

REVIEW–DISCUSSION  
ENNIUS AND THE ARCHITECTURE  
OF THE *ANNALES*

Jackie Elliott, *Ennius and the Architecture of the Annales*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013. Pp. xiv + 590. Hardcover, £75.00 / \$110.00. ISBN 978-1-107-02748-0.

**E**lliott's book is a complicated and richly rewarding study, which will be many things to many people. To begin with what it is not: it is not an introduction to Ennius, it is not a new critical edition of the fragments of the *Annales*, and it is not for the faint of heart. What it is, however, is an original, stimulating, densely but often beautifully argued reappraisal of a crucially important poem. Or rather—of the influence and reception of that poem, and the ways in which its reception, from the Late Republic to the twentieth century, has made and unmade the text.

The book itself measures six hundred pages from cover to cover, but Elliott's organisation makes the volume easy to approach in different pieces for different purposes. Each of the five chapters has a clear introduction and summarising conclusion, and each builds upon the other (though Chapters 2 and 3 are parallel studies). What follows is intended (in part) as an aid to the unfortunate scenario that many readers may not be able to begin at the beginning and read straight through to the end. Some more general comments, focusing upon matters historical and historiographic, follow summaries of each chapter.

Elliott begins with an Introduction (1–17), in which she accomplishes several things; whether you intend to read every page or to skip to a particular chapter, begin here (and read also the Epilogue, 295–7, on which more below). She opens with a clear statement of the book's purpose, which is to analyse how the facts of transmission and the decisions of past editors together inform our access to Ennius' *Annales*. In essence, what Elliott will do is replace the authority of the latter (principally, though not exclusively, Otto Skutsch) with that of the former, rearranging the fragments by date of the quoting author (a thing we generally do know) instead of by presumed location within the chronological frame of the poem (a thing which, as Elliott emphasises, we cannot know; Chapter 1 explores that question at greater length). The result is an Ennius who benefits from the field's growing interest in the methodologies of working with fragments (see esp. 5 n. 12; 7 n. 16), and whose complicated relationships with Homer and Vergil, and with prose history and social performance, appear rather differently as a result.

Chapter 1, ‘Ennius and the annalistic tradition at Rome’ (18–74), explores the evidence for and the implications of the title *Annales*. In keeping with her reorganisation of the fragments by quoting source, Elliott suggests that the poem was not necessarily structured in the year-by-year format that might be implied by its title. Instead, she proposes that ‘the relevance of the poem’s title lies ... in its probable allusion to the work’s public function at Rome’ (22). The word *Annales*, she argues, announces a particularly ‘Romanocentric’ function for the poem and places it within a larger cultural conversation about the past—and control over the past—at Rome.

Elliott subjects several common assumptions to critical scrutiny, beginning with the relationship between Ennius’ *Annales* and the (terminally vexed, though see now J. Rich in *FRHist*) *Annales Maximi* (23–30). Though she is diplomatic in her phrasing, this short analysis demonstrates that, at the least, one should not claim the influence of either one as grounds for assertions about the other. At the risk of digressing, I do not see an overwhelming similarity between Gellius’ quotation of Cato (*quotiens lunae aut solis lumine caligo aut quid obstitit*, Gell. 2.28.6 = *FRHist* 5 F 80) and Cicero’s quotation of Ennius (*nonis Iunis soli luna obstitit et nox*, Cic. *Rep.* 1.25 = *Ann.* 153), the assertion of which has a lengthy pedigree. We find the requisite three words in common, but there are limited alternatives when one seeks to describe an eclipse in Latin.<sup>1</sup> If one suspends belief in the interconnection of Ennius’ *Annales* and the *Annales Maximi*, the use of these lines as both evidence and product of that interconnection invites (re-)justification.

