

James I. Porter, *Classical Pasts: The Classical Traditions of Greece and Rome*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005. Pp. 450; ill. ISBN 0-691-08941-8. \$70.00 (hb). ISBN 0-691-08941-6. \$27.95 (pb).

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[Authors and titles are listed at the end of the review.]

What is in a name? The word 'classical' conjures up a variety of different pictures in our minds: the 'classical age' of Louis XIV of France, the 'Viennese classic' musical era of the early nineteenth-century... Our notion of 'classical' Athens and 'classical' Rome moves from the Greek and Roman construction of their past, in which the ages of Perikles and Augustus were singled out as exemplary moments. Professor of Classical Studies James Porter (University of Michigan) and a selected group of scholars try to define various ways of looking at the 'classical'.

Porter introduces the book with a lengthy essay (sixty-five pages), in which he repeatedly points at the questionable paradigms of classics. His essay is really introductory in all senses: terminology, ancient and modern views, everything passes his revue. Porter sketches what he calls the 'various mechanisms of classicism' (p. 62), viz. retrospective and prospective, transferential and regressive. Each mechanism has its own properties, but the differences are often difficult to distinguish, so that the author concludes that none of these aspects acts alone. The essay, however, might have been more to the point and loses its focus by entering into details which deviate the reader's attention (at last mine) from the core of the argumentation. Porter does not connect his own visions with the contributions following the introduction, nor makes it clear why these texts have been selected (and their authors invited to contribute). The series opens with a short study by Susan E. Alcock and John F. Cherry about the Mycenaean tholos of Orchomenos which played a role in the later history of the Boeotian polis by tracing its origin back to the Homeric era. Pausanias dedicated some lines to the monument in his description of Boeotia (Paus. 9.36.4-5). The tholos was excavated by Schliemann and indeed shows traces of its being (re)used in Hellenistic and Roman times. Alcock and Cherry claim that the tomb of Orchomenos' legendary founder Minyas gave some weight to the tiny community, by furnishing the town with a 'lieu de mémoire'. The 'classical' here lies in the status effect enhanced in the run of the centuries.

Armand D'Angour's contribution about the role of various 'Muses' (poetry, music and dance) during the performance of epic recitations stresses the importance of tradition in early Greek society. The audience of all ages after Homer and Hesiod needed some footing and asked for recognizable plots and, therefore, poetry could not deviate too far from the established models. By means of this repetitive character, Greek poetry became 'classical' in itself. According to this view, then, classicism is intrinsically conservative. But D'Angour warns us against simplistic reductions of this point: the decisive fact is not that Homer and Hesiod are the oldest authors known to us, but that their poetry possessed adamant qualities: this is the reason why their reception was so lucky.

A similar line of investigation permeates the following essay on 'the politics of metaphor in fourth-century Athens'. Yun Lee Too concentrates on Isocrates' idea that μεταφορά, i.e. political change is always for the worse. The logos of stability had to be preserved as Athens was in decline, lacking great men like Solon, Kleisthenes and Perikles.

Andrew Stewart plunges into the Hellenistic period with an analysis of the 'baroque', an awkward term too readily used for sculptural expressions from the Hellenistic era characterized by emotions and heavy movements. 'Classical' does not refer to the visual arts, but to drama, especially the tragedies of the fifth century, traces of which Stewart detects in the emotionally loaded, 'baroque' sculpture of the Hellenistic era. The Pasquino group, for instance, expresses the concept of *hamartia* often addressed in drama, e.g. Achilles' passion leading to his downfall. Similar emotional expressions are to be seen in sculptures such as the Achilles and Penthesileia, and the Dying Gaul. It is remarkable how Stewart succeeds in saying something new about the Laocoon statue, now seen as a blind man moving his head to the right as a reaction to the hissing snake next to his face (fig. 4.1).

John Henderson focuses on 45 BC, the year that Cicero's beloved daughter Tullia died. Henderson argues that Cicero's representation of his own coping with the bereavement is modeled on the Stoic philosopher's paradigm of extreme self-control. The parental emotions seem to be sorted out entirely and, apparently, this reaction was based on the 'classics'. The model of self-restraint embodied by Socrates drinking his poison was also in Cicero's mind as he tried to avoid emotional outbursts. Cicero then tries to bring this Stoic ideal in line with the Roman mores of mourning and the Roman sense of family memory and family decorum. Henderson makes his case with extensive quotations from Cicero's philosophical writings.

Mario Citroni explores the concept of the 'canon' in Roman literature, beginning with a definition of the term as connected with Greek notions of the 'rule' set by 'selected authors'. In the second century AD Gellius defined the quality of a 'classical' author (19.8.15 *classicus scriptor*) as 'first-class', in stark contrast with the inferior rank of the *proletarius*. Many Latin authors were infatuated with the idea of the 'canon', i.e. what was believed to be the standard rule. Lists of authors and their characteristics circulated in Antiquity and most criteria rested on Greek examples; the authors endeavored to include themselves and their own stylistic features into these templates; their readers applied the same principles. One example is the notion of Ennius as *alter Homerus*. Later generations would come to emulate their Latin-tongue predecessors and no longer the standard Greek examples only.

