

**Christina-Panagiota MANOLEA – Francois RENAUD – Harold TARRANT (eds.),
Reassessing Homer in the Platonic Tradition. Beiträge zur Altertumskunde
Bd. 426. Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter 2025, ISBN: 978-3-11167-309-7**

The volume presents a wide-ranging, methodologically coherent study of Homer's reception within the Platonic tradition, from the earliest Academic responses to developments in Late Antique Neoplatonism. Although the subject has attracted substantial specialist attention in recent decades with many studies devoted to single authors' attitude towards Homer, the Platonic tradition has not often been examined with the same systematic ambition and diachronic scope as in this recent collection of essays. The volume benefits from a polyphony of scholarly voices, which, taken together, reconstruct both the historical evolution of the so-called "Homer-Plato question" (p. 1) – that is, Plato's criticism of Homeric poetry – and its broader thematic developments within the Platonic tradition.

Francesca PENTASSUGLIO (pp. 11-27) examines Homer's presence in Xenophon's *Symposium* and Plutarch's *Table Talks*, both densely interwoven with Homeric allusions. Xenophon does not attack Homeric poetry as such; rather, he objects to its conventional encyclopaedic and mnemonic deployment – seen as pedagogically ineffective – while nonetheless drawing on Homer to bolster his own arguments. Plutarch, who regards Xenophon as a model for proper sympotic conduct, treats Homer primarily as a source and a means of legitimating behavioural norms and philosophical claims; his occasional criticisms of Homeric poetry largely register as minor echoes of Plato's devaluation of poetry.

Marta ANTOLA (pp. 29-47) identifies a suggestive *fil rouge* linking Homer, Plato, and Plotinus through the figure of Odysseus, albeit with the risk of 'retrojecting' Platonic motifs onto Homer himself. Odysseus appears to deploy an "erotic strategy" (p. 31): by confronting the physical manifestations of *eros* he consolidates a 'non-physical love' to his homeland. A comparable dynamic informs the Socrates of the Platonic dialogues, whose resistance to the physical beauty of his young interlocutors propels him toward an 'intelligible longing' for Beauty and Good. Plotinus, for his part, assimilates Odysseus in the *Enneads*, transforming the hero into the emblem of the Neoplatonic philosopher who renounces bodily pleasures to return to his true homeland – the metaphysical realm of the Forms and, ultimately, the One.

According to Michele CORRADI (pp. 49-64), Aristotle's *Poetics* responds to Plato's critical challenge to show how poetry can be not only pleasant but also useful; in

doing so, Aristotle operates within the conceptual framework established by Plato. For Aristotle, Homer is a consummate poet because he devotes ample space to direct speeches by noble characters, thus practising the only form of *mimesis* Plato accepts – although, in Aristotle’s view, Plato was mistaken to judge Homeric heroes negatively. Homer’s poetry is also defensible because it displays natural talent or refined technique, unlike the divinely possessed – and devoid of self-awareness – poet of Plato’s *Ion*. Finally, Aristotle appears to suggest that Plato’s own dialogues, which blend tragedy (*spoudaios*) and comedy (*phaulos*), place him in Homer’s lineage, the first to combine both genres.

Marco DONATO (pp. 65-92) investigates Homeric citations and the broader presence of Homer in Platonic dialogues traditionally deemed dubious or spurious. DONATO shows that Homeric quotations sometimes brighten the dialogic narrative, sometimes provide argumentative support, and sometimes prompt allegorical exegesis based on the view that Homer spoke in “enigmas” requiring interpretation. If many of the so-called *dubia* and *spuria* were produced within the Hellenistic Academy, this corpus then represents a significant chapter in Homer’s reception within the Platonic tradition and warrants further, more detailed scholarly study along the observations DONATO proposes.

Carlotta CAPUCCINO (pp. 101-121) examines Plato’s *Ion* and the reception of its famous passages on the poet’s divine possession. Plato introduces a radical shift: whereas earlier traditions saw divine inspiration as elevating the poet to quasi-divine status, Plato reframes it as evidence of the poet’s passivity. The poet becomes a mere conduit of divine power, the deity supplanting the poet’s own thought. This provoked a twofold reception: some Platonists read Plato as issuing a severe critique of poetry; others argued he was in fact exalting poetry by making it a vessel of the divine, and that Plato himself – given his remarks about philosophers as “divine individuals” – might be viewed as a philosopher-poet speaking for the gods.

