

Joan SILVA BARRIS, *Metre and Rhythm in Greek Verse*, Wien: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2011 (Wiener Studien, Beiheft 35), 177 pp., ISBN 978-3-7001-6902-4, € 39.20.

The book *Metre and Rhythm in Greek Verse* by J. SILVA BARRIS (hereinafter JSB) is devoted to a subject that because of its difficulty and hypothetical nature is not particularly popular among classical scholars.

An advantage of this book is its disposition¹. The division into parts, chapters, and subchapters is so detailed that it successfully compensates for the lack of indices *locorum* and *rerum*. On the other hand, the author should have been more careful and avoided a weird situation where a title of one of the subchapters is not much shorter than its text (p. 40). His book is divided into three main Parts. In the “First Part: Relative Basic Durations and Syllabic Equivalences” he discusses some of the most important concepts and phenomena related to metre and rhythm. These are e.g. πρώτος χρόνος, πούς, responsion, κατάλεξις etc. In the “Second Part: Rhythmic Value of Traditional Poetic-Musical Genres” the individual types of rhythms are discussed and in the final “Third Part: Rhythmic Proposals for Some Metrically Compound Passages” the author tests his views on selected poetic passages. The Parts are preceded by a prologue in which JSB describes the method and purpose of his investigations. The discussion in his book abruptly ends in a sequence of notes followed by no epilogue. I believe that any reader would be glad to be reminded not only of the most important conclusions formulated in the book but also of the author’s tribute to his subject matter and the perspectives presented by his research. Such an epilogue would be all the more useful as it is extremely difficult to reach conclusions about the above-mentioned issues from studying the individual chapters of his book.

I have managed to identify at least three main obstacles that make it hard or even impossible to follow JSB’s discussion. The first one is of a linguistic nature. I wonder why, on the one hand, the author has been so reckless as to decide to publish the text of his book without apparently having consulted a native speaker’s opinion on it and, on the other, why OAW referees and copy-editors have let him do it. As a non-native user of English I do not mind if the text of his book is riddled with slips and mistakes. What worries me is JSB’s frequent inability to express his thoughts in a precise and transparent way despite the fact that precision and transparency are, at least in my opinion, the most needed features of a discussion on the complicated topics that cover the metre and rhythm of Greek poetry.

Another difficulty that does not allow me to become fully familiar with the author’s views is his lack of consistency and sometimes even ignorance in making proper use of the scholarly nomenclature. I hope that I do not have to emphasise the importance of its strict observance in the field of ancient Greek music. JSB however does not seem to care much about strictness and precision in this regard. He usually does not respect the difference between two basic concepts, that is, between metrical position and syllable². Such a distinction is crucial for anyone who investigates metre and rhythm and it is likely to make it unnecessary for them to coin or borrow from others such strange terms as “a metrically³ long syllable” (p. 31), or “a double-short syllable”⁴ (p. 50). His

¹ I will not discuss it here in detail as the contents of the book are available after login on OAW’s site: <http://hw.oeaw.ac.at/6902-4>.

² The difference is explained e.g. by T. COLE, *Epiploke: Rhythmical Continuity and Poetic Structure in Greek Lyric*, Cambridge, Mass.–London 1988, p. 18.

³ All underlinings are mine.

⁴ This term can be found in B.H. MCLEAN, *An Introduction to Greek Epigraphy of the Hellenistic and Roman Periods...*, Ann Arbor 2002, p. 365.