Another assumption that Elliott questions is the connection between Ennius’ epic poem and Latin ‘annalistic’ historiography (30–8). This assumption has given us three useful things to which, it may be, we are not entitled: a sense of Ennius’ project as historical in the Romans’ own sense of that term; a basis for assertions about the work’s form and content, onto which select fragments may be mapped and which they may then be seen to confirm; and, implicitly, a justification for assertions about prose *annales*. Elliott’s discussion in this section is more concerned with the Romans’ reception of (the idea of) *annales* than with the content of works to which that title is sometimes attached by quoting authors, and as such it does more to dispel scholarly misconceptions than it does to explain the significance of Ennius’ title (a subject to which she will turn in more detail in Chapters 4 and 5). Elliott explores those modern ideas before

<sup>1</sup> Thus also Apuleius (*de deo Socr.* 1): *luna radios solis obstiti uel aduersi usurpat*; cf. Lucr. 5.751–7; Oros. 7.4.15. Pliny (*HN* 2.51–6) offers the range of alternative formulations (favouring *defectus*, the term also preferred by Lucretius and Vergil). I do not mean here to deny the possibility that Ennius and Cato together reflect a phrase employed by the *Annales Maximi*, but the recurrence of the relevant terms in Vitruvius’ discussion of the preservative qualities of Punic wax might give us pause (7.4: *ita obstans cerae punicae lorica non patitur nec lunae splendorem nec solis radios lambendo eripere his politionibus colorem*).

returning to the issue of Ennius' relationship with Roman historical traditions in terms of consular dating and other aspects of the arrangement of material. She then offers, by way of conclusion, the compromise that 'the title pre-conditioned the audience to expect a record of events that time had already hallowed' while acknowledging that this idea 'is no more surely founded' than some other interpretations.<sup>2</sup>

Elliott's discussion of consular dating illustrates the method she will use for several of the chapters that follow: (at times) densely packed quotations from the *Annales* (and other texts; English translations follow the Latin when a fragment is first presented, and usually thereafter as well), amply footnoted contextualisation, close examination of relevant matters from the level of a single word to that of an overarching scholarly generalisation, the deconstruction (through multiple iterations of this assessing of the evidence) of received wisdom on the *Annales*, and the suggestion of one or more alternatives proposed in terms that stimulate further discussion and which are often capped by a satisfyingly quotable observation. This method takes the reader, for example, from the fact that 'the claim that Ennius used the dating mechanism associated with the priestly chronicle ... and organised time in a fashion analogous to the chronicle rests on four surviving fragments equivalent to 5 lines' (52) to the suggestion that 'the presentation of the events of the second half of the third century and of the beginning of the second was—surprisingly and daringly—of events of a distant, mythical past' (58) and thence to the conclusion that the fragments used as evidence for the structure of the *Annales* 'give us no stricter sense of chronological progression through the narrative than we would naturally assume, simply on the basis of the fact that the work is a product of the ancient world rather than of post-modern literature' (69). You do not have to agree with any single point of Elliott's analysis to profit from it,<sup>3</sup> but you do have to read every word.

Chapter 2, 'The Vergiliocentric sources and the question of the evidence: Ennius and the epic tradition of Greece and Rome' (75–134), develops one of Elliott's most important contributions—the illumination, on the one hand, of just how 'epic' Ennius' epic poem is, and on the other, of how much our apprehension of Ennius as a mediator between Homer and Vergil is the product of his 'Vergiliocentric' excerptors, and particularly Macrobius (a problem that receives another full-scale evaluation in Nora Goldschmidt's *Shaggy Crowns*,

<sup>2</sup> Thus Elliott's approach may be fruitfully juxtaposed with (e.g.) John Rich's comments in *FRHist* (and forthcoming, in greater detail), reassessing what we have been accustomed to call 'the annalistic tradition.'

<sup>3</sup> To give one small example, the assertion that 'it is far from evident' that *Ann.* 324 (*Graecia Sulpicio sorti data, Gallia Cottae*) is a 'date-marker' (53) is unnecessarily skeptical; while questions of the line's authorship and the metrical preference for *Gallia* instead of *Italia* are important, the line points rather clearly to the year 200 BCE.

along quite different lines to those pursued by Elliott).<sup>4</sup> Since the approximately 80% of Ennian fragments that do *not* derive from commentators on Vergil do not display the same overt Homeric saturation as those that do, Elliott offers the conclusion that ‘to the extent that the *Annales* today seem to the modern reader crucial to the epic tradition, they are the creation of Vergil and of the Vergiliocentric sources’ (134). In short, Ennius’ ‘epic-ness’ is a problem within his interpretation, not a solution. She returns to this issue in Chapter 4.

