

## SUBJECT REVIEWS

### *Greek literature*

In the books reviewed there is a cumulative resistance to the normative discourse, shifting our attention away from the centre and to the margins. This might mean listening to marginalized women, from the poets themselves to characters in poetry, or people today who relate to those female characters' experiences. It might mean pushing beyond spatial boundaries and encountering dislocation and disjunction in the hazy hinterland of the non-elite. It might mean moving the human to one side, so that nature and the nonhuman can come to the fore (and teach us about what it means to be human, along the way). These books give voice to suppressed groups including women, animals, and the land. They highlight axes of oppression, and give us tools to shift the balance of power: from the language we use to the way we relate to the world around us. And with stories of prophetic horses, sympathetic lions, and pensive pigs, their interpretations – as well as the classical tales they recount – are not to be missed!

*How Women Became Poets*, from classicist and acclaimed novelist Emily Hauser, is an exceptionally detailed 'archaeology' of the Greek words for poet, from the beginnings of archaic poetry to the end of the Hellenistic period.<sup>1</sup> On the face of it, this task might seem dry – but this book is anything but. It shows how important names are and have always been; how the normative discourse can conceal other voices; how a shift in our perspective and our lens of analysis can reveal a whole undercurrent that has always been there, though we lacked the tools to see it.

The *aidos*, singer, dominates archaic epic. The *aidos anēr*, singer man, who sings of the *klea andrōn*, the glories of men. A singer man singing to men about the glorious deeds of men. Song is ringfenced according to gender, but Hauser is attentive to detail and does not push an agenda: she spots the cracks in the fence already in the *Iliad*, where women might be *aidoi* in lamentation. And she weighs up interpretations: is the Hesiodic *Mousaōn therapōn*, servant of the Muses, a positive nod to female power or male appropriation of female creativity? Ultimately she detects an 'ironic pose of servitude which in fact emphasizes the male poet's agency' (56), and this certainly fits with Hesiod's fable of the hawk and the nightingale in which the potential threat of feminine song to male poetics is silenced by the stronger masculine bird. This trope of an attack on the female body to curtail song is nowhere more vivid than in the *Homeric Hymn to Hermes*, which Hauser reads as a prolonged rape analogy. The female 'singer' tortoise is mute – until turned into a lyre by a male god, a sequence of physical and sexual imagery showing her overpowered, her body violated and appropriated.

<sup>1</sup> *How Women Became Poets. A Gender History of Greek Literature*. By Emily Hauser. Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2023. Pp. xvii + 354. Hardback \$39.95, ISBN: 978-0-691-20107-8.

In the classical period, a new term takes over: the *poiētēs*, poet, and it is all about making. The poet as a maker, and the poet as maker of (civic) men. In the plays of Aristophanes, Hauser's first case study in this period, there is an in-group: a shared masculinity between poet and audience as makers and citizens. The 'gender bending' that acts as a source of humour throughout, for example, the *Thesmophoriazousae* does nothing to decentre the male, but rather highlights the masculine poet's task of adopting the female voice. Plato then takes this up with poetry as a highly political project – indeed one from which female characters and voices must be banned. Euripides experiments with female *ainoi*, from Muses to Sphinxes, birds to shuttles – all of which reveal tension and discomfort with turning the *ainos* feminine.

In the final section of the book, 'Bird', Hauser lets the women poets speak. They are given relatively little space, because so little space has been given to them across the history of Greek literature. Form reflects content here, and reinforces Hauser's point, but what this section reveals as a culmination of the study is pivotal. The female poets (from Sappho to Nossis, Anyte to Erinna) look to each other and write against men. For instance, Nossis' self-use of the nightingale (*aēdōn*) appropriates Hesiod's oppressed bird and revivifies it for women. Further, Sappho's self-description as *mousopolos*, one who serves the Muses, is shown to be a considered response to Hesiod's *Mousaōn therapōn* that rejects the archaic male suppression of female creative agency and instead evokes a proximity to the Muses, an engaged care and guardianship that creates a 'community of practice'. The mother-daughter metaphor for figuring women's poetic creation is more than a metaphor: it is an 'identity that allows a woman to encode her creativity behind a "subversive mask" that appears to conform to gendered norms' (257). Women poets were aware of the words male authors used of themselves. They were fully cognisant of the discourse of masculinity that was packaged up with those words. So they reject the terms. They do not use them of themselves. Instead, they find their own way: a way that is highly allusive and significant.

