

H. WIRTH, *DIE LINKE HAND. WAHRNEHMUNG UND BEWERTUNG IN DER GRIECHISCHEN UND RÖMISCHEN ANTIKE* (Heidelberger Althistorische Beiträge und Epigraphische Studien 47). Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 2010. Pp. 271, illus. ISBN 9783515094498. €49.00.

The book under review, which has its origins in a 2008 Heidelberg dissertation supervised by Géza Alföldy and Angelos Chaniotis, deals with a topic that is rather unconventional for practitioners of ancient history, as the author himself admits (7). While some traditionalists might doubt the value of an analysis of Greek and Roman conceptions of the significance of left- and right-handedness, others (including the reviewer) will undoubtedly find this enquiry to be of great relevance for cultural studies and *Mentalitätsgeschichte* — in particular since, for more than a decade, the body in Graeco-Roman antiquity has increasingly become the focus of numerous classical studies, as can be seen, for example, from the impressive list of titles contained in the general bibliography of the volume on *Bodies and Boundaries in Graeco-Roman Antiquity*, edited by the reviewer and Mireille M. Lee (2009), 11–14.

Wirth considers the perceptions and evaluations of the ‘left’, the left hand and left-handers and relies upon an impressive variety of sources, which for the most part comprise literary texts but also epigraphic and archaeological evidence, in particular illustrations of hands on vases, reliefs, coins and graffiti. However, the diversity of the sources taken into account in this book is a virtue as well as a problem. It does not become clear to the reader how the sources consulted differ in their relevance to the author’s analysis; for example, in discussions of literary texts the question of genre should have been addressed. More importantly, the aspect of chronology has been completely neglected: is it justified to discuss early Greek writers such as Homer or Hesiod alongside authors from the early Roman Empire or even later periods? One may argue that the relative scarcity of evidence leaves scholars with no other choice, but however true this may be, the question of temporal specificity should have been problematized at some point.

After a very short introduction (9–12), the second chapter (13–48) examines Greek and Latin terms for ‘left’ (σκαίος, λαίος, ἀριστερός, εὐώνυμος and *laevus, scaevus, sinister*) and ‘right’ (δεξιός and *dexter*) and comes to the conclusion that ‘left’ was often associated with misfortune, clumsiness or stupidity. In the context of Roman augury, however, it could also have positive connotations, though not beyond the first century A.D. The third chapter (49–112) concentrates on the general meaning of ‘left’ and ‘right’ in the Graeco-Roman world and looks at domains such as biology, religion and superstition, divination and the military. In ancient natural science, the right side, often connected with an active rôle and male element, was favoured and supposed to be superior to the left. The dualistic nature of ancient thinking can also be observed in religion: sanctuaries ought to be accessed from the right, priests’ movements during sacrifices should be from the left to the right, and divine signs were interpreted as favourable when they appeared on the right side (although in Roman augury it was usually the left side that signified a good omen). In the military, it was the right part of the Greek phalanx formation that enjoyed higher prestige; for the Roman army such a preference cannot be identified to the same extent.

The longest and perhaps most compelling chapter of this study (113–208) explores the significance of the left and the right hands. According to authors such as Aristotle and Cicero, human hands are instruments that contribute a great deal to the development of cultural life and the arts; they also play a vital rôle in non-verbal gestural communication, as is emphasized above all by Quintilian (*Inst. orat.* 11.3.85–7, 92–124). In a religious context, the right hand of a god serves as the healing hand; it provides help but can also punish. It is therefore a pre-eminent symbol of divine power, especially for the goddess Fides. This is why the right hand has an important function as a sign of reliability and trustworthiness in connection with oaths, treaties or promises. In addition, it indicates friendship and intimacy. The raising of the right hand or even the whole arm can be understood as a specific prayer gesture rather than just as a form of adoration. In the Roman world, the right hand is frequently associated with victory. Thus the loss of the right hand as a punishment entails social stigmatization and prevents the mutilated person from performing certain practices such as a handshake, an oath, or cultic and religious rituals. The preference for the right hand has a discernible impact on the way in which garments are arranged; sometimes this leads to a complete veiling of the left hand. Some sources seem to link the left hand with theft and improper sexual acts. To a certain degree, it also has some connection with the underworld, magic and witchcraft, which may be explained through the principle of the conscious inversion of common practice involving the right hand. Certain rules about the use of hands can be identified

even for dining. It is intriguing that Roman sources thematize the left hand more often than is the case for Greek texts. According to W., this is due to the fact that religion and cult, with their normative set of regulations, influenced all areas of Roman society, in particular with regard to the function of the right hand as a symbol of *fides*.

