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Abstract

Marina Coray's commentary on *Iliad* 19, originally published in German in 2009, is part of the ongoing Basel commentary series on Homer's *Iliad*, edited by Anton Bierl and Joachim Latacz. So far thirteen volumes of the series have been published in German, and five in English translation. Coray's commentary is a work of great erudition and will be an indispensable resource for scholars of Homer. Here I focus on the utility of this slightly revised new English edition for anglophone readers at various levels, and consider how this commentary relates to and supplements Mark W. Edwards' outstanding commentary on *Iliad* 17-20, which is Volume V (1991) of the Cambridge series edited by G. S. Kirk, and represents the current English-language scholarly standard. (*excerpt*)

Keywords

Marina Coray, Homer, Iliad, Basel Commentary

Disciplines

Ancient History, Greek and Roman through Late Antiquity | Classics | European Languages and Societies

Marina Coray, *Homer's Iliad: The Basel Commentary, Book XIX. (Translated by Benjamin W. Millis and Sara Strack and edited by S. Douglas Olson)*. Berlin; Boston: De Gruyter, 2016. Pp. xv, 218. ISBN 9781501512247. \$182.00.

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Marina Coray's commentary on *Iliad* 19, originally published in German in 2009, is part of the ongoing Basel commentary series on Homer's *Iliad*, edited by Anton Bierl and Joachim Latacz. So far thirteen volumes of the series have been published in German, and five in English translation.¹ Coray's commentary is a work of great erudition and will be an indispensable resource for scholars of Homer. Here I focus on the utility of this slightly revised new English edition for anglophone readers at various levels, and consider how this commentary relates to and supplements Mark W. Edwards' outstanding commentary on *Iliad* 17-20, which is Volume V (1991) of the Cambridge series edited by G. S. Kirk, and represents the current English-language scholarly standard.

To begin with, Millis and Strack's translation itself is excellent, very accurately rendering the German while transforming it into an English idiom that is always readable and often graceful and sophisticated. Examples of the latter include the following phrases: "die Notwendigkeit des Essens vor dem Kampf" becomes "the necessity of taking nourishment before battle" (ad 145-235), and "endlosen Aneinanderreihung von Katastrophen" becomes "an endless concatenation of catastrophes" (ad 290b). Occasionally, the translation loses some smoothness because it keeps so close to the German syntax (e.g. ad 266-276). The only real infelicity is the choice to translate the German "Lanze" in reference to Achilles' Pelian ash-spear by its English cognate "lance," which, unfortunately, conjures up the image of medieval knights jousting. The book seems to be well produced and free of errors, except for a metrical typo in the English edition ad 279 with an extra breve added to the scansion of 17.199.

After two brief prefaces, Coray's volume begins with crucial "Notes for the Reader" that introduce the commentary's typography, structure, and some abbreviations. In accordance with the convention of the Basel series, Coray provides four levels of commentary distinguished by different type sizes and placements and meant for different audiences: 1) "the most important explanations" intended for all kinds of users in regular type, with lemmata taken from Richmond Lattimore's English translation of the *Iliad* and requiring no knowledge of Greek; 2) more detailed and philological explanations of the Greek text itself (M. L. West's Teubner) in smaller type; 3) specialized discussion relating to sub-fields of Homeric scholarship in the smallest type; and 4) "elementary" explanations of Homeric word forms, prosody, and meter designed for school and university students located below a dividing line at the bottom of each page. There is also a second introductory section, "24 Rules Relating to Homeric Language," which provides a concise overview of Homeric prosody, morphology, and syntax. Coray constantly refers readers to the "24 Rules" in the fourth level of the commentary.

The Basel commentary series is clearly envisaged as a multipurpose tool suitable for everyone from the amateur reader of Homer in translation and the student learning Homeric Greek to the Homer specialist. But despite these admirable intentions (which the prohibitive price tag already undermines), I am not sure that this commentary is accessible to this whole range of users. First, while the "24 Rules" offer a helpful review of Homeric meter and language, it does not in itself constitute a beginner's guide, as it provides limited explanation (it summarizes "so-called *tmesis*" in a parenthetical half-sentence aside on p. 7) and sometimes assumes specialized knowledge of linguistics (e.g. it references the "Ionic-Attic sound change" on p. 1). The reader who would like a fuller discussion must consult the "Grammar of Homeric Greek" essay in the *Prolegomena* volume, which is cross-referenced throughout the "24 Rules." That said, the inclusion of even a schematic overview of this subject is a welcome addition to any Homer commentary, and an advance on the Cambridge series.