*Ancient Women Writers of Greece and Rome* acts as a perfect complement to the final section of *How Women Became Poets* – these would be great books to draw on together in teaching.<sup>2</sup> From Routledge's series of Sourcebooks For the Ancient World, it is a primer, presenting the extant writings of major female authors from the Greco-Roman world, mainly poetry but also letters. As the editors note, this is not only a convenient but also a very cost-effective way to access such a broad range of texts. Though its predecessor, Ian Plant's 2004 anthology, is more exhaustive at fifty authors to this volume's sixteen, *Ancient Women Writers* is the more usable for teaching;<sup>3</sup> the sources are given in the original languages, with English translation, commentaries, and running vocabulary, complete with appendices and glossaries at the end. Judith Hallett's introduction complements Hauser's argument in that it examines the normative discourse: the preservation and interpretation of female-authored poetry by men. What we have comes down to male choice, which is distorting. Even attribution is skewed towards the male: Hallett gives the contested example of Sulpicia's elegies, which are often attributed to a male impersonator, but on grounds that (she argues) are easily

<sup>2</sup> *Ancient Women Writers of Greece and Rome*. By Bartolo A. Natoli, Angela Pitts, and Judith P. Hallett. London/New York, Routledge, 2022. Pp. xvi + 408. Paperback £28.79, ISBN: 978-0-367-46252-9.

<sup>3</sup> I. Plant, *Women Writers of Ancient Greece and Rome. An Anthology* (Norman, OK, 2004).

refuted. And predominantly or exclusively male interpretation of, for instance, Sappho's poetry has led to a failure to understand or even an active resistance against certain social and sexual scenarios. Hallett concludes with a biographical comment, noting that many prominent modern female scholars of women's literary voices bring experiences from outside the heteronormative, or share 'perceptions derived from studying, and often living, in all-female learning environments' (8).

That we might bring our own experiences to our readings and that the field might be enriched for it is at the centre of Emma Bridges's book *Warriors' Wives*.<sup>4</sup> A clear, simple, accessible, and affordable book suitable for classicist and non-classicist alike, it focuses on the experience of military spouses ancient and modern. Bridges reflects on the use of personal voice in classical scholarship (8, n. 16) and brings her own voice to the fore as the wife of a husband who spent seventeen years as a military pilot in the RAF. The scope of the volume is, on the one hand, conflicts in living memory, primarily in the US and Britain, and, on the other hand, the Trojan War as depicted in epic and drama. Bridges' methodology is a comparative one, but it is not universalizing as she recognizes the pitfalls of, for instance, retrospective diagnosis (of PTSD and similar). Concepts are explored that shine light on comparable experiences, such as the 'ambiguous loss' (uncertainty about whether a spouse will return) shared by Penelope and modern military spouses.

In *Odyssey* 8, the bard Demodocus sings to the gathered men about the male experience of war. Odysseus responds with tears – like the weeping of a captive woman. A striking gender reversal, often taken to be liberatory in terms of the power of song to cross gender boundaries. And yet, as Hauser astutely argues, 'the boundary crossing only goes one way: this kind of involvement in song is only made available to the men' (Hauser 35). The comparison therefore underlines the fact that the women are excluded: 'the only war trauma a woman can experience is the actual trauma of war' (Hauser 35), as we see in their laments. This really gets to the heart of the female experience in wartime, and it is here that Bridges picks up the story. As *Warriors' Wives* makes very clear, despite Hector's assertions, war has never been exclusively 'the men's concern' (204).

