Reading Moral Miscellanies[1]

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In 2002, a slim volume called *Schott's Original Miscellany* was published in London and became a sensation.[2] A farrago of literary quotations, popular wisdom, everyday information, curious facts and lists of all sorts, Schott taps into the reading public's love of diverse, superficial knowledge, arranged in a more-or-less orderly fashion. It is rare for a miscellany to become a bestseller, but Schott's success brought to notice a large and flourishing, though little-discussed and somewhat lowly-rated genre of publishing. Miscellanies these days come in all shapes and sizes, from the venerable *Whitaker's Almanack,* which has been publishing useful information about the contemporary world annually since 1868, through recent classics like John Julius Norwich's literary *Christmas Crackers*, to such cheerful aids to modern living as *14,000 Things to be Happy About.*[3] There are sporting miscellanies, gardening miscellanies, humorous miscellanies and moralizing miscellanies with titles like *The Wisdom of the Greeks*.[4]

The miscellany's popularity is no recent phenomenon. From the twelfth to the nineteenth centuries miscellanies were a staple of European, and later American culture. Chiefly religious, moral or literary (with a good deal of overlap between those categories), at first in Latin but increasingly in the vernacular, they dominated education and the culture of educated people. Intellectuals as eminent as Erasmus compiled and circulated them. Literary giants like Swift, Addison, Coleridge and Thoreau had miscellanies published of their prose and verse. Hundreds were produced for use in schools. The rise of the magazine and the newspaper supplement are in some ways an extension of the popularity of the miscellany.[5]

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[1] The first version of this paper was read to a workshop on The Ancient Book at the Institute for Advanced Studies, the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, organized by Prof. Margalit Finkelberg and Prof. Guy Stroumsa in May 2005. I am grateful to the organizers and to the Institute for their hospitality, to the workshop's participants and to Katerina Oikonomopoulou for their helpful comments on that version.

[2] Compiled by Ben Schott (London, 2002). A miscellany is defined by the OED as, 'A mixture, medley ... Separate treatises or studies on a subject collected into one volume; literary compositions of various kinds brought together to form a book'. The informative kind of miscellany represented by Schott or Whitaker is now often thought of as typical, but historically, collections of essays or literary extracts on a theme are much more common.

[3] Compiled by B.A. Kipfer (New York, 1990).

[4] Compiled by M. Thompson (Oxford, 2002).

[5] J. Swift, *Miscellanies in Prose and Verse* (London, 1711), J. Addison, *Miscellanies in Verse and Prose* (London, 1725), S. Taylor Coleridge, *Miscellanies, Aesthetic and Literary* (London, 1885), H.D. Thoreau, *Early Essays and Miscellanies*, edited by J. Moldenhauer and E. Moser with A. Kern (Princeton, 1975). Helpful recent discussions of mediaeval and early modern miscellanies include R. Burton, *Classical Poets in the Florilegium Gallicum* (Frankfurt, 1983); J. Dagenais, *The Ethics of Reading in Manuscript Culture* (Princeton,

It was, and is, a flexible genre. A miscellany may be a collection of smaller works, excerpts from works, snippets of information, stories or maxims; it can be laid out thematically, alphabetically, chronologically, randomly or in any way that takes the compiler's fancy. The contents may be limited — by author, genre or subject matter — as much or as little as you like, though before the twentieth century the riotous diversity of Schott would have been very unusual. Anthologies, encyclopaedias, companions and even commentaries, are therefore more or less closely related to miscellanies, if they are not identical to them.[6]

This brings us to the Graeco-Roman world, which had in common with the twenty-first century that miscellanies were very popular and very little discussed. There is no named ancient genre of miscellany, the nearest perhaps being *satura* (originally a medley of prose and/or verse compiled to be read or performed on stage, and later the genre of satire), which only covers a fraction of works which one can call miscellaneous.[7] Those who compiled what we should call miscellanies gave them a variety of names. Aulus Gellius, for instance, called his miscellany *Attic Nights*, describing it as *commentaria*, 'notes'.[8] Gellius reports (pr. 6-9) no fewer than thirty titles which other compilers had given to works of a similar type, of which the less picturesque include *From My Reading, Problems, Handbook, Memorabilia, Things, Incidentals, Things Educational, Topics, Questions* and *Things Thrown Together*. Among the many metaphorical titles he mentions is *Stromateis*, 'tapestries', which is the title of a lost work by Plutarch and a surviving one by Clement of Alexandria.[9] Others, as diverse as they are inventive, include, *Muses, Woods, Athena's Robe, The Horn of Plenty, Honeycomb, Fields, Bouquet, Fruit Basket, Natural History* and *Universal History*.[10] A little earlier, Valerius Maximus had called his compilation of exemplary stories simply *Memorable Words and Deeds*, while, a little later, Aelian called his historical miscellany *Poikilê Historia* (the nearest

1994); A. Ferry, *Tradition and the Individual Poem. An Inquiry into Anthologies* (Stanford, 2001); À. Moss, *Printed Commonplace Books and the Structuring of Renaissance Thought* (Oxford, 1996); S.G. Nichols and S. Wenzel (eds.), *The Whole Book. Cultural Perspectives on the Mediaeval Miscellany* (Ann Arbor, 1996); R.M. Piccione, 'Forme di trasmissione della letteratura sentenziosa', in M. Funghi (ed.), *Aspetti di Letteratura Gnomica nel Mondo Antico*. vol. 2 (Firenze, 2004), 403-42; E.M. Sanford, 'The uses of Classical Latin authors in the Libri Manuales', *TAPA* 55 (1924), 190-247; B. Taylor, 'Mediaeval proverb collections: the West European tradition', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 55 (1992), 19-35; B. Taylor, M.J. Duffell and C. Burnett (eds.), 'Proverbia Senecae et versus Ebrardi super eadem', *Euphrosyne NS* 26 (1998), 357-78.

6   Miscellanies never claim to be exhaustive, which distinguishes them from e.g. dictionaries. There is no clear dividing line between the miscellany and the anthology, but I follow classical tradition in reserving 'anthology' for collections of epigrams.

7   Ennius is credited with the earliest use of the word *satura*, given to a miscellaneous collection of poems; he may have borrowed the idea from Posidippus' *Soros* (H. Petersmann, 'Der Begriff "satura" und die Entstehung der Gattung', in J. Adamietz [ed.], *Die Römische Satire* [Darmstadt, 1986], 7-21; M. Coffey, *Roman Satire*[2] [Bristol, 1989], 11-18.) The earliest use of the word 'miscellany' is by Politian in his *Miscellanea* of 1489.

8   *Pr.* 3.

9   Plutarch's *Stromateis* is cited by Eusebius, *PE* 1.7.

10   On the prevalence of book titles drawn from the natural world, see K. Coleman (ed.), *Statius: Silvae IV* (Oxford, 1988), xxii-iv.

English comes to doing the adjective justice, is the use Gerard Manley Hopkins makes of the word 'pied').

