

among the rabbis. Quite surprisingly, despite their conspicuous pagan character there is no explicit condemnation of the books of Homer; moreover, in one place the Talmud asserts that one is allowed to read them since it is like reading "a letter," i.e., a neutral, non-heretical, book (*pt. San.* 10:1, 28a). Later in that passage, the Talmud states that the books mentioned were "given" to be studied in a certain mode. Some scholars inferred from this that the books of Homer were read within rabbinic circles (Lieberman 1950, 108–110). However, according to an accurate version of the text it is more likely that the books referred to were not the books of Homer (Naeh 2007, 243–249). While it is quite certain, then, that Palestinian rabbis allowed the reading of Homer, we have no hint about actual reading of these books by the rabbis.

Some of the rabbis were acquainted, to different degrees, with Greek language and culture, and may even have had an awareness of some aspects of Homeric studies. In their treatment of the biblical text, they employed preservation methods and hermeneutical techniques similar to those used by Alexandrian commentators of Homer (Lieberman 1950, 20–99; Daube 1953) (see ALEXANDRIAN SCHOLARSHIP). It is also plausible that the organization of the Jewish Bible into twenty-four books (the only system known in rabbinic literature) followed the Greek paradigm of the division of the *ILIAD* and *ODYSSEY* (Darshan 2007; see BOOK DIVISION). According to a rabbi of the 2nd century CE, children of the rabbinic elite received Hellenic education (*b. BQ.* 83a). If we accept his testimony, we should assume some knowledge of the Homeric text in these circles. Nevertheless, the actual use of Homeric motifs in rabbinic literature is very rare and sparse. The use of popular motifs, like the SIRENS (*Sifra* 49d) or the CENTAURS (*GenR.* 23:6), does not indicate a direct knowledge of the literary text. Of more significance is the Homeric expression "run over the topmost ears of corn without breaking them" (*Il.* 20.227), which appears in the Midrash in a different context (*EcclR.* 9:11), but this too may reflect a popular or rhetoric aphorism (Lieberman 1950, 113–114). Finally, it has been suggested that the motif of God's porphyry decorated with the acts of the martyrs (*Mid. Ps.* 9:13) is derived from the story of HELEN's embroidered web (*Il.* 3.25–28; Liebes 2006, 86–88). These

scarce and thin examples, even if considered as evidence for a sort of literary influence on the rabbis, do not allow for any substantial conclusion about the actual acquaintance of the rabbis with the Homeric text. The first Hebrew TRANSLATION of the Homeric poems, by Shaul Tchernichovsky, appeared in the 1920s.

References and Suggested Readings

Generally, the question of "the rabbis and Homer" emerges within the broad discussion of the Greek influence on Palestinian and rabbinic Judaism, which presents a full spectrum of scholarly opinions from the minimalists, like Alon 1958, 248–277 and Feldman 1993, to the maximalists, like Hengel 1991. The primary and still important, comprehensive work is Lieberman 1942, 1950, 1974. Alon (above) is a significant and detailed criticism of Lieberman 1942. A selection of other general discussions: Sevenster 1968; Blidstein 1997; Levine 1998, 85–115; Schäfer 1998, 1–26; Sperber, 2006.

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Reception, Byzantine Since Classical times, the Homeric epics have been a schoolbook from which pupils learnt reading and writing (see EDUCATION, HOMER IN). The Alexandrians with their detailed philological activity prepared the way for the Byzantine study of Homer (see ALEXANDRIAN SCHOLARSHIP). Teachers continued to teach Homer to a Christian audience in the schools of the 4th century although the Homeric poems were composed in a difficult language which was not spoken anymore.

It is impossible to generalize the reception of Homer by Christian intellectuals in the early Byzantine period up to the 8th century. There was a wide range of attitudes from indifference to the allegorization of Clement of Alexandria and the assertion of Homer's connection to Moses and the Hebrew scriptures by Methodios of Olympos. In early Christian thought, the Homeric myth is assimilated and Homer, although not praised, is freely exploited by the Church Fathers (Lamberton 1986, 242–243). Ethical messages in pagan literature were identified and appropriated for Christian education through a process of selection (see RECEPTION, EARLY CHRISTIAN).