Bridges delineates gender roles in epic and drama, starting of course with Hector and Andromache, and sees correlation with gender dichotomies amongst modern military spouses. She makes the compelling point that, whilst these starkly divided gender roles in literature mapped onto ancient Greek patriarchal society, the divided gender roles in modern military families are in many ways *at odds with* modern society, and this increased disjunction puts the added pressure of alienation on today's military wives. But there is another side to the gender divide in wartime, and that is the extra labour expected of the spouse left behind, which might also *challenge* traditional divisions of gendered labour. Odysseus tells Penelope 'You must take care of everything here' (*Od.* 18.266), and Bridges links this with the reverse sex similes also addressed by Hauser as the woman must take on the male role in her husband's absence. For me, Bridges' reading really put Penelope in context, in perennially relevant factors such as keeping busy as a coping strategy (Penelope's weaving) or the sense that life is on

<sup>4</sup> *Warriors' Wives. Ancient Greek Myth and Modern Experience*. By Emma Bridges. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2023. Pp. xviii + 234. Hardback £25, ISBN: 978-0-198-84352-8.

hold whilst a military partner is away (97). Bridges returns to the reverse sex similes in her chapter 'Reunion', in which she presents them as a way of reopening communication, of helping spouses not be strangers in each other's world. The complexities of reintegration and reunion brought to my mind Christopher Rush's 2015 novel *Penelope's Web*,<sup>5</sup> in which veteran Odysseus struggles to fit into the society from which he has been absent for so long.

Hauser notes that Agamemnon left Clytemnestra with a 'singer man' whose job it was to guard his wife (30). Essentially he was to safeguard her *story*: a male bard put in place to enforce the 'correct' story on the female character. This resonates with Bridges' discussion of Clytemnestra in Aeschylus and Euripides, in terms of the competing demands of military and family as 'greedy institutions'. The conflict between military and familial obligations lies at the centre of Agamemnon's story, and the fate of Iphigenia takes the theme of sacrifice to its ultimate extreme. That Euripides presents Iphigenia's sacrifice as a *willing* one reframes her not as a female victim of war, but as a stand-in for the soldier. This is cast by Bridges as an attempt to align those 'greedy institutions', but she also shows that it 'erases the experiences of the women on whom the impact of their husbands' service is profound and often damaging' (73). There is a rewriting of the women's stories, a safeguarding of the illusion that the military mission and values of the family align. This correlates with Hauser's idea of a normative discourse, and Bridges offers fascinating examples of the 'story' in action, including quotations from modern military 'handbooks' such as 'Reassure your spouse that they are needed, even though you've coped during the deployment', or a picture of the 'Modern Military Wife' as one who is 'pleased to relinquish the head-of-household mantel when her husband is home' (125).

The erasing of women's experiences is one facet of male-dominated epic and drama. But Bridges also shows how this literature, composed by men and for men, can bear witness to female suffering. And, as Hauser shows through the *Iliad's* female *aidoi*, we can hear women's voices even in male-dominated poetry. Cecilia Nobili's book *Voce Di Donne Nell' Epica* takes up this call, and listens to Homer's women through their weaving, their prayers, their lamentation, their position at the margins – even, in Helen's case, their proximity to the male poet.<sup>6</sup> Though beyond the anglophone bibliography, this is another accessible and introductory book that gives extended key passages from epic quoted in translation (such as Andromache's plea to Hector at *Iliad* 6.407–39 and 477–514) as well as clear summaries of central episodes. It would be well complemented by *Ancient Women Writers of Greece and Rome*: Chapter 1 on weaving, for instance, mentions Sappho and other female song, but would be supported by the wider range of female-authored poems given there. Nobili consistently draws connections between epic expression and social practices, uncovering remnants of work songs (recalling Karanika's book *Voices at Work*<sup>7</sup>) and discussing female modes of song such as wedding poetry (Chapter 4). Particularly compelling is Nobili's focus

<sup>5</sup> Christopher Rush, *Penelope's Web* (Edinburgh, 2015).

