John A. MacPhail Jr., *Porphyry's Homeric Questions on the Iliad*: Text Translation Commentary. Texte und Kommentare herausgegeben von Siegmar Döpp, Adolf Köhnken, Ruth Scodel, vol. 36, Berlin – New York: DeGruyter, 2011, pp. 310, ISBN 9783110195439.

It is now 60 years since H Erbse[1] set out how a new edition of Porphyry's *Homeric Problems* should be constituted, to replace the old but still valuable edition of Schrader.[2] He suggested three sections, the first being an edition of the 32 Problems of the 14th c. Vatican ms. 305, which alone contains the first book of Porphyry's work, and which Schrader had not collated personally, with the parallel excepts from that book (though from an earlier complete manuscript), which were written into a lost manuscript of the *Iliad* b-class, - only once according to Erbse - and now preserved in various forms in its descendants. This labour of editing the Vatican ms. of Porphyry's Book One was undertaken by A.R. Sodano in 1970, who also edited in parallel those same problems that were independently preserved in the b-class. The result was useful but not easy to use. Now, since Porphyry's *Questions* as preserved in the Vatican ms. may start from one disputed passage but are discussed generally with wide reference to *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, the parallel excerpts we have are of necessity attached only to specific passages in the Homeric text, and have been adapted accordingly from the original with some rare additions, though not excessively. Therefore Erbse's second proposal was for an edition of all the many other excerpts from the other lost books of Porphyry in the b-scholia, ordered according to the Homeric text. These he said could be determined by a) either the presence of Porphyry's name, or b) overlap with text known to be Porphyrianic. Schrader had by contrast included everything that looked like Porphyry, or even represented an ancient problem, so that his edition has many examples of what we would now call exegetic scholia, which are not likely to be Porphyrianic but which he thought - wrongly - derived from Porphyry. Erbse's third section was as even he admitted very difficult. There are excerpts from Porphyry's *Questions* in the D-scholia, with his name attached, whence they have entered into the A-scholia, and also into Eustathius' Homer commentary, and elsewhere but there are also extracts without P.'s name, and D-scholia which look very much like Porphyriana, and may of course derive from P's source material. There are also Porphyriana in the T(ownleyanus) e.g. he is named

1 H. Erbse, *Beiträge zur Überlieferung der Iliasscholien*, Munich 1960, 72ff.

2 H. Schrader, *Porphyrii Quaestionum Homericarum ad Iliadem pertinentium reliquias*, Leipzig 1880; P.Q. H. *ad Odysseam pertinentium reliquias*, Leipzig 1890.

for contradicting Aristarchus on M 258, and this would presumably come indirectly from Porphyry's zetema, which we happen to have in full in the b-scholia, and it should be booked as a testimonium, at least, in the present book. These Erbse wanted to call Dubia - though some are obviously not dubious, and many a reader will be puzzled to find in his edition scholia labelled as "Porph ?" or "ex/ Porph?" since by his rationale, these are scholia vetera. In these last years, we have acquired two major desiderata, not noted by M.: a workable edition of the D-scholia by van Thiel[3] and two excellent volumes of the scholia to the *Odyssey* by M. Pontani[4], the latter of importance since large amounts of Porphyry were excerpted differently into two branches of those scholia. This roughly is a simplified version of a very complex situation.

Porphyry is important because his is the most learned work of Homeric exegesis surviving from antiquity and the only non-allegorical one to survive in any completeness. One can reckon that there were originally at least three and perhaps four or more books of *Homeric Questions*, much of it surviving. Because Porphyry in bulk was not imported into the scholia until byzantine times, Erbse himself did not include Porphyriana in his magisterial scholia *vetera* to the *Iliad*, - with some exceptions; but Pontani has now printed out in full the *Odyssey* material including Porphyry, and for this we must be extremely grateful. It will be seen from what has already been said that any work on the *Homeric Questions* is not for the faint hearted. McPhail (hereafter M.) has undertaken this formidable task as a doctoral thesis at the University of Michigan, though strangely no supervisor is named. Despite the title, however, his aim is limited, and is to fulfil only a part of Erbse's second section, i.e. those excerpts dealing with the *Iliad* attested by name for Porphyry, which are set out with a full apparatus from the four mss. sources that Erbse defined. Since the excerpts from Porphyry's *Questions* regarding the *Odyssey* will now be edited in Pontani's volumes, it does make (accidentally) sense that M.'s book would fill much of the gap left by Erbse's decision to omit Porphyry. It remains to be seen whether M. has replaced the edition of Schrader from 1880.

