

NICHOLAS RICHARDSON (ed.), *Three Homeric Hymns: To Apollo, Hermes, and Aphrodite. Hymns 3, 4, and 5*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010, pp. xiii + 272, ISBN 978-0521457743.

The recent spate of translations of the Homeric Hymns has shown that interest in them is on the rise, and they are being used more in literature and mythology courses¹. However, until recently there has been a shortage of English commentaries on the hymns. For a long time Richardson's 1976 commentary on the *Hymn to Demeter* was the only major commentary on one of the long hymns, until the recent publication of Faulkner's work on the hymn to Aphrodite². The standard English commentary on all the hymns has remained the 1936 edition of Allen, Halliday and Sikes, so R's Cambridge 'green and yellow' commentary on the hymns to Apollo, Hermes and Aphrodite definitely fills a gap in the market. His experience in writing not only his detailed commentary on *H. Dem.* but also books 21-4 of the Cambridge *Iliad* commentary makes him eminently qualified for the task. The three hymns chosen are the natural ones to choose, since they are the ones with no detailed commentary until recently. The longer hymns are of course the ones of most interest, and accessible commentaries on these will be welcome to many students and scholars, but it might have been good to remind readers that these hymns are part of a wider collection, and think about questions of genre, by including a couple of short hymns, or one of the medium-length hymns such as *Hymn 7* to Dionysus, and 19 to Pan (R. in his preface (p. ix) says that he had originally intended to include some shorter hymns, but this did not in the end prove possible).

The introduction first discusses concisely the nature and purpose of the hymns, the origin of the collection and the structure and themes of the hymns. R. summarises the main reasons that the longer hymns are usually assumed to be preludes to epic recitations; he cautiously accepts this view, and also that most of the hymns were composed to be performed at festivals. He describes the usual hymnic structure, with a relative clause and descriptions of the god's attributes or activities; and major themes of birth, exploits and acquisition of *timai*, and institution of cults and sanctuaries. The bulk of the introduction discusses the individual hymns, looking at their structure, themes, dating, language and style. R. outlines an interesting, though not fully convincing, division of the Apollo hymn into three main parts, rather than the usual two. He argues that these three 'movements' each have a geographical catalogue and some parallel themes

¹ M. J. Crudden, *The Homeric Hymns*, Oxford 2001; J. Cashford (transl.), N. J. Richardson (intro, notes), *The Homeric Hymns*, London 2003; D. J. Rayor, *The Homeric hymns*, Berkeley 2004; D. Hine, *Works of Hesiod and the Homeric Hymns*, Chicago 2005; S. Ruden (transl.) & S. Murnaghan (intro, notes), *Homeric Hymns*, Indianapolis 2005.

² A. Faulkner, *The Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite*, Oxford 2008.

and phrases. However, the second and third movements are clearly more closely linked than the first, since they form part of a continuous narrative about the founding of the Delphic oracle. R. largely avoids discussion of the notorious problem about the hymn's unity, stating that 'the hymn is designed to be taken as a unified composition, and this is how we ought to read it' (15). This is a reasonable viewpoint, and it is understandable that R. prefers to discuss the hymn as it stands rather than rehash the much-debated questions of the hymn's origin and unity (or lack thereof). However, he might have given a bit more space to the question given its importance in the history of the hymn's criticism and the fact that it is still being debated³. R. gives a good concise outline of the arguments that have been used to date the hymn, concluding that a date in the early sixth century is likely.

In his discussion of *Herm.* R. covers a wider variety of themes, reflecting the complexity of this hymn. He has some good comments on understanding the hymn as comedy, and how the gods in it are portrayed as more like human beings; and some suggestive points about possible relationships between this hymn and *Ap.* He presents good arguments for dating the hymn in the sixth century, probably rightly rejecting the fifth-century date suggested by some. R. points out that in language and style *Aph.* is the most Homeric of the hymns, but that it should still be dated later than the Homeric epics because of modifications of language and formulae, and some signs of being influenced by Homer and Hesiod. A seventh-century date seems most likely. R. also tentatively supports an origin in Asia Minor and the theory that the hymn was composed to honour an aristocratic family in the Troad who claimed descent from Aeneas. This has been contested in recent years, but seems the most probable way of explaining the importance the hymn gives to prophecies about Anchises' descendants.

