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A Companion to the Ancient Greek Language (Book Review)

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Egbert J. Bakker (ed.), *A Companion to the Ancient Greek Language. Blackwell Companions to the Ancient World. Literature and Culture*. Chichester/Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010. Pp. xxxix, 657. ISBN 9781405153263. $199.95.

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Preview

It has become customary for reviews of handbooks to express misgivings toward the genre and its ever-increasing presence. But whatever one might think of companion volumes, this is a useful book. It boasts a wide range of generally high-quality essays by a parade of eminent scholars. Perhaps its most praiseworthy feature is the clarity and accessibility of many of its contributions, which makes them ideal starting points for the non-specialist. We will no doubt be assigning several of these chapters in our classes.

The book contains thirty-seven contributions, which are divided among the following seven Parts: The Sources; The Language; Greek in Time and Space: Historical and Geographical Connections; Greek in Context; Greek as Literature; The Study of Greek; Beyond Antiquity. Thus, true to its title, this is not just a volume of essays on Greek linguistics, but instead spans the gamut from the more "hardcore" linguistic to the more literary. This is a major strength of the book: philologists and linguists do not communicate or collaborate often enough, and bringing these approaches together in one book is a laudable step in the right direction.

A further strength of the volume is that it boasts Greek-oriented introductions to topics like pragmatics (by Egbert Bakker), register variation (by Andreas Willi), and technical languages (by Francesca Schironi), which are not easy to come by otherwise. While a handbook cannot of course cover everything, the addition of chapters on Greek particles and corpus linguistics would have significantly improved its utility. Since Denniston's book is now woefully out of date, a summary of recent work on discourse particles in Greek (and elsewhere) is a

desideratum; as classicists we know far too little about how these elements contribute to the meanings of our texts, despite their frequency.[1] Given that corpus-linguistic investigations are becoming ever more prevalent (e.g. Andreas Willi's contribution on register variation and Staffan Wahlgren's on Byzantine literature in this volume), an introduction to these methods and their applications would have been welcome, as they are of undeniable promise to classical studies.[2] Lastly, it should also be noted that meter (and, more generally, prosody) is only indirectly represented in the volume. There is to be sure an interesting chapter on "Language and Meter," by Gregory Nagy, but this does not offer readers an introduction to the study of Greek metrics. On the whole, though, the *lacunae* are greatly outweighed by the number of information-rich contributions.

We have only a few minor critical remarks to offer about the book on a general level, several of which are intrinsic to the genre. The volume is by and large directed at non-specialists, but the type of non-specialist targeted by the individual chapters ranges from the novice to the knowledgeable. The sequence of contributions is occasionally awkward; for instance, the reader needs familiarity with the material in the chapter on Greek and Indo-European to appreciate certain points of the morphology chapter, but the latter precedes the former; the problem is partly alleviated by cross-references. While each chapter concludes with a helpful block of "Further Reading," the essays vary enormously in the amount of secondary literature cited in the main text, ranging from none to citation-riddled. The use of different phonetic and phonological notation throughout the book is a familiar annoyance to the seasoned reader, but will mislead non-specialists. For example, the long open and close *o*vowels are represented variously as /ō/$_1$ and /ō/$_2$, /ǭ/ and /ọ̄/, and /ɔ̄/ and /ọ̄/; only the last pair is listed under "Symbols Used" (p. xviii). The representation of Greek is also inconsistent. Some articles switch between Greek script and Roman transliteration, which is itself inconsistent across contributions. The book was not carefully proofread. Typos and misprints are more common than they should be; while most are merely irritating, some will lead to confusion, e.g. Ὀδυσεὺς (as if nominative) for genitive Ὀδυσεῦς (pp. 408, 409). Constraints of space permit us to comment only on a fraction of the articles that stood out to us (and intersect with our areas of interest).