The ancient miscellany, like its modern counterpart, is properly any collection of shorter pieces or excerpts, arranged to educate or entertain. One wonders whether despite the prestigious names attached to some collections (the Seven Sages, Pythagoras, Cato the Elder, Solomon, Jesus Christ, Menander, Meleager, Plutarch, Pliny, Hippocrates, Clement, Stobaeus) miscellanies may have been felt to be a trifle vulgar. They are, with a few honourable exceptions, regarded as slightly *infra dignitatem* by modern scholars. Literary critics would generally rather read complete poems or works of prose. Philosophers and theologians would rather read dialogues and treatises. Historians would rather read histories or biographies. It is notable that even an author like Plutarch, the focus of so much recent scholarship, attracts far less interest for his miscellaneous works than for his biographies and philosophical essays.

Nevertheless, to judge by the number and diversity surviving, the number not surviving of which we know, and the number of quotations from them and references to them in other literature, miscellanies played a central role in Hellenistic and Roman culture.[11] Examples survive of almost every imaginable kind: historical, natural historical, medical, philosophical, theological, sympotic, poetic, rhetorical, biographical, proverbial and mixed. They survive in manuscript, on papyrus and on stone. They constitute an important stage in the genealogy of literature, picking and preserving the plums of earlier works and providing material for later ones. They may have been the primary or only form in which many people encountered Greek and Latin literature, and they were certainly the form in which many in the Byzantine, Mediaeval and Early Modern worlds would become acquainted with the classics of Greece and Rome.

To tackle the whole range would be a challenge in a monograph, let alone an essay. In what follows, I confine myself to a relatively short period — the early Roman Empire — and focus in particular on miscellanies of 'wisdom' material, many of which claim to be educational or come from an educational environment.[12] Miscellanies are not a new genre in the early Empire, but it happens that few earlier collections survive, except in very fragmentary form on papyrus.[13] 'Wisdom' miscellanies have a number of attractions, apart from coinciding with my own interests in ethics and education. They form a significant body of material, large and diverse but not impossibly so, encompassing proverb and maxim collections such as those of Zenobius, ps.-Diogenianus, ps.-Cato and ps.-Sextus, the fable collections of Babrius and Phaedrus, exemplary stories by Valerius Maximus and proverbs, fables, stories and gnomic sayings on papyrus.[14] Educational

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11 David Stern (*The Anthology in Jewish Literature* [Oxford, 2004], 7) makes a similar point about the anthology in Jewish literature, which he says has been generally neglected as a genre, despite being perhaps the most important genre in early Jewish literature.

12 The word 'wisdom' in this sense is not much used by classical scholars, but in some ways it is preferable to 'ethical material'. The latter could include all kinds of literature but 'wisdom' is used by scholars in adjacent disciplines of the kind of material I am discussing here — fables, stories, proverbs and maxims.

13 This is probably simply because so little literature of any kind survives from the Hellenistic period.

14 Proverbs are distinguished from gnomic sayings by being anonymous; gnomai are quotations from named authors.

examples are especially informative because they were definitely designed to be used (not, as we shall see, an easy assumption to make of all our material), and often by unsophisticated readers. The main difficulty with wisdom miscellanies is that they rarely tell us how they expect to be used. It will be helpful, therefore, to bring in for comparison a range of other material from the same period.

My question is how miscellanies of wisdom material were read. From beginning to end? Thematically, like a modern reference book? By dipping in at random, like Schott's? The answer is not obvious (and it has not been of much interest to classicists), but it is of some significance. Just as it makes a difference to students of Gellius or Athenaeus whether one thinks that their sympotic miscellanies were constructed to be read through, or not, and affects one's view of Valerius Maximus or Aelian whether one thinks they were written simply to be mined for anecdotes, or also to be read in their own right, it makes a difference to one's understanding of popular ethics whether or not readers were expected to read the whole of a proverb or fable collection.

It is easier to imagine some miscellanies being read from start to finish, than others. A series of poems can be a pleasure to read. A string of stories about famous generals may be as interesting as one or two. It is harder to imagine being charmed by a hundred proverbs in succession, or gnomic quotations, or even a hundred fables. I therefore begin with these difficult cases, and what, if anything, we can deduce about the way they were read.

Aside from their repetitive form and tone, the main reason for doubting that proverbs, gnomic quotations, and even fables and exemplary stories, can have been intended to be read in large concentrations, is that each saying or story addresses a different situation. Take, for instance, a sequence of proverbs from Zenobius's collection:

> Don't despise a country orator.
> The withered bramble is the most unbending.
> The god lacks nothing.
> Admetus' song. [An eponym for grief]
> Sing to the myrtle.[15]

Why would anyone want to read strings of proverbs like this? They do not offer the kind of general principles which prepare one for life as a whole; reading them is not like reading the Ten Commandments, which give the essence of a whole ethical code. They are, in fact, miscellaneous; one could read dozens and not meet anything that addresses one's particular situation, and if one did find something relevant, there would be no immediate need to go on reading. Scholars have therefore tended to assume, when they have considered the question at all, that when such moralizing sayings were brought together in a collection, it was not to be read as such.[16]

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[15]   Zen. 1.15-19.

[16]   Valerius Maximus has attracted the most explicit formulations of this view. It is often said (e.g. W.M. Bloomer, *Valerius Maximus and the Rhetoric of the New Nobility* [London, 1992], 12, 16-17) that he intended *Memorable Words and Deeds* as a source book for lawyers and declaimers, to be mined for its anecdotes rather than read in its own right. (C. Skidmore assumes the same of compilations in general — *Practical Ethics for Roman Gentlemen* [Exeter, 1996], 38, 48). This is unlikely. Valerius does not suggest it. Greek and Latin oratory in general make sparing use of *exempla*; the (to scholars, over-influential)

What little we know of the circumstances in which proverbs were collected does not, at least, contradict this view. A number of philosophers, beginning with Aristotle, Clearchus and Chrysippus, collected proverbs for the purpose of studying them, but we do not know whether they circulated their collections as such.[17] The earliest surviving proverb collections, those of Zenobius and ps.-Diogenianus, are both dated approximately to the reign of Hadrian and derive from collections made by scholars in the first century BCE.[18] Perhaps, one might think, such collections were never intended to be read outside libraries and Mouseia, but simply to form the basis for scholarly research, or even to be exhibition pieces, part of the dazzlingly comprehensive collections of the great Hellenistic libraries.[19]

Some positive support comes from the surviving proverb collections themselves. The three largest, those of Zenobius and ps.-Diogenianus, and ps.-Plutarch's *Proverbs of the Alexandrians*, are all arranged alphabetically by initial letter. Each entry provides the proverb (in compressed form, often without articles or verbs), an explanation of its meaning, sometimes an alternative explanation, and sometimes a reference to the use of the proverb or a variant of it in literature. So, for example:

> Plunder of Kinnaros. Callimachus mentioned this in his iambics. Timaeus said that Kinnaros was a Selinuntian brothel-keeper. Having grown very rich from this activity, he said in his lifetime that he was going to dedicate his property to Aphrodite, but when he died he laid out what he had to plunder.
>
> Skyrian start. A proverb about those who are worthless and never make a profit. Because Skyros is so stony and grim.[20]

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exception is Cicero, who uses them equally in letters and philosophical works. J. Chaplin (*Livy's Exemplary History.* [Oxford, 2000], 5-21) corrects the picture somewhat, noting that exempla are discussed by rhetorical theorists but concentrating on their use by historians; R. Mayer ('Roman historical exempla in Seneca', in O. Reverdin and B. Grange [eds.], *Sénèque et la Prose Latine.* Fondation Hardt, *Entretiens* 36 [Geneva, 1991], 141-69:140) refers to the tradition 'both moral and rhetorical' of exempla. Under the principate, exempla are uncommon in speeches but are staples of certain styles of history, biography, sympotic literature, philosophy, novels, essays and letters; the only authors to cite Valerius explicitly in the early empire are not orators. It is probable that Valerius intended his work for all moralists, and it was used in that way. This being so, there is no reason *a priori* to assume that other collections existed only to be mined.

