

# **SCRIPTA CLASSICA ISRAELICA**

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# SCRIPTA CLASSICA ISRAELICA

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## CONTENTS

	PAGE
PREFACE TO VOLUME XLII .....	1
ORY AMITAY, Classics in Israel: Where Do We Go From Here? .....	3
AMIT BARATZ, Greece and Rome in Israeli Schools .....	9
ANDREA BALBO, ELISA DELLA CALCE, AND SIMONE MOLLEA, Towards an Unusual <i>speculum principis</i> ? Virtues in the <i>Confucius Sinarum Philosophus' Proemialis Declaratio</i> .....	19
WERNER ECK, Hadrian in Iudaea. Zu gefälschten Inschriften υπέρ σωτηρίας αὐτοκράτορος Καίσαρος Τραιανοῦ Ἀδριανοῦ .....	41
ESTHER ESHEL, HAGGAI MISGAV, AND ROI PORAT, Legal Ostraca From Herodium .....	53
ALEXANDROS KAMPAKOGLU, Daphnis in the Middle: Theocritus' Inter-generic Poetics and the Origins of the Bucolic Genre .....	67
YOSEF Z. (YOSSIE) LIEBERSOHN, Δίκαιος and Cognates in Plato's Crito .....	91
DMITRY EZROHI, When Teleology Fails: Aristotle on Bile as a Useless Residue in <i>Parts of Animals</i> .....	111
ERRATA .....	131
 BOOK REVIEWS	
Franco Montanari, <i>History of Ancient Greek Literature. Volume 1: The Archaic and Classical Ages</i> , with the collaboration of Fausto Montana, translated from the Italian original by Rachel Barritt Costa with revision by Orla Mulholland; <i>Volume 2: The Hellenistic Age and the Roman Imperial Period</i> , with the collaboration of Fausto Montana, translated from the Italian original by Orla Mulholland (by Heinz- Günther Nesselrath) .....	133
Sitta von Reden (ed.), <i>The Cambridge Companion to the Ancient Greek Economy</i> (by Jeremy Trevett) .....	137
Jennifer Baird and April Pudsey (eds.), <i>Housing in the Ancient Mediterranean World: Material and Textual Approaches</i> (by Michael Eisenberg) .....	139
Julia L. Shear, <i>Serving Athena: The Festival of the Panathenaia and the Construction of Athenian Identities</i> (by Ilaria Bultrighini) .....	142
David Saunders (ed.), <i>Underworld: Imagining the Afterlife in Ancient South Italian Vase Painting</i> (by Rivka Gersht) .....	144
Michaël Girardin, <i>L'offrande et le tribut. Histoire politique de la fiscalité en Judée hellénistique et romaine (200 a.C.–135 p.C.)</i> (by Benedikt Eckhardt) .....	147
Noah Hacham and Tal Ilan (eds.), <i>Corpus Papyrorum Judaicarum V: The Early- Roman Period (30 BCE–117 CE)</i> (by Haggai Olshanetsky) .....	149
Michael Philip Penn, Scott Fitzgerald Johnson, Christine Shepardson, and Charles M. Stang (eds.), <i>Invitation to Syriac Christianity: An Anthology</i> (by Catalin-Stefan Popa) .....	152
OBITUARIES: DAVID WEISSERT (by RACHEL ZELNICK-ABRAMOVITZ) .....	157
MOSHE FISCHER (by OREN TAL AND ITAMAR TAXEL) .....	161
AMINADAV A. DYKMAN (by ABRAHAM AROUETTY) .....	164
DISSERTATIONS IN PROGRESS .....	167
PROCEEDINGS: THE ISRAEL SOCIETY FOR THE PROMOTION OF CLASSICAL STUDIES .....	175

## BOOK REVIEWS

Franco Montanari, *History of Ancient Greek Literature. Volume 1: The Archaic and Classical Ages*, with the collaboration of Fausto Montana, translated from the Italian original by Rachel Barritt Costa with revision by Orla Mulholland; *Volume 2: The Hellenistic Age and the Roman Imperial Period*, with the collaboration of Fausto Montana, translated from the Italian original by Orla Mulholland, Berlin / Boston: De Gruyter, 2022, 1174 pp. ISBN 9783110419924.

Writing a comprehensive history of Greek Literature spanning roughly one thousand and three hundred years (from the mid-eighth century BCE to the mid-sixth century CE) is a daunting task for any single scholar,<sup>1</sup> even the most excellent one. Montanari is an excellent scholar, and he has produced a most impressive panorama—actually the third revised version of it<sup>2</sup>—of the incredible richness and variety of Greek Literature from Homer to Procopius of Caesarea. At the same time, it has to be acknowledged that the very breadth and extent of this literature makes it virtually impossible that one excellent scholar (even with the collaboration of another excellent one) can cover all of it with the same degree of expertise and depth. Thus this genre of single-author comprehensive literary history has its inevitable limitations; and I hope that I will not seem to be too churlish, if I point some of them out in the present case.