The knowledgeable non-specialist will find an excellent resource in Roger D. Woodard's contribution on the history of the alphabet. He begins early, with the adaptation of Egyptian writing to represent West Semitic, as reflected in the "Proto-Sinaitic" inscriptions of the early second millennium BCE. A linguistically-informed treatment of the adaptation of the individual Phoenician graphemes to represent Greek follows, with an informative discussion of the more problematic cases, e.g. the sibilants (note that *_sig-dô_ (p. 32) must be a typo or misprint for *_sig-yô_). This chronological depth offers some insight into the development not just of the Greek alphabet, but of writing systems more generally. A minor comment may be added on *qoppa* and *kappa*. As Woodard points out (pp. 29-30), although the utilization of graphemes to spell allophones of the same phoneme is typologically

unusual, the adapter(s) clearly distinguished between allophones of the Greek phoneme /k/ by adopting the Phoenician grapheme *qop* for backed, and *kap* for non-backed, allophones. Note that adults typically have difficulty discriminating contrasts that are not phonemic in their first language, *except* where the phonetic cues are particularly salient.3 This may well have been the case at the time of adaptation and afterwards in the areas that continued to employ both graphemes. The remainder of the chapter is dedicated to the more challenging questions of where, why, and when the adaptation took place. Woodard laudably presents other views alongside his own. Towards the end of the discussion, he returns to recent Proto-Sinaitic inscriptional finds, the sociocultural context of which allow for the view that the "practical needs of mercenary military activity" motivated the adaptation of Egyptian writing for West Semitic language (p. 43). Woodard suggests that the Greek alphabet may have developed under similar conditions, where literate Cypriot mercenaries were operating in Syria-Palestine in the ninth century BCE.

Part II opens with an exemplary chapter on primarily synchronic phonology by Philomen Probert. The contribution is a didactic marvel. Probert introduces phonological concepts clearly and intuitively, and illustrates them with examples that will be particularly useful for the student of Greek, e.g. because they involve common alternations in the language. The scope of Probert's discussion includes not only segmental phonology, but also an excellent introduction to syllable structure and accentuation.

Michael Weiss' chapter on morphology and Jeremy Rau's on Greek and Indo-European focus squarely on diachrony. Weiss' assumes a slightly more knowledgable (or diligent) reader, as technical terms like "event types" (p. 111) are used without explanation. But such readers will certainly benefit from the state-of-the-art presentation. The chapter is organized as a morphological sketch grammar, with Attic as the point of departure. Morphemes are classified according to lexical category (nominal or verbal), then by their inflectional or derivational character. Weiss provides a diachronic derivation for virtually every morpheme listed; the result is a resource that exists nowhere else in this form. Rau begins his contribution by situating Greek in the context of the Indo-European language family and distinguishing early phases of the language's development. The body of the chapter presents the main phonological and morphological developments that distinguish Greek from other Indo-European languages, as well as those that differentiate the Greek dialects. This is followed by a note on the lexicon. The presentation is admirably clear: Rau has selected the most important developments and paired them with well-chosen examples. Unfortunately, both contributions lack in-text citations. For the most part, this is unproblematic and makes for smoother reading, but in-text citations would have alerted the reader to situations in which no *communis opinio* exists, e.g. the development of the 1sg. secondary medio-passive suffix μην (non-Attic-Ionic μᾱν), where the authors' accounts agree (pp. 114, 185), though Rau expresses misgivings; or the thematic genitive singular ου, which some

(including Rau and Weiss) derive from * *osi̯o* and others from *-*oso* (c.f. Helmut Rix, *Historische Grammatik des Griechischen*, Darmstadt, 1992, pp. 138-139). This is, however, a minor issue, and both contributions are invaluable introductions to Greek historical phonology and morphology.

Despite its odd title, Michael Clarke's "Semantics and Vocabulary," is one of the most interesting and insightful of the volume (which is not to say, however, that we are in complete agreement with his claims). We have no doubt that every classicist will benefit from reading this essay. Clarke not only offers insights into lexical semantics that will enrich the reader's understanding of what word-meaning is, but he also makes clear why *LSJ*, that withered backbone of our reading—and thus interpretive—experience, is so "muddled and treacherous" (p. 132). He begins with the claim that lexical meaning is intimately bound up with a speaker's experience of a word, and thus extends far beyond the rough paraphrases and vague equations that dictionaries offer (p. 125): "Our task is not to jump from a word in Greek to a word in English...[r]ather, it is to move from the diverse uses of the Greek signifier back to whatever concept was *represented* by it, explaining in each case the associative logic which allowed the ancient speech-community to link each referent to that concept whenever the word was used." Following the work of Demont and Moussy, he then offers a unified conceptual analysis of the verb τρέφω (see also the recent treatment of R. Drew Griffith, *Classical Philology* 105 (2010): 301-307), whose polysemy ranges from the sense 'rearing a child' to 'the curdling of milk into cheese when mixed with fig juice.' Clarke argues for an underlying definition 'make the unrealised coagulate into fullness,' which is then instantiated in various real-world examples that vary according to degree of prototypicality. Clarke's discussion eventually leads to a consideration of diachronic semantics, that is, the accretion and loss of meaning over time. The how of this process is given very little attention (although, to be sure, the author was working with space constraints), and we were left wondering e.g. what happens over time that causes Greek speakers to use τρέφωalmost exclusively in reference to child-rearing. But this did not detract from our admiration for the essay. For what Clarke offers the reader is a new set of tools for analyzing lexical meaning and approaching deeper questions of Greek thought and culture, an exciting prospect for any classicist.