<sup>6</sup> *Voci di donne nell' epica: Personaggi e modelli poetici femminili nell' Iliade e nell' Odissea*. By Cecilia Nobili. Roma: Carocci editore, 2023. Pp. 154. Paperback €17, ISBN: 978-8-829-02087-4.

<sup>7</sup> A. Karanika, *Voices at Work. Women, Performance, and Labor in Ancient Greece* (Baltimore, MD, 2014).

on Andromache, not just in terms of her traditional role as exemplary wife, but also her critical viewpoint on the heroic ethos. Andromache uses lament as her only vehicle of expression, because her envisaged situation is so bad: to reiterate Hauser's claim, 'the only war trauma a woman can experience is the actual trauma of war'. Yet Nobili brings out even further what is latent in Hauser's discussion of female lament: that Homer's women have a voice, and they sometimes use that voice in protest. Calypso, for instance, is cast as a protofeminist, complaining that the gods can have affairs whilst goddesses cannot. The final chapter, on Helen and Penelope as Homeric alter egos, showcases Helen's multifaceted verbal guises whilst also bringing us full circle to the repeated connection between song and weaving. Both Hauser and Nobili, however, risk underestimating Penelope. Nobili contrasts the independent Helen with the marginalized and silenced Penelope, and Hauser argues that *muthos* as authoritative speech is taken away from Penelope. Yet in the *Odyssey* ten out of twenty-seven instances of *muthos* are attributed to Penelope. Women vie with men for authority through speech – and I would argue that it is not always so clear who comes out ahead.

Can humans ever truly fit into nature? This is one of the central questions asked by William G. Thalmann in his book *Theocritus: Space, Absence, and Desire*.<sup>8</sup> The book treats the Theocritean corpus as a multifaceted whole, covering a range of fictional spaces (from the bucolic to the urban, the mythological to the encomiastic), all coloured by the overarching contextual space of the Ptolemaic empire. But the bucolic *Idylls* take on particular importance as they raise the question of the relationship of human culture to nature. As Thalmann points out, 'human societies and human cultures bear a reciprocal relation to space' (3), and this is nowhere clearer than in the often fraught relationship between humans and the natural environment. *Idyll* 1 explores the 'disjunction from nature': as visions of the fusion of human with nature never materialize; as human music is shown not to fit the natural world; as Daphnis dies, at odds with his environs. Human-centred Daphnis sees nature as an extension of the human, but Thalmann asks the provoking question: 'What if the natural world is actually indifferent?' (108). Considering the pessimistic tone that comes through much of Theocritus' attention to nature and materiality in the *Idylls*, I would hazard the even more provoking one: What if it is *negatively* disposed?<sup>9</sup>

The bucolic space is defined by its margins and boundaries, from sea and rock to agricultural fields, orchards, and untamed land. It is 'the mountain', a self-enclosed (though permeable) area distanced from other kinds of land. A comparison with Hesiod's *Works and Days* makes the point that the bucolic and the agricultural project are very different and, by including *Idyll* 21 in his analysis, Thalmann can show that the herdsman is also very different from the fisherman who inhabits and even crosses the boundary between land and sea, those limits of the bucolic world. This 'question of spatial boundaries and interest in margins might draw attention to analogous distinctions: between humans and animal, self and other' (32). Thalmann relates this to the fluidity of ethnic and cultural distinctions in the lives of the poems' first readers.

<sup>8</sup> *Theocritus: Space, Absence, and Desire*. By William G. Thalmann. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2023. Pp. xxii + 232. Hardback £54, ISBN: 9780197636558.

<sup>9</sup> See further L. G. Canevaro, *Theocritus and Things. Material Agency in the Idylls* (Edinburgh, 2023).

Bucolic space, then, might represent a response to the dislocations in the wake of Alexander's conquests. The centripetal force of Alexandria is particularly evident in *Idylls* 2 and 15, which Thalmann shows to lean heavily on themes of liminality and mobility – and it can be no coincidence that ideas of marginality and the blurred boundaries of the threshold are explored in poems that have women at their heart. The questioning of distinctions and boundaries resonates with our final two books in terms of human–animal interactions, and marginality comes to the fore through their decentring of the conventional (male, elite) human subject.

