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Malcolm Davies,
The Aethiopsis: Neo-Analysis Reanalyzed.

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The *Aethiopsis* recounted the events in the Trojan War following the action of the *Iliad*, including the death of Achilles himself. Virtually no “physical” traces of this poem have survived, and we know the poem’s plot only through a paraphrase in Proclus; yet the poem wields outsize influence in the study of archaic Greek epic due to its being considered a “source” for the *Iliad* in the branch of Homeric scholarship that has come to be known as “Neo-analysis.” It is a reappraisal of this theory that Malcolm Davies wants to achieve in offering this analysis of the *Aethiopsis*.

After summarily dealing with older analytic theories according to which the *Aethiopsis* is an amalgamation of two earlier distinct poems, a *Penthesileia* and a *Memnonid*, Davies sets out, in Chapter 1, to survey the evidence customarily adduced for a dependency of the *Iliad* on the *Aethiopsis*. He resists the one size fits all approach of many of the Neoanalysts and goes through the relevant scenes one by one, taking the “complexity of the issues involved” (4) as a guiding principle without pledging allegiance to or outright rejection of the Neoanalytic program. In many cases, Davies argues, the primacy of the *Aethiopsis* “is not susceptible of proof” (6) and the traditional qualitative argument that the better version of the motif must be the older and original one does not hold water. Davies usefully points out that certain motifs may be so generic and traditional as to be interdependent, rather than being related to each other as a source and its derivation (10–12).

In the end it is only the scene in Book 8 in which Diomedes rescues Nestor from death at the hands of Hector after Paris has shot Nestor’s horse that is singled out as a sure case of the *Iliad* modeling itself on a scene in the *Aethiopsis*, the scene in which Antilochos saves his father Nestor from death at the hands of Memnon. He is killed in this action by Memnon, who in turn will be killed by Achilles. The rationale used is the Neo-analyst Wolfgang Kullmann’s reformulation of the qual-

ity argument that is other-wise inconclusive: “If there are two uses of a motif, one tragic, the other not, then the tragic version must be primary and original” (6). In all other cases (e.g., Antilochus saving Menelaus’ life, 5.561–73; Thrasymedes saving his brother Antilochus, 16.317–29; Patroclus’ pyre as modeled on Achilles’, 23.192–211; Patroclus’ death as modeled on Achilles’, 16.844–54; Sarpedon’s death as modeled on Memnon’s in the *Aethiopsis*; Hector’s death as modeled on Memnon’s) there is for Davies a contextually bound reason to argue that the Neo-analytic approach tends to be reductive. As Davies puts it in a capping phrase: “Neoanalysis seems to act as block to the understanding of a given passage’s impact” (p. 22).

In Chapter 2, Davies examines vase paintings as possible evidence for the *Aethiopsis* and concludes that only one scene, Eos carrying her son Memnon’s corpse from the battle location (34–6), finds secure attestation on archaic artifacts, including Attic red- and black-figure vases and Etruscan mirrors. One might add, however, that even if we can identify a character or scene that is recognizable from Proclus’ paraphrase, it does not necessarily follow that it is drawn from an *Aethiopsis* as an actual poetic work. This is *a fortiori* the case when details are not in easy or direct agreement with what we know of the *Aethiopsis*, such as Hermes, and not Zeus, as the deity who holds the scales in the vase paintings of a *Psychostasia* (a “weighing of the souls”) involving Achilles and Memnon. Davies remains skeptical on an *ad hoc* basis, drawing attention to the specific requirements of the visual medium which may account for the detail of the presence of Thetis and Eos, Achilles’ and Memnon’s mothers, in various painted scenes, such as the *Psychostasia* or the actual combat between the two heroes (29, 32). But here we can turn the argument around and entertain the possibility that the scene in the picture, adapted to the requirements of the visual medium and the space of the vase, *may* refer to a scene from the lost poem. In one case, Hypnos and Thanatos transporting a corpse that is supposedly Memnon’s, Davies voices strong doubts about this identification; and even if we somehow learned that the vases in question indeed depict Hypnos, Thanatos, and Memnon, we cannot exclude the possibility that the scene comes from the *Iliad* (16.676–83; Sarpedon’s corpse) and is transferred to Memnon.

The perspective shifts when in Chapter 3 instead of the *Iliad* the *Aethiopsis* itself is taken as vantage point, in the form of a commentary on the paraphrase of the poem we find in Proclus. Moving through the poem episode by episode Davies adopts the same skeptical stance as in the previous chapters, expressing hesitation on the question whether Attic vase paintings of Achilles and Penthesileia faithfully represent scenes from the lost poem; the question whether these scenes underlie our *Iliad* is of course moot. This is not the case for the Thersites episode in the *Aethiopsis*

which in Proclus' summary immediately follows the death and burial of Penthesileia. Thersites' death at the hand of Achilles when he insults the latter is more "tragic" than his beating in the *Iliad* at the hand of Odysseus, who intervenes in Thersites' quarrel with Agamemnon; but Davies still maintains that "the presence of elaboration and the absence of 'tragic' consequences are not infallible indexes of derivative status" (54), drawing attention to the possibility that the *Aethiopsis* draws on an un-Homeric tradition in which Thersites is of Aetolian nobility. When we come to the death of Antilochos at the hands of Memnon (61–4), the scene is less seen as a model for the death of Patroclus at the hands of Hector than for the scene in Virgil's *Aeneid* in which Lausus dies at the hands of Aeneas in an attempt to save the life of his father Mezentius. The discussion has suddenly, and not unreasonably, shifted into a (neo-)analysis of the *Aeneid*.

The discussion, sure-footed and even-handed throughout, is mostly a critical review of older scholarship and contains much useful material for scholars wishing to immerse themselves in the intricacies of the discussion over the years. There is, however, no reference to modern discussions of the *Aethiopsis*, with the exception of Martin West's 2013 *The Epic Cycle* (Oxford). Fantuzzi's and Tsagalis' *The Greek Epic Cycle and its Ancient Reception* (Cambridge 2015) and Bruno Currie's *Homer's Allusive Art* (Oxford 2016) may have been published too late to have been taken into account. But this is not true for much of the work of Jonathan Burgess since his 2001 monograph *The Tradition of the Trojan War in Homer and the Epic Cycle* (Baltimore, MD). And this work is precisely at the core of what is referred to on the back cover of the book as Neoanalysis' "recent revival in subtler form" ([the] "theory's more sophisticated reincarnation"). There is much recent work on the possibility of antecedents to the Homeric poems through a combination of oral poetry study and intertextuality: the recognition that salient traditional phraseology can be "re-used" in other epic stories and episodes, thus transferring its themes and associations to a new context. If this is the "revival" that is referred to on the back cover, then the book's argument neither acknowledges it nor benefits from it. This omission is especially felt in the discussion of the well-known lines describing Achilles' reaction to the death of Patroclus in formulas seemingly evoking Achilles' own death. Scholarship on this issue has much progressed since Kakridis (1949), Pestalozzi (1945), and Schadewaldt (1952).

In closing, then, this short book provides reliable guidance through the maze of older literature, but does not provide new perspectives nor does it engage with the most recent developments.