In "Greek and the Languages of Asia Minor," Shane Hawkins presents an overview of language contact between Greek speakers and those of Anatolia. This is a topic that has received increased attention in recent years, and Hawkins offers a wealth of interesting data to ponder. We have only a few things to add. One is that in addition to χιλιάρχης, which was calqued from Old Persian *hazarapati-, we also have the formἀζαραπατεῖς in Hesychius. While the calques ὁ βασιλεὺς μέγας and βασιλεὺςβασιλέων are based on Old Persian models (which Hawkins provides on p. 226), these may in turn have been calqued from Akkadian, i.e. *šarru rabû* and *šar(ri) šarrānī*; see M.J. Seux, *Épithètes royales akkadiennes et sumériennes* (Paris 1967). Hawkins' survey makes it clear that this topic now offers a rich supply of data to work with. We look forward to scholarship

that begins to dig deeper into this data for insights into Greek culture, as questions like the following are still largely unexplored: why did Greeks borrow what they did? Why did they sometimes calque instead of borrow? These questions can also be asked from the Anatolian or broader Near Eastern side. To the "Further Reading," add now Gang Bai, *Semitische Lehnwörter im Altgriechischen* (Hamburg 2009) and I. Yakubovich, *Sociolinguistics of the Luvian Language* (Leiden/Boston 2010).

The chapter on syntax, by Evert van Emde Boas and Luuk Huitink, left us with significant reservations. We recognize that the topic is complex and that the absence of a *communis opinio* on many matters makes it difficult to present in a handbook. And on the whole, the authors do a good job of presenting a combination of well-established material of the sort one could find in Smyth, along with some newer research, as witnessed by the enlightening discussion of complementation on pp. 142-145. Elsewhere, however, the discussion is too basic. For example, they recapitulate elementary facts about case and agreement, which we assume readers will be well familiar with. There are also problems of content, especially in the section on word order. For example, on p. 148 the authors state that enclitics "occur in the second place of their syntactic unit, a feature which Greek shares with many Indo-European languages (Wackernagel's Law). To this class belong most other particles, non-contrastive personal pronouns," etc. The reader should disregard this characterization of Wackernagel's Law, as it is at best only partially accurate, and furthermore, distorts a fundamental feature of second-position behavior. To take enclitic object pronouns as an example, what is remarkable about their distribution is that they do *not* appear "in the second place of their syntactic unit" (by which we presume the authors would mean the verb phrase in this case), but occur canonically after the first prosodic word of their clause, and thus often well outside of "their syntactic unit." With proclitics (a term we prefer to the authors' *prepositive(s)*), we find another inaccurate generalization (p. 148): "Prepositive words (the article, relative pronouns, prepositions, conjunctions, negative, and a number of mostly connective particles) only occur in the first position of their syntactic unit." The ordering restriction is overstated: it is not the case that these words *only* occur in the first position of their syntactic unit. Van Emde Boas and Huitink also neglect to mention that the special distribution of clitics in the clause is not just a matter of syntax, but also of phonology, in as much as full prosodic words are not subject to such constraints. To the "Further Reading," add A.M. Devine and L.D. Stephens, *Discontinuous Syntax: Hyperbaton in Greek* (Oxford 2000); D. Matić, "Topic, Focus, and Discourse Structure. Ancient Greek Word Order," *Studies in Language* 27 (2003): 573-633; B. Agbayani and C. Golston's recent "Phonological movement in Classical Greek," *Language* 86.1 (2010): 133-167; and the 2010 dissertation of N. Bertrand, *L'ordre des mots chez Home\re* (University of Paris-Sorbonne).