inconsistency is glaring on p. 144, where in one sentence he writes about a “syllabic sequence” and in the next one the term “position” is used: “The lyric genre in question is based upon a rather free combination of the syllabic sequences (–) – ∼ – and (–) – ∼ ∼ – ∼ ∼ – (–). Within the synaphy, one of the positions in brackets...”. Note also the term “lyric genre” referring to a metrical type called dactylo-epitrites (at the beginning of the chapter he calls them “This type of lyric”) and “synaphy” which, as it seems, stands for “synapheia”. On p. 79 he discusses a metrical pattern of the iambic trimeter calling it “The syllabic model of non-comic stichic iambic trimeter”. On p. 47 there appears an odd term “an unequal metric duration” while on p. 85 I find “rhythmic duration of the *positio anceps*”. If the distinction between “metric” and “rhythmic” durations has any sense, the author should have defined it. Generally, in order to avoid complaints, the author should have precisely defined the following terms and expressions: “catalectic increase” (p. 47), “prosodic synaphy” (p. 55), “phonic synaphy” (p. 135, n. 453), “syllabic groups with an inferior metric value” (p. 25), “catalectic value” (p. 69), “poetic *continuum*” (p. 140), “synaphy between *metra*” (p. 139), “metric level” (p. 136), “rhythmic level” (p. 45), “verbal level” (p. 45), “syllabic level” (p. 48) and many others no less confusing. Without those explanations and definitions his perhaps valuable views will remain obscure and inaccessible even for a specialist.

The third obstacle that makes it hard to follow the author’s reasoning is his negligence. It can be seen e.g. in the way JSB refers to the text and apparatus of some of the Greek authors; he does not care to inform his readers which editions he means, see e.g. p. 34, n. 106; p. 35, n. 110. On p. 52, n. 174 he is no less negligent when he refers to “the Teubnerian edition of E. *Ba.*” without giving any further information about the edition. Besides, JSB incessantly uses expressions like “as we have had occasion to observe”, “as we have observed further above”, or “taking into account the information compiled thus far” etc. I did not manage to find a single instance in which this referring back would be accompanied with a page number, or at least a title of a chapter. Only at the end of the book, on p. 147, he is apparently more specific when referring back to its beginning in the following words: “according to what has been established in the first part of this book...”. And that is all; no page number follows. Moreover, on p. 135 he refers to “all that has been stated thus far”. I sometimes have the impression that it is the author’s intention to make it impossible for the reader to see what in fact has been established or stated. One can doubt if anything, since JSB’s purpose, in his own words, is “to formulate certain conclusions or hypotheses” that “serve as a starting point for the formulation of new hypotheses, and so on.” (p. 12). In my opinion, this cannot lead anyone to state anything certain or significant because in the process of generating hypotheses from other hypotheses every successive hypothesis is weaker and weaker till one reaches the point where there is no room for scholarly methods and no scholarly way of thinking is possible anymore.

Numerous quotations from the works of ancient theorists are a valuable feature of his book. The Greek texts are provided with English translations which could be of use for novices in ancient Greek language and music. Unfortunately, a good impression of the author’s erudition is destroyed by his negative approach towards intellectual property. That is what can be concluded from the fact that most translations lack their author’s or authors’ names. Moreover, the quotations often lack a commentary and JSB leaves their interpretations to his readers, see for example p. 38. Earlier, on p. 17 he quotes Aristox. *Rhyth.* 4 and 14 and sees in these passages an information about χρόνος being embodied “in one of the two constituent parts of the foot”. But in *Rhyth.* 4 and 14 Aristoxenus does not say anything about foot or its parts. On p. 45 JSB quotes Heph. IV 2 who says that in dactyls catalexis can be a matter of taking off two συλλαβαί from the full dactylic foot – ∼ ∼ (it is the so-called catalexis *in syllabam*). This results in a blunt close: ... ∼ ∼ – and certainly not in a pendant one: ... – – as JSB concludes – probably misled by the English “a disyllabic catalexis” (p. 46) that renders Hephæstion’s παρὰ δύο συλλαβὰς τὸ καταλεκτικόν (the translator’s name is unknown). On p. 45, when commenting on Aristid. Quint. *De mus.* I 23, the author offers an explanation of the expression μακροτέρα κατάλεξις. He suggests that “the words of Aristides Quintilianus refer to different levels within the poem”. One of those levels is verbal: “On a verbal

level, it is true that there is a missing syllable". He does not explain how the term "verbal level" should be perceived even though it actually implies words with missing syllables, which would be an absurd interpretation of Aristides Quintilianus' views.