Chapter 3, ‘The pre-Vergilian sources’ (135–97), moves the reader back from the (largely) late-antique source-texts of the preceding chapter, to the Ennius of Varro, the *ad Herennium*, the *Bellum Hispaniense*, and, most notably, Cicero. Cicero’s Ennius emerges here as an individual and an author; the contrast with other quoting authorities in Elliott’s analysis is striking, and brings home the extent to which excerptors’ pragmatic harvesting of words and phrases have flattened and (for lack of a better term) ‘text-ified’ the poem. Elliott has many interesting things to say on Cicero’s use of the past in a variety of speeches and philosophical and rhetorical works (152–95), and this is one of the strongest ‘stand-alone’ sections of the book. She explores the complexities and contradictions of Cicero’s use of Ennius, drawing valuable attention to factors such as the motivations of different speakers within the dialogues. These characters quote the master poet for reasons very much ‘their’ own and, at times, it seems that Cicero has them misrepresent or problematise the lines they quote. Thus in his use in the *Brutus* of Ennius’ *suaviloquente ore Cethegus* (*Ann.* 304–5), Cicero makes the poem stand in for the analytic history of early Roman oratory which he would have liked to be able to cite: ‘with no such account available, he turns to the work that suggests the information that he would like and treats it *as if it were of the type* he requires’ (159, emphasis mine).

As Elliott herself observes in one of many footnote gems, ‘Cicero’s overt presentation diverts attention from questions that our evidence might allow us to answer by promoting debate of the unanswerable’ (167 n. 89).<sup>5</sup> Thus, we

<sup>4</sup> N. Goldschmidt’s *Shaggy Crowns: Ennius’ Annales and Virgil’s Aeneid* (Oxford, 2013). Since Elliott focuses upon the prose excerptors of the *Annales* (and, explicitly, not its reflection in later poets), these two books work together to illuminate the poem’s cultural and literary *Nachleben*. In another way, though, their projects are opposed (and this, also, makes them useful to read together): Goldschmidt concludes that Vergil’s epic so thoroughly ‘confuses and inverts’ Ennius’ representation of the Roman past as to render impossible an unmediated approach to at least some aspects of the *Annales* (192). By this reading, the Vergiliocentrics—beginning with Vergil himself—did not so much preserve their Ennian patrimony as, to paraphrase Sergio Casali (and Sigmund Freud), ‘kill’ it.

<sup>5</sup> It is worth mentioning in this context Jay Fisher’s *The Annals of Quintus Ennius and the Italic Tradition* (Baltimore, 2014), which accords well with this dictum. Fisher considers the relationships among Ennius’ epic phrasing and Ennius’ own source-texts, broadly defined as civic and ritual ‘collocations’ active in the wider linguistic and cultural landscapes of Ennius’ Italy. His analyses complicate received readings, as with his discussion of *pedibus*

should perhaps spend less time on the question of the organisation of the *Annales*, and more on the hints that Ennius pioneered techniques that loom large in later Roman historical writing. These include his building a larger narrative arc from the episodic and the exemplary, and the possibility that he had his own ‘Alexander Digression’, only hinted at through a supralinear quotation on a manuscript of Orosius (and thus beautifully encapsulating the sheer scale of what we do not have from this poem; 196–7, on *Ann.* 213).

Chapter 4, ‘The *Annales* as historiography: Ennius and the invention of the Roman past’ (198–232), unites the arguments in Chapters 2 and 3 with a larger payoff for readings of the *Annales*. Elliott begins with the problematic antithesis that past scholarship has seen between ‘Homerising’ and historicising Ennius. Her analysis of the impact quoting authors’ own motives have had on our apprehension of the poem allows her to move beyond this dichotomy—that is, there is nothing to explain. ‘Ennius’ hybridisation of the contents and methods of local Roman or annalistic historiography and the formal features of Homeric epic’ was precisely the point, and the (or a) great contribution of his poem to the Romans’ emerging historical worldview. The chapter concludes with five brief close readings, a structural move which may initially seem jarring, but which Elliott uses to good effect in order to illustrate the benefits of reading even the ‘historical’ fragments through a Homeric lens (Ap. Claudius Caecus as Hecuba (220–2) shows both how something startling can be very neat to think with and also how, if one wishes to posit an intertextual echo, one must be prepared to pursue its implications).