In Part V, "Greek as Literature," Joshua Katz sets out to offer "a fair and engaging account of what 'inherited poetics' means and why it is both important and

interesting to study the inheritance, the poetics, and the combination of the two" (p. 368), and does so successfully, delivering an introduction to Indo-European formulaics, diachronic metrics, and stylistics that will be approachable for the novice, and an excellent bibliographic resource for the more knowledgeable. Concepts and methodology are introduced primarily by way of Homeric material. To his credit, Katz not only reviews metrical formulae of probable pre-Greek provenance (those most celebrated achievements of comparative poetics), but also gives an admirably clear account of a central problem in this area of research: what is the likelihood that a formulaic phrase such as "swift horses" (Homeric ὠκέες ἵπποι, Rigvedic *áśvās* ... *āśávaḥ*, etc.) would have arisen independently in multiple poetic traditions in which poets composed with etymologically-related words about similar things? Katz then demonstrates more refined ways to answer this question, leading the reader from the basic to the more sophisticated methodology. Thus the chapter not only introduces readers to inherited poetics, but also lays out future prospects for research.

In one of several chapters on the literary dialects, Olav Hackstein discusses "The Greek of Epic," and offers a convenient, up-to-date summary of research on the provenance of the Homeric-Ionic and the Aeolic component of the epic language. The *Leitmotiv* of the chapter is that "[t]wo opposing factors, the conservative potential of the tradition and the innovative potential of the creative composition, have led to the linguistic shape of Homeric Greek with its constant combining and intertwining of linguistic archaism and innovation" (p. 404). Here, Hackstein pays special attention to the demands of the hexameter, which encouraged poets both to continue using metrically useful archaic forms and to innovate, rendering metrically problematic forms useful. These innovative processes are illustrated by a host of well-selected examples. Like Katz, Hackstein discusses the origin of the hexameter, and suggests a new explanation of spondee zeugma in the fourth and fifth feet, i.e. of the constraint against implementing the bicipitia of those feet with a word-final heavy syllable. Adopting the theory that the hexameter arose via conjunction of an octosyllabic verse and a pherecratean, Hackstein proposes that over time, the poets preferred to implement the pherecratean's Aeolic base with a pyrrhic sequence (respecting the syllable count), and that this is the historical explanation for dactylic rhythm in the fourth foot; the dactylic rhythm in the fifth foot continues the dactylic sequence after the Aeolic base (p. 414). The fact that a heavy syllable in these bicipitia is more permissible if it is not word-final has to do with the relative ease with which the poets "dactylized" word-final sequences (cf. p. 411). This highly compact proposal raises an interesting question: can this approach be extended to explain the spondee zeugma in the second foot, which would presumably continue the dactylic sequence (following the Aeolic base) of an original glyconic? The reader interested in more synchronically oriented accounts of spondee zeugma and related phenomena may add A.M. Devine and L.D. Stephens, *Language and Metre: Resolution, Porson's Bridge, and their Prosodic Basis* (Chico 1984) to the "Further

Reading," where the extensive discussion of spondee zeugma does not, it should be noted, take the dactylization processes into account.

Lastly, the price of the book is punishing—why not issue a paperback that students can actually afford?

Notes:

1. For an overview, see M. Zimmerman, "Discourse Particles," to appear in P. Portner et al.*Semantics: An International Handbook of Natural Language Meaning* (Berlin). The empirical focus of the essay is contemporary German, but the issues discussed are relevant for Greek.
2. For quantitative approaches, see e.g. the recent introductions of H. Bayen, *Analyzing Linguistic Data: A Practical Introduction to Statistics using R* (Cambridge 2008); K. Johnson, *Quantitative Methods in Linguistics* (Malden, MA/Oxford 2008); for corpus linguistics, see e.g. T. McEnergy and A. Wilson, *Corpus Linguistics* (Edinburough 2001).
3. Cf. C.T. Best et al., "Examination of the perceptual re-organization for speech contrasts: Zulu click discrimination by English-speaking adults and infants," *Journal of Experimental Psychology: Human Perception and Performance* 14 (1988): 345- 360.