[17]   D.L. 5.26, 7.200.

[18]   Didymus Chalkenterus in Alexandria and Lucillus of Tarrha in Crete (see discussion by O. Crusius and L. Cohn, 'Zur handschriftlichen Überlieferung, Kritik und Quellenkunde der Paroemiographen', *Philologus* 6 [1891-3], 201-324; K. Rupprecht, 'Paroimia', 'Paroimographoi', *RE* 18.3 [1949], cols. 1707-78:1735ff.).

[19]   It is tempting to connect with this idea the tradition that the first collection of Aesop's fables was made by Demetrius of Phalerum, who was also associated with the foundation of the Alexandrian library. Demetrius was also credited by Stobaeus (3.1.172-3) with making the first collection of *apophthegmata* (Sayings of the Seven Sages); unfortunately, both traditions are bogus (see F. Maltomini, 'Sulla trasmissione dei "Detti dei Sette Sapienti"', in Funghi [above, n. 5] 2:1-24).

[20]   Zen. 1.31-32.

These collections are, in effect, scholia to Greek proverbs, not too distantly related to scholia to Homer or other famous authors. The unusual — perhaps unique — thing about them is that their subject is not a great work but a compilation of popular wisdom culled probably from both written and oral sources. This is striking testimony to the importance of proverbs in Greek culture. It also suggests at least one way in which the collections were used. Just as if you wanted an explanation of a word or a line of Homer, you would scroll to the right place in an edition with scholia, if you wanted the explanation of a proverb, you would look it up under its initial letter in one of these collections.

Alphabetical arrangement places limitations on other kinds of use. If you wanted to use Zenobius, for instance, thematically, to look up proverbs about women, you would turn first to the letter gamma for *gyne* (woman). There you would find no proverbs about women in general, though by lexical good fortune you would find three about old women (*graus*). Proverbs about women are scattered through the collection under their names, the names of their husbands or whatever else is the first word of the proverb.[21] Apart from looking up individual proverbs, it is hard to imagine how these collections could be used unless people read right through them.

Did proverb collections, then, exist only to be consulted piecemeal by experts? One more piece of evidence suggests as much: no proverb collection has yet been found on papyrus, though maxims by famous men, gnomic quotations from the poets and many other kinds of wisdom material have. On the other hand, scholia are usually commentaries on existing texts, which would suggest that some non-surviving proverb collections may have circulated and been read simply as compilations. The preface to ps.-Diogenianus provides a shred of evidence in support of this.

> The proverb, they say, is so called from the word *oimos*, ['way' or 'road']: so they are called 'roads'. For men, whatever they found of common utility, wrote it down to be a crowd-leading road on which the majority might find help. They say that the sayings of wise men became known in a similar way, as well as the pronouncements of Pythagoras. (*Centuria P.* 1.1-6)

Apparently, proverbs were written down before they were made subjects of scholarship, just as the maxims of famous men were.[22] If so, perhaps, like maxims, they were, in fact, read in collections.

In support of this view we can adduce the surprising, to contemporary taste, but unquestionable popularity of proverb collections in the early modern world up to the nineteenth century. A collection like Erasmus's *Adagia* was reprinted dozens of times and widely translated into vernacular languages within a few years of being published, and innumerable original compilations preceded and followed it. Of the several hundred mediaeval and modern miscellanies in the Bodleian Library, I sampled about a hundred, including a number of proverb collections, to see how they are arranged and whether they tell us how they expected readers to approach them. They compare closely with their classical forbears, covering a wide range of material and being monothematic or polythematic, thematically arranged, alphabetical or apparently random in order. Like classical miscellanies, unfortunately, they all too often begin without any introduction at

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21   E.g. Akko, Gello, Naera, Polycrates, 'Sillier', 'Lemnian'.
22   Ps.-Diogenianus, unlike many ancient authors, differentiates between proverbs and gnomai.

all, or only a brief one in which the compiler introduces himself without explaining how he expects his book to be used.

An exception is the proverb collection of Robert Bland, published in 1814. Bland, whose proverbs are taken chiefly from Erasmus, prefaces his work as follows:

> Short as this collection may appear [he is apologising for not including more of Erasmus's material], there will be found in it, under various heads, observations applying to all the ordinary occurrences and situations in life ... Should it be urged, that many of the observations are such as would occur to every well educated and sensible man, let those to whom they are superfluous pass them over ... But should they reject them altogether, the work may still have its utility: the young and inexperienced may find in it that information, which those more advanced in life cannot, or ought not to want; it may lead them to consult the books from which the quotations are taken ... No attempt has been made, it will be observed, to arrange the proverbs in classes, or even to place them alphabetically. Their number was found to be too inconsiderable for classification; and as an Index is given, the reader will be enabled to find what he looks for as readily as if they had been placed in alphabetical order.[23]

Since he mentions that some readers may pass over some of the material, it seems likely that Bland imagines them reading the book through. This conclusion is fortified by the fact that he chooses not to arrange his proverbs in any particular order, and is bullish about it. The number he regards as 'too inconsiderable for classification' is 657 — almost the same number as Zenobius and not many fewer than ps.-Diogenianus.[24] If nineteenth-century readers had the stomach to read all the way through collections like this in pursuit of wisdom, it seems quite possible that Greek and Roman readers had too.

The main objection which I raised earlier to the idea that one might read a proverb collection through — that wisdom sayings are miscellaneous and situationally specific, so that reading large numbers of them would be an uneconomical way to seek general ethical guidance — was partially answered in antiquity by Seneca the Younger. In his 94th letter, Seneca addresses the objections of Aristo the Stoic to *sententiae*, in which he includes both proverbs and gnomic quotations. Aristo regards *sententiae*, which are taught in every school and at every grandmother's knee, as too specific and not philosophical or systematic enough to produce a good man (94.2-3, 8-9). Seneca's response is that although *sententiae* present themselves to us unsystematically, they can be sorted (in the mind?) into systematic groups (21). They may look infinitely many and diverse, but in fact they are not: their most important themes come up time and again with only minor variations (35). They refresh the memory, concentrate the mind and remind us even of what we know, which is useful, as no-one's memory or ethical practice is perfect (21,

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23   R. Bland, *Bland's Proverbs. Chiefly from the Adagia of Erasmus and further illustrated by corresponding examples from the Spanish, Italian, French and English languages* (London, 1814), pr. xiii, xvii. Cf. the anonymously published 1789 collection, *Miscellanies Moral and Instructive in Prose and Verse Collected from Various Authors for the Use of Schools and Improvement of Young Persons of Both Sexes*, which emphasizes the usefulness of miscellanies for the instruction of the young in its preface, notes that it (like Stobaeus) has changed quotations occasionally, better to fit the point it wants to make, and also presents its material in no particular order.