'Animals are all the rage these days' (Usher, ix). Their interconnectedness with humans, their agency, their precarious place in our struggling planet. My youngest son (age four) has me read facts from *Endangered Wildlife* to him every night, so this concern feels palpable in our house. Though the way we treat, care for, and cohabit our world with animals is very much a contemporary issue, it is by no means a new one, and in fact we can learn a lot from societies that 'lived closer than most of us to the sources of their survival' (ix). Mark Usher's small but perfectly formed sourcebook *How to Care About Animals* presents a selection of Greek and Latin texts that take us back to classical iterations of key concepts such as systems thinking and relational rather than transactional interactions with animals.<sup>10</sup> The texts are given in their original language, followed by Usher's English translation, and supplemented by helpful explanatory notes that often expound on the translation choices or contribute suggestions for further reading. The excerpts are organized thematically, giving cohesion to the book and justifying selections within the selections, such as the focus on 'escape artists' in Aelian's *The Peculiar Behaviour of Animals*.

What is impressive about this volume is how grounded even the most philosophical of the excerpts feel. As both classicist and agriculturalist, running his *Works and Days* farm in Vermont, Mark Usher is perfectly situated to connect the literary with the practical.<sup>11</sup> He lives 'closer than most of us' to animals and the land, and his own experiences, interjected throughout the introduction and notes, are valuable and relevant. Take section 7 'Lions, Tigers and Bears', for instance, with its selection from [Aristotle] *On Marvellous Things Heard*. Usher asserts 'The reader may decide for him- or herself what is plausible... The translator has given his own verdicts in the notes' (67). On what seems to be a large, wild mountain sheep or goat that protects itself by defecating jets of excrement that reach over forty feet: 'I have seen donkeys spray liquid feces quite some distance in self-defense when agitated, so that is not an implausible detail' (210; from my position of ignorance, I would have thought it unlikely). On a hyena that makes whoever sees it mute and unable to move: this is a fear response, 'I felt it once when turning a corner in the Black Hills of South Dakota with two small children in tow and meeting a bison face to face' (211; again, not an experience most people will have had). These comments from experience

<sup>10</sup> *How to Care About Animals. An Ancient Guide to Creatures Great and Small. Porphyry and Friends*. By M. D. Usher. Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2023. Pp. xvi + 232. Hardback \$17.95, ISBN: 978-0-691-24043-5.

<sup>11</sup> *How to Care About Animals* is a 'sequel' of sorts to *How to Be a Farmer. An Ancient Guide to Life on the Land*, published by Usher in 2021 (see *G&R* 69.2, 365). It also picks up on themes from Usher's fuller treatment of systems and sustainability in his 2020 book *Plato's Pigs and Other Ruminations. Ancient Guides to Living with Nature*.

bring the texts to life, and connect them with the present and the person. This sense of relevance is helped along by a range of references to (as just some examples): William Blake, David Attenborough, and snakes filmed at the Kariega Game Reserve in South Africa – the book might be small, but it is mighty.

The selection builds to a crescendo with its two longest sections: sections 11, ‘Pigs is Equal’ (Plutarch’s story of Odysseus and Circe asking the ‘pigs’ their opinion on people), and 12, ‘Abstinence makes the heart grow fonder’ (Porphyry’s philosophical case for vegetarianism). Here again we can connect with the ancients through Usher’s experience: when Porphyry writes that animals ‘approach the human who feeds them in set order and mobs him with attention’ (194–5), ‘The translator can verify the utter truth of this statement from experience’ (228). So what might we learn from these sensitively curated texts? Aristotle shows that, just as the whole structure matters for a house, so nature is a synthetic whole. Seneca shows us the problem of overreaching and urges us to know our place. And ultimately we are left with the ever-important message that the just treatment of animals makes us better humans (Porphyry) – that the pigs might just have it right after all (Plutarch).

