



Kernos

Revue internationale et pluridisciplinaire de religion
grecque antique

29 | 2016
Varia

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Electronic version

URL: <http://kernos.revues.org/2433>
ISSN: 2034-7871

Publisher

Centre international d'étude de la religion
grecque antique

Printed version

Date of publication: 1 October 2016
Number of pages: 445-447
ISSN: 0776-3824

Electronic reference

Max Leventhal, « Lykophron: Alexandra. Greek Text, Translation, Commentary, & Introduction », *Kernos* [Online], 29 | 2016, Online since 01 October 2016, connection on 12 February 2017. URL : <http://kernos.revues.org/2433>

This text was automatically generated on 12 February 2017.

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REFERENCES

Simon HORNBLOWER, *Lykophron: Alexandra. Greek Text, Translation, Commentary, & Introduction*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2015. 1 vol. 16 × 24 cm, 626 p. ISBN : 978-0-199-57670-8.

- 1 A highly erudite and learned work by a scholar who epitomises the ivory tower, the 1474 line text of Lycophron's *Alexandra* has been diligently repaid by Simon Hornblower (S.H.) with a commentary of equal learning. As he points out, this is the first full-length commentary in English (p. 4). The depth of discussion which S.H. provides, both in his lemmatic comments and in the introduction, will make this an indispensable work for those studying Lycophron and Hellenistic literature, but also for those coming to this σκοτεινὸν ποίημα for the first time.
- 2 The format of the commentary is aimed at ease of reading and comprehension. After the introductory material, an annex discussing a thesis on the date of the *Alexandra* proposed while the book was in proof (attested by the misspelled 'Antichos' for Antiochos four lines in), and a synopsis, the Greek text and translation are printed on parallel pages, with commentary below. Since, as S.H. admits, he retains in translation the 'the innumerable periphrastic obscurities of naming', this layout has been chosen in the hope that 'the inevitable difficulty of understanding these allusions will be short lived' (p. 113). For such a tough poem, especially in terms of vocabulary, this seems the best configuration. The book ends with an appendix on the anapaestic Cassandra poem, *P.Berol.* 9775, and its possible relation to the *Alexandra*.

- 3 The text of the *Alexandra* in S.H.'s words 'is intended as no more than a companion to the commentary' (p. 113) and, no doubt for the sake of clarity as well as space, variants are registered only if they become a point of discussion. The translation is as readable as can be expected from the dense Greek. Helpfully, monstrous sentences (e.g. v. 694–711) are broken down into smaller, manageable ones.
- 4 The 119-page introduction considers typical questions of mythic and linguistic content, literary influence, date, authorship, performance context, and structure, the history of the text and modern editions, and it is commendably thorough. S.H.'s discussion of literary sources and influences on the *Alexandra* will be a particular boon to scholars of Hellenistic literature (p. 7–36), while his section on the influence of the *Alexandra* on later texts eschews discussion of the *Aeneid*, sending the reader to the relevant *R.-E.* articles. For a commentary which in general aims at being comprehensive, a few paragraphs on the *Aeneid* and Lycophron who not have gone amiss. Likewise, the section of metamorphoses in the poem is helpful, although to the mind of this reviewer, printing the complete list of 28 metamorphoses at the lemma to v. 176 is not. A companion monograph is planned entitled *Lykophron's Alexandra and the Hellenistic World*, and a number of points in the introduction refer the reader to it as a supplement (e.g. p. 36, 62): we await its publication.
- 5 In addition to the expected topics, S.H. takes ample space in the introduction to advance his own interpretation of and approach to the text. On the date of the poem, he suggests 190 B.C.E, with the 'unique wrestler' at v. 1447 understood as Titus Quinctius Flamininus. Both claims are persuasively argued and likely correct. In any case, H.'s belief in the date and identity of the figure does not compromise analysis in the commentary: e.g. Flamininus as the wrestler is only ever introduced as probable (p. 132, 431). The second notable section of the introduction is 'Lycophron and epigraphy'. In this long excursus (p. 62–92), originally published as a separate article (*CQ* 64.1 [2014], p. 91–120), S.H. expounds the importance of the many cult epithets employed by Lycophron, their relation to the epigraphic evidence and value as a source, and the wider significance for local and panhellenic religion. This is an immense contribution to scholarship on Lycophron, not least because it argues for the wider cultural and historical significance of the text.
- 6 The lemmatic commentary deals with individual words and phrases by line, as well as introducing and contextualising larger sections of the narrative. Here S.H. is helpful in explaining linguistic anomalies and suggesting literary parallels and influences from a great range of sources, both poetry and prose. His knowledge of the mythological tradition which informs the *Alexandra*, and the nature of the texts which constitute the tradition, is vast, but always presented with clarity. Sometimes, however, the discussion can become too expansive. S.H. considers the suggestion that the Cypriote section (v. 447–591) — the five leaders who found Cyprus — is derived from Eratosthenes over 5 columns (p. 217–219) and, while he comes to the fair conclusion that influence is probable, the intervening discussion could have been compressed. Infrequently, too, a pertinent literary association is missed; Lycophron's mention of Zethos at v. 602 requires at least a note contrasting it with Amphion and Zethos on Jason's cloak in the *Argonautica* (1.735–741). Generally speaking, though, S.H. is conservative in his literary analysis, and tends to record other commentators' interpretations and readings, and only passing judgement where necessary.