It must be said therefore that the title is variously misleading, not only because this is not a text of the *Homeric Questions*, but since there is really no adequate commentary. Anyone who has ever looked up all the ancient sources on a major Homeric problem will understand that this is inevitably a huge task, requiring the commentator to summarize hundreds of years of scholarship, condense, and make sense of it. For example, at an elementary

3 Called a parekdosis at:
www.ub.uni-koeln.de/digital/fachinfos/altertum/volltexte/index_ger.html, where will be found Nicola Ernst's valuable *Odyssey* scholia, which can be used a replacement for Pontani.

4 F. Pontani, *Scholia Graeca in Odysseam 1-2*, Rome 2007, 2010.

level on p. 35 on B73 we would wish to know exactly what is meant by the Aristotelian plot-line that should not occur because of a *mechane*, and we are referred in a note to the Greek text of *Poetics* 1460a37 to explain the translation "from a contrivance"; this would be incomprehensible to the Greekless. It would have been better to leave the Greek word as *mechane*, and explain the Aristotelian concept in greater detail, here as "unmotivated intervention", since Porphyry runs on for another page about it.

Here is M.'s translation,

"Why did Agamemnon test the Achaeans and thus bring it about that the opposite of what he was planning nearly happened? The prevention is from a contrivance, for Athene prevented it. But it is unpoetical for a contrivance to solve <the problem> otherwise than [η M: μη *B] from the plot itself. Aristotle says that the representation of what is accustomed to happen is poetic, but <δε add. M> the introduction of dangers is even more <characteristic> of poets."

I do not think any reader could understand this, without a great deal more explanation than can be given in the odd brief footnote.

In addition a commentary would require a collection of the relevant testimonia and parallels, always a major task with ancient scholia and particularly with questions that can go back many centuries to Aristotle and Zoilus. Erbse's rich apparatus of course provides some indirect guidance here, but M. himself offers practically nothing, not even those parallels from the Dubia which can be found in Erbse. Likewise the introduction to the manuscript evidence is perfunctory, - there is a stemma on p.10 - but no evidence is produced to show why Sodano's more complex stemma (XXXIV) is reduced to Erbse's more basic one, esp. since Erbse was not editing the text. (Now that Pontani has shown that Porphyry was twice excerpted, it would be prudent to check whether the same would not be possible for the *Iliad*.) As a result no reader will be able to follow the reasoning behind an excerpt like that at A104 which depends on *B^A - a manuscript symbol nowhere explained. At Ψ 269 in the Escorial ms was set an excerpt about *talanton*, but the same excerpt appears at N295 and B169 in other mss.; since M. only tells us the folio numbers of these mss., we shall have to look up Erbse or Schrader to discover what these other Homer lines were, and so find the scholia in Erbse; nor does he note the Gigon or Rose number of the central Aristotle fragment. On *Iliad* E7 there are two sets of excerpts, but again only the folio number in the mss is given, not the Homeric line, so that we do not know why we have excerpts 7a which is in *B at two places and 7b which is an A-scholion, citing Zoilos, neither with the marker "of Porphyrios". In fact Erbse (Ueberl. p. 32) had argued that the first came from a source of Porphyry in the exegetic scholia, and the second from Porphyry via the D scholia; whether this is so is something that needs argument or refutation, but it is what one will find in his scholia vetera. But technically E7a and 7b belong to dubia, and

not among the direct excerpts, and thus should not be in this book. There are many such problems which are not confronted here, and finding the evidence oneself is very time consuming. Sometimes the discussion is so abbreviated that one does not know what is being said, e.g. I can make nothing of p.8, "Six extracts on the *Iliad* Book are identical in style to Book One but for one exception in each." The citation of "Plutarch, *de latentur vivendo* 1130e4" on p.213 does not encourage.

