

BOOK REVIEW

The Emergence of the Lyric Canon. By THEODORA A. HADJIMICHAEL. Oxford, UK and New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2019. Pp. v-xx + 332. Hardback, \$105.00. ISBN: 9780198810865

T*he Emergence of the Lyric Canon* addresses how the canon of nine ancient Greek lyric poets (Pindar, Bacchylides, Sappho, Anacreon, Stesichorus, Simonides, Ibycus, Alcaeus and Alcman) was represented and passed down beginning in the archaic period through their presence at the Library of Alexandria. The book consists of an Introduction, seven chapters and a Conclusion. The front matter presents, in addition to the Acknowledgements and Dedication, a List of Maps and Figures, a list of Conventions and Abbreviations and a Note to the Reader. The end matter includes a Bibliography, an Index Locorum and a General Index.

The Introduction reviews the terms “lyric” and “canon” as key components of the upcoming discussion, the methodological focus on reception theory, as well as a summary of core arguments made in each of the seven chapters. Chapter 1, “The World of Lyric: Local, Pan-Hellenic, and Athenian,” discusses the contexts of creating and performing lyric poetry in general, addressing how the local and Pan-Hellenic environments in which poems may have been composed mattered as well as the role of 5th-century Athens in the composition of lyrics and in the passing on of works by the canonical nine. Chapter 2, “The Canonical Nine on the Comic Stage,” examines the citations and treatments of lyric poetry in ancient comedies. Chapter 3, “Plato, Poetry, and the Lyric Nine,” considers how Plato discussed and cited lyric poetry in contrast to his well-known rejection of most tragedy and Homeric texts. Chapter 4, “The Peripatos,” discusses the importance of the Peripatetic scholars and the library associated with the Lyceum in maintaining and passing on the process of canonization and their roles in general reception of such poetry. Chapter 5, “Towards a Written Text,” addresses the shift from oral song to physical text, and how availability and circulations of texts may

have affected the transmission of the canonical poets. Chapter 6, “The Hellenistic Era,” focuses on the Library of Alexandria and some of the librarians who may have maintained and influenced the Greek lyric canon. Chapter 7, “The Paradox of Bacchylides,” addresses the one poet of the canonical nine whose work does not follow the patterns noted in the previous chapters. The “Conclusion” reviews the overall arguments, restates the goals of the analysis, and makes suggestions of how the ideas and method might be applied to other genres.

One of the biggest strengths of this book is its basis in primary sources of various kinds, including scholia, inscriptions and vases. It is also openly direct about the lacunae in records and the generally extrapolar nature of many conclusions reached. Besides addressing a subject that has been growing in recognized importance with a focus on the nature of literary canons and their formation and transmission, the concluding note suggesting that one of the book’s goals is to provide a method that might be of use with other genres (288) is an interesting one. The focus on process and the roles of elitism and conservatism is likewise intriguing.

In spite of its good qualities, the book does have a few potential pitfalls, most noticeably in possible use by students. The author points out in the prefatory “Note to the Reader” that some book-length studies published in 2018 were not accessible to her, and were thus not included in the bibliography; this same note is also the location of a short but important explanation on terminology concerning “lyric” versus “melic.” While the front matter is an expected location for such details, that crucial information might be easily overlooked by a less experienced scholar, especially since it is not repeated directly in the main text.

This is not a book easily used by early and possibly mid-stage undergraduate students for other reasons as well. There is little detail about what is known of the nine poets themselves or reviews of their poetry, and neither is there much detailed discussion of how the canon may have been set in the first place. Similarly, there are frequent references to scholia but little direct discussion of what is known about such commentary, or why they matter in particular as sources.

These areas of knowledge are all incomplete in themselves, which is acknowledged, but the arguments become less accessible to a general audience without such background as is known. There are also occasional untranslated phrases of Greek and Latin, although meaning can often be derived from context. A more

experienced scholar would be fine without the contextual background, but the lack of even a brief review of what is accepted or known is surprising given the book's frequent recognition of the limitations of the primary source information. Overall, of the two stated goals for the book, "to explore the process through which the Lyric Canon was formed in antiquity and to bring to the surface larger cultural issues in connection with the survival and transmission" (288), the latter is considerably more successful.

Overall, the premise and general presentation of the argument is well done, and provides a good model for both working with a range of different source types, and being consistently careful about lacunae in sources and knowledge. This book would be best in collections aimed at more advanced students and scholars of Greek lyric and those engaged in receptions studies of the ancient worlds.

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