

*This pdf contains the text of the review as it was published. The page numbers of the original publication are indicated by numbers in bold between square brackets.*

**Mnemosyne 62 (2009) 493-496**

**Grossardt, P. 2006. *Einführung, Übersetzung und Kommentar zum Heroikos von Flavius Philostrat* (Schweizerische Beiträge zur Altertumswissenschaft, 33). Basel, Schwabe. xii, 825 p. Pr. €103.50 (hb).**

Arithmetic may go some way to convince the reader that this is a major scholarly achievement. Ludo de Lannoy's Teubner text of Philostratus' *Heroicus* (henceforth: *Her.*) numbers 78 pages, apparatus criticus included. Peter Grossardt (henceforth: G.) spends two volumes amounting to 825 pages on what he promises his readers in the preface (p. vii-viii): a detailed line-by-line commentary, a translation in a current modern language that faithfully reflects the scholarly state-of-the-art, and an interpretation attempting to come to terms with Philostratus' literary intention. The first volume offers a 177-page introduction, the translation, a very full bibliography (785 titles), as well as appendices and indices on the introduction; the second volume contains the commentary (427 pages), followed by indices. One might be tempted to think that almost eight pages of introduction plus commentary for one page in De Lannoy's Teubner is a bit too much of a good thing, but that would be doing scant justice to G., who evidently has set out both to clarify points of detail and to offer a daring overall interpretation; to present an exhaustive review of past and present scholarship on the *Her.* as well as locating the work in its literary context. Honesty urges the present reviewer to admit that his competence is no match for G.'s comprehensive expertise. Still, wherever I feel sufficiently confident to judge, G.'s discussions invariably impress me as being well-informed and ingeniously argued – which, of course, does not amount to saying that I am always able to endorse his conclusions.

The introduction consecutively discusses Philostratus' life and work; Protesilaus' myth and cult; the *Her.* and contemporary religious discourse; the *Her.* as a literary work of art; and the history of its reception in Antiquity, Middle Ages, and Renaissance. Already in the first chapter (pp. 3-24), G. amply demonstrates his intimate knowledge of relevant scholarship. In taking the *Nero*, the *Vita Apollonii* (henceforth: *VA*), the *Her.*, the *Gymnasticus*, the (first) *Imagines* and the *Vitae Sophistarum* as the works of one and the same Severan author, he sensibly follows De Lannoy's authoritative treatment of the identity and literary output of the different Philostrati,<sup>1</sup> and I found little to disagree with in his biographical account of this Athenian sophist.<sup>2</sup> However, I feel

---

<sup>1</sup> De Lannoy, L. 1997. *Le problème des Philostrate*, in: *ANRW* II.34.3, 2362-449.

<sup>2</sup> One matter of detail: referring to *VS* 607 and 617, G. maintains (p. 3) that Philostratus had been a pupil of Antipater of Hierapolis and Hippodromus of Larissa. Whether the passages in question offer sufficient evidence to support these conclusions is debatable, see e.g. Solmsen, F. 1941. *Philostratos* (9)-(12), in:

that G. is overconfident in maintaining [494] that it is possible to extract arguments for the internal chronology of the oeuvre as a whole from Philostratus' handling of identical themes and motives in different works. A case in point is his argument for the *Her.* being later than the *VA*: following Friedrich Solmsen,<sup>3</sup> G. contends (p. 17) that Philostratus would have had no incentive to compose the chapters in the *VA* (4.11-6) on Apollonius' visit to Achilles' tomb, if by that time the *Her.*, in which the same subjects are treated at greater length, would already have been completed. To me it seems that this line of reasoning was dealt with very effectively by Graham Anderson,<sup>4</sup> who pointed out that it "runs counter to the whole technique of producing sophistic literature, which can rely on expansion and contraction of familiar material in only slightly different contexts".