I found the commentary's format to be formidable and unwieldy at first. For the reader who wants to digest all the levels of the commentary, the different type sizes are distracting and the multiple registers are occasionally repetitious. On the other hand, the amateur reader may find it difficult to distinguish and absorb the desired register amid each densely packed page of explanation and bibliography. The commentary is chock full of abbreviations and other sigla, which reference, *inter alia*, each separate chapter of the *Prolegomena* volume, ancient works and authors, modern scholarship, and analytic vocabulary (e.g. VB = verse-beginning). The challenge of deciphering the abbreviations is increased by the fact that the keys are located in two separate places, the opening "Notes for the Reader" and the closing "Bibliographic Abbreviations." Overall, the user must surmount a steep learning curve to access the commentary comfortably, making it less than ideal for the casual reader or undergraduate student. In addition, Coray's frequent references to other volumes in the Basel series require the reader to have ready access to multiple volumes to make full use of the commentary. While there is a one-page "Overview of the Action in Book 19" that precedes the commentary, there is no introductory interpretive essay covering the whole book. By contrast, Edwards' Cambridge commentary has a single type size, provides full in-text citations, and begins book 19 with a few paragraphs of interpretive overview on top of the thematic essays introducing the volume as a whole. I would recommend Coray's text to Homer students as a tool for approaching specific passages, but not as an introductory companion to the entire book.

Coray's commentary does become easier to navigate with experience and rewards the Homeric scholar with a wider range of information and analysis than Edwards' commentary. It reflects advances in the field in the twenty-five years since the publication of Edwards' commentary, integrating the latest approaches and recent bibliography, and representing a new philological standard. While Edwards' work is elegantly concise, confidently learned, and particularly brilliant on Homer's poetics and literary purpose, Coray's is more systematic, comprehensive, and multivocal.

First of all, her commentary is linguistically authoritative, and draws heavily on the recently completed *Lexikon des frühgriechischen Epos*, although this is by no means Coray's only source. Coray far surpasses Edwards in her discussions of meaning, etymology (including Mycenaean origins), word formation, grammar, syntax, *hapax legomena*, etc. The parsings of verbs and other

grammatical and prosodic explanations in the lowest register can be enlightening for advanced scholars as well as students.

Second, this commentary is a wonderful resource for understanding Homer's narrative strategies and formulaic art. Coray integrates into her commentary the narratological analysis and vocabulary introduced by Irene de Jong.² This inclusion draws welcome attention to the narrative's shifting focalization and techniques of foreshadowing and flashback. Even more helpful is the way that Coray methodically identifies and explains type-scenes, motifs, and formulas. She also extensively cross-references similar or identical themes, actions, and formulaic elements that appear elsewhere in the *Iliad*, the *Odyssey*, and other early Greek hexameter poetry, explicitly noting repeated verses and verse-halves. Coray often makes good interpretive use of such parallels,³ although I noticed two instances when she does not observe or discuss potentially significant repetitions of individual words elsewhere in the epic.⁴ Another innovation is Coray's citation of Near Eastern and Indic parallels to Homer, for which she relies primarily on the relatively recent work of M. L. West.⁵

In the area of literary-critical interpretation, Coray frequently cites Edwards and there is a fair amount of overlap in their textual analyses. However, in many instances, she greatly expands on Edwards,⁶ and sometimes gives an independent reading.⁷ I appreciate how Coray tends to offer several different ways of understanding a phrase or passage (with relevant bibliography), empowering the reader to decide on the best solution. She employs the same method in her treatment of textual problems, presenting a variety of arguments for inclusion or athetization (e.g. ad 326-337 on Achilles' mention of Neoptolemos). Coray is particularly good on Achilles' aggression, grief, and fasting, and on lament and the "motif of satiety." She cites a more extensive bibliography than Edwards and her commentary provides an excellent entry point into German scholarship for the Anglophone reader, while also showing impressive familiarity with English-language scholarship.⁸

In sum, Coray's achievement is exceptional, and this admirable translation of her volume will allow Anglophone Homeric scholars and advanced students to consult her work more easily.