One of these limitations is in fact fairly typical for the genre of “History of Greek Literature”: the first periods of this literature, i.e. the “Archaic” and the “Classical” periods are often covered in much more detail (and thus substantially more pages) than the later periods (i.e. the “Hellenistic” and the “Roman Imperial” ones).<sup>3</sup> Montanari’s volumes are no exception in this respect: the

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<sup>1</sup> As title page and preface make clear, Montanari did not write all of this history all by himself, but got help from an excellent collaborator, Prof. Fausto Montana (of the University of Pavia). It is a pity, however, that the exact extent of his collaboration is nowhere made clear: on the title page, his “collaboration” is mentioned; in his preface Montanari calls him ‘the co-author of this manual’ (p. VI); on the cover, however, only Montanari’s name as author appears. Given Montana’s expertise as a specialist in the history of Ancient Greek Scholarship (from Hellenistic times onwards), one may surmise that his most important contributions to this two-volume history are situated in the chapters covering that scholarship in this work; beyond that, any speculation is idle.

<sup>2</sup> The first edition (*Storia della letteratura greca*, 893 pages; already ‘con la collaborazione di Fausto Montana’) came out in 1998, the second one (now in two volumes: 1: *L’età arcaica e l’età classica*, 633 pages; 2: *L’età ellenistica e l’età imperiale*, 406 pages) in 2017. The third Italian edition (of 2022) was occasioned by the English translation that is the subject of this review (with vol. 1 now comprising 629 pages and vol. 2 402 pages).

<sup>3</sup> To present just two examples: Albin Lesky’s *Geschichte der griechischen Literatur*, with 1023 pages (in its third edition of 1971) on a roughly similar scale, devotes about 260 pages to Greek Literature of the Archaic Age, about 440 pages to that of the Classical Age, about 185 pages to Hellenistic Literature and only about 100 pages to Imperial Greek Literature. In *The Cambridge History of Classical Literature, vol. 1: Greek Literature*, ed. by P. Easterling and B. M. W. Knox, of 1985, Archaic and Classical Greek Literature get just a bit less than 500 pages, Hellenistic Literature around 95 pages, and Imperial Greek Literature just a bit more than 70 pages. In contrast to this, the survey of ancient Greek literature included in the *Einleitung in die Griechische Philologie* edited by this reviewer in 1997 is a bit more evenly balanced: Archaic and Classical Greek Literature are outlined on 75 pages, Hellenistic Literature on 23 pages, Imperial Greek Literature (until 300 CE) on 25 pages, and Late Antique Greek Literature (until 565 CE) on 22 pages.

literature of “The Archaic Age” is presented on 285 pages, that of “The Classical Age” on 410 pages, that of “The Hellenistic Age” on a bit more than 190 pages, and that of “The Roman Imperial Period” on about 220 pages. Thus the literature belonging to the roughly 450 years between the middle of the eighth century and the end of the fourth century BCE gets almost 700 pages, while the literature belonging to the approximately 300 years of Hellenistic times has to make do with the already mentioned 190 pages, and the more or less six hundred years of the Imperial and Late Antique Period—during which the volume of still extant Greek Literature grew exponentially compared to that still preserved from the preceding 750 years—are confined to about one fifth of the total space. Let me add just two illustrative examples of what this means: the Homeric epics (comprising a bit more than 27000 hexametres)—the impressive beginning of the epic genre in Antiquity—receive a really excellent treatment on about 80 pages, while the huge epic output of Nonnus (comprising not only the more than 20000 verses of his *Dionysiaca*, but also the 3655 verses of his *Paraphrasis S. Evangelii Ioannei*) gets less than two pages. Second example: the oratory of Demosthenes is dealt with on eleven pages, the oratory of the “Christian Demosthenes”, the Christian master preacher John Chrysostom—with an enormous output of some 500 homilies and sermons (even if not all of them are genuine)—again on less than two pages.