It just so happens that Julia Kindt’s book *The Trojan Horse and Other Stories* examines some of the very same tales as *How to Care About Animals*.<sup>12</sup> Circe’s talking pig Grunter makes another appearance, as does Androclus’ lion, and again we are treated to discussions of, for instance, vegetarianism in antiquity. Yet the focus and approach are very different, and these two books end up being extremely complementary and would make another excellent pair for a course syllabus. Kindt’s book is yet another accessible and affordable read, and, endorsed as it is by none other than Stephen Fry, it has rightly made it into the mainstream. It is made up of ten chapters, each presenting a different story about human–nonhuman entanglement. As well as pigs and lions we have outlandish creatures such as the Sphinx, the Cyclops, and the Minotaur; constructed animals such as the Trojan horse – and, my favourite, Achilles’ talking horse Xanthus. The overarching question is how the ancient world mobilized concepts of ‘the animal’ and ‘animality’ to conceive of the human, but the analysis is not limited to the ancient world. Each chapter follows ‘the creature’s trail into the present’ (7), tracking instances of its reception, its persistence. In the case of the Sphinx, Kindt looks to Freud; for the Minotaur, it is Picasso. Case studies that pick up the story but push it to its limits.

I cannot resist taking this opportunity to spend a bit of time with Xanthus. He is the only example in either the *Iliad* or the *Odyssey* of a talking animal (this is no Farthing Wood). It is an underrated story, often glossed over exactly because it is an outlier – much like the talking donkey in the Bible, which I always feel does not get enough attention – but, as Kindt shows, the horizontal relationship this episode sets up between the human and the nonhuman is crucial in its context. Literary anthropologist Chris Danta writes of stories such as fables ‘uplifting’ animals to the human level, focusing on the humanity of the animal. Xanthus, on the other hand, achieves the opposite.

<sup>12</sup> *The Trojan Horse And Other Stories. Ten Ancient Creatures That Make Us Human*. By Julia Kindt. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2024. Pp. xiv + 356. Hardback £25, ISBN: 978-1-009-41138-7.

He aligns the human and nonhuman, but directs our attention to the *limits* of the human condition, the animality of the human. Achilles is at his most bestial in this latter phase of the epic; perhaps subhuman, perhaps superhuman, he does not really regain his humanity until he treats with Priam in Book 24 and returns Hector's body. As Kindt shows in her analysis of the Trojan Horse, Achilles in these books epitomizes the animalistic nature of close combat (130). The story of Xanthus pushes back against ideas of human exceptionalism through *logos*, but his speech itself, in which he prophesies Achilles' death, brings animal and human in line with one another through their basic common denominator: mortality. Kindt shows that much the same applies to the talking pig in Plutarch, when Grunter gives a list of everything that is wrong with humans. The supposed 'uplifting' act of giving the pig a voice is used for the purpose of undermining the very position of the human as a being the animal should look up to (52).

Usher frames the story of Androclus' lion as one about mercy. Kindt touches on this theme too, but focuses primarily on justice and whether animals have a share in it. This chapter helpfully disentangles anthropomorphism from anthropocentrism, showing that the former might bring out real sympathies and correspondences between the human and nonhuman animal. As vital-materialist Jane Bennett writes: 'anthropomorphism can reveal isomorphism'.<sup>13</sup> Androclus is a slave mistreated by his master – so morality and justice are central to the story. It can draw our attention to the dehumanization of slaves, of prisoners – and, by extension, of other suppressed groups (including women and the lower classes). It is in this shifting of attention to the margins, to axes of oppression, that books such as Usher's and Kindt's arguably make their greatest contribution. In her chapter on Polyphemus as 'other' ('geographical liminality coincides with the limits of humanity', 98), Kindt raises the important issue of decolonizing Classics, and in her conclusion she makes a convincing case for a broad view of this crucial decentring agenda. It is not just about race or nationality, but about all sorts of suppressed voices: those of the nonhuman included. '[W]henver questions of human identity are at stake, the animal is never far away' (282). A further axis of difference and suppression is that of disability, and I would note that Kindt's analysis of the Minotaur is complementary to the work of the Asterion network for neurodivergent classicists (<https://asterion.uk>).<sup>14</sup> Kindt emphasizes the themes of belonging and diversity in her chapter, and makes the compelling point that the Minotaur is different from most classical hybrids in that he has an animal *head*, rather than body: an apt symbol for neurodiversity indeed. As Kindt puts it, in this story we see 'an acknowledgement of the fact that the world is more complex than the categories we have created to describe, contain and

