

*Omero Sconfitto: Ricerche sul mito di Troia dall'antichità al Rinascimento.*

Valentina Prosperi.

Temi e testi 125. Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 2013. xi +108 pp. €16.

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This short book gathers together three distinct studies on the theme of the diffusion of the myth of Troy in Western culture, from antiquity to the Renaissance: “Il Mito Troiano tra Seconda Sofistica e Primà Età Moderna”; “Anche i Bambini e gli Ignoranti le Conoscono’: Le Tradizioni Troiane Medievali nella *Divina commedia*”; and “Omero Sconfitto: Una Proposta per la Ricezione dell’*Iliade* in Italia tra Quattro e Cinquecento.” These three essays focus on the extraordinary success in the Latin world of the works of Dictys of Crete and Dares the Phrygian: the *Ephemeris belli Troiani* and the *De excidio Troiae historia*.

The first essay seeks to understand the success of the works of Dictys and Dares throughout late antiquity, the Middle Ages, and the Renaissance, on the basis of a study of their Greek sources. Indeed, Valentina Prosperi considers that the translation of the originals in Latin have distracted the attention of scholars from their Greek sources, and that by placing these sources within their historical and social context we can throw light not only on them, but also on the *Ephemeris belli Troiani* and the *De excidio Troiae historia*. From this original perspective, she highlights that the Greek sources of Dictys and Dares depend on a well-defined cultural movement, the Second Sophistic. She argues convincingly that those sources belong to a type of literature called “pseudo-documentarism,” and must be placed within a discussion of the concept of storytelling and the status of fiction. An inadvertent combination of characteristics (autopsy and “explanatory requirement”) gives them a highly historical dimension.

The second essay studies the relationship between the myth of Troy and Dante’s work. Prosperi examines whether — as maintained by a great majority of critics — the mythical material of the classical tradition found in the *Commedia*, particularly the myth of Troy, has Virgil for the only source. She demonstrates accurately that Dante used sources other than Virgil and Servius’s commentary, and that those sources were medieval retellings of the story of Troy, based on the works of Dictys and Dares. Prosperi argues that even though the Trojan legends are part of the cultural heritage of Dante, they play a marginal role in the *Commedia*, especially when we consider the importance they had at this time. Dante’s attitude toward Trojan legends is not characterized by ignorance or indifference, but results from creative and ideological choice.

In her third essay, Prosperi discusses the *Iliad*’s reception in Italy during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, and studies to what extent the uninterrupted success of Dictys

and Dares after Homer's rediscovery impeded a wider diffusion of the Homeric poem. Relying on the analysis by Robin Sowerby ("Early Humanist Failure with Homer," *International Journal of the Classical Tradition* 4 [1997]: 37–63, 165–94), the orientation of this study is clearly marked by a negative assessment of Homer's reception in the Renaissance. According to Prosperi, this failure of Homer in the time of humanism cannot be reduced to the question of a comparison with Virgil. She highlights that the works of Dictys and Dares were always considered historical texts by Petrarch and Boccaccio, the first instigators of the rediscovery of Homer in Italy. After Petrarch and Boccaccio's generation, the two texts conserved their nonfiction and documentary character in their role of *accessus* of poetic texts dealing with the Trojan War, in a continuity of their role in the Middle Ages. The essay proposes an accurate study of the editorial success of Dictys and Dares in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries compared with that of Homer.

Prosperi's approach stimulates reflection, particularly in the first two essays, and the long period covered contributes greatly to the value of the study. Assumptions and method appear more questionable in the last essay: first, the methodological problem of generalization is not tackled; furthermore, the claim of humanist failure with Homer is debatable and should be reassessed; and last, humanists' Greek studies are not sufficiently taken into account, notably in their use of Greek manuscript sources — the rediscovery of Homer in the Renaissance cannot be separated from the rediscovery of Greek commentary.

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