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The other poet : the ancient reception of Hesiod

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THE OTHER POET
THE ANCIENT RECEPTION OF HESIOD

PROEFSCHRIFT

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Preface

In the summer of 2009 some friends and I climbed Mount Olympus. I had often seen the mountain from one of the villages on the Thessalian plain, a friendly-looking giant with its peak usually hidden in a couple of clouds. When actually on one of its many folds, things are different. The road was long and steep, there was a fierce and cold wind, and the thick mist seriously impeded our sight. Every time we thought the top was near, we saw a more elevated piece of rock protruding from the mist still further away. Nonetheless, after a few hours we reached the Mytikas. When we were about to start our descent, something marvellous happened: the clouds disappeared, the sun broke through and suddenly we could see the entire mountainslope, and the path we had taken.

It appears to me now that writing this dissertation was an experience very much like climbing Olympus. The collection, analysis and especially the presentation of the material turned out to be a challenge of mountain-like proportions. I admit that sometimes I could barely see where I was going, and simply put one foot in front of the other. It has been particularly difficult for me (especially as a self-funded PhD candidate or ‘buiten-promovendus’) to keep a constant pace and still find the time to re-think, re-consider, or even to relax. Fortunately, the right path had been clearly marked, and there were many friends along the way cheering me on, and sharing in my experience. It is only now, when I have reached my goal, that I can clearly see how much I have learned.

Naturally, the journey in itself has been rewarding as well. Hesiod is an immensely interesting author, and we have the privilege of living in an age that is more and more coming round to appreciate him as such. His scope and influence are awesome, and his relationship with Homeric epic is far more dynamic than has often been assumed; I am certain that there is still much to gain from future research in this field. It has been a great pleasure for me to approach ancient epic within the framework of the main tenets of cultural memory studies. Memory wars over culturally important figures from the past are fought out every day, and to attempt to analyse this thoroughly human process in the ancient world has never ceased to intrigue me. Moreover, the occasional inclusion of modern views of Hesiod has shown how truly never-ending the pendulum of imagination and mental construction swings to and fro, from one end to the other.

PREFACE

Climbing Olympus takes two days. This dissertation took slightly less than ten years. I take comfort in the fact that in ancient epic too, difficult things usually take ten years to complete. During this long period, I have been happy to be part of the research school OIKOS. Apart from their support, many friends have helped me: some by letting me work and putting up with my continuous bustling; others by forcing me to relax and leave the book alone for a while. They are very dear to me, and without them I would certainly have lost my sanity somewhere along the way. So thank you Andrea, Daniël, Frans, Hanna, Marja, Marten, Michel, Robbert, Sebastiaan, Susannah, and many others. I feel the deepest gratitude towards my parents, to whom I owe everything, and towards my sister Naomi and brother Edward, who have always loved and supported me. A special thanks goes to the monkeyheads, particularly Mark, for countless reasons. Lastly, I thank Joëlle, for always being there for me, even on the very slopes of Olympus.