This edition is essentially a "purified" Schrader for the *Iliad* excerpts, minus the Vaticanus, minus the *Odyssey* excerpts and minus the dubia, but also minus the problems that arise from Erbse's dubia. It is of course much easier to read text and apparatus than in Schrader, though the text has not really been so improved as one might have hoped, especially when one cannot see what the rationale is, though here and there M does offer an emendation of a desperate passage. There are 131 excerpts, filling irregularly 125 pages of Greek text, contrasting with the 54 pages of Schrader's text of the Vaticanus. Add Pontani's *Odyssey* excerpts and we have a major body of scholarship. This is now made partly available by M's translation, which is the first in English and seeks to be literal. But the style of Porphyry, even before exerpting, is terse and apodictic, and makes his thought difficult to follow at the best of times. Then there is the technical vocabulary: M. often translates φωνή as «sound» instead of «term»[5] thus making p. 213, 24 incomprehensible, all the more regrettable because his emendation ἅμα τῳ is sensible. M. translates there

"<*** lac. vidit Schr.> since along with "without" the sound also signifies "much" in compound words, for thus "*achanes* sea", "the quite large" ...

There is no need for Schrader's lacuna (he tended to insert these because of his false views of the relation between Porphyry and the exegetic scholia): it is a simple genitive absolute hung on the preceding in slovenly fashion with a row of examples, as:

" - the term <πειρ-> in compounds meaning with the addition of "without" [i.e. a privative] also "large" just as in "a-chanes sea", the very large <sea> ..."

One can see how much needs to be rewritten. The result of an attempted literal rendering reads as if Porpyhry had been put through Google translation. The english is very hard to read, with confusing ambiguities that are best resolved by looking at the Greek, e.g. p. 35, line 4 gives "Then he was told..", but no "he" has been mentioned, and the verb is passive "it was said...". It does not help that there are too many compositional errors e.g. p. 145 variants mixed: "in accord with to its connection", p. 43, verbs delayed, "their sedition has been <stopped>", or omitted "since an insolent man already <has

5 Erbse, *Scholia Vetera VI*, Sermo grammaticus 525 gives "vocabulum"; Lampe, *Patristic Gk Lex.* gives "term".

been> stopped", or repeated. p. 157, 1 "Why did Peleus send Phoenix ... nevertheless send him". No spell checker has been applied: p.2 11 "bueautiful". Such things are to be found on almost every page. One gets the impression of a manuscript put together in a hurry. As for the actual meaning, why e.g. is Homeric ἀφραίνω [B258] translated as "gasp" on p. 43? Is this a confusion with ἀσπαίρω? I could find no explanation for such oddities. Here is a typical sample from p.43:

"So erring naturally endowed with speech is admonished, ill endowed being rich with a penalty of money, confident in strength of body with binds and tortures of the body."

It speaks for itself. With more care, it would have been possible and generally useful to make a translation of Porphyry's often difficult Greek accessible to the Greekless reader. Even then, there would still be much need of explanation of the often hasty and turgid arguments of a philosopher, which were designed for an audience who knew the Homer text and its ancient problems intimately.

On the positive side M. makes the interesting point (pp. 6-8) which we can now verify for ourselves, that while half of the excerpts are like those of book one, the rest are phrased far more in the formal language of zetemata. ("Why does..." "How can..." "For what reason... "It must be said..." "This contradicts...") Did Porphyry alter his language in the later books? Or did the excerptor(s) alter their method of adapting his text as they broke up Porphyry's text to apply it to individual lines of Homer? Since Sodano's parallel text is not altered in this way, it should follow that Porphyry did indeed alter his methods in his later books; in that case Erbse was wrong to make such a major distinction between Porphyry ("ehrwürdig") and the zetemata of the D-scholia ("Schulmeisterei"). M. Schmidt[6] has now delivered a fairer and balanced verdict on these, and in fact much more could be said about the methods and mental attitudes of the writers of zetemata. But this is an issue which others will have to pursue. I believe that the mechanisms and language and attitudes of the propounders of these *Problems* remained more or less the same throughout antiquity, but this branch of ancient learning which can be traced for a thousand years has never been studied adequately. In this respect at least, M. has done a service if his work encourages further study.

But regrettably even if the idea behind this book was not misplaced, the execution and supervision (if any) are deficient, the editing non existent, and the final result a considerable disappointment, and a black mark for a publisher hitherto honoured for its contribution to ancient scholarship. There are indices, but it scarcely helps a reader that books of Homer are named by

6 M. Schmidt, "The Homer of the scholia: what is explained to the reader", in F. Montanari (ed.), *Omero tremila anni dopo*, Rome 2002, 159-83.

Arabic numbers, while Erbse's scholia and Schrader and M. in his text uses Greek letters.

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