

Anke Walter, *Erzählen und Gesang im Flavischen Epos*. (Göttinger Forum für Altertumswissenschaft, Beihefte Neue Folge 5). Berlin & Boston: Verlag de Gruyter, 2014. Pp. xi +393. ISBN 978-3-11-037050-8. €154.

*Storytelling and Song in Flavian Epic* is the title of Anke Walter's doctoral dissertation (Heidelberg, Germany 2011), which appeared in 2014 in a refashioned form in Germany. Discussed are the *Argonautica* of Valerius Flaccus (pp. 10-110), the *Thebais* of Statius (pp. 112-239), and the *Punica* of Silius Italicus (pp. 240-331). The book is rounded off by a 'Schlussbetrachtung' ('Conclusion', pp. 332-50), a bibliography (pp. 351-69) and two Indices, one of quoted lines (pp. 370-88) and the other of 'Sachen' ('objects', pp. 389-93). As 'objects' we find individual names such as 'Achilles' and 'Zeus' and also *termini technici* such as 'Brudermord' and 'Bürgerkrieg', *damnatio memoriae* and 'Vogelschau'. In the bibliography we miss some central publications, such as A. J. Boyle & W. J. Dominik (edd.), *Flavian Rome – Culture, Image, Text* (Leiden & Boston 2003); or P. Bilde, *Flavius Josephus between Jerusalem and Rome* (Sheffield 1988); or F. Delarue et al. (edd.) *Epicedion: Hommage à P. Papinius Statius* (Poitiers 1996).<sup>1</sup>

But let us not get lost in minor questions; we should rather look at the book's aims and results. Walter, known already through pertinent publications on the poems of Statius and Silius Italicus,<sup>2</sup> sets out to show here that there are great differences between each of the three poets and their epic visions, which 'give the age-old genre of epic poetry a new face' (p. 9). The way of storytelling used by Silius Italicus on the one hand and of Valerius Flaccus and Statius on the other is seen by Walter as remarkably different (p. 4): in the *Punica* the narrator is acting as a powerful controlling force in his presentation, whereas in *Argonautica* and *Thebais* there is a mix of influence of the plot on the narrator and vice versa; Walter sees this phenomenon paralleled in the art of the modern novel, where also the individual author and his special material influence each other strongly.

Walter structures her analysis of each poem in three identical steps: after a short 'Einleitung' (Introduction) follow sections on the narrator, the prooemium, the story in general, and a conclusion. This is certainly quite helpful for the readers of the book, who thus easily find their way to the special points of information they might be looking for.

Her results: there is 'a complex mixture of elements drawing the reader into the world described in the poem, and other factors turning him away from it, a mix of nearness and distance' (p. 350). All three poets offer a certain kind of a parallel between ancient epic and the modern novel (see p. 349, n. 10): here and there, a writer strives 'to become, to impersonate what he describes, even when the subject itself is debased, vulgar, boring'.<sup>3</sup> Walter underlines (see p. 350) the point that the polyphony of voices – even where they are contradicting each other – makes the special value of epic poetry visible as a medium that deals with memory as well as one that reflects contemporary conditions. The book certainly will contribute to a deeper understanding of an important genre of literature and of its manifestations in the Flavian epoch of classical epic poetry.

<sup>1</sup> Also recently appeared: Antony Augustakis, *Flavian Poetry and its Greek Past*, Mnemosyne Supplementum 366, (Leiden & Boston 2014).

<sup>2</sup> 'Der Mythos von Linus und Coroebus in Statius' *Thebais* – ein aitiologischer Gegentwurf zur *Aeneis*', in C. Reitz & N. Kramer (edd.), *Tradition und Erneuerung* (Berlin 2010), pp. 63-91; 'Beginning at the End: Silius Italicus and the Desolation of Thebes', in G. Manuwald & A. Voigt (edd.), *Flavian Epic Interactions* (Berlin 2013) pp. 311-26.

<sup>3</sup> See J. Wood, *How Fiction Works* (London 2009) p. 28.