The Homeric epics provided information about the Olympian GODS and preserved their established religious authority, despite the hostile

approach of monastic writers such as St. John the Psychaites (9th century) or John Kameniates (10th century) (Browning 1975, 18–19). The recognition of the moral value of the epics gradually increased (for example, Basil was critical of Homeric myth but acknowledged that Homer's poetry was ethical). A process of ALLEGORICAL INTERPRETATION was adopted in order to discover the "hidden meaning" of the Homeric subtext; this interpretation encouraged the exploration of moral principles, the identification of heroes and gods with forces of nature, and the allusion to historical events and characters. Hence, Homer was transformed into a prophet who had access to the secrets of the universe (this image of Homer as a prophet is found in some rare portraits in manuscripts analyzed in detail by Pontani 2005c) and was even used to embellish ecclesiastical writing.

The high rhetorical value of the Homeric text was emphasized by teachers of rhetoric and writers who received the main rhetorical principles especially from the *ILIAD*. Reading aids became necessary for the comprehension of the text in schoolrooms. Pupils learning the poetic text from dictation were helped by interlinear PARAPHRASES, GLOSSES on hard words, elementary marginal commentaries with more information on mythology and interpretation than on textual criticism (e.g., the 9th-century bT SCHOLIA) or grammatical commentaries (e.g., the Homeric *EPIMERISMI*) (Browning 1992b, 137–139; see also SCHOLARSHIP, BYZANTINE).

A scholar needed a more detailed, exegetical commentary with information on textual interpretation, mythology, and ALLEGORY compiled in the form of marginal scholia (such as the VENETUS A scholia). This exegetical material was presented as authoritative by Byzantine scholars of the 9th and 10th centuries and generally excludes earlier Christian points of view (Browning 1992b, 139).

The 12th century was the most important period for the renaissance of Homeric studies in Byzantium. Together with original scholarly achievements, Byzantine writers and historians from Anna Comnena to Niketas Choniates included Homeric allusions in their works, and paraphrases achieved great popularity (e.g., Constantine Manasses' paraphrase: Pontani 2005c, 562).

The scholars of this period handled the Homeric text with intellectual confidence. Tzetzes, having stated his authorship in his *Commentary on Book*

1 of the Iliad, argued with the ancient scholars. His commentary was characterized by a competitive attitude and asserted itself as a text in its own right (Budelmann 2002). An increasing interest in the subtext was conceived as an opportunity to contemporize Homer; in his *Homeric Allegories* (1146), Tzetzes offers a mixture of literature and allegorical interpretation. The Homeric epics continued to be popular in schools but they also became literature again, to be read and enjoyed. This new interest in Homer as literature was reflected by Tzetzes' *Carmina Homerica*, in HEXAMETER with material from the whole of the Trojan CYCLE. The *ODYSSEY* was also read, though less than the *Iliad*. Several introductions were written for educational purposes, drawing out the moral lessons from ODYSSEUS' story (e.g., the Pseudo-Gregoras text: Matranga 1850, 520–524).

The audience of the 12th century was also interested in enhancing its knowledge about the background of the TROJAN WAR. Isaac (Isaakios) Komnenos' Homeric works include two treatises (on *The Events Homer Left Out*, and a *Description of the Greeks and Trojans at Troy*) and an *Introduction to the Iliad*. But Isaac's most original work was his edition of the *Iliad*, including a preface and the text with comments (Pontani 2006).

EUSTATHIUS, archbishop of Thessalonica, practiced the teaching of Homer in his own lectures, which inspired him to write his detailed *Homeric Disquisitions*. In order to facilitate his teaching of Homer, Eustathius reevaluated the definition of myth as a pedagogical instrument and developed allegorical interpretations which made Homeric passages inoffensive to Christian taste and significantly influenced the audience's receptiveness.

In the late Byzantine period, although there was intense study of some classical texts (mainly drama and Pindar), there was no great Homeric textual scholarship. Commentators (like Michael Senacherim) and paraphrasts (like John Pediasimos, Manuel Moschopoulos, and Constantine Hermoniakos) wrote commentaries or allegorical paraphrases, but there were no scholarly works like those of Tzetzes or Eustathius.