The *Her.* has offered an interpretative challenge to generations of scholars. Does the dialogue between a vinedresser living on the Thracian Chersonese and a Phoenician merchant about the continued existence of the heroes of the Trojan war reflect "the cosy Homeric piety of a well-connected man of letters of the late Severan age"?<sup>5</sup> Or was the theological content of the *Her.* nothing more than an elegant pretext for practising the sophistic hobby of correcting Homer?<sup>6</sup> In Tim Whitmarsh' succinct phrasing: "Is this text a pious homage, or a sophistic joke?"<sup>7</sup> In his introductory chapter on the *Her.* and contemporary religious discourse (pp. 34-46), G. rejects both the belief that Philostratus catered to Caracalla's religious predilections and the idea that the author attempted to foster a cultic revival along traditional pagan lines. Instead, he offers a twofold suggestion on what the author had in mind: "eine deutliche Bekräftigung des epikureischen Materialismus und (...) eine grosse Hommage an die Kraft der Dichtung, die als einzige den menschlichen Tod überwinden kann" (p. 46).

In order to substantiate the second half of this suggestion G. refers, quite convincingly, to Achilles' hymn to Echo (*Her.* 55.3), where Homer is given credit for [495] the immortality of the heroes and for Troy's survival. In the introductory chapter on the *Her.* as a literary work of art (pp.

---

*RE* 20.1, 124-77, at 136; Anderson, G. 1986. *Philostratus: Biography and Belles Lettres in the Third Century A.D.* (London), 18 n. 13; Ritti, T. 1988. *Il sofista Antipatro di Hierapolis*, *MGR* 13, 71-128, at 76-8; Flinterman, J.J. 1995. *Power, Paideia & Pythagoreanism* (Amsterdam), 16 with n. 68; and Civiletti M. 2002. *Filostrato: Vite dei sofisti*. Introduzione, traduzione e note di M.C. (Milano), 625-6 n. 18 (on *VS* 607).

<sup>3</sup> Solmsen, F. 1940. *Some Works of Philostratus the Elder*, *TAPhA* 71, 556-72, at 572.

<sup>4</sup> Anderson 1986, 294-5.

<sup>5</sup> Lane Fox, R. 1986. *Pagans and Christians in the Mediterranean World from the Second Century AD to the Conversion of Constantine* (London), 148.

<sup>6</sup> Anderson 1986, 253 with 257 n. 132.

<sup>7</sup> Whitmarsh, T. 2004. *The Harvest of Wisdom: Landscape, Description, and Identity in the Heroikos*, in: Bradshaw Aitken, E., Berenson Maclean, J.K. (eds.) *Philostratus' Heroikos: Religion and Identity in the Third Century C.E.* (Leiden), 237-49, at 249.

99 and 119-20; see also the commentary ad loc.), G. returns to this hymn, pointing out that in Greco-Roman literature Echo can be used as a cipher for intertextuality, and suggesting that in the *Her.* Echo ultimately refers to Philostratus' own reworking of the Trojan saga, in which all the voices of the previous literature on the subject reverberate. I experienced more difficulties in following the arguments for the first half of G.'s interpretative proposal. Admittedly, some passages in the *corpus Philostrateum* do have a surprisingly Epicurean ring. Thus, the vehement denial of the effectiveness of magical practices and the emphasis on the decisive influence of chance and of purely human factors on the results of human actions in VA 7.39 are strongly reminiscent of the Epicurean persona adopted by Lucian in his *Alexander*.<sup>8</sup> Besides, as Thomas Schirren has recently pointed out,<sup>9</sup> in Apollonius' posthumous oracle (VA 8.31) ἀήρ rather than αἰθήρ is mentioned as the element with which the soul will mingle after death: a notion that seems easier to reconcile with Epicurean than with Pythagorean ideas about the soul's final destination.<sup>10</sup> Still, a sprinkling of Epicurean *philosophoumena* does not add up to 'a clear confirmation of Epicurean materialism', and G.'s reading of the *Her.* as "epikureisches Kunstwerk" displays a disquieting dependence on the frequent use of the word κῆπος which, G. insists (pp. 43-4), should be understood as pointing to the Garden rather than as part and parcel of the idyllic scenery. The reader may judge for himself whether βίωη δ' ἂν ἡδιστά που καὶ ἀλυπτότατα ἐξελθῶν τοῦ ὀμίλου (*Her.* 5.2) should be read as "versteckte Andeutung auf Epikurs Lehre" (p. 44 and the commentary ad loc.). I myself doubt whether the combination of ἡδονή and ἀλυπία is so exclusively Epicurean as to warrant this interpretation<sup>11</sup> — even if one would be willing to [496] follow G.'s argument that the words under discussion must have a philosophical content because they are used in a context in which Platonic vocabulary abounds.

Interpretations of other passages by G. are as attractive as the ones discussed in the above paragraph, unfortunately without invariably carrying conviction. A case in point is G.'s suggestion that spring, summer, and autumn in the *Her.* should be read as referring to epic time, the classical period, and the author's lifetime respectively (pp. 126-7 and 357): a reading that, according to G., is suggested by the fact that Philostratus' dialogue, although obviously drawing inspiration from

<sup>8</sup> Epicurean persona: Branham, R.B. 1989. *Unruly Eloquence: Lucian and the Comedy of Traditions* (Cambridge, MA), 181-210; see e.g. *Luc. Alex.* 25, 36, 38, 43-7 and 60-1; VA 7.39 strongly reminiscent of Lucian: Flinterman 1995, 65 with n. 38.

<sup>9</sup> Schirren, Th. 2005. *Philosophos Bios. Die antike Philosophenbiographie als symbolische Form. Studien zur Vita Apollonii des Philostrat* (Heidelberg), 306-12. Note that Grossardt (p. viii) hails Schirren's monograph as "wegweisend". On Schirren's approach cf. the review article by Wannes Gyselinck (2007. *Pinning down Proteus: Some Thoughts on an Interpretation of Philostratus' Vita Apollonii*, AC 76, 195-203).

<sup>10</sup> Not too much should be built on ἀήρ though. Plutarch, for example, can hardly be suspected of Epicurean leanings. Nevertheless, in *De genio Socratis* 590b the soul of Timarchus of Chaeronea when, admittedly temporarily, leaving his body κατεμίνυτο πρὸς ἀέρα διαυγῆ καὶ καθαρὸν.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. e.g. *Arist. Rh.* 1365b11-3: καὶ τὸ ἀλυπτότερον καὶ τὸ μεθ' ἡδονῆς· πλείω γὰρ ἑνός, ὥστε ὑπάρχει καὶ ἡ ἡδονὴ ἀγαθὸν καὶ ἡ ἀλυπία.

Plato's *Phaedrus*, is set in autumn (*Her.* 3.2) rather than in full summer (e.g. *Phdr.* 229a; 230b-c). Ultimately, however, this interpretative construction hinges upon the contention (p. 126) that Protesilaus "an einer hervorgehobenen Stelle mit der Frühling assoziiert wird (*Her.* 11,9)". What the vinedresser is actually telling the Phoenician merchant in the passage under discussion is that he is in the habit of making libations to the hero of whatever the season – summer, autumn, or spring – has on offer, and I fail to recognize the unequivocal association of heroic time with spring claimed by G. in the introduction (but not repeated in the commentary ad loc.).

The reading of references to seasons as allusions to historical periods is attractive, even though the keystone of the construction is missing. The attempt to interpret the dating to the 154th Olympiad (164-161 BCE) of Achilles' elimination of the Amazons during their attack on the island of Leuke, in *Her.* 56.11, as a reference to the death of Antiochus IV Epiphanes in the year 164 BCE after a failed attempt to rob the temple of Artemis in Elymais (*Plb.* 31.9) is nothing more than a shot in the dark, given the extent of our ignorance of the history of the 154th Olympiad. And the interpretation of this hypothetical reference as an allusion ("eine zweifach verschlüsselte Anspielung") to the death of Caracalla (p. 39 and commentary ad loc.) is speculation pure and simple. I should add that I do not have a more viable solution to this enigmatic dating.

In short, no student of Philostratus should miss the opportunity of profiting from the enormous amount of valuable material assembled by G. The above remarks may go some way to alert the reader to the audacious nature of his overall interpretation of the *Her.* as well as to the boldness of some of his readings of individual passages. In my view, these characteristics do not detract from the soundness of his central thesis: that the *Her.* should be understood as a celebration of the triumph of literature over time rather than as a piece of religious propaganda.

Jaap-Jan Flinterman