

BOOK REVIEW

Stesichorus in Context. Edited by P.J. FINGLASS AND ADRIAN KELLY. Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2015. Pp. xii + 212. Hardcover, \$110.00. ISBN 978-1-107-06973-2.

On the heels of Patrick Finglass' and Malcolm Davies' extensive edition and commentary (Cambridge, 2014) comes *Stesichorus in Context*, a slim but cohesive collection of papers that both assesses the state of scholarship and frequently points the way forward. It may not quite equal 1967—a year which saw the publication of fragments of the *Geryoneis*, the *Eriphyle*, and the *Sack of Troy*—but the past fourteen months have been very important for the study of Stesichorus.

In the jointly-authored introduction, Patrick Finglass provides a concise overview of scholarship from 1556 to the present before Adrian Kelly outlines the design and contents of the volume. Finglass focuses in particular on the era of papyrological discovery (1956–1990), and capably outlines the major figures and principal scholarly debates in this period of dramatic advances in scholarship.

The three papers of Part I (“Stesichorus in Epic”) interact richly. In a provocative opening foray, Adrian Kelly argues that sustained poetic interaction with Homer (as opposed to general appeals or allusions) begins with Stesichorus: the exhibition of a mother’s breast and the poppy simile of *Geryoneis* fr. 17F, he argues, elicit sympathy for the monster as the *Iliad* does for the Trojans (cf. *Il.* 22.82–83; 8.302–308), while Telemachus’ visit to Helen (fr. 170F.1–11; cf. *Od.* 15.160–178) alters her Homeric authority and relationship to Menelaus. It’s a bold argument, though oralists of various stripes will likely protest at the high bar Kelly sets for interaction.¹

¹ Concepts such as Foley’s “traditional referentiality” pass unmentioned [see J.M. Foley, 1999, *Homer’s Traditional Art* (University Park)], as do other pertinent studies of poetic tradition: e.g. G. Nagy, 1994, *Pindar’s Homer* (Baltimore); R. Scodel, 2003, *Listening to Homer* (Ann Arbor); E.T.E. Barker & J. Christensen, 2006, “Fight Club: the New Archilochus Fragment and Its Resonance with Homeric Epic” *MD* 57: 9–41. For this reviewer, Sappho 44 (and its dialectal peculiarities) is particularly problematic, which Kelly acknowledges but does not pursue fully.

Chris Carey's contribution follows, and takes a different tack. He argues that Stesichorus bridges the gap between Homer and the Epic Cycle while adapting epic technique to lyric modes. After making the important point that overlap with Homeric material is otherwise *avoided*, he interprets the Helen intertext as an anchor (for the *Nostoi*), while seeing in the employment of Homeric style and techniques such as character-speech hints of generic rivalry (62). The late Martin West adds a third perspective on the background and context of lyric epic. He concurs with Carey on many points, but also observes the tailoring of poetic beginnings and conclusions to particular performance contexts. The arguments that emerge from this insight are bold: where Carey intriguingly situates Stesichorean lyric between rhapsodic and tragic competitions (52–55), West ponders instead the possibility of a regional poetic phenomenon at Locri, which he links to Xenocritus (75–77). Also important is the citharoidic practice of setting poetry in more elaborate musical contexts (77–78): for West, the triadic structure of Stesichorean verse reflects compositional rather than performance considerations, and he considers it unlikely that the poems could be danced.

In the brief second section (“Stesichorean Poetics”), Patrick Finglass ponders the *Cycnus*, *Thebais*, and *Helen* with an eye to illuminating Stesichorus' narrative technique. The conclusions about plot, character, and technique are eminently reasonable, but nonetheless require a grain of salt; especially as regards *Cycnus* and *Helen*, Finglass' “controlled speculation” (96) is disproportional to the surviving fragments and testimony. Ian Rutherford subsequently evaluates the evidence for romantic Stesichorean poetry, a nineteenth-century idea based on fragments now widely considered spurious. He judiciously concludes that there is no evidence to deny the possibility of romantic narratives in sixth-century poetry, but admits that only Aristoxenus' citation of a *Calyce* (Ath. 14.619d-e) appears secure; the testimony of the *Marmor Parium* regarding a second, fourth-century Stesichorus of Himera suggests the possibility that later poets appropriated the moniker.

The final section (“Reception and Influence”) begins with Ewen Bowie's fascinating study of Stesichorus' Athenian reception. He interprets the *Marmor Parium*'s testimony that Stesichorus “came to Greece” in 485/484 BCE as reflecting a provision for performance of Stesichorus at a major Athenian festival. This, and the case that his work was known to fifth-century Athenian audiences, are both convincingly made, but more tenuous is the proposition of earlier performance linked to reforms of the Panathenaia in 566/565 in the archonship of

Hippocleides, whose Philaid descendant Cimon may have played a role in the 'arrival' of 485/484.

Laura Swift then considers Athenian tragedy's reception, and makes a compelling case for allusions to the *Thebais* and *Oresteia* at the level of myth, character, and imagery. The argument excels in tracing tragedians' manipulations of Stesichorean material for their own dramatic purposes: the articulation of how Aeschylus adapts Clytemnestra's snake-dream and the character of Orestes' Nurse, for example, are both especially insightful. Richard Hunter then considers Stesichorus' Hellenistic reception—in *Idyll* 18, specifically—in a complex argument that explores Hermogenes' remarks about the poet's 'sweet' style: though he is ultimately concerned mostly with Theocritus, Hunter's exploration of the *Idyll's* rich literary heritage—*Phaedrus*, Gorgias' *Encomium*, Isocrates, Sappho, Homer—repeatedly detects allusions to and engagement with Stesichorus. The accumulation of connections approaches critical mass, counterbalancing what are necessarily speculative and subtle arguments.

The final paper by Gerson Schade brings the story of Stesichorus' reception to the present. Until the era of papyrological discovery, this was largely indirect and concerned principally with the *Palinode* as described by Plato and refracted by Horace: the motifs of poetic blindness and recantation abound. A most intriguing twist comes in one of Bargagli's *trattenimenti* (p. 174), where it is (falsely) implied that the poet was a philanderer whose advances towards Helen were rebuffed! Schade concludes with Anne Carson's *Autobiography of Red*, whose interactions with the fragmentary *Geryoneis* are shown to be widespread, sensitive, and playful. Etymology, family life, the history of scholarship and, most critically, the mythological encounter with Heracles all build upon Stesichorus, whose own inventiveness makes him the appropriate foundation for such a poetic project.

There is much to praise in this wide-ranging collection. For one thing, as the number of cross-references indicates, the papers are regularly in dialogue with one another, frequently with insightful results. To put it plainly, important questions about Stesichorus' place in the literary and mythological traditions he both inherited and influenced, as well as about his style, subject-matter and poetic technique, are all assessed judiciously. Omissions or oversights are few: though several contributors—most notably West—touch on the matter of performance and performance context, a stand-alone discussion of that topic is perhaps warranted.

By their nature, fragments frustrate, and speculation is unavoidable when dealing with such meager remains. The contributors are to be commended for pursuing the evidence as bravely as they do, even though those endeavors must also be kept in perspective. We must continue to hold out hope for new papyri, in whose light their findings can be assessed anew.

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