

BOOK REVIEW

Ennius and the Architecture of the Annales. By JACKIE ELLIOTT. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013. Pp. xiv + 590. Hardcover, \$110.00. ISBN 978-1-107-02748-0.

In this important book, Jackie Elliott questions most of what editors, especially Otto Skutsch, typically infer about Ennius' *Annales*. Her fundamental argument is that we must be skeptical about the placement of any fragment that is not securely attached to a specific context by the source that quotes it. From my perspective, the most important implication of this argument is that Skutsch's conception of the *Annales* as a rigorously chronological narrative is unjustifiably strict. Although I do have some reservations about the rigidity of her skepticism, Elliott nevertheless opens a wide door for future investigations into the *Annales*, a most welcome development, given the current resurgence in Ennian studies.

Elliott's book is divided into five chapters, with an excellent series of appendices that offers the fragments in different forms, organized first by book-attribution then a second time by source. The basic insight of Elliott's first chapter is that scholars assume too much about the poem's function and narrative economy on the basis of the title *Annales*. In fact, Elliott argues persuasively that there was no developed tradition of *annales maximi* to serve as a structural model for Ennius' poem. The next two chapters deal with the sources that transmit the *Annales'* fragments. Chapter 2 discusses the sources that look back to Ennius through the lens of Vergil's reception of the *Annales*. Elliott labels these sources "Vergiliocentric", arguing that these represent Ennius as the critical figure in the epic tradition at Rome, in whose *Annales* Vergil found Homer accessible in an historical Latin form. The third chapter treats the pre-Vergilian sources, focusing especially on Cicero, who is, in her opinion, most influential for the characterization of Ennius' poem as a serious historiographical endeavor. In her final two chapters, Elliott explores Ennius' aims in writing the *Annales*. Chapter 4 shows that the Homerizing aspects of the *Annales* that we find in the Vergiliocentric sources were fundamental for the poem's historiographical aims prized by Cicero, and that this fusion worked its in-

fluence on the subsequent tradition of Latin prose historiography. Chapter 5 argues that the *Annales* should be read as universalizing historiography, situating Rome as “the primary focus of the cosmos in all its aspects” (234).

The major reservation I have about Elliott’s approach is that at times it unnecessarily limits our understanding of this fragmentary material. A good example of this limitation concerns Lucretius’ description of Homer’s speech in the *Annales*-poem as “*rerum natura*” (*DRN* 1.126). Elliott duly cautions us against reading this phrase too expansively, given that no other source suggests that Homer spoke of anything other than the doctrine of metempsychosis (144–151). But must we rely solely on the sources of our fragments, if compelling evidence is at hand elsewhere? Illustrative here is a fragment traditionally thought to describe the flooding of the Tiber at the exposure of the twins, but which Skutsch ascribes to an account of the water cycle in Homer’s speech (*desunt rivos camposque remanant*, *Ann.* 5). Skutsch supports his argument with topography (he cites many prose sources that describe the Tiber flooding only into fields, not streams) and intertextuality: Lucretius uses the line ending *-que remanant* at *DRN* 5.269 and 6.635 while describing the water cycle, and, Skutsch reminds us, this verb occurs nowhere else in Latin literature outside of these three *loci*. Elliott, characteristically cautious, agrees (149 n. 40) that Flores *et al.* “rightly protest Skutsch’s move”, although the latter merely label this one of Skutsch’s “more incredible” conjectures (49) in restoring the fragment to its traditional location.¹ But none of this amounts to actual refutation of the compelling case Skutsch makes for ascribing this fragment to Homer’s speech.

To be fair, Elliott herself appears to be of two minds regarding the poem: when it suits her argument later in Chapter 5 that Homer’s speech was of cosmic importance, she suggests that “Lucretius’ term had an identifiable referent in the poem to the *Annales*” (254). While we should follow Elliott’s note of caution against reading into our fragments more than the evidence sanctions, in our reconstructions of the *Annales* we cannot disregard strong evidence like the Lucretian intertextuality involved in *Ann.* 5.

Another issue arises for the reader from the fact that Elliott’s approach is basically cautionary, not dispositive. For example, after she has convincingly deconstructed Skutsch’s chronological reconstruction of the poem, she does not pursue the wider implications of her argument. The reader is left to wonder how frequently Ennius may have presented material out of chronological order. Once

¹ Flores, E., P. Esposito *et al.* (eds.) (2002) *Quinto Ennio, Annali. Vol. II: Libri I-VIII. Commentari*. Naples.

again, considerations external to our sources for the *Annales* are instructive. Naeivius' *Bellum Punicum* contained an extended flashback that may have taken up more than half of the poem; roughly one-sixth of the *Aeneid* is achronological, more if you include the major prophetic episodes; and over one-fourth of the *Metamorphoses* derives from embedded narratives of some sort.² What does the evidence reliably tell us about this aspect of the *Annales*? Elliott offers no answers to questions like these; her restraint at times unnecessarily circumscribes the potential application of her arguments.

Despite these reservations, Elliott's book should be welcomed as the new benchmark in the thriving area of Ennian studies. In fact, the limitations of her methodology that I have emphasized may actually serve to generate new arguments about the *Annales*. I fully expect that this book will remain a fixture in our bibliographies for many years to come.

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² 3369 out of the *Metamorphoses*' 11,995 lines: Mercury on Syrinx (1.689-712); the embedded narratives surrounding Apollo's crow (2.542-595); Acoetes' speech to Pentheus (3.582-691); the tales told by the Minyades (4.43-415); the Muse's story to Minerva (5.269-678); Aeacus' narrative of the Plague at Aegina (7.517-660); Cephalus' own tragic history (7.690-862); the embedded narratives at Achelous' house (8.577-89, 590-610, 621-724, 738-878, 9.4-88); Orpheus' song (10.148-739); Daedalion and Chione (11.291-345); the story of Aesacus (11.751-795); the stories told by Nestor (12.182-535, 542-76); the embedded narratives in Ovid's "*Aeneid*" (13.643-674, 681-701, 750-897, 917-965, 14.130-153, 167-440, 464-511); and the Hippolytus-Virbius' story (15.492-546).