The first section of each of the four great periods of Greek Literature treated by Montanari contains an overview of the historical context, which is concluded by a “Chronological Table of Principal Historical Events” (for the Archaic Age on pp. 44–6, for the Classical Age on pp. 333–36, for the Hellenistic Age on pp. 745–49, and for the Imperial Period on pp. 940–42). This is certainly a useful feature, but sometimes the details presented here are of no real relevance for the subsequent treatment of the literature that originated in this context: do we really need to know that Cleander was tyrant of Gela between 505 and 498, Hippocrates tyrant of the same city between 498 and 491, Anaxilas tyrant of Rhegium between 494 and 476, and Gelon tyrant of Gela between 491 and 485/4 (all entries on p. 45)? Has the fact that the tyrant Thrasybulus was expelled from Syracuse in 465 (entry on p. 333) any significance for the development of Greek Literature as depicted in this work? An especially high amount of similarly obscure entries is found in the chronological table for the Hellenistic Age; here the reader is virtually overwhelmed by a plethora of (sometimes only secondary) historical events (very often battles) involving agents that play no role elsewhere in this literary history. It might have been better to include more dates for the coming-into-being of literary works in these tables: there are some indications for the staging of plays of Aeschylus, but none for those of the other important playwrights of Classical Athens.

Already in the first volume, the presentation of some authors or works or literary phenomena shows deficiencies, for which a few examples must suffice. Concerning the much-contested authenticity of the play *Prometheus Bound*, Montanari tries to sum up the pros and cons equitably; but when he invokes the ‘static nature of the play’ as a marker of ‘affinity between this tragedy and those which are definitely by Aeschylus’ (p. 393), one might object that really none of the other six plays has such a “static nature” as *Prometheus Bound*. – In the depiction of Euripides’ play *Ion*, the plot summary (p. 475) exhibits some inaccuracies: it is not really true that ‘the god [Apollo] now wants mother and son [i.e. the Athenian queen Creusa and the title figure Ion] to meet and recognise each other’—in his prologue, Apollo’s brother Hermes explicitly states (vv. 69–73) that Apollo (wanting to conceal his rape of Creusa) will pronounce an intentionally false oracle proclaiming Ion to be the son of Creusa’s mortal husband and only afterwards (back in Athens) son and mother are to recognize each other. Also the sentence ‘Creusa suspects that Ion is the fruit of an adulterous relationship involving her husband and prepares to kill the boy’ does not give an accurate picture of the play’s unfolding action—actually, Creusa is informed of Apollo’s false oracle by the chorus,

and she is then persuaded by her old manservant to plan an assassination attempt against Ion. – As for his treatment of the development of Attic Comedy, the presentation of Middle Comedy (pp. 518–21) is rather unsatisfactory: the statement ‘The plots [...] became increasingly out of touch with the real-world polis’ (p. 519) is much too sweeping,<sup>4</sup> and almost no characteristic features of Middle Comedy (as far as they can be made out in the longer fragments: peculiar treatments of myth, peculiar recitative metres, peculiar language in bravura pieces<sup>5</sup>) are discussed. In the introduction to New Comedy there is a brief acknowledgement that the fundamental differences between Old and New Comedy ‘were developed in the Middle Comedy’ (vol. 2, p. 750), but that is about all.

Especially in the second volume, however, the treatments of some authors are so brief that at least some of their interesting works are inadequately dealt with. The presentation of Plutarch (p. 988–1000) is a case in point: the treatment of his *Lives* is acceptable, but that of the *Moralia*<sup>6</sup> too often restricts itself to the enumeration of mere titles with almost no further characterisation; to say, e.g., that the dialogue *De genio Socratis* ‘addresses the traditional problem of the *daimonion* of Socrates’ completely ignores the marvellous literary art of this piece, which combines serious philosophical discussions with an exciting historical setting (for these discussions take place on the eve of Thebes’ liberation from Spartan occupation in 379 BCE). The presentation of Dio of Prusa (p. 1042–44) is definitely too short: it says nothing of his four speeches *On Kingship*—important texts for contemporary imperial ideology—of his *Bithynian Speeches* (which provide interesting insights into the workings of Roman provincial administration and its relations with local authorities), of his colourful *Borystheniticus* (combining a description of a Greek outpost on the Black Sea with a fascinating speech on the order of the cosmos and its periodic destruction and rebirth), nor of his dazzlingly sophisticated *Troicus* (an ample anti-Homeric description of the Trojan War, in which the Trojans win!). Two works by Flavius Philostratus, the *Life of Apollonius of Tyana* and the dialogue *Heroicus*, would also have merited a more substantial treatment (they are presented on p. 1049 in just eight lines).

And for all its comprehensiveness, this history still exhibits some gaps. The dramatic genre of satyr play gets a brief mention of nine lines (p. 349) and a similarly brief characterisation (two thirds of a page on p. 476) of Euripides’ *Cyclops*; about the interesting later phase of satyric drama in early Hellenistic times (with plays by the authors Python and Sosithus) we hear nothing. Rather sketchy is also the presentation of Cynicism in Hellenistic and Imperial times (p. 1026): there is no mention of Teles (third century BCE), the author of seven still extant diatribes; of Demetrius, a friend of the Younger Seneca (and often mentioned by him); nor of Oenomaus of Gadara (earlier second century CE), of whose *Detection of Deceivers* (a colourful invective against oracles) long passages have been preserved by Eusebius of Caesarea.

