

**ON QUINTUS
SMYRNAEUS AND
THE "HOMER" OF
THE TRAGIC POET**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649247561

On Quintus Smyrnaeus and the "Homer" of the Tragic Poet by F. A. Paley

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Cover @ 2017

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ON

QUINTUS SMYRNAEUS

AND *Harro Colcl 56*

THE "HOMER" OF THE TRAGIC POETS.

Frederick Atthorpe
BY
F. A. PALEY, M.A.

CLASSICAL EXAMINER IN THE UNIVERSITY OF LONDON,
PROFESSOR OF CLASSICAL LITERATURE IN THE UNIVERSITY COLLEGE,
KENSINGTON.

Cambridge, Eng.

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[For Private Distribution.]

1876.

QUINTUS SMYRNAEUS
AND THE LOST EPICS OF THE CYCLUS.

THE epic poem on the *Troica*, in fourteen *λόγοι* or narrations, attributed to one Quintus (*Κόϊντος*) of Smyrna, appears to be a composition of greater literary interest and importance, if not of somewhat higher poetic merit, than has commonly been supposed. It is an example of a work that has been not merely eclipsed but well nigh extinguished by the greater effulgence of the Homer that has been traditionally received and acknowledged as such. The title of the poem, *τὰ μεθ' Ὀμηρον*, indicates that the subject is continued from the death and funeral of Hector, with which the Iliad concludes. It comprehends, in a word, a considerable portion of those epics on the capture of Troy and the events subsequent to it, which were, from whatever cause, much more familiar to, or at all events much more made use of by the tragic poets and vase-painters in the age of Pericles than the Homer whom we have been taught to venerate as the real originator of this branch of Grecian literature. Of the author, Quintus, nothing whatever is known from external sources, and scarcely anything from internal evidence. He himself tells us (xii. 308-13) that the Muses inspired him to sing, while yet a beardless youth tending his flocks on the plain of Smyrna, near the Hermus. From the fact that

a MS. of the *Posthomerica* of Quintus was first found by Cardinal Bessarion at the Monastery of St. Nicholas at Otranto in Calabria, the *sobriquet* of "Quintus Calaber" has been commonly assigned as the name of the poet. But there is no reason to think that he belonged to any city in Magna Graecia. That he was a Roman *civis* or *libertus* or *cliens* seems probable from the nature of the name *Quintus*. It has been rather ingeniously suggested* that, as Q. Ennius himself was "Calabris in montibus ortus," and was said to have dreamed (Pers. Sat. vi. 11) that he was "Maconides quintus pavone ex Pythagorae," "the fifth in transmigration from the person of Homer," so this title *Quintus* may contain some allusion to the profession of a Homerid. The date is placed, by conjecture founded on the style and on some metrical characteristics (though I myself attribute no great weight to them), as late as the fourth or even the fifth century after the Christian era. The statement about his being visited by the Muses when a shepherd boy is too closely like that in Hesiod's Theogony (22),

αἶ νύ ποθ' Ἡσίοδον καλὴν ἐδίδαξαν αἰοῖδην,
ἄρνας ποιμαίνονθ' Ἑλικῶνος ἰπὸ ζαθέοιο,

to be deserving of credence. It is more likely that it was intended to conceal the real author, just as Persius in his Prologue represents himself as *semipraganna*. He may have intended to claim originality for much older poems which in fact he only arranged, epitomised, or compiled.

* See Koehly, *Præf.* p. x. (ed. Teubner, 1853), who does not agree with this view. From an inscription said to have been found at Naples, and given in Corp. Inscr. Græc., No. 5815, the real name of the writer has been supposed to be *Alcibiades*.

But whoever the poet was, and wherever he lived, it is certain that he has handed down to us—how far altered or re-arranged we cannot positively say*—the very poems which Virgil and Propertius repeatedly translate, and which were even known, as I shall be able to demonstrate, four centuries earlier, to Sophocles and Euripides, and probably even to Aeschylus and Pindar.

I very much fear that this is a question in which few take any interest. Nevertheless, it is well worthy of careful consideration. Some theory is necessary to account for these apparently secondary poems having at one time, and that *the best period of Grecian literature*, enjoyed a reputation, as they certainly seem to have done, greater than "Homer" himself. If Homer was always the *θεῖος Ὀμηρος*, how is it that he so rarely comes before us in any writings before the time of Plato? That "Homer" is only a name, round which different groupings of epic poetry centered, none of them really older than the writing or literary age, *i.e.* later than the Persian wars, though all of them made up from very old materials, is the position which I defend as, on the whole, the most probable one. My object now is to give some direct proofs that a large proportion of this Homeric *farrago*, so to say, has been preserved by Quintus, and that the tragics were perfectly familiar with many of the details that he has recorded. And I cannot think this evidence unimportant to the solution of the great enigma of the date of our texts.