24   Zenobius gives about 700 if one includes variants, ps.-Diogenianus about 900.

25). *Sententiae*, moreover, are so vivid and commonsensical that they go straight to our emotions and arouse us to do good (29). Seneca thinks that good men need both philosophical doctrines and *sententiae*, and says so both here and in the following letter (94.45-6, 95.13-40).

If, like Seneca, we take the specificity of wisdom sayings and stories to consist largely in variations on a limited number of general principles, which themselves are widely useful, it becomes easier to imagine Greek and Roman audiences being receptive to larger concentrations of them. And illustrations are easy to find. Any well-represented topic in wisdom literature, such as the importance of justice, or courage, or being able to trust one's friends, generates numerous sayings and stories which illustrate the theme in diverse contexts.[25]

Like Aristo, Seneca accepts that *sententiae* are both acquired unsystematically in the course of everyday life, and taught systematically, at school and perhaps, through reading, later in life too. In the course of Letter 94, he quotes from the *Distichs of Cato*, which at some point between the second century BCE and the early empire became a much-read collection, and twice from a collection of *Sayings of the Seven Sages*, in addition to quoting numerous gnomic sayings as examples of useful *sententiae*. The fact that he often quotes more than one saying, of one genre and from one collection, at a time, hints that he had read and memorized not just individual sayings, but collections of sayings (e.g. 27-8, 43). However surprising it is to us, it seems quite possible that collections of proverbs (and gnomic quotations) were read, and memorized, as collections.

Proverb collections are a particularly difficult case. When we turn to maxims of great men, fables, stories, gnomic quotations from the poets and all kinds of other ethical material, a wealth of evidence attests that they were read in collections, and not by any means only by scholars.

Papyri from Graeco-Roman Egypt, dating from the third century BCE to the seventh century CE, have yielded a rich variety of miscellanies. Many are in school hands, including some belonging to near-beginners. So, for instance, on a broken fragment of pottery we find scratched:

> Revere your parents like the gods.
> … despising money.
> [Restrain yourself] if you have a bad temper.
> … to all, if you would succeed in life.
> … old age, if you have the means to support age.
> Speak, if it is right; if not, keep silence.
> Do not assume an accusing speech is trustworthy.[26]

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25   Discussed at length in the forthcoming T. Morgan, *Popular Morality in the Early Roman Empire* (Cambridge, 2007), chs. 2-5.

26   J.G. Milne, 'A gnomic ostrakon', *JEA* 8 (1922), 156-7, ll. 5-12. Wisdom material on papyrus is most readily accessed via the Leuven Database of Ancient Books, online. Wisdom material from educational contexts is catalogued by R. Cribiore, *Writing, Teachers and Students in Graeco-Roman Egypt* (Atlanta, 1996) and T. Morgan, *Literate Education in the Hellenistic and Roman Worlds* (Cambridge, 1998).

Papyrus Bouriant 1 preserves particularly well a teacher's collection of twenty-four gnomic sayings from Menander (or other comic poets), alphabetically arranged. The subject matter is diverse:

> Letters are the beginning of life.
> Life without livelihood is not a life.
> Honour the old man, the image of the god.
> It is a bad thing to transplant an old tree.
> Love is the oldest of all the gods...

The same text preserves a collection of exemplary stories, grouped in typical fashion by their subject, here Diogenes the Cynic:

> Seeing a fly on his table, he said, 'Even Diogenes nurtures parasites'.
> Seeing one woman speaking to another, he said, 'What a sword is being sharpened'.
> Seeing a woman learning letters, he said, 'The asp is getting poison from the viper'.....[27]

Several school text miscellanies are quite long, preserving twenty or thirty sayings or stories; some may originally have been much longer. As well as stories and sayings to educate children, there are gnomic riddles to test them:

> What is strange and paradoxical in life? Man.
> What is the teacher of things? Experience.
> What is sweet in life? Happiness. Trust...
> What is the business of life? Wealth. Virtue...[28]

It is likely that texts like these were not only read and copied, but memorized. Quintilian recommends (1.1.34-6) that one should give maxims to children to read, write and memorize in the early stages of education, and his recommendations in general chime remarkably well with the papyrus evidence.[29]

Some school miscellanies were read and copied *in extenso* and even *in toto*. Other miscellanies survive in informal, scholarly hands, making texts which we generally take to be working texts (rather than *objets d'art*, as some literature in ornamental book hands may have been). Last but not least, miscellanies survive in formal book hands.[30] Survival itself is strong evidence that texts were read and used. Much which was read and admired in antiquity has not survived the vagaries of transmission, but virtually nothing which was not admired, or which was admired but little read, has done so. The fact that so many fragments of miscellanies, many of which overlap in content, are still with us argues that they did have a readership, and probably a large one.

Collections of gnomic sayings on papyrus are sometimes thematically ordered. Fables rarely show any organization, though occasionally two or three consecutive fables share an animal character. Among papyri in book hands, *P. Harr.* 2.174 preserves a fragment

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27   On chreiai in educational contexts see also R.F. Hock and E. O'Neil (eds.), *The Chreia and Ancient Rhetoric: Classroom Exercises* (Atlanta, 2002); Morgan, *Literate Education*, ch. 4.
28   F.G. Kenyon, 'Two Greek school tablets', *JHS* 29 (1909), 32-9:36.
29   Morgan, *Literate Education*, 44-6, chs. 3-6 *passim*.
30   E.g. *PSI* 1.16, *P. Oxy.* 1812, 3522 (possible scholars' copies); *P. Oxy.* 2944, 3174, 3541, 4099 (copies in book hands). The Leuven Database of Ancient Books provides an accessible, searchable list on the world-wide web.

of a collection on *tyche* (fortune), while a fragment published by Bartoletti includes quotations from the poets on wealth, followed by virtue and *tyche*.[31] Thematic organization of any kind would make it easier for people looking for a particular category to skim through the text. It would also help people reading through to remember what they had read.

Turning to manuscripts, many compilers of miscellanies say explicitly that they expect to be read, or that parts of their work have already been read. The fables of Babrius and Phaedrus are borderline cases as miscellanies; though they mostly tell versions of existing fables, they both tell them in their own words, and their epimythia are often their own. They just qualify as miscellanies because they present a selection from the existing repertoire of fables, exhibited with little or no thematic order and making no single over-all story or argument.[32] Both Babrius and Phaedrus address their readers. In his third prologue, Phaedrus asks the dedicatee, one Eutychus, outright whether his introduction has persuaded Eutychus to read the work (3 *pr.* 62-3). Phaedrus also twice addresses the general reader, and hopes that his fables will be found useful.[33] Reading does not necessarily imply reading through, but it is the most natural interpretation, while the act of writing an introduction suggests that the author expects readers at least to start reading at the beginning, rather than jumping in at random. We may also note that both fabulists' introductions form sequences, which make most sense if they imagine people reading them in the order in which manuscripts present them. Babrius announces half way through his work, 'I was the first to open this door [to fables in verse] ... now I sing a second book for you'. Phaedrus, having begun with the modest statement that he is following Aesop, becomes more and more self-aggrandizing: in Book Two he says that he will preserve Aesop's style but add something of his own, in Book Three that he has turned Aesop's country lane into a road, in Book Four that he has added new fables to the corpus and in Book Five that he has gone beyond Aesop altogether.[34] (Both authors had some justification for their self-confidence: they both appear on papyrus within a generation or two of their deaths, and substantial fragments of Babrius's fables exist in school copies. The latter make certain that chunks, at least, of Babrius were read sequentially.[35])