There are also some mistakes that have to be corrected. In a brief preliminary characterisation of the Roman Imperial Period, it is stated that Late Antiquity was ‘marked [...] by the development of an increasingly flourishing Graeco-Hebrew and Graeco-Christian literature’ (p. 14)—but ‘Graeco-Hebrew’ literature effectively came to an end already with Flavius Josephus towards the end of the first century CE. Maximus of Tyre (second century CE) is presented as an adherent of Neoplatonism (p. 1044), while somewhat earlier (p. 1029) it is more correctly claimed that Neoplatonism was developed ‘in the course of the third century’. On p. 1051 we read about Lucian

<sup>4</sup> See, e.g., H.-G. Nesselrath, ‘The Polis of Athens in Middle Comedy,’ in: G. W. Dobrov (ed.), *The City as Comedy*, Chapel Hill – London 1997, 271–88.

<sup>5</sup> See H.-G. Nesselrath, *Die attische Mittlere Komödie*, Berlin – New York 1990, 188–280.

<sup>6</sup> Their Greek title is rendered correctly as Ἡθικά on p. 999, but incorrectly as Ἐθικά on p. 994.



of Samosata that ‘In 167 he was present at the Olympic Games’, but there were no Olympic Games in that year; they took place two years earlier.<sup>7</sup> On p. 1052, it is claimed that Lucian’s *How to Write History* ‘features various sentiments unfavourable to Rome’, but I can detect nothing of that in this essay; on the contrary, Lucian seems very much to identify with the Roman cause, speaking of “us” when he talks about Romans (e.g. ch. 5, 31).<sup>8</sup> On p. 1053, Lucianic dialogues like *Essays in Portraiture*, *Essays in Portraiture Defended*, *Toxaris* and *Anacharsis* are incorrectly classified as ‘philosophical in content’; nor are works like *Philosophies for Sale* or *The Parasite* really concerned with ‘the representation of human types’.

In his preface, Montanari calls these two volumes ‘a reference manual for university and for consultation by scholars and by anyone with an interest in ancient Greek literature’ (p. V); but they are a work of reference that is almost totally devoid of bibliographical references<sup>9</sup>—so readers cannot check on which (secondary) sources Montanari has based his presentations. It might have been advisable to provide at least some suggestions for ‘Further reading’ at the end of (at least) the major sections. – The last part of the work is an ‘Index of Authors’ (mostly ancient, but a few modern ones like Wilamowitz and Martin West, too) comprising 16 pages.<sup>10</sup> This is certainly useful, but it would have been even more useful, if it had been enriched by other persons playing a historical role in these volumes and by literary terms (like satire, invective etc.). Perhaps a future edition of this impressive work can be endowed with at least some bibliography and a fuller index, as here suggested.

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Sitta von Reden (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to the Ancient Greek Economy*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022. 360 pp. ISBN: 978-1108404846

Recent work on the ancient Greek economy has revolutionized the study of the subject. Central to this development has been Alain Bresson’s 2015 book *The Making of the Ancient Greek Economy*. In place of the largely static picture painted by Moses Finley in *The Ancient Economy*, Bresson argues that the economy of Greece grew rapidly during the Archaic and Classical periods and that this growth is attributable in large part to the development of institutions, such as coined money and

<sup>7</sup> This whole section about Lucian’s life, by the way, is much too confident in assigning specific dates to various events and writings of this author.

<sup>8</sup> On Lucian’s neutral or even positive attitude towards Roman administration see H.-G. Nesselrath, ‘Lucian on Roman officials,’ in: P. R. Bosman (Ed.), *Intellectual and Empire in Greco-Roman Antiquity*, Abingdon – New York 2019, 178–88.

<sup>9</sup> At the end of volume 2, there is an 8 page-section called ‘Bibliography of Translations’ compiled by Elena Squeri, but it is far from presenting a comprehensive collection of such translations (missing are, e.g., Achilles Tatius, Heliodorus, Longus, Julian, Menander, Origen), and of the authors included rather often only partial translations are cited (e.g. of Aristophanes, Dio of Prusa, Dionysius (wrongly spelled as ‘Dionysus’) of Halicarnassus, Euripides, Eusebius, Lucian). Thus the usefulness of this “bibliography” is much reduced.

<sup>10</sup> Again compiled by Elena Squeri. Interestingly, among the ‘authors’ we also find ‘Socrates of Athens’, who never published a single word.