Notes:

1. In the original German edition, we now have a *Prolegomena* volume and volumes covering *Iliad* 1, 2, 3, 6, 9, 14, 16, 17, 18, 19, 22, and 24. Aside from the *Prolegomena*, each German volume features two separate fascicles, the first containing a Greek text edited by Martin L. West based on his Teubner edition and a translation into German verse by Latacz, and the second a commentary. In English translation, we have the *Prolegomena* volume and commentaries (without the text) on *Iliad* 3, 6, 19, and 24. There is a recent BMCR review of the *Prolegomena* volume in English translation by Evert van Emde Boas, BMCR [2016.08.22](#), and previous reviews of the original German editions of *Iliad* 1 by Johannes Haubold, BMCR [2001.09.01](#) and *Iliad* 2 by J. B. Lethbridge, BMCR [2005.08.16](#). I echo some of the general comments from these previous reviews.

2. I. J. F. de Jong, *Narrators and Focalizers: The Presentation of the Story in the Iliad* (Amsterdam 1987).
3. For example, ad 238-276 Coray helpfully analyzes the similarities and differences between the close of the assembly in book 19 and the return of Chryseis and Greek reconciliation with Apollo in book 1, although she does not cite the recent discussion of this narrative echo offered by Bruce Louden, *The Iliad: Structure, Myth, and Meaning* (Baltimore 2006), 123-125.
4. In her excellent discussion of the meaning of ἰανθῆς (ad 173-174), which Odysseus uses to predict the effect of Agamemnon's compensatory gifts on Achilles, Coray fails to refer the reader to the later reappearance of this word in a repeated formula (24.147 = 24.176 = 24.196) that describes the desired effect of Priam's ransom gifts on Achilles. Similarly, when drawing attention to the word λώβην (ad 208), which Achilles here uses to describe Hektor's insult, Coray does not observe or analyze the fact that Achilles uses the word in the same line-end position in 9.387 to decry Agamemnon's prior abuse. Both these repetitions (also neglected by Edwards) contribute to a narrative parallelism between Achilles' anger towards Agamemnon, and then towards Hektor.
5. M. L. West, *The East Face of Helicon: West Asiatic Elements in Greek Poetry and Myth* (Oxford 1997). Coray notes parallels to the Hebrew Bible (ad 95-133, ad 347-354), the Rig Veda (ad 121), Assyrian poetry (ad 128-130), and the Epic of Gilgamesh (ad 314).
6. Coray expands on Edwards' treatments of, e.g. the Erinyes invoked in Agamemnon's oath (ad 259), Achilles' speech in response to Agamemnon (ad 270-275), the multiple functions of Briseis' lament (ad 282-302), and Achilles' divine nourishment (ad 347-354).
7. Coray offers new commentary on Agamemnon's reasons for not sleeping with Briseis (ad 262), on Achilles' failure to mention his part in Zeus' plan to kill Achaians (ad 273b-274), and on the gleaming of Achilles' armor (ad 374-383).
8. However, I noticed these few bibliographic omissions: on the relationship of Achilles and Patroklos (ad 4-6a), David M. Halperin, "Heroes and their Pals," in *One Hundred Years of Homosexuality: And Other Essays on Greek Love* (New York; London 1990) and Marco Fantuzzi, *Achilles in Love: Intertextual Studies* (Oxford 2012), 187-214; on χόλος (ad 67), Thomas R. Walsh, *Fighting Words and Feuding Words* (Lanham 2005), 113-116; on Achilles' fasting (ad 155-183), Michael Nagler, *Spontaneity and Tradition: A Study in the Oral Art of Homer* (Berkeley 1974) 174-180; on Zeus' control of plot (ad 223b-224), Bruce Heiden, *Homer's Cosmic Fabrication* (Oxford 2008), 29-34; on satiety (ad 307 and ad 402), Thomas R. MacCary, *Childlike Achilles: Ontogeny and Phylogeny in the Iliad* (New York 1982), 143-148.

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