the value of ἀρετὰ πολύμοχθος, the personified goddess invoked at its start, and "forming in them a habit of taking pleasure in the proper praise of excellent actions." (124). Chapter 8 Ford somewhat mysteriously calls "Reading", that is, an attempt to examine the figures and metaphors of the song against the backdrop of comparable language in the poetic tradition. "I consider this," Ford says, "to read the poetry in the poet, for I hold with Aristotle that the poet's native gifts are to be sought on the level of language" (137). Thus, he traces via Euripides and Bacchylides the moralizing idea embodied in Virtue's epithet πολύμοχθος as prerequisite for fame, scrutinizes the mythic heroes named by Aristotle as precedents for Hermias in the attainment of *kleos* through toilsome virtue, and finally describes the traditional role of encomiastic song in securing undying fame for its subject through performance and re-performance: Aristotle figures this – as Ford brilliantly suggests – in the closing lines of his encomium as a song within the song, sung by the Muses in honor of Zeus Xenios, in which Hermias serves as exemplar "of steadfast friendship", φιλίας ... βεβαίον, the poem's closing words (v.21). Finally, in Chapter 9, "Endurance", Ford mines the evidence of the ancient response to Aristotle's song to show how "the survival of its words in fact depended on the friendship it celebrates" (157), for the anecdotes describing the reaction to the song bespeak its re-performance whether in recital or through writing: "Once singing is replaced by writing, scholarship must take up the tasks of friendship if the song is to survive" (171). As this summary of its chapters suggests, Ford does indeed offer us a model—lucid and brilliantly executed—for reading lyric "in the round". I gladly recommend this book to all students of Greek literature, from advanced undergraduates to fully-fledged scholars.

And yet, I have one serious complaint. The book is so riddled with typos as to make reading it a constant source of irritation.<sup>1</sup> How could a great publishing

<sup>1</sup> Here are errors I happened to note (my sense, however, is that systematic proof-reading would reveal more): p.xvi "it could be seem"; p.xx "Altertumswissensschaft"; p.7 "Hermippus" (Hermias?); p.21 "retrievable" (irretrievable?); p.65 "in favor of poem"; p.69 "whether it was a paean, a species of hymn, or a kind of song appropriate to mortals ("whether it was a paean, a species of hymn, or a kind of song appropriate to mortals)"; p.73 "evidence for the how epinician was performed. indeed"; p.98 v.5 κλύτ', ἐπεὶ, *ibid.* v.7 εἶ τις, *ibid.* v.20 ἕκατι, *ibid.* v.22 ἰδοῖς, ' νιδὸν εἶπες; p.118 v.19 ὄπλοισι; p.127 v.1413 τήν, *ibid.* v.1418 καί; p.133 "Heraceles"; p.146 "*causis belli*"; p.153 ζ[ώμ]ατι, *ibid.* "surpases"; p.176 n.7 lines 4-9 quotation from Aristotle's *NE* improperly divided by extraneous text; p.177 n.10 "Ari."; p.178 n.22 "(n.d.)" i.e. no date?; p.185 n.15 "It plausible"; p.191 n.9 *διθροάμποις*, *ibid.* n.11 ἐμμουόντο; p.197 n.6 "Foe"; p.203 n.8 περὶ ἀρειῆς, *ibid.* n.12 "Eurpides"; p.205 n.24 ἠρόσέβεια;

house like the Oxford University Press allow an otherwise excellent volume to appear with such incompetent editing? No encomia here: ἀρετὰ πολύμοχθος was not well-served.

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p.206 n.31 ἠὺσέβεια; p.209 n.11 “*Pythian* 9.35” (for 9.63), *ibid.* n.15 “Ibucys’s”; p.212 n.9 “in v.7” (for v.6, cf. Ford’s sentence on p.162 immediately prior to n.9), *ibid.* n.10 ἰδρύδατο, *ibid.* n.13 “v.7” (for v.6, as in n.9 above); p.213 n.22 “Trampgedach”; p.220 “Crosset” (why does this name appear in the bibliography *after* names in Cs and Cu?), *ibid.* “*Drachmann*”, *ibid.* “*Dziatzko*”; p.224 (under “Hammond 1988”) “Wallbank”, *ibid.* (under “Immisch”) “Ein Gedichte”; p.226 “McLachan”; p.227 (under “Mitchell-Boyask”) “*Aesklepion*” (for “Asklepieion”, *ibid.* (under “Norden”) “*Formengeschichte*”; p.229 “Redfield, James. n.d.” (cf. on p.178 n.22 above), *ibid.* (under “Renehan 1982”) “Aristotle’s as”; p.231 (under “Zuntz”) “*philosphische*”.