In general, his relation to ancient theorists is somehow complicated. On p. 10 he is optimistic enough to say: "we will also have the opportunity to realize that the majority of the ancient Greek theory – especially Aristoxenian theory – is, in the main, coherently applicable to the metrics of archaic and classical texts". Moreover, on p. 14 JSB makes an apt remark concerning the ancient theorists who applied "analogous assumptions and methods" to "all rhythmic genres, whether recited or sung". Therefore, he says, "it seems acceptable, *a priori*, to approach those rhythms which were normally sung and those which were normally recited using similar methods". Surprisingly enough, without giving any reasons or arguments, he seems to reject the ancient theorists' practice in the very next sentence: "However, one must always take into account whether or not a particular work belongs to one type or another when it comes to its analysis".

Regretfully, JSB's way of presenting arguments and formulating conclusions is sometimes unacceptable. I will not dwell on the logic of such statements as the one on p. 51: "There are virtually no exceptions to this tendency" (if there are no exceptions, it is a rule or law – not a tendency) since there are some other and more serious points in his book at which he has obviously deviated from sound scholarly practice. Thus, on p. 26 he refers to irregular response maintaining that it is a matter of *substitution* of one syllabic group by another. In fact, the phenomenon called 'response' is, as its very name indicates, a metrical, rhythmical and probably melodic *correspondence* between strophes⁵. Considering the passages from Bacchylides that he referred to in note 72, I suppose that JSB discusses a rare phenomenon of correspondence between a long syllable and three short syllables. However, he maintains that it happens "often", even though he is able to find only four examples (followed by "etc.") of such responses (p. 26, n. 72). On pp. 59–63 JSB extensively comments on DH *Comp.* 108–109 and 142–144. Here is the course that his discussion takes. First, he argues that DH excludes the spondee from his remarks on dactyls and focuses on the full form – ∪ ∪ (pp. 59–61). Next, on p. 62, he maintains that (1) "the words of the Greek scholar on the long irrational syllable affect only the dactyl (– ∪ ∪)" and (2) "there are certain details in Dionysius of Halicarnassus' text which lead us to doubt even that the scholar took the term irrational to mean the long syllables of all the – ∪ ∪ feet in heroic verse". On the same page he asks "would it be wise to apply this passage from *De compositione verborum* to homeric or hesiodic dactyls?" and suggests that the right answer is 'no' because "it would be still the only testimony which would refer to a systematically ἄλογος internal proportion in the dactyl". Besides, even if in fact the proportion between – and ∪ ∪ in – ∪ ∪ is not 1:1 and even if "it is not beyond the realms of possibility that some, or even the majority, of the – ∪ ∪ feet of the epic verses of Homer, Hesiod, etc., might possess, in the performance, an initial syllable of a lesser duration than the sum of the two short syllables", then "the difference would have to be minimal and virtually imperceptible". Therefore, "the wisest approach would be to consider that his words pertain to observations carried out in relation to *certain* dactyls (– ∪ ∪) of recited verses in post-classical period" (p. 63). The arguments of (1) the uniqueness of Dionysius' testimony and (2) the imperceptibility of the quantitative difference between syllables in question would have been sound enough in other circumstances. However, in the context of JSB's book the argument as to the uniqueness seriously weakens his own hypotheses, as many or most of them are based on a unique ancient testimony, namely that of Aristoxenus. The argument related to imperceptibility is even worse, since almost the whole discussion in his book focuses on such small, hypothetical and most probably imperceptible irrational differences between syllables. One of the more grotesque examples of this approach can be found in the chapter devoted to dactylo-epitrites: "For these reasons, we are allowed to assume that

⁵ For evidence supporting the possibility of melodic responses between strophes in tragedy see my *Towards the Strophic Grammar of Greek Tragedy*, Poznań 2010, pp. 71 ff.

the internal proportion of the epitritic (-)...(-) is to be found between 1:1 and an indeterminate proportion closer to 1:2 but still relatively far from this ratio" (p. 145).

In "Prologue: Justification and Method" the author says that "it is possible to study Greek poetic-musical rhythm in a rigorous manner" (p. 10). Unfortunately, his own study, in my opinion, is a contradiction to the scholarly rigor and precision that are so needed in this kind of investigation. In general, I would not recommend this work to anyone seriously interested in the subject.

Piotr Stepień
Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznań