

## THE CAMBRIDGE COMPANION TO ANCIENT GREEK EPIC

Ancient Greek literature begins with the epic verses of Homer. Epic then continued as a fundamental literary form throughout antiquity and the influence of the poems produced extends beyond antiquity and down to the present. This *Companion* presents a fresh and boundary-breaking account of the ancient Greek epic tradition. It includes wide-ranging close readings of epics from Homer to Nonnus, traces their dialogues with other modes such as ancient Mesopotamian poetry, Greek lyric and didactic writing, and explores their afterlives in Byzantium, early Christianity, modern fiction and cinema, and the identity politics of Greece and Turkey. Plot summaries are provided for those unfamiliar with individual poems. Drawing on cutting-edge new research in a number of fields, such as racecraft, geopolitics and the theory of emotions, the volume demonstrates the sustained and often surprising power of this renowned ancient genre, and sheds new light on its continued impact and relevance today.

Emma Greensmith is Associate Professor of Classical Languages and Literature at the University of Oxford and Fellow of St John's College. She specialises in imperial Greek literature, particularly epic poetics and religious culture. Her 2020 book, *The Resurrection of Homer in Imperial Greek Epic*, offers a new reading of the role of epic and the reception of Homer in the Graeco-Roman world. She has co-edited a volume on the *Posthomerica* (2022) and is currently working on a new book entitled *Homer and the Bible: Christian Greek Epic in Late Antiquity*. She has written many articles and public engagement pieces on ancient Greek literature, and is also filming a documentary on Homer's *Odyssey* and its cultural legacy.

*A complete list of books in the series is at the back of the book.*

THE CAMBRIDGE  
COMPANION TO  
ANCIENT GREEK EPIC

EDITED BY  
EMMA GREENSMITH

*University of Oxford*



CAMBRIDGE  
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge University Press & Assessment  
978-1-316-51469-6 — The Cambridge Companion to Ancient Greek Epic  
Edited by Emma Greensmith  
Frontmatter  
[More Information](#)

---



CAMBRIDGE  
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Shaftesbury Road, Cambridge CB2 8EA, United Kingdom  
One Liberty Plaza, 20th Floor, New York, NY 10006, USA  
477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia  
314-321, 3rd Floor, Plot 3, Splendor Forum, Jasola District Centre,  
New Delhi – 110025, India  
103 Penang Road, #05-06/07, Visioncrest Commercial, Singapore 238467

Cambridge University Press is part of Cambridge University Press & Assessment,  
a department of the University of Cambridge.

We share the University's mission to contribute to society through the pursuit of education,  
learning and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

[www.cambridge.org](http://www.cambridge.org)  
Information on this title: [www.cambridge.org/9781316514696](http://www.cambridge.org/9781316514696)

DOI: 10.1017/9781009086585

© Cambridge University Press & Assessment 2024

This publication is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception and to the provisions  
of relevant collective licensing agreements, no reproduction of any part may take  
place without the written permission of Cambridge University Press & Assessment.

When citing this work, please include a reference to the DOI 10.1017/9781009086585

First published 2024

*A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library.*

*A Cataloging-in-Publication data record for this book is available from the Library of  
Congress*

ISBN 978-1-316-51469-6 Hardback  
ISBN 978-1-009-08737-7 Paperback

Additional resources for this publication at [www.cambridge.org/9781316514696](http://www.cambridge.org/9781316514696)

Cambridge University Press & Assessment has no responsibility for the persistence  
or accuracy of URLs for external or third-party internet websites referred to in this  
publication and does not guarantee that any content on such websites is, or will remain,  
accurate or appropriate.

CONTENTS

<i>List of Figures</i>	page viii
<i>List of Contributors</i>	x
<i>Preface</i>	xv
 Introduction: (Pushing) The Limits of Epic EMMA GREENSMITH	 i
 PART I: EPIC ENGAGEMENTS	
1 Greek and Near Eastern Epic: Context and Comparison BERNARDO BALLESTEROS	17
2 Epic and Lyric HENRY SPELMAN	41
3 Didactic (and) Epic EMILY KNEEBONE	58
 PART II: EPIC SPACE	
4 Space and Story: The <i>Iliad</i> and the <i>Odyssey</i> CHRISTOS C. TSAGALIS	81
5 Do Not Talk Death to Me: The Epic Underworld KAROLINA SEKITA	104
6 Epic Dislocation: Nostalgia and Return ALEXANDER C. LONEY	130
	v

CONTENTS

7	Shrunken Epic: The Poetics of Epyllion	147
	BERENICE VERHELST	

PART III: EPIC TIME

8	A Brief History of Epic Time	169
	SIMON GOLDHILL	
9	Time and Again: Apollonius' <i>Argonautica</i>	184
	TOM PHILLIPS	
10	Trojan Temporality in Imperial Greek Epic	204
	EMMA GREENSMITH	

PART IV: EPIC PEOPLE

11	The Language of Epic Sacrifice	231
	RENAUD GAGNÉ	
12	Epic Racecraft and the Race of Heroes	258
	JACKIE MURRAY	
13	Women in Homer and Beyond	274
	EMILY HAUSER	

PART V: EPIC FEELINGS

14	Before, Beneath, Beyond Emotions: Reading Affects in Epic	297
	PAULINE A. LEVEN	
15	Humour in Greek Epic	318
	MATT HOSTY	
16	Love, Desire and Erotics	334
	STEVEN D. SMITH	

CONTENTS

PART VI: EPIC WITHOUT END

17	Ancient Readers of Greek Epic	359
	RICHARD HUNTER	
18	Greek Epic in a Christian Empire: Grit in the Eye	381
	TIM WHITMARSH	
19	The Fates of Epic in Byzantium: Homer for a New Era	400
	MARKÉTA KULHÁNKOVÁ	
20	Homeric Epic and Nation-Building in Modern Greece and Turkey	422
	JOHANNA HANINK	
21	Ancient Greek Epic and the Cinema: Transformations and Archetypes	442
	MARTIN M. WINKLER	
	Epilogue: Reflections on Ancient Greek Epic in the Modern Greek Lands	460
	PANAYIOTIS CHRISTOFOROU	
	<i>Timeline of Ancient Greek Epic</i>	468
	<i>Bibliography</i>	469
	<i>Index Locorum</i>	525
	<i>Subject Index</i>	537

Additional resources for this publication at [www.cambridge.org/9781316514696](http://www.cambridge.org/9781316514696)

## FIGURES

5.1	Bronze shield-band from Olympia, <i>ca.</i> 560 BCE. Olympia Archaeological Museum B4918/9.	page 109
5.2	Apulian red-figure volute-krater, associated with Iliupersis Painter, 360–350 BCE. Ruvo di Puglia, Museum Jatta J1094.	110
5.3	Apulian red-figure volute-krater, attributed to the Underworld Painter, <i>ca.</i> 325–320 BCE. Naples, Archaeological Museum, inv. Stg. 709.	111
5.4	Apulian red-figure volute-krater, attributed to the Darius Painter, <i>ca.</i> 340–330 BCE. Toledo Museum of Art, inv. 1994.19.	112
5.5	Attic black-figure lip-cup by Xenocles, <i>ca.</i> 550–525 BCE. London B425.	112
5.6	Lucanian red-figure calyx-krater by the Dolon Painter, <i>ca.</i> 440–390 BCE. Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, Cabinet des Médailles 422.	115
5.7	Attic red-figure <i>pelike</i> by the Lykaon Painter, <i>ca.</i> 450–440 BCE. Boston, MFA 34.79.	116
5.8	Etruscan mirror, end of the fifth century BCE. Rome, Vatican Museums (Museo Gregoriano Etrusco) I, 33.1; ES 2.240.	117
5.9	Gold leaf from Petelia (modern Strongoli, Calabria, Italy), fourth century BCE. British Museum, inv. 3155.	119
20.1	Portrait of Theodoros Kolokotronis, oil painting on canvas by Dionysios Tsokos, 1861. National Historical Museum, Athens.	428
20.2	Bouboulina, aboard what is presumably the <i>Agamemnon</i> . Anonymous nineteenth-century painting. National Historical Museum, Athens.	428
20.3	The main building of the Istanbul Archaeological Museum, constructed over the period 1881–1891 and designed in Europeanising neoclassical style by French-Ottoman architect Alexandre Vallaury. Getty Images.	431
20.4	Map of the area claimed for Greece by Prime Minister Eleftherios Venizelos at the 1919 Paris Peace Conference (whose outcome was	

LIST OF FIGURES

	the Treaty of Versailles). From the <i>New York Times</i> weekly magazine <i>Current History</i> , 10 (April 1919), 62.	434
20.5	Map (detail) reflecting the ‘Blue Homeland’ ideology of Cihat Yaycı (b. 1966), former admiral in the Turkish navy and Blue Homeland ideologue. Creative Commons license.	441



## CONTRIBUTORS

BERNARDO BALLESTEROS is Assistant Professor in Early Greek Literature and Language at the Institut für Klassische Philologie, University of Vienna. After obtaining his doctorate at Oxford, he held postdoctoral positions at LMU Munich, the Warburg Institute, and the Faculty of Classics and Corpus Christi College, University of Oxford.

PANAYIOTIS CHRISTOFOROU is Departmental Lecturer in Ancient History, Faculty of Classics, and Oriel and Jesus Colleges, University of Oxford. He specialises in the politics, culture and society of the Roman world in the early Roman Empire, and focuses on popular perceptions of the Roman emperor. He is also interested in the reception of Greece and Rome in the modern world and alternative perspectives regarding the classical world. His first monograph, *Imagining the Roman Emperor: Perceptions of Rulers in the High Empire*, was published with Cambridge University Press in July 2023.

RENAUD GAGNÉ is Professor of Ancient Greek Literature and Religion at the University of Cambridge and a Fellow of Pembroke College. His most recent book is *Cosmography and the Idea of Hyperborea: A Philology of Worlds* (Cambridge University Press 2021).

SIMON GOLDHILL is Professor of Greek at the University of Cambridge, and Foreign Secretary and Vice President of the British Academy. His books have been translated into ten languages and won three international prizes. He has lectured and broadcast on radio and television all over the world. His most recent book is *The Christian Invention of Time* (Cambridge University Press, 2022).

EMMA GREENSMITH is Associate Professor of Classical Languages and Literature at the University of Oxford and Fellow of St John's College. She specialises in imperial Greek literature, particularly epic poetics and religious culture. Her 2020 book, *The Resurrection of Homer in Imperial Greek Epic: Quintus Smyrnaeus' Posthomerica and the Poetics of Impersonation* offers a new reading of the role of epic and the reception of Homer in the Graeco-Roman world. She has edited

## LIST OF CONTRIBUTORS

a volume on the *Posthomeric* (with S. Bär and L. Ozbek, 2022) and has written articles on Nonnus, Gregory of Nazianzus, Philostratus and the *Sibylline Oracles*. She is currently working on a new book entitled *Homer and the Bible: Readings in Christian Greek Epic*.

JOHANNA HANINK is Professor of Classics at Brown University, where she is also a faculty member in the Program in Modern Greek Studies. Her books include *The Classical Debt: Greek Antiquity in an Era of Austerity* (2017) and a translation of works by the modern Greek author Andreas Karkavitsas, *The Archeologist and Selected Sea Stories*, in the Penguin Classics series (2021).

EMILY HAUSER is Senior Lecturer in Classics and Ancient History at the University of Exeter, and the author of a trilogy of acclaimed novels reworking the women of Greek myth, including *For the Most Beautiful* (2016). She has written articles on gender in Homer, women poets in antiquity and their reception in contemporary women's writing. Her latest book is *How Women Became Poets* (2023, Princeton University Press); her next book on women in Homer, *Mythica*, is forthcoming in 2025 with Penguin Random House and the University of Chicago Press.

MATT HOSTY is Lecturer in Classics at St John's College, Oxford. His textual edition with commentary of the *Batrachomyomachia* (*Battle of the Frogs and Mice*) was published in 2020. His primary research focus is on ancient parody and pastiche, but he also works on Hellenistic poetry more broadly, with a particular interest in epic and epigram.

RICHARD HUNTER is Regius Professor of Greek Emeritus at the University of Cambridge and a Fellow of Trinity College, Cambridge. He is a General Editor of *Cambridge Greek and Latin Classics*, and his most recent books are *The Measure of Homer* (2018), (with R. Laemmle) *Euripides, Cyclops* (2020), *The Layers of the Text: Collected Papers on Classical Literature 2008–2021* (2021) and *Greek Epitaphic Poetry: A Selection* (2022).

EMILY KNEEBONE is Assistant Professor of Ancient Greek Literature at the University of Nottingham. She has published widely on Greek literature of the Roman imperial period, with a particular focus on later Greek epic poetry.

MARKÉTA KULHÁNKOVÁ works as researcher at the Czech Academy of Sciences and Associate Professor at Masaryk University in Brno, Czech Republic. Her research focuses mainly on Byzantine narrative, both in verse and in prose, both hagiography and secular genres. She is also interested in the reception of Byzantium in modern culture and translates Byzantine and modern Greek literature into Czech.

## LIST OF CONTRIBUTORS

PAULINE A. LEVEN is Professor of Classics and (by courtesy) of Music at Yale University. She is the author of *The Many-Headed Muse: Tradition and Innovation in Late Classical Greek Lyric Poetry* (Cambridge University Press, 2014), of *Music and Metamorphosis in Graeco-Roman Thought* (Cambridge University Press, 2021), and articles on various aspects of ancient Greek poetry, musical culture and poetics. She is currently working on a monograph entitled *Reading Greek Poetry in the Anthropocene*, in which she investigates the kind of claims that lyric poetry (from archaic song to imperial epigrams) makes about the experience of the self's relationships with the non-human world (especially rocks, water, trees and light).

ALEXANDER C. LONEY is Associate Professor of Classical Languages at Wheaton College. Previously, he was an American Council of Learned Societies New Faculty Fellow in Classics and a fellow of the Whitney Humanities Center at Yale University. He is the author of *The Ethics of Revenge and the Meanings of the Odyssey* (2019) and co-editor (with S. Scully) of *The Oxford Handbook of Hesiod* (2018). He has also published articles on Homer, Hesiod, Greek lyric poetry and tragedy. Currently he is working on nostalgia and ethical thought in archaic Greek poetry.

JACKIE MURRAY is Associate Professor of Classics at the State University at Buffalo. Her research areas are Hellenistic and Latin poetry, race and ethnicity in antiquity, and Black classicisms, especially the reception of classics in African American and Afro-Caribbean literature. Her monograph *Neikos: Apollonius' Argonautica and the Poetics of Controversy* is under contract with Harvard University Press, she has another book project with Yale University Press, *Race in Greek and Roman Epic*. With Rebecca Futo Kennedy, Jackie is writing a textbook *Understanding Race in Antiquity*, and with David Kaufman, *The Idea and Image of Slavery in Plato's Dialogues*. She is editing *The Cambridge Companion to Race and Classics* with Elena Giusti and Rosa Andújar.

TOM PHILLIPS is Senior Lecturer in Classical Literature at the University of Manchester. His publications include *Pindar's Library: Performance Poetry and Material Texts* (2016), *Untimely Epic: Apollonius Rhodius' Argonautica* (2020) and articles on Greek and Latin lyric poetry.

KAROLINA SEKITA is Senior Lecturer in Classics at the University of Tel Aviv, Israel. Her research interests lie in ancient Greek religion, and its interactions with the Mediterranean cultures, currently concerning ideas about death. She is the author of *Hades: The God of the Dead and His Cult in Archaic and Classical Greece* (forthcoming).

STEVEN D. SMITH is Professor of Classics and Comparative Literature at Hofstra University. He is the author of three books: *Greek Identity and the Athenian Past in*

## LIST OF CONTRIBUTORS

*Chariton: The Romance of Empire* (2007), *Man and Animal in Severan Rome: The Literary Imagination of Claudius Aelianus* (Cambridge University Press, 2014) and *Greek Epigram and Byzantine Culture: Gender, Desire, and Denial in the Age of Justinian* (Cambridge University Press, 2019).

HENRY SPELMAN teaches at the University of Cambridge. He is the author of *Pindar and the Poetics of Permanence* (2018) and articles on Greek literature as well as a co-editor of *Writing Literary History in the Greek and Roman World* and *Texts and Intertexts in Archaic and Classical Greece*, both forthcoming with Cambridge University Press.

CHRISTOS C. TSAGALIS is Professor of Ancient Greek Literature at the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki and a member of the Academia Europaea. He is the author most recently of *Early Greek Epic Fragments II: Kreophylos and Peisandros* (2022) and *Early Greek Epic: Language, Interpretation, Performance* (2023), and editor of *Heracles in Early Greek Epic* (2024).

BERENICE VERHELST is Assistant Professor of Ancient Greek at the University of Amsterdam. She specialises in late antiquity and more specifically the Greek epics of Nonnus of Panopolis and the epyllia and ecphrastic poems of the so-called Nonnian poets. Her latest work focuses on the *Homerocentones*. She works with the methods and terminology of narratology, genre studies and ancient rhetoric. As one of the coordinators of the DICES project ([www.dices.uni-rostock.de](http://www.dices.uni-rostock.de)) she is particularly interested in combining narratology and digital methods to quantify the striking differences regarding style and structure of late antique (secular and Christian) versus archaic and classical epic poetry.

TIM WHITMARSH is Regius Professor of Greek at the University of Cambridge, and a Fellow of Trinity College. A specialist in the literature, culture and religion of ancient Greece, he is the author of ten books, including *Battling the Gods: Atheism in the Ancient World* (2015) and *Dirty Love: The Genealogy of the Ancient Greek Novel* (2018), and over a hundred academic articles. He is Editor-in-Chief of the *Oxford Classical Dictionary* (5th edition). He has contributed frequently to newspapers such as the *Guardian*, the *Times Literary Supplement* and the *London Review of Books*, as well as to BBC radio and TV.

MARTIN M. WINKLER is Distinguished University Professor and Professor of Classics at George Mason University in Virginia. He has written and edited several books on Roman literature, the classical tradition and antiquity in the cinema and has published well over a hundred articles, book chapters, reviews, notes, etc. His most recent book is *Classical Antiquity and the Cinematic Imagination* (Cambridge University Press, 2024). He is an honorary member of the *Sociedade Brasileira de Retórica*.

## PREFACE

Producing a volume on a topic as vast and wild as Greek epic has been hard work, of the best and most rewarding kind. I am extremely grateful to Michael Sharp at Cambridge University Press for inviting me to edit this volume, and for his incisive advice and encouragement throughout the process. My gratitude also goes to Katie Idle, Reshma Venkatachalapathy, Damian Love and Pam Scholefield and to the anonymous readers for the press. Joshua Werrett deserves special thanks for his thorough and meticulous work as my research assistant, as do Oliver Parkes, Max Cheung, Gabrielle Russo, Panayiotis Christoforou and Markéta Kulhánková for their contributions to the accompanying resources. Berenice Verhelst generously allowed her previously published summary of the *Dionysiaca* to feature as a part of this volume, and I am very thankful to her for her willingness to share this impressive miniaturisation of the gargantuan Nonnus.

I benefited deeply from the insights and expertise of many colleagues and friends, including and especially those whose chapters are found within these pages. Tom Phillips, Pauline LeVen and (as ever) Tim Whitmarsh went above and beyond the contributors' call of duty and offered invaluable help, feedback and collaboration at so many stages of the project. I am fortunate to have completed this research and editorial work within the two generous and supportive Oxford institutions to which I am proud to belong: the Faculty of Classics and St John's College. I owe great thanks to my Lit. Hum. students from 2020 to 2024 for their stimulating ideas about ancient epic and their enthusiasm for this volume.

The Companion is dedicated to two of my own university teachers, Franco Basso and Rosanna Omitowaju, who first inspired my learning of Greek and love of ancient literature, and from whom I continue to learn so much.

\* \* \*

## PREFACE

Abbreviations of ancient works generally follow those in the *Oxford Classical Dictionary* (fourth edition). Abbreviations not included in the *OCD* are listed in the individual chapters. Whilst aiming for a certain level of consistency throughout the volume, I have also allowed contributors their preferences in certain stylistic matters, namely the presentation of ancient languages, names and transliterations. Editions of ancient texts are indicated in the footnotes of the chapters. All translations are the authors' own unless otherwise indicated.