

## RESEÑAS REVIEWS

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Margalit Finkelberg

*Homer and Early Greek Epic: Collected Essays*. Trends in Classics – Supplementary Volumes, 89. Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 2020. 402 pp. (ISBN: 9783110671421)

The book under review is a collection of thirty-one previously published contributions by the reputed Homerist, Margalit Finkelberg, professor emerita at the University of Tel-Aviv, where she taught Classics for over twenty-five years. Along with other aspects of Greek poetry and language that she has investigated, the Homeric poems and the cognate archaic epic have been the main core of her research.

As the author explains in the Preface, her study of Homer is dedicated to four overarching themes, which structure this collection of articles: the tension between the individuality of the epic poet and his use of tradi-

tional diction ('I. Language and diction', 1-110); the position which corresponds to the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* within a fragmentary preserved epic background ('II. Homer and heroic tradition', 111-96); the historical situations presupposed in the Homeric poems ('III. Homer's worlds and values', 197-288); and their posterity as canonical texts ('IV. Transmission and reception', 289-374). Contributions included in each section are presented chronologically to illustrate the progression of Finkelberg's points of view. When convenient, the articles have been updated by the author, who has also included useful cross-references.

The first article ('Is κλέος ἀφθιτον a Homeric formula?', 3-8) is already representative of Finkelberg's preoccupations. It analyses the Homeric expression κλέος ἄφθιτον ('imperishable fame'), usually regarded as a

pre-Greek formula, examines its parallels, and concludes that it is a unique expression, adapted from well-established formulas to fit in a particular context. Therefore, although the thesis is not established as such, this contribution already deals with the idea that there is a tension between the traditional diction and the particular needs of an oral poet. Significantly, this is also the case of the last article in this section ('Equivalent formulae for Zeus in their traditional context', 104-10), which also explores Homeric formulaic diction and proposes that individual poets have not only modified the formulaic repertory but also amplified it with idiosyncratic creations (110).

It should be considered that, on a theoretical level, two trends in Homeric studies pervade these contributions: Oralism and Neoanalysis. The Oral-Formulaic Theory plays a special role in the first section. This notwithstanding, it is also true, as can be deduced from the previous comments, that the author is critical with the more conventional versions of Oralism, as attested in 'Oral Theory or the limits of formulaic diction' (53-65) or 'Oral-Formulaic theory and the individual poet' (96-103).

In addition to Oralism, the other Homeric trend that plays a main role in the book is Neoanalysis, which pays special attention to the relations

between the *Iliad*, the *Odyssey*, and precedent epopees about the Trojan war. The topic is already present in the first paper in section two, 'The first song of Demodocus' (113-17), treating the quarrel between Achilles and Odysseus mentioned by this bard; the possibility that this theme was already part of the epic repertory is rejected in favour of a poetic invention adapted to the context. That the relation between the *Iliad* and the epic tradition may be different from the usual conceptions of Oralism and Neoanalysis is shown in 'The sources of *Iliad* 7' (140-49), in which the *Iliad* is presented as a 'metaepic' (149), an epopee which combines a provenance in the oral tradition with non-traditional poetics, which accounts for its special status within epic poetry. Finkelberg deviates clearly from the more usual positions in her attitude towards Oralism and Neoanalysis, as it may well be seen in 'Homer and his peers: Neoanalysis, Oral Theory, and the status of Homer' (150-68); in this contribution the author proposes a common basis which could promote an agreement between both trends, as may be the case if Homer's singularity is recognized by Oralists, and if Neoanalysts accept the possibility that the poet reshapes unwritten poems. Something similar happens with other contributions, for example 'Meta-Cyclic epic and Homeric

poetry' (169-81) or 'The formation of the Homeric epics' (182-96), which discusses the possibility of the Homeric poems being written down in the sixth century BC, a hypothesis which relates to the theory of the so-called 'Pisistratean recension', i.e., the writing down of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* on occasion of the institution of the Panathenaic festival, by the time of Pisistratus or his sons.

The third section deals, in a broad sense, with the historical background of the Homeric poems, for example with the information about Bronze Age matrilineal royal succession which can be extracted from the epopees (see 'Royal succession in heroic Greece', 199-217) or the concept of heroism embodied by Odysseus in the *Odyssey*, different from the Iliadic one and related to the Greek practice of hero-cult (see 'Odysseus and the genus "Hero"', 218-31). The article '*Timē* and *aretē* in Homer' (251-68) is especially thought-provoking, in which Finkelberg asserts that *timē* in Homer is not 'honour' but 'status', a term that implies not competition but cooperation within an aristocratic society; the related value of *aretē*, 'breeding' and afterwards 'virtue', is competitive and more egalitarian, as it depends on the potentialities of the individual. Finkelberg shows how both concepts are combined in the plot of the *Iliad*. Their coexistence in

the Homeric poems must be another case of combination of different historical levels, therefore another example of the world of Homer being not a consistent one but an amalgam of cultural elements proceeding from the different epochs during which the poems lived in an oral form.

Some of the contributions in the last section dedicated to the canonicity and afterlife of Homer deal with more concrete themes, such as papers number 25 ('Ajax's entry in the Hesiodic Catalogue of Women', 291-304) or 28 ("She turns about in the same spot and watches for Orion": ancient criticism and exegesis of *Od.* 5.274 = *Il.* 18.488', 331-39). The scope of others is far-reaching, as can be deduced from titles like 'The *Cypria*, the *Iliad*, and the problem of multiformity in oral and written tradition' (305-17), 'Homer as a foundation text' (318-30) or 'Canonizing and decanonizing Homer: reception of the Homeric poems in Antiquity and Modernity' (353-64). The last article ('Homer at the Panathenaia: some possible scenarios', 365-74) refers to a central issue in the 'Homeric Question': when did the Homeric poems receive a fixed, not necessarily written form? While recognizing that the evidence may be arranged in different ways, given what we know now, especially in iconography, Finkelberg is led to propose a fixed 'Homer' in the

mid-seventh century, not in the eighth, as traditionally supposed, nor in the late-sixth, as the theory of the 'Pisistratean recension' would imply.

While it is true that this volume contains reiterations which could have been avoided through a more unifying revision of the individual texts, doing so would have required writing a new book. The present volume nevertheless deserves an attentive reading, especially by those interested in Homer, the new formulations of the Oral-Poetry Theory and the collaboration between Oralism and Neoanalysis. The book presents a synthesis of a lifetime of work devoted to the Homeric poetry. It is a provisory synthesis, not a final point, as it is expected that many other academic works by the author are forthcoming.

José B. Torres  
Universidad de Navarra  
jtorres@unav.es

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### Ruth Finnegan

*Time for the World to Learn from Africa.* Hearing Others' Voices. London: Bales-tier Press, 2018. 226 pp. (ISBN: 9781911221210)

*Time for the world to learn from Africa* is the last book by the distinguished anthropologist Ruth Finnegan, in which she summarises the major con-

clusions of her long academic career and shares her most important insights related to Africa and its cultures. Undoubtedly, it is no coincidence that *Time to learn from Africa* was published in the series *Hearing others' voices*.

Probably every researcher who has ever worked in the field of oral literature, formulaic language, literacy studies, or African literatures has been inspired by Ruth Finnegan's pioneering publications, such as *Oral literature in Africa* (1970), *Oral Poetry* (1977), or *Literacy and Orality* (1988). Finnegan is a truly multifaceted, interdisciplinary researcher – in addition to Africa, she also worked with South Pacific cultures, amateur musicians in the UK, and the history of quotation marks, to mention just a few of her other interests.

Finnegan defines her reason for undertaking to write this book in the following terms: 'one of the main points of this volume is to bring out the truth... there is so much, here and now as in past centuries that we can learn from Africa' (15). The unspoken but still fundamental purpose of this book, as is the case with most of Finnegan's later work, is to remind us about our humanness and the importance of remaining human. *Time to learn from Africa* consists of eleven chapters, the first of which is intended to remind the reader about the