- 7 Perhaps more notably, S.H. also provides much historical background, describing the contemporary Hellenistic context of geographical locations, rituals and figures mentioned in the text. This detailed contextualisation stems from his belief that the *Alexandra* is a text ‘of the first importance for the understanding of some central aspects of ancient Greek religion and social history’ (p. 4), something which he expounds in the section ‘Lykophron and epigraphy’. Again, the degree to which the historical information presented in the commentary is strictly necessary will vary depending on the reader’s tolerance. At v. 691 for example (p. 286), S.H. marshals historical, archaeological and literary evidence in explaining the allusion to Pithekoussai and its insertion at this point in the poem. It is open to debate whether all this is required to make the point that, in a poem with a focus on the western Mediterranean and its Greek colonisation, the early Greek colony of Pithekoussai would be significant. Similarly, at v. 342–343 (and at v. 363), it is not clear how Trojan horse talismans are supposed to relate to Lykophron’s veiled mention of the Wooden Horse in the text; is the imagery on these objects significant for elucidating the text, or is this just a material parallel for the subject at hand? What is certain, however, is that the breadth with which the content of each line is approached will prime future scholarship to situate the text and its literary merits against a more clearly defined cultural history.
- 8 Yet this historical approach is introduced in a curious way. S.H.’s opening pitch in the introduction is to define the *Alexandra* as ‘a minor poetic masterpiece’, and he continues, ‘It is not Homer’s *Iliad* or Aeschylus’ *Agamemnon*, but...’ (p. 1). As one can observe from such collections as *The Minor Latin Poets*, *The Minor Greek Orators*, and *The Minor Greek Geographers*, the value judgement implied by ‘minor’ can have the effect of excusing a lack of scholarship, in the past as well as going forward. One gets the sense that for S.H. the fact that he believes the text to be ‘a powerful and richly plotted literary creation’ (p. 4) does not in itself secure it as a worthy subject of study, but it is its historical value that clinches it. Indeed the companion monograph is precisely aimed ‘to show how the historian can use the *Alexandra*’ (p. 4). Such strict disciplinary divisions may not be to everyone’s taste (see Leslie Kurke’s pertinent comments on the Hellenistic poet Machon, *PCPhS* 48 [2002], p. 58–63). This is a unique poem of significant length and that alone suffices to warrant a thorough modern commentary.
- 9 Despite the fine quality and helpful layout of the book, a number of slips remain. A few references are missing years (Halliday, p. 174, n. 232–242; Livrea, p. 184, n. 288; D’Alessio, p. 206, n. 403; Briscoe, p. 181, n. 274); these might refer the reader to a standard commentary, but it is not clear why they should lack year and page like other references (the overwhelming majority, in fairness). Graziosi and Haubold are twice mentioned (p. 225, n. 461; p. 231, n. 491), without a year (2010), and are also missing from the bibliography. Typographical errors appear but are never intrusive: e.g. read ‘made.’ for ‘made..’ (p. 86, n. 251); ‘A *hysple(n)x*’ for ‘A. *hysple(n)x*’ (p. 124, n. 22); ‘only’ for ‘only’ (p. 129, n. 32). The only howler I detected was the claim that Theocritus *Idyll* 15 was set in Syracuse (p. 43), where it was in fact in Alexandria (cf. e.g. v. 48). These minor mistakes and the quibble about the overtly historical framing of the commentary (as something to be set in opposition to a literary approach) notwithstanding, S.H.’s meticulous work more than lives up to the demands of Lykophron’s text and it is hoped that this will soon translate into studies of the text as work of literature embedded in a complex and vibrant historical and cultural reality.

AUTHORS

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