Some recent scholarship has shown that the hymns' influence on Hellenistic literature was wider than previously thought. The parallels with Callimachus' hymns have long been clear, but recent work has increased our understanding of echoes and imitations in other poets too. This shows that the hymns were less neglected than has often been suggested, so it is good that R. has a brief section on the hymns and Hellenistic poetry at the end of his introduction, though perhaps a bit more space could have been given to the topic. He points out reasons why these hymns appealed to Alexandrian poets, and cites some of the major parallels and the relevant recent bibliography. He correctly points out that 'The *Hymns* have left a much larger footprint in Hellenistic poetry than in Hellenistic scholarship'.

R.'s expertise in early epic poetry, and experience in writing commentaries on it, are visible in many of the commentary's virtues. R. shows throughout a thorough knowledge of early epic and other archaic Greek poetry, and cites

³ For recent restatements of a separatist position, see M. L. West, *Homeric Hymns, Homeric Apocrypha, Lives of Homer*, Loeb 496, Cambridge (Ma.) 2003; M. Chappell, "The Homeric Hymn to Apollo: The Question of Unity", in A. Faulkner (ed.), *The Homeric Hymns. Interpretative Essays*, Oxford 2011.

many appropriate parallels. He comments well on rare and difficult words, which are especially common in *Herm.*, but also discusses broader issues that arise from the text. As in the introduction, R. shows sensitivity to the literary qualities of the hymns, and is careful to point out literary devices and effects where he finds them. For instance, he notes the more comic and 'earthy' nature of *Herm.*, and comments on features such as the style of the old man's speech at 189-212, the 'burlesque' quality of the first encounter of Apollo and Hermes at 227-92 and the use of rhetorical devices in Hermes' speech at 260-77. Overall his comments are generally clear and concise, and his choice between different interpretations judicious. The commentary is clearly organised, with discussions of longer sections preceding the comments on separate lines or groups of lines. Where he has a definite preference between rival interpretations, he usually states this first before indicating alternative views, but sometimes he is content to summarise the different viewpoints without choosing between them.

As well as literary and linguistic points, R. comments where appropriate on religious, historical or other features; he always explains the issues lucidly, and shows knowledge of the relevant literature. For instance, in his notes on *Ap.* 29-46 he notes which places in the catalogue have evidence for a cult of Apollo, and on 146-72 he discusses the evidence for the history of the Delian festival. Other religious issues discussed in some detail are the controversial description of the rite at Onchestus at 231-8, and the meaning of the phrase *χρείων ἐκ δάφνης γυάλων* at 396. In these cases and some others R. outlines the different possible interpretations, but does not indicate any clear preference for one, though he does point out strengths and weaknesses in the arguments. The Pythian section of *H. Ap.* has more than any of the hymns been linked with particular historical events and contexts, and R. provides clear discussions of these. The most controversial lines are the closing prophecy at 540-3. Again R. provides a good concise discussion of the different views, with some criticism, but does not come down in favour of any one interpretation.

R. provides his own text, which provides a brief apparatus based on that of Càssola and using his sigla (Patrick James in his BMCR review⁴ mistakenly says that the text is also Càssola's). R. follows his own judgment, and does not consistently follow any one previous editor. He is willing to differ from other recent editors, for instance at *H. Ap.* 324f. where he (rightly in my view) defends Matthiae's reading *ἤα ῥ' ἐν*, with the meaning 'and yet after all I was called your wife'. At 402 of this hymn he emends the MSS' *νοῆσαι* to *νοήσας*, translating in his note as 'whoever of them noticed and observed [the dolphin]'. This is a small change, and does improve the sense, but the line with this emendation is still awkward, and West is probably wiser to obelise *νοῆσαι* in his Loeb text. Another case where he prints his own emendation is *H. Herm.* 527, where he suggests *πάντως* for the MSS *πάντων*. This may be right as it is again a slight change and definitely makes better sense than the transmitted reading.

⁴ <http://bmcr.brynmawr.edu/2011/2011-04-02.html>.

In his preface (p. ix) R. states that he hopes this edition 'will enable students of these delightful poems both to understand and to enjoy them more fully', and in my opinion he has succeeded in these aims. The commentary is more suited to adanced students and scholars studying the hymns than to those with less knowledge of Greek, but even the latter will find the introduction and some of the notes useful. Overall this is an excellent reliable and learned commentary on these hymns, and will be a very valuable resource for anyone who is studying the hymns or wishes to find out more about specific aspects of them or the significance of a particular passage.

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