Interest in the Trojan War remained undiminished among the public. There were compilations of scholarly material and EDITIONS with commentary of the *Odyssey* (like Gabalas's treatises and Chrysokokkes's [1336] copy with his own

commentary). A vernacular epic poem entitled *The Trojan War* (14th century) (a “free” translation of Benoit de St. Maure’s *Roman de Troie*) narrated the complete story of the Trojan War and enjoyed wide popular readership (Browning 1975, 31–33; 1992b, 145–146). Many 14th- and 15th-century MANUSCRIPTS containing Book 1 of the *Iliad*, accompanied by interlinear glosses and commentary, record the continuing role of Homer in elementary education.

The positive reception of the Homeric epics in the education and scholarship of Byzantium through allegorical interpretation of the text and its subsequent appropriation to Christian ethics and transliteration into minuscule (see TRANSLITERATION OF BOOKS) facilitated their reception in the Latin West and the preservation and appreciation of the textual tradition by the Italian humanists (see SCHOLARSHIP, RENAISSANCE THROUGH 17TH CENTURY).

References and Suggested Readings

Stallbaum 1825–1826 [1970]; Matranga 1850; Boissonade 1851; Hinck 1873, 57–88; Hunger 1955–1956; Van der Valk 1971–1987; Kindstrand 1979; Dyck 1983–1995. For more on the Byzantine reception of Homer see Browning 1975; Lambertson 1986; Browning 1992b; Budelmann 2002; Pontani 2005c and 2006.

ANTONY MAKRINOS

Reception, Syriac and Arabic The Hellenization of the peoples of the Near East in the millennium between ALEXANDER THE GREAT and the coming of Islam meant that the literate among the native Aramaic-/Syriac-speakers who had a Greek education would also know their Homer to varying degrees. But there is no evidence that during the same period Homer was translated into Syriac, due mainly, it would seem, to the antagonistic attitude on the part of Syriac-speaking Christians to pagan Greek culture (Brock 1982). This attitude changed to one of assimilation by the 7th century (mainly because of the alienating policies towards the Eastern churches by the Chalcedonian Byzantine state), and there is a late and solitary report by the major Syriac scholar, Barhebraeus (1225–1286), that Theophilus of Edessa (d. 785), the Maronite chief astrologer of the caliph al-Mahdi (r. 775–785), “translated from Greek into Syriac the two books by Homer on the conquest of

ILION in ancient times” (*Ta’rīḥ* 127, 14–15 Šālḥānī). It is not clear whether what is meant by the “two books” is the *ILIAD* and the *ODYSSEY* or just the first two books of the *Iliad* (Kraemer 1956, 261), though it has been argued that the former is the case on the basis of quotations from both epics in a Syriac author apparently writing after Theophilus (Raguse 1968; Köbert 1971). Nothing of Theophilus’s translation has survived, if indeed it ever existed, but there is little doubt that Syriac-speaking scholars had wide acquaintance with the Homeric epics and their contents, as is also evident from the account of the Trojan CYCLE in an anonymous Syriac chronicle of the 12th century (Nau 1908), which itself may not be unrelated to whatever Theophilus may have translated (Baumstark 1968 [1922], 341).

With regard to Arabic, there is not even any report about TRANSLATIONS of Homer. Despite the extensive Greco-Arabic translation movement in Baghdad from the middle of the 8th century to the end of the 10th, high literature in general, and especially the kind of poetry represented by Homer’s epics, were not translated (Gutas 1998, 194–195). The educated elite and literary personalities of the Baghdadi society of the time, who could have been expected to sponsor such translations, were quite aware that poetry does not easily cross linguistic and cultural boundaries. The great *littérateur* of the 9th century, al-Jāḥiẓ (d. 868), put it succinctly, in a sentiment also echoed by others: “Poems do not lend themselves to translation and ought not to be translated. When they are translated, their poetic structure is rent; the meter is no longer correct; poetic beauty disappears and nothing worthy of admiration remains in the poems” (Rosenthal 1975, 18; see ‘Abbās 1977, 23–26).

Such an undertaking would have also cost too much, without the sponsor receiving anything of value or use for his money, even if it is certain that the translators, or the best of them, could have produced a creditable version. Any non-native Greek speaker in the 9th century who learned classical Greek within the Islamic empire, let alone in Byzantium, would have studied Homer (see RECEPTION, BYZANTINE). There was widespread familiarity with Homeric scholarship among the translators, the vast majority of whom were Syriac-speaking Christians, as mentioned. The most famous of them, Ḥunayn ibn-Ishāq