George Alexander GAZIS (pp. 123-142) turns to the Homeric scholia, highlighting how many scholiasts adopt a “Homerocentric” approach (p. 139): Homer is conceived as Plato’s spiritual “master”, the source of an ancient wisdom from which Plato – and indeed all philosophers – drew. Consequently, Homer is not read through Plato; rather, numerous Platonic dialogues and doctrines are interpreted through Homer. Some scholia even claim, for example, that Homer inspired Plato’s preference for narrative over mimetic poetry, the prophetic portrayal of Socrates in the *Apology*, and the attribution of military roles to women in his political dialogues.

François RENAUD (pp. 143-159) examines *mimesis* in the *Republic*, focusing on Plato's distinction between the poet's own voice – more prominent in narrative poetry – and the voices of characters, whose representation forces the poet to mimic and thus identify with them. Plato devalues this latter mode as incapable of conveying a unified and objective perspective and as potentially dangerous when it imitates morally deficient characters. RENAUD then traces its reception: a scholiast's defence of a convergence between poet and characters (Homer speaks both directly and indirectly, i.e. through his characters); Plutarch's and Porphyry's preservation of the distinction; and its polemical use by Aristarchus and Athenaeus against Plato. Plato's anonymity in his dialogues can be read in this light: it signals that philosophy must be practised in the first person, not vicariously through fictional figures.

Georgia TSOUNI (pp. 161-179) investigates Cicero's stance toward Homer and Plato. For Cicero, Plato occupies for philosophers the same position Homer holds for poets: initiator of the genre, hence "the Homer of philosophers" (*Tusc.* 1.79). Cicero presents Homer as bearer of ancient wisdom and defending the superiority of the pursuit of knowledge through Odysseus, who rejects a life that combines material pleasures and knowledge (the Sirens' promise) in favour of exclusive dedication to a contemplative life, perhaps as a polemic against Epicureanism. For TSOUNI, this shows that, by the late Roman Republic era, invoking Homer had become a rhetorical strategy to articulate and legitimate specific philosophical positions.

Dino DE SANCTIS (pp. 181-192) analyses Homer's use in Plutarch's *Praecepta gerendae reipublicae*. In this work, Homer supplies a repertoire of moral and political *exempla* woven into a pedagogical discourse and civic instruction, combining quotation, exhortation, and correction. DE SANCTIS shows that, though indebted to Plato, Plutarch employs Homer autonomously as a source of practical wisdom: his citations aim to shape and educate the dispositions of his audience. As such, Plutarch does not primarily follow Platonic dialogues – with their recurrent devaluation of poetry – but aligns himself with the Alexandrian tradition of Homeric philology.

Selene I. S. BRUMANA (pp. 193-209) examines Maximus of Tyre's view that Homer functions both as a formal model for the Platonic dialogues and as a source for much of their content. Maximus endorses a long-standing conviction – rooted in the Hellenistic period, consolidated in the early Empire, and widespread in Late Antiquity – that Homer influenced Plato because he possessed an *archaia philosophia*, an ancestral and universal wisdom that required allegorical interpretation to be properly decoded.

Harold TARRANT (pp. 211-222) analyses sea and navigation imagery in Numenius of Apamea and in Porphyry, who draws the same imagery from Numenius. Odysseus' maritime wanderings are read by Numenius as an allegory of the incarnate soul, summoned to withdraw from the material and bodily realm and ascend toward the intelligible, a view later adopted by Plotinus and Porphyry. Numenius' identification of the sea with matter is supported by several Platonic dialogues, where the sea bears negative connotations (for example, Glaucus' submerged statue in the *Republic*, the devaluation of the sea in the *Laws* and even in the *Alcibiades II*, which Numenius likely regarded as genuine). Convinced that Plato's doctrines, like Homer's, demand allegorical interpretation, Numenius affirms a convergence between the two authors.