With the probably unnecessary restatement of how much I have gained from reading this book, Chapter 4 raised more questions for me than it answered. Elliott’s assertion of a ‘strong relationship between the *Annales* and Roman prose historiography’ (212) is certainly correct, but I did not need convincing on that point. Those less open to the idea may need (I imagine) to see it developed across more intermediaries than Claudius Quadrigarius and Livy (the latter of which represents Elliott’s target text in this chapter). She does refer to the fragmentary historians of the second century at various other places, but their absence here weakens an argument that their presence could have strengthened. In the opening paragraph of Chapter 3, Elliott had stated that ‘there is no second century evidence for what the poem meant, or how it

*pulsatis* and the ways that phrase points to an Italic tradition in an opening line usually read as aggressively Homerising (*Ann.* 1; Fisher (2014) 29–30). They also create surprising juxtapositions; taking *accipe daque* with reference to *foedus feri* yields a Pyrrhus who inadvertently surrenders to the Romans when he so generously returns prisoners without ransom (*Ann.* 32, 183–91; Fisher (2014) 92–106). His method complements Elliott’s project; insofar as Fisher’s trade is in phrases, our fragmentary access to the *Annales* is less a problem than it is for studies concerned with its larger structure or ideology. The extent to which Ennius’ poetic language is invested in his own local contexts is thus among the sorts of questions to which our scant evidence allows us to speak.

was received' (135), but one could make a good case for the heroic tribune of Cato's *Origines* (5 F 76) as an engagement with Ennius' Histrian-fighting tribune (*Ann.* 391–8); if Elliott is correct that 'Ennius' tribune mattered [not because of his "real" historical identity, but] because, as the poet made him, he instantiated Roman potential for stepping into Greece's shoes' (228), then Cato's tribune reads as a response—as part of a larger conversation about honour and commemoration that drove the production of literature in second-century Rome.

To be fair, that is not the book that Elliott was writing, and her emphasis on Livy's debt to Ennius (as she has foreshadowed in several important articles) is contribution enough. Indeed, we could go further—to Elliott's reading of Livy's use of *operae pretium* in his preface (215–17), we might add that his phrase *bonis ominibus uotisque et precationibus* finds an echo in Horace (*Carm.* 4.5.13: *uotis ominibusque et precibus*); commentators have suggested a common source in Ennius. Thus the interrelation of poetic and prose historiographies at Rome certainly was, as Elliott suggests, complicated and crucially important: we may rarely be able to see the connections, but that does not mean we should not look for them.

Chapter 5, '*Imperium sine fine: the Annales and universal history*' (233–94), pursues this idea further. Elliott begins with the modest proposal that we consider there to be a 'useful analogy' between the *Annales* and the concept of universal history (233). Her ultimate conclusions are dramatic, though: the *Annales* was not, as it is sometimes read, 'narrowly nationalistic' (280); it pioneered a 'Roman universalism' in which phenomena such as religious syncretism should be recognised as radical, and challenging, acts; and, it is (at least partly) responsible for subsequent Romans' idea of their city as the centre of the cosmos. In essence, Ennius' epic was well suited to compel the universe of the past into the frames of Roman time and space. This is both because the poem perforce inscribed events at the (expanding) edges of the empire within Latin *annales*, and also because his poetic genre allowed him to take over *literary* history: as Olympian Jove becomes Jupiter Optimus Maximus and the Trojan War is co-opted as Roman history, so Ennius 'universalised' Homeric styles and values and thereby appropriated them for Rome. At no one stage is Ennius unique (and in this chapter Elliott is quick to point to his predecessors and near-contemporaries), but the overall scope and impact of his project generated something new.

From a literary perspective, this chapter is fascinating, and Elliott raises important new ideas about the relationship between Ennius and Polybius (for example) and about the broader and more revolutionary ways in which we should read the *Annales* in the context of Rome's emergent second-century imperialism. It is in this last area, however, that my sense of the desiderata of the preceding chapter became most acute. At several places (e.g. 240 n. 31; 248–