<sup>13</sup> J. Bennett, *Vibrant Matter. A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham, NC, 2010), 99.

<sup>14</sup> Founder Cora Beth Fraser explains the choice of name: 'When autistic people like me...are talked about by others, we're often cast as not quite human...or as locked away in our own worlds...as somehow monstrous. That's why we chose the name Asterion: the name that was given in myth to the hybrid child before he became cast as the monstrous Bull of Minos. In centring neurodivergent people...we're giving the monster a voice. Maybe when we do so, people will realise that difference is not something they need to avoid.' <<https://peoplingthepast.com/2021/10/15/blog-post-36-cora-beth-fraser/>>.



control it' (215). This not only characterizes the tale of the Minotaur but epitomizes, I think, this compelling book.

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### *Latin literature*

The study of the transmission of Latin texts has received an important new addition: the second volume of Stephen Oakley's *Studies in the Transmission of Latin Texts*, dedicated to the text of Vitruvius, the agricultural treatises of Cato and Varro, Porphyrio's commentary on Horace (or, rather, the abbreviated commentary transmitted under his name in manuscript V and younger related manuscripts), and Priscian's Latin translation of Dionysius' *Periegesis*.<sup>1</sup> In meticulous analyses and close work with manuscripts and incunables, Oakley traces the transmission of these texts and the genealogical relationships of individual (groups of) manuscripts as well as the progress of the scholarship on their transmission. The book is nicely illustrated by fifty-one images of some of the key manuscripts, and Oakley provides information of how to access these and others online as well.

Oakley's aim is to prove the value of the genealogical and stemmatic methods for the texts in question (i.e. of assessing individual manuscripts based on their position in the 'family tree' of manuscripts and their interrelationships) and to shed new light on the transmission history of the texts in question and the value of individual manuscripts, in order to assess their value for future new editions of the texts. Oakley's book is certainly a work for the specialist, but, in addition to the insights into the textual transmissions in question, a lot can be learned from it about the story behind ancient texts: the journeys of individual manuscripts and scribes and about the broader cultural history behind them, including the mix-up of manuscript pages and the occasional borrowed manuscript that, despite promises to the contrary, was never returned. Oakley's recent volume is not only testimony to painstaking labour and immense learning, but also an important reminder that we need to train students and the next generation of scholars in the history of transmission and textual criticism, to keep alive the fascinating history behind the texts that have reached us through such a long chain of transmission.

Moving back in time to the early stages of the history of Latin literature, we come to Erik Pulz' commentary on the love poetry by Laevius.<sup>2</sup> Laevius' *Erotopaegnia*, a

<sup>1</sup> *Studies in the Transmission of Latin Texts. Volume II: Vitruvius, Cato, De agricultura and Varro, De re rustica, Porphyrio, and Priscian, Periegesis*. By S. P. Oakley. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2023. Pp. xxiii + 418. 51 b/w illustrations. Hardback £160.00, ISBN: 978-0-19-8-84873-8.

<sup>2</sup> *Laevius – ein altlateinischer Liebesdichter. Studien, Text und Interpretationskommentar*. By Erik Pulz. Untersuchungen zur antiken Literatur und Geschichte 153. Berlin, de Gruyter, 2023. Pp. xiii + 315. Hardback £100.00, ISBN: 978-3-11-1-23643-8.