Emilie KUTASH (pp. 223-241) offers a comparison of Homer, Plato, Proclus, and Simone Weil on war. Homer portrays warfare in its full range – from brutal carnage to heroic episodes – with striking realism. Plato, by contrast, insists that scenes of battle should be excluded from the education of future rulers, who must instead emulate the 'heroic' ideal of philosophy embodied by Socrates, namely the primacy of reason. Proclus accepts Homer's war-scenes but reads them allegorically as expressions of the soul's need – both at the microcosmic and macrocosmic levels – to resist the temptations of matter. From a modern standpoint, these positions invite reflection on human attitude towards war: Simone Weil interprets the *Iliad* as a perfect depiction of war's barbarity, stripped of nobility. KUTASH, echoing Freud, provocatively asks whether Heraclitus' tenet – war as the father of all things – might not be emblematic of human nature.

Anna MOTTA (pp. 243-260) examines Proclus and the Anonymous *Prolegomena*, who argue that in Plato divinely inspired poetry and philosophy coexist. Plato recovers an ancient wisdom – or more precisely, an ancestral theology – which he expresses more decisively than earlier *sophoi*. He both reveals divine truth openly (through a dialectical approach and an 'entheastic' one, that is, when he is possessed by divine power) and conceals it cryptically so it can be decoded via symbolic structures and iconic motifs. While following the style of Homeric divine poetry, Plato grounds revelation in dialectic, which, in the Neoplatonists' eyes, renders him superior to earlier sages and enables his philosophy-revelation to disclose the structure and interrelations of metaphysical principles.

Graeme MILES (pp. 261-270) focuses on Proclus' non-allegorical readings of Homer. Proclus distinguishes several genres of poetry: only divinely inspired poetry demands allegorical interpretation to uncover deeper truths; didactic

and mimetic poetry do not call for allegoresis. Allegory, indeed, suits knowledge of the gods, not of heroes, who must be treated differently. In a Platonic spirit, one must deny that gods commit evil, and allegory reconciles Homeric episodes with this assumption; this constraint does not bind heroes, who are human and fallible. Therefore, Homer is thought to depict the human condition as ontologically free to choose good or evil.

Laura MARONGIU (pp. 271-289) examines a passage in Book VIII of the *Republic* (545c-547a) containing two Homeric quotations and focuses on Proclus' reading of them. Proclus holds that Plato cited Homer seriously to convey a precise philosophical message, not merely for stylistic effect or ironic distance: quotation of Homeric lines reinforces Plato's thesis that dissent and dissimilarity undermine the integrity of any reality, which must be preserved by adhering to a universal norm that is valid for human affairs, mathematics, and metaphysics, namely the priority of similarity. For Proclus, the divine spoke through Homer and, ultimately, through Plato quoting Homer.

Finally, Oiva KUISMA (pp. 291-305) discusses Proclus' view that Plato is a *zelotēs*, an "emulator" of Homer: one who neither copies nor distorts but transposes and develops analogous material in the competitive spirit that, for Plato in the *Ion*, characterises poetry. Proclus' reading rests on knowledge as *anamnesis*: if all knowledge is "recollection", Plato does not introduce radical novelties but retrieves earlier insights, expressing philosophically what predecessors formulated poetically. Yet, contrary to Proclus, it may be more accurate to argue that Plato sought to replace the Homeric world with his own vision of human nature, society, and the cosmos—especially the world presupposed in the *Republic-Timaeus-Critias* trilogy.

The volume is a substantial contribution to scholarship in ancient philosophy and Greek literature. It persuasively shows that, despite Plato's trenchant critique, Homer was not simply rejected within the Platonic tradition; rather, Platonists fostered a 'dialogue' between the two, treating Homer as a cultural, ethical, and theological authority with whom Plato had engaged decisively. Far from being a monolithic block, the Platonic tradition appears as an interpretive laboratory where the Homer-Plato question is reread, defended, criticised, allegorised, and imitated. Minor typographical slips, occasional non-idiomatic turns of phrase in English, and sporadic formatting inconsistencies do not detract from the volume's overall clarity, rigor, or coherence. Many essays point to promising directions for further research, which will benefit from the volume's insights.

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