Tonio Hölscher formulates the idea of cultural memory as fundamental to the understanding of the phenomenon of classical style in Augustan Rome. Hölscher's view is that Augustus and his generation had a "fundamentally retrospective habitus" (p. 240), whereby Greek forms and images were used in Augustan Rome to convey a sense of *gravitas* and *sanctitas*. Polykleitos and his Doryphoros indeed stood for these ideals, Praxiteles symbolized charm and grace, and Hellenism gave suggestions for satyrs, bucolic and daily life scenes; but when we look at the Ara Pacis frieze of imperial family members and dignitaries and we associate it with the Ionic frieze of the Parthenon, the ideological message we receive is not that of Greek democracy but rather that of Roman *dignitas*. The Greek artifacts on display in Roman temples served the purpose of emphasizing Roman values. Hölscher's essay is in line with the theoretical approach of the author's well-known study *Römische Bildsprache als semantisches System*, which has recently been translated into English [1](#).

Jas' Elsner's essay tackles forms of 'classicism' other than the Greek and Roman ones. He argues that even the introduction of Egyptian motifs could be used to enrich the 'language of images', to use Hölscher's wording. The example of the obelisk erected by Hadrian for Antinous is a good example of this technique, alluding to the Roman *consecratio* of conquered Egypt. Elsner also speaks about 'Egyptomania' in the houses of Pompeii, but does not make clear what sort of classicism would be involved here.

James Porter writes about Greek and Roman literature in his second contribution to this volume. He starts with a discussion of Aristophanes' famous treatment of Aeschylus and Euripides in the *Frogs*, to be seen as an extreme and isolated case of hard-core criticism of contemporary people. This impossible comparison of two superb authors, Aeschylus and Euripides, goes over into a discussion of aspects of speaking and sound in rhetoric, in which Porter mainly relies on theoretical treatises on this topic, such as Longinus, Dionysius of Halicarnassus and Quintilian. Porter's title 'Feeling classical' implies that ancient people literally felt, saw and heard the classics. A manifestation of this desire to recreate, almost bring back to life, the classics can be seen in the practice of reciting letters written by great men of the past, whether real or fictional. These testimonies enhanced the emotions of writer and reader alike and increased the value of ancient 'classical' texts as such. In this love of quotation the use of archaisms and tropes of the severe style would reinforce the idea of authenticity; stylistic means, therefore, were of great importance.

Tim Whitmarsh sketches the shift from poetry to prose in the literary taste of second century AD, which he sees reflected in various works. In Plutarch's essay of the Pythia in Delphi the participants in the debate remark on how the Pythia -- who, as a very old religious institution, is a *locus classicus* by herself -- refrains from speaking verses. Verse has now apparently become obsolete, a relic of the old system and no longer fashionable. Aristides in his prose hymn goes even further, accusing Greek poetry of being effeminate and not up to the standards of modern times.

Glenn Most brings the volume to a closure with some reflections on Athens as a school of all people. He starts with Raphael's 'School of Athens' in the Vatican Palaces and ends with the Gennadion Library at Athens, following Isocrates' notion of *paideia* as central to the shaping of Greek identity: 'It is those who share in our education who are called Greeks' (Panegyricus 50). If Most had read all essays in Porter's book, he would have concluded, I think, in the way I do: both Rome and Athens still tell us a tale we can gain profit from in our reflections on tradition and renewal.

A general bibliography and an index of passages and names conclude this interesting collection of essays. Each contribution is high standard and valuable in its own right. The only regrettable feature of this volume is that there is no clear connection between the texts included, which remain self-contained contributions. Hence the descriptive quality of the present review: the book does not seem to lend itself to an argumentative approach, at least to this reviewer.

List of Contributions

James I. Porter, "What Is "Classical" about Classical Antiquity?", pp. 1-65.

Susan E. Alcock and John F. Cherry, "'No Greater Marvel": A Bronze Age Classic at Orchomenos", pp. 69-86.

Armand D'Angour, "Intimations of the Classical in Early Greek *Mousike*", pp. 89-105.

Yun Lee Too, "Rehistoricizing Classicism: Isocrates and the Politics of Metaphor in Fourth-Century Athens", pp. 106-124.

Andrew Stewart, "Baroque Classics: The Tragic Muse and the *Exemplum*", pp. 127-170.

John Henderson, "From φιλοσοφία into *PHILOSOPHIA*: Classicism and Ciceronianism", pp. 173-203.

Mario Citroni, "The Concept of the Classical and the Canons of Model Authors in Roman Literature", pp. 204-234.

Tonio Hölscher, "Greek Styles and Greek Art in Augustan Rome: Issues of the Present versus Records of the Past", pp. 237-269.

Jas' Elsner, "Classicism in Roman Art", pp. 270-297.

James I. Porter, "Feeling Classical: Classicism and Ancient Literary Classicism", pp. 301-352.

Tim Whitmarsh, "Quickening the Classics: The Politics of Prose in Roman Greece", pp. 353-374.

Glenn W. Most, "Athens as the School of Greece", pp. 377-388.

Notes:

1. T. Hölscher, *The Language of Images in Roman Art*, translated by A. Snodgrass and A. Künzl-Snodgrass, with a Foreword by J. Elsner, Cambridge University Press 2004.