The final chapter (209–40) investigates how ancient sources describe and assess the phenomenon of left-handedness. While Plato pleads for an equal use of both hands, Aristotle accentuates the natural superiority of the right hand. Pliny the Elder observes that few people have a left hand that is more powerful than the right hand. On the whole, left-handedness is regarded as an exception and a curiosity, but precisely for that reason it makes certain left-handers such as painters or gladiators stand out from the crowd. On the other hand, it may also be employed as an element of negative characterization, as in the case of Suetonius' portrayal of the emperor Tiberius.

W. lucidly summarizes his results in a final chapter (241–7), to which he adds an extensive bibliography (250–67), a short index and twelve pages of illustrations. In sum, despite a certain lack of careful attention to important methodological considerations, this is an engagingly written and well-structured book which covers a wide range of material.

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doi:10.1017/S0075435812000330

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J. RÜPKE (ED.), *FASTI SACERDOTUM: A PROSOPOGRAPHY OF PAGAN, JEWISH AND CHRISTIAN RELIGIOUS OFFICIALS IN THE CITY OF ROME, 300 BC to AD 499*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008. Pp. viii + 1107. ISBN 978019991137. £325.00.

A thousand pages of priests may not be everybody's idea of heaven, but this book provides an extraordinarily useful research tool for those who work on the religious history of Rome or on many other areas of Roman life in which priests played a part. *Fasti sacerdotum* first appeared in German in 2005 as a three-volume work. This review concerns the one-volume translation published in 2008. The original consists (in Volume 1) of a year-by-year list of the names of certain or probable holders of religious office (51–572), followed by a list of the members in alphabetical order under their offices (573–646); and (in Volume 2) an alphabetical list of those listed in Volume 1 with short accounts, not so much biographies in the normal sense of the word, as basic information focusing on the evidence for, and the dates of, their religious office-holding; thus Volume 2 provides the evidence supporting the lists in Volume 1. Volume 3 consists of a series of studies of problems connected with the various office-holders and of the records through which we have knowledge of them.

This translation (by David Richardson) is a single-volume work, very substantial in bulk and price, and provides the three main lists in full together with the introduction to Volume 1, but only a selection of the studies from Volume 3 — four out of the thirteen sections. The four included are valuable and in many ways challenging studies (Livy and the *Annales Maximii*; the lists of *calatores*; the cult-personnel of Iuppiter Dolichenus; religion and administration in the later Empire); the situation left, however, is not entirely satisfactory, because the reader will need to check the German original to be sure what the 'book' discusses and what it does not. The boundary between what is a translation and what a new work derived from the original gets blurred at this point. Nor is it clear how the reader of the translation would find out what she/he is missing. What might seem curious is the fact that Volume 3, all in German, has to be so truncated; while Volume 1 is included, although it consists almost entirely of the names of officials and therefore, apart from the occasional footnote, has no need to be translated. This last point, however, is not in fact a mistake, but a necessary feature of the whole plan, because the strength of the one-volume format is precisely that the two main lists are available within the single volume. They are strictly interdependent, because the evidence for the annual lists of names and all the debates about who were members and who were not at different moments is to be found in the biographic section. So the user, working for instance on priestly colleges, has to turn constantly from one section to the other and back.

Nobody could possibly doubt the scholarly usefulness of this work. It covers 800 years and provides information about 3,590 religious officials in the city of Rome, only counting those allotted a running number, not those listed but not numbered as dubious or even forged. They include the official priests of Rome, but also other pagan priests and Jewish and Christian priests.