

BOOK REVIEW

The Oxford Handbook of Hesiod. Edited by ALEXANDER C. LONEY and STEPHEN SCULLY. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2018. Pp. viii + 529. Hardback, \$150.00. ISBN: 978-0-19-020903-2.

The editors of the volume under review state unambiguously in their introduction that the “time for a *Handbook of Hesiod* is ripe” (1). I fully agree with this claim, but I believe that the reason is not only because “the last decade” has seen “at least thirteen major publications on Hesiod’s poetry or its reception” (ibid.), but also because there is a discrepancy between the neglect of Hesiod in modern scholarship (relative to the virtual flood of Homeric scholarship) and the considerably greater importance of Hesiod in antiquity. In antiquity, Hesiod was largely regarded to be on the same level with Homer; for a long time, he was dated before Homer, and in the *Certamen Homeri et Hesiodi*, it is Hesiod who wins the prestigious tripod, not Homer. Therefore, the recent turn toward Hesiod is maybe not only a scholarly trend, but also an orientation back to those ancient roots.

Nine years after the publication of *Brill’s Companion to Hesiod* (edited by Franco Montanari, Antonios Rengakos and Christos Tsagalis [Leiden and Boston 2009]), another five hundred handbook pages on Hesiod are not superfluous at all. The chapters in the *Handbook* are, on average, shorter and more condensed than those in the *Companion*, and thus targeted at a broader readership, and there is a stronger focus on Hesiod’s reception as compared to the *Companion*. The chapters are arranged in four main parts: “Hesiod in Context” (four chapters), “Hesiod’s Art” (seven chapters), “Hesiod in the Greco-Roman Period” (thirteen chapters) and “Hesiod from Byzantium to Modern Times” (five chapters). There is no general bibliography; instead, each chapter contains its own list of references at the end. All quotes from Greek and Latin come with a translation, which makes the *Handbook* widely accessible; oddly, though, in a few chapters quotes appear solely as translations, without the original text altogether.

The opening chapter of the first section is programmatically entitled “The Hesiodic Question” (Chapter 2, by Hugo H. Koning). The author convincingly

demonstrates that “Hesiod is just as entitled to a ‘question’ as Homer” (26), for it is, contrary to common assumption, not so that Hesiod “tells us everything we need to know” (17) – the answers to the questions about his name, dating and provenance are less straightforward than many scholars believe. The other chapters in the first part of the volume address “Seventh-Century Material Culture in Boiotia” (Chapter 3, by Stephanie Larson), the socio-cultural and political contexts of Hesiod’s reality (Chapter 4 [“In Hesiod’s World”], by David W. Tandy) and “The Prehistory and Analogues of Hesiod’s Poetry” (Chapter 5, by Joshua T. Katz). The latter also briefly deals with the Near-Eastern influences on Hesiod’s poetry, a controversial topic since the publication of Martin West’s *The East Face of Helicon* (Oxford 1997). This aspect would perhaps have deserved some more room and discussion.

For reasons of limited space, I am unable to mention (let alone summarize and discuss) all the other chapters from this capacious volume. Therefore, I select three which I consider to be of particular relevance for one or another reason (without, of course, wishing to depreciate all those excellent contributions that must remain unacknowledged). One contribution which should be singled out is that by Suzanne Lye on “Gender in Hesiod: A Poetics of the Powerless” (Chapter 12). Here the well-known misogynistic tendencies in the *Theogony* and the *Works and Days* are scrutinized, and Lye concludes that “Hesiod’s use of misogynistic language reflects his socioeconomic vulnerability” (186). This is a most instructive chapter with a conclusion that sounds plausible. At the same time, however, it is problematic because the assumption that the *persona* of Hesiod as represented in his poems “must have accurately reflected his society’s context and mores” (187 n.1) is an unproven claim. One could as well turn the tables and ask the question: why should Hesiod put so much emphasis on expressing those views if they were nothing but contemporary mainstream? Ultimately we are faced with an irresolvable hermeneutic circle.

No one holding a handbook on Hesiod will be surprised to read about, for example, Hesiod and Solon (Chapter 13), Pindar (Chapter 17), the tragedy (Chapter 18), and Plato (Chapter 20 [strangely there is no chapter on the aforementioned *Certamen Homeri et Hesiodi*]). However, a contribution on “Ovid’s Hesiodic Voices” (Chapter 24, by Ioannis Ziogas) may be less obvious. Admittedly, it is not far-fetched to think of Hesiod as a model for the myth of the four ages in the *Metamorphoses* – but it does not end there; Ziogas also finds Hesiodic traces in the *Fasti* and the *Ars amatoria*, and he argues that Ovid was “interested in perceiving Hesiod’s cosmos through the lens of a comprehensive

narrative as he repeatedly points to the harmony and conflict between and within Hesiod's works" (390).

From the fourth part of the volume, my favourite chapter was that on "Theorizing with Hesiod: Freudian Constructs and Structuralism" (Chapter 29, by Stephen Scully and Charles Stocking). While Hesiod's influence on Sigmund Freud seems to have been relatively tangential, it appears to have been of quite some importance on thinkers such as Jean-Pierre Vernant, Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida. I must confess that I had absolutely no idea about this side of the reception of Hesiod. *Mutatis mutandis*, this handbook will surely offer one or the other unforeseen surprise to every reader.

To conclude: *The Oxford Handbook of Hesiod* is a fantastic volume, with chapters all written by accomplished international scholars; a volume that bespeaks the wide range of Hesiodic scholarship and reception from antiquity to today. Consequently, it is an indispensable work of reference relevant to anyone who is interested in Hesiod. Besides, it should also be part of every Homerist's library.

SILVIO BÄR

University of Oslo, silvio.baer@ifikk.uio.no