

# EDITORIAL

We begin this year's volume with two reviews, both longer than usual, that engage directly with the question of what we, as classical scholars, think we are doing or ought to be doing: Michael Reeve's review of two collections of essays on the commentary as a scholarly genre and Amy Richlin's review of the British Academy volume *Classics in Progress* (edited by T. P. Wiseman)—a book which sets out to survey from a largely British standpoint the way classical scholarship has developed over the last (nearly) fifty years. While Reeve's review will primarily interest literary and linguistic scholars, Richlin's sharply raises the question of the inclusivity of the discipline. Though perhaps few readers will be found to agree with both these reviews in equal measure, we imagine that most will find a good deal to ponder in both of them. It is not the function of a review journal such as *CR* to favour one particular position on such important general issues, but rather to provide an opportunity for differences of opinion—sometimes quite striking differences, as will be seen—to be expressed freely and constructively.

On a more detailed and practical level as well, what begins as an assessment of a new publication can turn into a reconsideration of substantive problems, as, for example, in the case of Timothy Barnes's important re-opening of the question of sources in his review of the new Budé volume of the *Historia Augusta*. In a less polemical vein, Gerald M. Browne avoids anodyne summary of a volume on late-antique Nubia in favour of what is, for philologists at least, a fascinating brief essay on the identification of the language of the Blemmyes, the Nubians' southern neighbours (and incidentally one which calls for the use of a Coptic font, a typographical rarity in the pages of *CR*). Doubtless, a mainstream classicist with a syllabus to teach may be tempted to regard both these topics as marginal; but the presence of such discussions, which substantively advance the *status quaestionis* in specialized areas and which will doubtless be quoted by future scholars, can stand both as an indication of the liveliness of *Classics* and of the range of subject-matter it embraces, and also as a reminder of the fact, sometimes forgotten, at least by pessimists, that 'research' in our subject often really does mean finding new things out at the proverbial coalface.

Readers of our journal will also come upon reviews of many publications of a more or less educational nature. One cannot fail to be impressed by the number and range of editions, translations, selections, commentaries, 'companions' (a friendly-sounding word, now often favoured), introductions, surveys, and syntheses that are appearing in print, intended primarily for the student or non-specialist market. In some areas central to the standard school or university syllabus, such as Greek tragedy or the politics of the Augustan principate, it may easily happen that several such books, often covering broadly similar ground in somewhat different ways, are published in any one year. It is right that *CR* should take notice of these alongside those works that present the fruits of new research; for we classicists are, whether we like it or not, largely a pedagogic profession. We hope that we provide a useful service to the wider community of classicists, by publishing expert opinions on the extent to which a given example of the genre is informed by the latest research, its suitability for teaching or private study at different levels, its intellectual merits or deficiencies, and, not least, its factual, linguistic, and typographical accuracy.

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As ever, this issue of the journal deals with a rich variety of work on many aspects of the classical world. Rather than select items for mention on more or less subjective grounds, it seems appropriate to signal some of the high points by recalling the words of our reviewers. In the area of Greek studies, we find ‘one of the most important commentaries to be produced on the *Odyssey* for years’ (Ray Clare on Irene de Jong); an ‘excellent and scholarly translation of the *Oresteia*’ (Alex Garvie on Christopher Collard); the ‘best introduction’ to the *Medea* ‘between two covers’ (Deborah Boedeker on Donald Mastronarde); an edition of the *Acharnians* which makes an ‘enormous contribution’ and ‘will . . . remain standard for a very long time’ (Keith Sidwell on S. Douglas Olson); a book on the neglected Neoplatonist Hierocles which is an ‘indispensable addition to any research library’ (Johan C. Thom on Hermann S. Schibli). To judge from the comments of Malcolm Heath and John Ferrari, there are three clearly significant contributions in the area of ancient literary criticism (Ford, Halliwell, Ledbetter). On the Roman side, the editor of a collection of fragments of *fabulae praetextae* ‘has done scholars and students of Roman drama a truly great service’ (Costas Panayotakis on Gesine Manuwald); Roland Mayer’s ‘companion’ to Seneca’s *Phaedra*, according to David Wray, ‘belongs in the hands of every student of Roman drama’; Kirk Freudenburg has put forward a ‘wealth of sophisticated and provocative ideas’ on Roman satire ‘with remarkable clarity and unfailing wit’ (Costas Panayotakis); R. S. Bloch has written (in the words of Rhiannon Ash) ‘an exciting and genuinely innovative study’ of Tacitus’ account of the Jewish nation. Greek historians will note, *inter alia*, a ‘thorough and well-argued’ book on the finances of the Athenian Empire (Jeremy Trevett on L. J. Samons II), and a book on the Delphic Amphictiony that ‘no serious historian of antiquity can afford to ignore’ (Gordon Shrimpton on P. Sánchez). There is a largish crop of work in the current growth areas of Hellenistic history and the later Roman Empire, while historians of the early Principate may look forward to a ‘penetrating enhancement of our understanding of Julio-Claudian rule’ (Richard Talbert on Gregory Rowe’s book on the Tiberian *senatusconsulta*). In the epigraphic sphere, our reviewers draw attention to two volumes of the second edition of *Inscriptiones Graecae* of which one is ‘a pleasure to use, and a credit to the generations of scholars concerned’ (P. J. Thonemann), while the other has filled a need for a new edition of Samian inscriptions ‘in the most expert fashion’ (Graham Shipley): these are clearly major technical achievements which will take their place among the indispensable instruments of scholarship. In short, the vintage looks a good one; and, incidentally, this collection of enthusiastic comments may go some way towards disproving any suspicion which readers might have entertained that *CR* reviewers are in general a hypercritical crowd.

On the domestic side (so to speak) of *CR*, we are continuing to make improvements. The electronic revolution *festinat lente*: electronic distribution of proofs to contributors has been under way for some time now, and seems to work smoothly, while the balance has at last tipped towards electronic as opposed to paper submission of copy (112 reviews out of 150 in this issue were submitted by e-mail). In connection with this, we shall shortly be issuing a revised and much more detailed set of guidelines to contributors, so that the time taken up by the process of copy-editing can be greatly reduced. Once editors and contributors are fully accustomed to the new system, it should become possible for us to keep much more closely to production schedules. Finally, it should not go unmentioned that we have received some compliments on our recent ‘face-lift’, and in particular on the fact that we have introduced (or rather revived) the editorial. We are pleased to be continuing to make use of our vantage point as editors to guide our readers through each six-monthly harvest, and to draw

attention to developments of particular interest and important current controversies. In another forty-eight years' time, whoever undertakes a retrospective survey along the lines of Wiseman's *Classics in Progress* may find some historical interest in what will doubtless seem by then to be quaintly old-fashioned ideas.

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