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[31]   V. Bartoletti, 'Frammenti d'un florilegio gnomologico in un papiro fiorentino', *Atti dell' XI Congresso Internazionale di Papirologia* (Milano, 1966), 1-14; cf. O. Bouquiaux-Simon, 'Additamenta pour une anthologie mutilée (*P. Berol. inv. 21312 + P. Schubart 27*)', *Proceedings of the 19th International Congress of Papyrology* (Cairo, 1989), 461-479. J.W. B. Barns, 'A new gnomologium: with some remarks on gnomic anthologies', *CQ* 44 (1950), 126-37 and *CQ* 1 (1951), 1-19, is also on *tyche*, from the second century BCE.

[32]   Babrius (like the Augustana recension of Aesop) is alphabetically organized; some scholars have seen traces of thematic organization in Phaedrus (e.g. L. Hermann, *Babrius et Ses Poèmes* [Bruxelles, 1973], 67-9; M. Nøjgaard, *La Fable Antique* [Copenhagen, 1964], vol. 2:15-18, 161-3).

[33]   1 pr. 3-4, 2 pr. 11. At the beginning of Part Two of his fables (9-12) Babrius says that his first book has already gained imitators, while Phaedrus opens Book Four (15ff.) by boasting of the envy and glory which are already his.

[34]   Babr. 107 pt. 2.9-10, 16; Phaedr. 1 pr. 1-2, 2 pr. 8-12, 3 pr. 38, 4 pr. 11-13, pr. 5.1.

[35]   The earliest date to within a generation or two of his death (*P. Oxy.* 1249, *P. Lugd. Bat.* 25.5); cf. *P. Amh.* 2.26; D.C. Hesseling, 'On waxen tablets with fables of Babrius', *JHS* 13

Valerius Maximus introduces himself by saying that he has collected *exempla* of memorable words and deeds scattered through numerous distinguished authors, so that others who want examples may find them more easily (1 *pr.*); he too addresses a patron, Tiberius Caesar. The *Distichs of Cato* begin, in suitably severe style:

> When I realized how many people go seriously astray in the way of morals, I decided that I should help them in their opinions … Now I shall teach you, dearest son, how to put together your mental habit. Therefore read my precepts in such a way that you understand, for to read and not to understand is to fail.[36]

Neither of these introductions tells us explicitly how they expected to be read, though as I noted above, the fact that they *are* introductions is suggestive. The internal organization of Valerius's work, however, offers some clues. True to his aim of enabling readers to find suitable *exempla* without having to read the whole of existing literature, Valerius presents his work thematically, mostly by good and bad qualities, but sometimes in religious, political or legal categories, dividing his examples into Roman ones and foreign ones. This should make it relatively easy for the busy reader to skim through, looking for 'courage', 'moderation' or 'unexpected wills', and to find a suitable story. It also, however, makes it easier for the 'through-reader' to connect the plethora of stories thematically and remember them. As everyone knows who has played the party game in which one tries to remember a collection of objects which have been displayed for a few minutes and then removed, the trick is to make a sequence of them, and the same is true when reading a collection of diverse stories.

Valerius also links chapters by association of ideas. In Book Five (4-10), for instance, *pietas* towards parents is followed by *pietas* towards siblings and country, the love of parents for children, severity of parents towards children, moderation of parents towards children and bravery of parents with dead children. Again, this might be a useful guide for the reader skimming through to find a particular section, but it would also help the 'through-reader' to remember what he read. Many other miscellanies organize themselves in this way, with some kind of logical progression from one theme to another. Stobaeus's anthology is an excellent example, beginning with quotations about the gods and moving on to the structure and components of the universe, human nature and behaviour, virtues and vices, society, and ending with death and memorials.

Other aspects of Valerius's work are directed much more obviously at the through-reader than the skimmer. Frequently, Valerius links chapters by commenting on the connections between them. Chapter 6.9, for instance, on changes of fortune, ends with a reflection on the fragility of humankind in the face of fortune. The next chapter (7.1 *pr.*) begins, 'We have given many examples of changeable fortune; few can be given of her being consistently favourable'. The next few chapters are less naturally linked, but

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(1893), 293-314; P.J. Sijpesteijn, 'Prose paraphrase of fables of Babrius (?)', *Stud. Pap.* 6 (1968), 8-10. It may be Babrius to whom Quintilian refers when he recommends that children read Greek fables in verse (1.9.1): no other Greek versifier of fables is known in the first century.

[36]   *Prol.* The *Distichs* are almost impossible to date; it is uncertain which parts, if any, of their composite structure go back to Cato himself, and it is not clear how long before the fourth century, when they emerge clearly as a collection, they became one. A number of individual *dicta* are attested in the early empire.

Valerius creates links for them: so 7.2, on wise words and deeds, begins, 'I shall now set out that kind of happiness (*felicitatis*, which can also mean 'good fortune') which is all in one's state of mind'. 7.3 continues the theme, 'There is another type of doing or saying, moving by easy transition from wisdom to the name of cunning'. Passages which look forward or back and create links between sections are irrelevant to someone mining the work for stories, but they aid memory and create interest for the through-reader. It seems clear that Valerius expects some readers to read in this way.

So far, we have seen a little evidence to suggest that some wisdom collections were designed for the use of scholars. At the same time, we have seen nothing to contradict, and a certain amount to support the idea that wisdom collections of all kinds, arranged in many ways, were accessible to and were read, and read through, by school children, scholars and general readers. We now turn briefly to some other miscellanies of the early empire, to see what evidence they yield of how they were read.

Pliny the Elder's *Natural History* is not usually thought of as a miscellany. Gellius, however, thought that it was (pr. 8), and as Pliny presents his own work in his preface, it has as much in common with an anthology or miscellany as with a modern encyclopae-dia.[37] Pliny does imply (pr. 14) that he is trying to cover every aspect of nature (at any rate, he says that no Greek has so far done so). He goes on to say, though (*pr.* 17-18), that out of the 2000 books he has read by 1000 authors, he has culled around 20,000 'noteworthy things' — not everything there is to know about nature, but the things most worth knowing. The aim of this project, as he says, tongue in cheek, to the Emperor Vespasian, is to give Vespasian not more to read but less. 'I have appended to this letter a list of the contents of the books ... By this means you will enable others not to read them either, but to seek whatever each of them desires, and know in what place to find it' (*pr.* 33).[38]

The *Natural History* has much in common, organizationally, with Valerius's *Memorable Words and Deeds* (which Pliny doubtless knew). Pliny's list of contents helps readers to scroll through the work looking for a particular chapter, but it has serious limitations. At the beginning of Book Thirty, for instance, Pliny attacks Magi for being liars and frauds, and mentions that he has had cause to object to them before. Magi, however, do not appear anywhere in Pliny's list of contents. If as an ancient reader you had not read the previous 29 books, you would have had no way of knowing or finding

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37   M. Beagon, *Roman Nature. The Thought of Pliny the Elder* (Oxford, 1992), 11-14 discusses the encyclopaedic nature of the work, in the sense that it covered the 'basic knowledge for a properly educated free man' in its area (12), and its Roman precedents; G.B. Conte, *Genre and Readers* (Baltimore, 1994) says the work 'must surely obey a logic of the discursive form' (72) and argues that one of the 'lines of organization' running through the work 'articulates it (implicitly) according to "mental connections"...' (100), which suggests that it would have made sense to read the work through.