52), the absence of references to scholarship on the second century at Rome—in terms of its politics, its wars, its problematic internal shifts—will necessarily make this book less convincing for those on the ‘historical’ side of things.<sup>6</sup> This may be simply because they (I should perhaps say ‘we’) are not its (main) intended audience, an impression at times furthered by the selection of bibliography. Elliott states that her ‘primary objective remains to make sense of the literary legacy of the *Annales*, especially as it pertains to Roman historiography’ (234). Her magisterial study certainly accomplishes that goal, but it is because of the great potential of these insights for Roman cultural and political history that the isolation of Elliott’s Ennius from his external context (as opposed to the contexts he wrote for himself) is worth remarking. If there is one quibble that this reviewer might be permitted here, it is that—as timely, and as exciting, as this work is—it is situated somewhat outside other important, and current, conversations on second-century commemorative genres more broadly construed.<sup>7</sup>

Elliott’s succinct Epilogue (295–7) makes clear why she made the choices that she did, however, with an eloquence that I will not insult by paraphrase (296):

The enduring frustration of working with fragmentary texts, perhaps too obvious to need stating, is of not being able to see around the corner, not being able to see what the fragments fail to show us. One consequence of this is that, in reconstructing fragments, use of the imagination is not an avoidable temptation but a necessity—the imagination,

<sup>6</sup> This impression is furthered by the comment at 15 n. 34, that ‘the intellectual origins of much of this work [i.e. previous studies of Ennius in context] lie in the scholarship of E. Flaig, K.-J. Hölkeskamp, M. Jehne and J. Rüpke’. The first three scholars named do not appear in the bibliography, and they, along with (e.g.) Hans Beck, Wolfgang Blösel, Harriet Flower, and Uwe Walter could offer support to the claims set forth in the final chapters. It is not my intention here to point to specific lacunae in the bibliography; we all have our favourite references, and their canonisation is not always helpful. That said, literature and history are as inseparable at Rome as religion and politics, and a few more names on the ‘history’ side would have been welcome insofar as issues of self-representation and historical memory at Rome are relevant to Elliott’s theses.

<sup>7</sup> For example, it would be particularly interesting to situate Elliott’s Ennius in relationship to the various other forms of textual and visual commemoration that proliferated at his time of writing; to choose three examples, Gesine Manuwald, Peter Kruschwitz, and Anna Clark have published relevant studies on Roman theatre, verse inscriptions, and the articulation of the divine in both monumental and historical representations. Enrica Sciarrino’s *Cato the Censor and the Beginnings of Latin Prose: From Poetic Translation to Elite Transcription* (Columbus, 2011) appeared too late to figure here (Elliott’s latest reference is 2010); Sciarrino’s work offers a valuable model of literary history as cultural history. It may be that the intersection of these varied approaches points the way towards a new historiographic appreciation of the *Annales*.

albeit governed by awareness of the limits within which the author operated, however we identify and assess them ... Of necessity, we rely on our sense of the history and the function of the text as a whole, about which we are too little informed, in re-imagining any part of it. The resulting circularity is a vice that no reconstruction attempting to make whole sense of a broken text can escape. There is perhaps no remedy to this vice beyond advertisement of it, as an invitation to critical engagement.

The book is well produced and virtually free of typographic infelicities, and its five generous appendices (298–558) offer the reader (1) an overview of the ‘traditional’ arrangement of the fragments; (2) references to the gods; (3.1) a table of fragments for which the quoting authority provides a book number, (3.2) for which there are plausible modern conjectures, and (3.3) for which there is little or no evidence; (4) a quick reference guide for the chronology of quoting authors; and (5) two hundred pages in which Elliott presents the fragments, in chronological order of quoting author, with their context of quotation. These are not translated (for reasons of space if nothing else), but since she provides translations within her main narrative, the lack is not felt here. The bibliography is particularly strong on universal history and in recognising the contributions of earlier (‘before-Skutsch’) twentieth-century scholars. A general index incorporates an *index locorum* and makes beautifully clear, in the entry on ‘Ennius, *Annales*’, Elliott’s striking success at incorporating every single one of his 623 fragments into her realisation of the ‘whole sense of a broken text’.

Elliott’s Ennius is a gift—six hundred lines of poetry from an all-but-mute generation, here newly presented in such a way as to spark the curiosity and to command the respect of the next generation of scholars. We may owe the ‘Vergiliocentrics’ an unpayable debt for their preservation of so much of the *Annales*; Elliott’s exploration of that debt has paradoxically freed the poem from the tyranny of the *Aeneid*.

*Florida State University*

JESSICA H. CLARK  
jhclark@fsu.edu