



## rev. G. Baratta (ed.), L'ABC di un impero: iniziare a scrivere a Roma

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*L'ABC di un impero: iniziare a scrivere a Roma*. A cura di GIULIA BARATTA. Armariolum – Studi dedicati alla vita quotidiana nel mondo classico 1. Scienze e Lettere, Roma 2019. ISBN 978-88-6687-164-4. VIII, 202 pp. EUR 35.

According to a recent survey, quantification of how many people were literate in antiquity is not only impossible, but even undesirable. Such an inquiry would detract from the astonishing range of contexts and functions that made written symbols meaningful to their readers as well as historically significant (P. Ripat, “Literacies”, in C. Laes (ed.), *A Cultural History of Education in Antiquity*, London 2020, 117–134). By now, the bibliography that has sprung from W. V. Harris’s groundbreaking monograph, *Ancient Literacy*, Cambridge MA 1989, is indeed considerable, and the best way forward seems to be to make detailed inquiries into specific cases – epigraphical, iconographical, archaeological – in order to add to the general picture. This seems to have been the aim of the admirable project that took the form of a series of encounters set up by Giulia Baratta, which resulted in the present volume.

The book opens with a solid overview by Marc Mayer i Olivé on the overall presence of writing in many epigraphical documents, including *tegulae* and numismatical evidence (p. 4–28). Francesca Boldrer does what is essential, but often omitted, namely looking at the entry *littera* in the *Thesaurus Linguae Latinae*. She limits her research to Plautus and Cicero, but even despite this limitation, telling observations on the importance of writing and monuments for the continuation of memory come to the fore (p. 29–42). In her chapter on coercive education in Roman schools, aptly entitled “La letra con sangre entra”, Giulia Baratta offers some important new insights into the iconographical evidence concerning corporal punishment (p. 43–56; for the erotic figure 6, see C. Laes, “Most Subversive Suffering: Pain and the Reversal of Roles in Graeco-Roman Antiquity”, *Hyperboreus* 27,2 (2021) 213–237), though she failed to notice some contributions on this well-studied topic (J. Christes, “Et nos manum ferulae subduximus. Von brutaler Pädagogik bei Griechen und Römer”, in U. Krebs and J. Forster (eds.), *Vom Opfer zum Täter? Gewalt in Schule und Erziehung von den Sumerern bis zur Gegenwart*, Bad Heilbrunn 2003, 51–70; C. Laes, “Child Beating in Roman Antiquity: Some Reconsiderations”, in K. Mustakallio, J. Hanska, H.-L. Sainio and V. Vuolanto (eds.), *Hoping for Continuity: Childhood, Education and Death in Antiquity and the Middle Ages*, Rome 2005, 75–89). A richly documented and well informed overview, including the most recent bibliography and new readings, is offered in Silvia Braitto’s chapter on child graffiti (p. 57–74). There follow two detailed studies on very specific items: Antonio Varone on a previously unedited *defixio* from Stabiae (p. 75–94) and Alfredo Buonopane with a most convincing interpretation of AE 1994, 1876 as an instance of homophobic bullying (p. 95–102; see also C. Laes, “Children and Bullying/ Harassment in Graeco-Roman Antiquity”, *Classical Journal* 115,1 (2019) 33–60). The most striking feature of the

volume is undoubtedly the strong focus on detailed studies for a specific region: a chapter by Silvia Forti on oil lamps from Leptis Magna (p. 103–120); a contribution by Cristina Bassi on literacy and the use of letters in the Alpine regions (p. 139–157); Silvia M. Marengo on alphabets and the colonisation of the Hadriatic Regions V and VI (p. 159–168); and Fulvia Mainardis on the reception of administrative epigraphical documents in municipalities of Italy in the Late Republic and Early Empire (p. 181–202). Cultural approaches characterise both Javier Velaza's chapter on alphabets as ritual elements in the ancient world (p. 121–138) and Simona Antolini's study on the famous new letters, the inverse digamma and the half H, as developed by Emperor Claudius (p. 169–180; the latter letter, incidentally, occurs in Germania Inferior too, as witnessed by C. Rüger, "Eine Ubica aemulatio Claudi Caesaris? Beobachtungen zu einem Graphem in Niedergermanien", *Acta Archaeologica Lovaniensia* 24 (1985) 159–166 and T. Vennemann, †, *Sprachwissenschaft* 19 (1994) 235–270).

Overall, this is a most important and well-edited volume that deserves full attention in the ever-growing debate on ancient literacy. Both the editor and the contributors deserve all praise.

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LAURITZ NOACK: *Religion als kultureller Ordnungsrahmen in Platons Nomoi*. Philippika 143. Harrassowitz Verlag, Wiesbaden 2020. ISBN 978-3-447-11484-4; ISBN (e-book) 978-3-447-39033-0. VIII, 140 S. EUR 38.

For a long time, Plato's last work – probably partly not written by him – the *Laws* remained largely unread among the Platonic corpus, mostly due to its style, which had been regarded as less vivid than most of his other dialogues, as well as its emphasis on religion, with curious references to folk beliefs and folk religion. However, in recent decades the *Laws* has aroused considerable interest. In addition to an extensive commentary by Klaus Schöpsdau (1994–2011), several monographs on different aspects of the *Laws* have been published, especially about the cultural institutions of Greek *poleis* (for instance, *Performance and Culture in Plato's Laws*, edited by Anastasia-Erasmia Peponi, 2013). Lauritz Noack's book is a recent contribution to this "renaissance" of the *Laws*. It is a reworking of his dissertation (Philipps-Universität Marburg, 2019). The title of the book contains, again, the difficult concept of *culture*, which Noack addresses briefly in a footnote (p. 5 n.19). Although the common notion of the religious emphasis of the *Laws* is of course valid (the dialogue famously begins with the word θεός), Noack's starting point emphasises that the *Nomoi* is a philosophical work: in the *Laws* we have a philosophical approach to society, and the references to folk religion are an important