38   J.P. Small, *Wax Tablets of the Mind* (London, 1997), 16-18 takes this at face value as meaning the work was not read through, but see below. She notes that although 'we find tables of contents so useful' (17), they did not become standard in ancient books, and points out that Pliny's index itself would take quite some time to scroll through, before one began looking through the work (without guides like page numbers). She concludes that they are not useful enough to justify the space they take up and the effort of producing them; perhaps, too, dipping into such works was not common enough to be worth making easier.

what else Pliny had said about Magi (it would be hard enough to find the place again if you had). Cross-references like this are common in the *Natural History*, and they make little sense for any but the through-reader.

There are other signs that Pliny expects some people to read his work through and makes provision for them. Most books are linked with a passage indicating how what comes next follows from what came before. At the beginning of Book Seven, the first six books are summed up before Pliny launches into his account of humanity. Within books, too, sections are linked, and Pliny offers an explanation when he seems to deviate from his course. ('This will be a good place to talk about the Euphrates', [5.20.83] he says when interrupting an account of the towns and regions of Syria.) Factual material is also regularly coloured with passages of lyrical description, historical anecdotes or moralizing:

> How can one describe that Campanian shore itself, so happy and blessedly lovely, so as to make clear that in that one place there is a work of joyful nature!...
>
> The first place [among animals] will by right be allotted to man, for whose sake it seems that great nature brought everything into being, though her great gifts come at a vicious price, so that one cannot rightly judge whether she is a better mother or worse step-mother to man...[39]

None of these literary techniques would make much sense if Pliny expected his readers only to mine his work for information.

It is not uncommon to place a list of contents at the beginning of a miscellany. Aulus Gellius does it, and so does Stobaeus.[40] Such lists must have made it easier for some readers to scan the text looking for a particular chapter: Gellius explains that his list makes clear 'what can be sought and found in each book'.[41] They also acted as an advertisement for the work and a prospectus for through-readers, not unlike the epitome which is sometimes preserved at the beginning of a play.[42]

It is worth noting, however, that even a list of contents was of limited help to the Roman reader looking for a particular topic or quotation. Papyrus rolls came in standard sizes with standard numbers of lines to a column; columns were sometimes numbered and sometimes scribes marked off every hundred lines (for instance in editions of Homer) or the total number of lines in a poem, but to reach the right leaf and column a reader would still need to scroll through earlier sections until he reached the right one.[43] It has often been observed that the physical structure of a papyrus does not encourage the reader to dip in and out of a text at random, as it is so easy to do with a codex. Rolling

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[39]   3.5.40, 7.1.1.

[40]   It is not certain that the list at the beginning of Valerius Maximus is original: M. Schanz, *Geschichte der Römischen Literatur*, C. Hosius (ed.) (München, 1935), vol. 2: 589 n. 1.

[41]   Pr. 25. He may have taken the idea from Pliny and earlier collectors (A. Vardi, 'Genre, conventions, cultural programme in Gellius' *Noctes Atticae*', in L. Holford-Strevens and A. Vardi (eds.), *The Worlds of Aulus Gellius* (Oxford, 2004), 159-86:174-7. Vardi argues, and I agree, that this table of contents was not designed primarily as a search tool (177).

[42]   M. van Rossum-Steenbeek, *Greek Readers' Digests?* (Leiden, 1998), 50-52, cf. 83-4.

[43]   E.G. Turner, *Greek Manuscripts of the Ancient World²*, revised and enlarged by P.J. Parsons, (London, 1987), 16. There is little evidence for the citation of passages by line number, but see e.g. D.L. 7.187-9.

and unrolling a papyrus needs care, even with practice, and the charm of opening a text at random or dotting about in it would have been severely limited by the physical business of manipulating the roll.[44]

As a result, the way we typically use a miscellany today — either dipping in and out at random, or using the index to find and turn directly to a particular section — may be the way Greeks and Romans are least likely to have used it. Their easiest options, before the codex superseded the papyrus roll, were to skim through or to read through. (Gellius (9.4.5) describes himself in just this way as reading excitedly through a clutch of old Greek geographico-ethnographic works, which he had picked up cheaply in Brundisium, and which sound as though they may have been miscellaneous in format.) In the case of the many texts which provided no list of contents, or worse, were not thematically arranged, it is hard to see how the reader can usefully even have skimmed them. Most collections of fables, gnomic quotations and maxim collections fall into this category, and it is hard to imagine how they could be productively tackled except by being read through.

To return to early imperial miscellanies: sympotic miscellanies form a substantial genre of their own, and a number of scholars have shown how carefully they are framed as works of literature. This suggests that authors expected their readers to read them through, and this proposition is supported by the arrangement of topics and the way they are introduced. Athenaeus, for instance, begins the *Deipnosophistae* by saying that, 'The plan of the discourse reflects the rich bounty of a feast, and the arrangement of the book the courses of the dinner' (1.1b). Just as a dinner is carefully ordered to stimulate and satisfy, so, the implication is, is the conversation. Plutarch's *Quaestiones Convivales* claim to be records of learned and philosophical discussions, so they open appropriately with the question whether philosophy is a suitable topic for sympotic conversation at all. After that, Plutarch discusses whether the host should place his guests or not, why different peoples hold different places in honour, why the so-called 'consul's place' is particularly honourable and what sort of man the symposiast should be, before launching the philosophical discussion proper with a tribute to Plato's *Symposium*, a question about love. It is clear that whatever *variatio* Plutarch later employs to beguile readers, the work is launched with a clear structure and sequence of ideas of the kind that will make sense to the through-reader.[45]

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[44]   E.g. W. Schubart, *Das Buch bei den Griechen und Römern*[3] (Leipzig, 1962), 97-9; L.D. Reynolds and N.G. Wilson, *Scribes and Scholars*[3] (Oxford, 1991), 35; G. Bastianini, 'Biblion Elissomenon', in *Storia Poesia e Pensiero nel Mondo Antico* (Napoli, 1994), 45-8; E. Puglia, *La Cura del Libro nel Mondo Antico* (Napoli, 1997), 74-9; E. Valette-Cagnac, *La Lecture à Rome* (Paris, 1997), 52-56. T.C. Skeat argues unpersuasively ('Roll *vs* codex: a new approach?' *ZPE* 84 [1990], 297-8) that reading and referring back and forward in a papyrus roll was *easier* than in a codex.

[45]   Studies of sympotic miscellanies have focussed on their overall organization rather than specifically their accommodations to through-readers, which is not quite the same thing, but the connection is suggested by e.g. J. Wilkins, 'Dialogue and comedy: the structure of the *Deipnosophistae*', in D. Braund and J. Wilkins (eds.), *Athenaeus and His World* (Exeter, 2000), 23-37; J. Koenig, 'Fragmentation and coherence in Plutarch's *Quaestiones Convivales*', in J. Koenig and T. Whitmarsh (eds.), *Ordering Knowledge in the Roman Empire* (Cambridge, forthcoming).

Aulus Gellius, in his *Attic Nights*, chooses not to impose a train of thought on his material (*pr.* 2-3), deliberately putting down his jottings, as he says, in 'any old order'. He can afford to do this, in his own view, because everything he has included is useful and interesting, of a sort to encourage lively minds to enquire further. Not for him the indiscriminate piling up of material, 'reading which, the mind will languish in gloom and boredom before it finds anything which is a pleasure to read or adds to its culture or is worth memorizing' (*pr.* 11-12). This sounds as though, contrary to what we might expect, and despite the fact that he has included a list of contents, Gellius expects his readers to read through the work. (He also, like Pliny or Valerius, enjoys making links between chapters.) This impression is strengthened when Gellius goes on to say that he hopes readers will forgive him if they encounter material they know (16). If readers had been expected to use the list of contents to pick and choose what they read, they would presumably have been able to avoid what was familiar.

Plutarch composed many different kinds of miscellany: primarily, in addition to *Quaestiones Convivales,* philosophical and biographical ones, but also what one might call anthropological ones, such as *Quaestiones Romanae.* The last are minimally ordered, but certain trains of thought do connect parts of them.[46] The first few topics of *Quaestiones Romanae,* for instance, concern why brides must touch fire and water, why torches are lit in the course of marriage rites, why there is only one shrine of Diana in Rome that men may enter, and why Diana's shrine on the Aventine sports cattle rather than stags' horns (263e-264d). The link between the first two and the second two is that Diana is the goddess of childbirth. There follows a further series of loosely linked questions about various family relations.

A work like Plutarch's *Advice to A Bride and Groom* is ordered rather differently. Plutarch opens the work by describing it as *kephalaia* — a summary of the main points of the happy couple's shared philosophical training, and tells them that they should both read it because it will be useful in their life together (138b-c). There follows a series of points which at first sight look disorderly, but which at least one scholar has seen as following a sequence and even forming a ring composition.[47] The sequence does not strike all readers equally clearly, but that the work has structure is widely agreed and should come as no surprise, since it derives from philosophy and philosophy is nothing if not systematic. That being the case, the bride and groom will doubtless do best to read the whole work, and if one is going to read the whole work, the simplest way to do it and to be sure you have covered everything, is to read it from start to finish. It seems likeliest, therefore, that this is what Plutarch expected them to do.

Theological miscellanies have in common with philosophical ones that we can expect them, on some level, to be systematic. Clement of Alexandria's *Stromateis*, his

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[46]   S.-T. Teodorsson, *A Commentary on Plutarch's Table Talks* (Güteborg, 1989), e.g. 38-9, 87, 133, while commenting on the loose structure of the work, notes points where a talk clearly follows on from the previous one, or returns to an earlier topic after a digression.

[47]   See the discussion of L. Goessler, 'Advice to the Bride and Groom', in S. Pomeroy (ed.), *Plutarch's 'Advice to the Bride and Groom' and 'A Consolation to His Wife'* (Oxford, 1999), 97-115:97-8. C. Patterson, 'Plutarch's advice to the bride and groom', ibid, 128-137:132 does not find the structure quite so clear, but argues that it covers the three main aspects of marriage according to Stoic theory.

'patchwork' introduction to Christian doctrine, is an excellent example of a theological miscellany which is much less miscellaneous than it first appears.

> Let these notes of mine, as I have often said, be varied (*poikilôs*), for the inexperienced who encounter them any old way, and, as the name suggests, let them be thrown together, moving restlessly from one thing to another, and now indicating one thing, now showing another... For the writing will find the man who understands it... So as you might expect, the fertility of the small seeds of doctrines encompassed in this work is great, 'like the fodder of the field', as the scripture says... (4.2).

Clement goes on to say, with the aid of many literary allusions, that the *Stromateis* include something of a great variety of subjects. It is enough for him to point the way; after that, people must find out the rest for themselves. In the introduction to a later book, he returns to this theme using a well-known image:

> The flowers flowering variously (*poikilôs*) in a meadow, and the orchards of fruit trees in a park, are not organized and separated by species (in the way learned people put together *Fields* and *Helicons* and *Honeycombs* and *Robes*, gathering the various flowers). With those things which happened to come to mind and without order or bowdlerization, but deliberately scattered, I have deliberately variegated the form of the *Stromateis*, like a meadow. And so my notes will be like sparks, and for the man who is prepared for knowledge, if he happens to encounter them, a real effort to understand will prove advantageous and useful. For it is just that one should labour not only for food, but (much more so) for knowledge ... (6.1).

Despite Clement's protestation that all he has written down here are 'seeds' and inartistically scattered ones at that, much of the work is highly ordered. Book One, for instance, begins with the usefulness of written instruction, which is followed by chapters on the shortcomings of philosophers, philosophy as subordinate to theology, the uses of education, the uses of philosophy, what is true in philosophy, what Greek philosophy got from barbarians, the superiority of Jewish Law to Greek philosophy, and so on. As in Pliny's *Natural History,* many chapters begin and end with references back or forward to other material, which imply that the reader is reading consecutively. Most importantly, there is nothing here which is not important for a Christian to know, so any reader who wished to progress in his or her faith can be assumed to have read the whole work.

The *Sentences of Sextus* constitute a slightly different kind of theological miscellany: a second-century Christian compilation of proverbs and gnomic sayings from pagan poetry and philosophy, widely quoted and cited by later Christian authors.[48] In the fourth century the famous spiritual director, Rufinus, sent a translation of the *Sentences* to friends who had asked him for some spiritual reading which was a little shorter and

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48   Quoted by Origen and Jerome, *Regula Magistri* and Rule of St. Benedict. Origen: *Contra Celsum* 8.30, *Comm. St. Matthew* 15.3, *Hom. in Ezech.* 1.11, Epiphanius, *Panarion* 64.7.3 (quoting Origen's commentary on the first psalm). Jerome: *Adv. Iovinianum* 1.49, *Comm. in Ezech.* 6. *Regula*: chs. 10, 11; *Rule*: ch. 7. Origen says in the first passage that 'even the majority of Christians' encounter the opinion he cites in Sextus, and in the second, that Sextus makes a point 'in his Sentences, a book accepted by many as sound', implying that the book was widely read by Christians. It seems to be a Christianized version of a pagan gnomology with added gnomai of Pythagoras (see the discussion by H. Chadwick, *The Sentences of Sextus* [Cambridge, 1959], 107-16, 138-43).

simpler than the writings of the theologians, Origen, Gregory Nazianzen and Basil. In his preface, Rufinus says that the *Sentences* are so short that they can always be to hand, like a ring. The theologians mentioned would certainly have been read from end to end. Rufinus does not tell his friends to do the same with the *Sentences*, but he does imply that they should be thoroughly read and studied, so no doubt the whole work was covered eventually. Substantial chunks of it, though not the whole work, consist of sentences which hang together thematically or even follow one from another; for instance, the work begins:

> A faithful man is an elect man.
> An elect man is a man of God.
> A man of God is he who is worthy of God.
> A worthy man is he who does nothing unworthy of God.
> Study to be faithful so that you may do nothing unworthy of God...

It would therefore make sense to read large parts of the work, if not the whole collection, consecutively.

To return to Plutarch, several of his miscellanies collect sayings or stories of kings and commanders, Romans, Spartans and so on. The introduction to the *Sayings of Kings and Commanders* contrasts that work with Plutarch's *Lives*, which include much of the same material. Biographies, says Plutarch, have to be read at leisure, but a collection of sayings acts as 'signs of lives and elements' (172e), and can therefore be read quickly and economically. He does not say that they can be read in any order, but he arranges the work roughly chronologically and by state, so that it is relatively easy to skim over some sections and focus on others. This, among Plutarch's miscellanies, is the type closest to our ethical miscellanies, and frustratingly, it is the least informative about how it should be read. The most we can say is that it could equally well be skimmed or read through.

One last, rather different type of ancient miscellany may be worth mentioning, because it is so clearly meant to be used and useful, and it can only have been used by being read (or at least skimmed) through from the beginning on each occasion. The *Oracles of Astrampsychus*, which seem to have been put together around the second century, preserve a series of oracular questions and answers. The questioner would choose the question he wanted to ask from a long, numbered list. He would then be asked to think of a number between 1 and 10. The number of his question added to the number he had thought of would lead to a numbered section in a list of answers. The number the questioner had thought of would lead to the number of an answer within the section. To identify his question, the questioner would have to read, or have read out to him, the options from the beginning. One could easily arrange these thematically to make the process quicker, but they are in fact quite unordered: for instance,

> Will I sail safely?
> Is it time to consult the oracle?
> Will I serve in the army?
> Will I have a share in the business?
> Will I advance in office?
> Will I go out of town?
> Is it to my advantage to enter into an agreement?
> Will I be successful?

Will I purchase what is offered?
Will I marry and will it be to my advantage?
Can I be harmed in the business affair?
Will I move from this place?
Is my wife having a baby?[49]

Apparently the oracle's customers saw no difficulty in reading or listening to a string of questions compiled in no particular order, to get to the one they wanted.

In the epilogue to *On Animals*, Aelian puts the miscellanist's project in particularly attractive terms:

> I know that some will not praise this work, because I have not distinguished between animals in my discourse, nor said everything about each one individually, but I have mixed up the various (*poikila*) animals variously (*poikilôs*), and said things about many, and in one place I have left the discourse about one group of animals, and in another I have gone back and said other things about their nature. In the first place, I am my own man and no slave of anyone else's judgement and decisions, and I say that I do not have to follow wherever anyone else leads. In the second place, seeking to entice readers by the variety (*poikilôi*) of what there was to read, and fleeing the tedium of monotony, I thought that I should weave and knit my work to look like a meadow or a beautiful garland of many colours, with the many animals as the flowers.

Aelian's apology (apart from his rather weak assertion of intellectual independence) raises an obvious possibility which we have not yet considered. Perhaps to try to discover how miscellanies were read is an intrinsically paradoxical, an absurd project. Not because it is difficult, but because if there is one type of text which can equally well be read in *any* order, it is the miscellany. If the point of the text is to be varied and disorderly, why should it matter how or how much of it you read?

This takes us back to the twenty-first century and contemporary assumptions about how miscellanies are read — like Schott or *The Weekend Book*, by being picked up and opened at random to while away an idle hour, and put down without regret. I hope, however, that I have shown how little evidence there is for that style of reading in antiquity. We have found a degree of order in nearly all miscellanies, of a kind which makes them easier either to use systematically, or to read through. In some cases, they have a deep structure, literary or logical, which makes through-reading highly desirable. In others, they make references back and forward and offer the through reader passages of literary charm to sweeten the recital of information. Miscellanies of many kinds appear in school texts and the reading, copying and memorizing of such material is discussed by educational theorists and attested by many other authors. Paradoxically, even the fact that many miscellanists explicitly aim for *variatio*, variety of tone and subject matter, argues that they expect to be read from start to finish, at least by some readers. If one did not expect people to read one's text in a particular order, there would be no point in working to surprise and please them with variety.

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[49] ll. 12-24, transl. R. Stewart and K. Morrell in W. Hansen (ed.), *Ancient Greek Popular Literature* (Bloomington, 1998), 292-3. This method of divination is rather different from that of its nearest relatives, dice oracles (see e.g. comments of J.G. Frazer's commentary [London, 1898], *ad* Pausanias 7.25.10).

It is also worth noting that being read piecemeal and out of order, if it did sometimes happen to miscellanies (and no doubt, in practice, it did), was by no means uniquely their fate. In school texts on papyrus, for example, we find many extracts from Homer, Euripides or other popular authors, presented individually or in no particular order. It was evidently normal for school children to read parts of works and to read them out of order.[50] Even copies of famous works in professional book hands on papyrus, suggest that whole works were not necessarily copied or read. Twice as many fragments survive of the first two books of the *Iliad* as of the next two, and seven times as many as of Book Twenty-Four. More than three times more fragments of the first book of Herodotus survive than of any other (and the next best represented is Book Five). One could replicate these findings many times. It seems clear that reading a work of any genre did not necessarily mean reading it all, or perhaps not all at once. But no-one would say that Homer or Herodotus was therefore not *meant* to be read or heard through, and we cannot make that assumption about miscellanies either. Whatever is distinctive about miscellanies as a genre, it is not that they were not always read consecutively or *in toto*.

Last but not least, underlying the modern assumption that one reads a miscellany piecemeal and in no particular order, lurks the belief that miscellanies are trivial. At best, they are thought to constitute '… summaries and selections [from serious literature] from which to acquire the veneer of culture that is all most people can aspire to'.[51] To apply this view to antiquity is to misunderstand the place, and underestimate the importance of miscellanies in Greek and Roman culture.

All the miscellanies we have looked at have a serious purpose as well as aiming to entertain.[52] They often claim to be educational, informative or moral; they make clear that they expect to be read. They deal with significant subjects like history, morality, custom, science, theology. What is distinctive about them is that they deliver information and ideas in a compact, even terse format. Ideally (Gellius criticizes those which fail),[53] they bring together the best — most authoritative, useful, memorable or beautiful — elements of their subject and material with as little extraneous matter as possible. In recent years, the structure, function and cultural position of certain kinds of miscellanies have attracted increasing scholarly attention, and it is to be hoped that moral miscellanies will benefit further from this trend in the future. If and when they do, I suspect we shall find that they were taken very seriously: read, marked, learned and inwardly digested.

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[50] Morgan, *Literate Education*, ch. 3. Some authors, such as Isocrates and Menander, were so heavily mined for excerpts as to turn into miscellanies.

[51] L. Holford-Strevens, *Aulus Gellius²* (Oxford, 2003), 29.

[52] On the purpose of even an unlikely candidate like Gellius's *Attic Nights*, see S. Beall, 'Gellian humanism revisited', in Holford-Strevens and Vardi (eds.), *Worlds of Gellius*, 206-222 and T. Morgan, 'Educational values', op. cit., 187-205.

[53] Pr. 5.