* The very fact of materials undoubtedly old being thus "cooked" and modernised at a late period at once confirms and illustrates my position with respect to "our Homer," which I take in like manner to be a not very early recension and re-adaptation of old materials.

It seems then in every way probable that this Quintus collected or compiled a considerable portion of the ancient poems which had been included in the Epic Cyclus, and which, though they had existed in writing from, at least, the times of the Alexandrine critics, were dropping out of notice, eclipsed by the "Homer" that had attained such especial pre-eminence in the age of Plato.

That Quintus was a literary Roman, or even an adopted Greek, or a grammarian who wrote for some learned Roman *patronus*, might not unfairly be inferred from his eulogy in xiii. 336, of the city on the Tiber destined to be founded by Aeneas:

τὸν γὰρ θέσφατόν ἐστι θεῶν ἔρικυδέι βουλῇ
 Θύμβριν ἐπ' εὐρυρέθρον ἀπὸ Ξάνθοιο μολόντα
 τευξέμεν ἱερὸν ἄστν καὶ ἐσσομένοισιν ἀγητὸν
 ἀνθρώποις.

But, if he really belonged to Smyrna, as appears probable, he perhaps was, in his earlier career, one of a school of *Ὀμηρίδαι*, or rhapsodists, whom we know to have existed in Plato's time (Ion, p. 530: Symp., p. 252), and who may have continued the practice and the profession till quite a late period.

The Roman libraries however had Greek books enough* to supply authentic copies of the Alexandrine Cyclus to any who took interest enough in a less popular kind of literature, even as late, perhaps, as the time commonly assigned to Quintus. The very large use made of these poems

* Juv. Sat. iii. 208, "Jamque vetus Græcos servabat cista libellos." The fact is well known from Cicero's and Pliny's letters, as well as from discoveries at Herculaneum. But the libraries of Alexandria and Pergamus were of course accessible.

by Virgil, Ovid, and Propertius, and to some extent by Horace, shows that they enjoyed a high degree of popularity in the Augustan age. I cannot doubt then, from considering all the bearings of the question, that this Quintus Smyrnaeus has laboured under a somewhat unjust and unfortunate depreciation. We have all so hugged the notion, fostered as it has been by the great names of Gladstone and Grote, that we possess the genuine Homer of B.C. 850, that we have despised, as feeble imitations, all poems that we have supposed to have been written in later times as *supplements* to the Iliad and the Odyssey: the fact being, that those very epics are themselves largely indebted to the poems which the tragics knew and so extensively used.

I purposely made my own careful perusals (not once, but several times) of the work of Quintus, before I referred to literary accounts, not only of the author's history, if known, but of his general merits as a poet. And I must say I was somewhat surprised at the disparaging verdict by which he is almost put out of the category, so to say, of poets deserving any consideration at all.* The following is from K. O. Müller's and Donaldson's *History of Grecian Literature* (vol. iii. p. 365).

"He has drawn up from the best authorities a continuation of Homer's Iliad down to the capture of Troy and the departure of the Greeks. In this painstaking work Quintus has earned the praise of careful versification, and of a certain amount of ingenuity in his similes. But

* The best and fullest account of the poems of Quintus, and of his relation to the epics of the Cyclops, is G. Bernhardt's *Grundriss der Griechischen Litteratur*, vol. ii., p. 286 seqq.

he has no epic genius; he cannot paint characters; and his gods and heroes are only so many puppets, which he sets in motion by very visible strings. And when he aims at it with the strongest effort, he almost becomes ludicrous (!). Thus, when Oenone, after refusing to heal the wound of Paris, performs upon herself the sacrifice of the Suttée out of regret for his death, a sagacious nymph standing by indulges in the reflexion that Paris must have been a madman to neglect such a faithful wife for a worthless dame like Helen" (x. 471).*

And this is all the account that is given, in a professed History of the Literature of Ancient Greece, of the works of a poet who has, I shrewdly suspect, transmitted to us much more of the "Homer" of the Periclean age than is contained in the Iliad and the Odyssey together. In Col. Mure's *History of Greek Literature* Q. Smyrnaeus is omitted altogether.

In Dr. Smith's larger *Dictionary of Greek and Roman Biography* the fact is indeed recognised, that much of the Cyclic poems is embodied in Quintus; but the great literary importance of it is overlooked from the assumption that these poems were in themselves merely enlargements or continuations of the Iliad. "In phraseology, similes, and other technicalities, Quintus closely copied Homer. The materials for his poem he found in the works of the earlier poets of the Epic Cycle. There can be little doubt that the work of Quintus Smyrnaeus is *nothing more than an*

* This criticism is shallow and unfair. The deep love of Oenone for Paris, beautifully described in Ovid's *Epistle Oenone Paridi*, explains all his conduct and the self-sacrifice to unrequited love. The remark of the pitying nymph is most natural and most pathetic. "Why ever did Paris desert so devoted a wife as Oenone for the gay but heartless Helen?"