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Review of: The Comet of 44 B.C. and Caesar's Funeral Games by John T. Ramsey and A. Lewis Licht

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dental” (κατὰ συμβεβηκόζ, 190b25–27, 191b13–17). But Aristotle rejects the instance of “horse-animal becomes dog-animal” as a case of “animal-matter becomes animal-being” (so it is not discordant). Aristotle insists that “only” on the hypothesis both of a substrate and of a pair form-and-privation can an account of becoming be given; he allows that perhaps the pair form-and-privation may be taken as the simple presence or absence of the single term “form” (191a6–22). So the third alleged difficulty in fact explains the second. Even were these (and the other) difficulties real, they would not establish Bolotin’s “modification” of Aristotle’s “surface account” (p. 22).

Chapters 2 (teleology: *Physics* 2.4–8 [195b30–9b32]), 3 (continuity and infinite divisibility: from *Physics* 3, 6, and 8), and 4 (place: *Physics* 4.1–5 [208a27–213a11]) attempt to reduce complex discussions to similar sly suggestions that Aristotle truly believed the very opposite of what he argues for at length. (One cannot interpret Aristotle’s statement of the causal priority of mind and nature to chance [198a5–12] as merely a claim that they are epistemologically prior.)

Chapter 5, “The Doctrine of Weight and Lightness” (*De caelo* 4.1–5 [307b28–313a13]), argues that Aristotle denied absolute and relative weight and lightness but believed in Archimedean density. One of Bolotin’s openings is Aristotle’s alleged failure to mention that the cause of the weight or lightness of a body might be, not the excess of its interstitial void over solid (309a3–b8), nor the ratio (309b8–16), but the “difference.” What sort of “difference” is not an excess? Once again, the verdict must be: not proven.

Bolotin’s book contains some good—it reminds us that carefully reading Aristotle, whose context surely included the political, is difficult. But it remains a *demonstrandum* that Aristotle wrote both to inform the attentive elite and to delude the masses. Despite Bolotin, it hardly seems possible Aristotle doubted the doctrines studied here. Using Bolotin’s method of reading, one might infer from the many difficulties and faults of Bolotin’s surface account that *he* disguises his true view—let us hope.

PAUL T. KEYSER

John T. Ramsey; A. Lewis Licht. *The Comet of 44 B.C. and Caesar’s Funeral Games.* Foreword by **Brian G. Marsden.** (American Philological Association, American Classical Studies,

39.) xx + 236 pp., figs., tables, apps., bibl., indexes. Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1997. \$27.95 (cloth); \$17.95 (paper).

In 44 B.C. a comet appeared in the sky at Rome in the course of the funeral games in honor of Julius Caesar. The comet remained visible for seven days and was even bright enough to be seen in the daylight. Normally, comets were baleful signs, but this one was widely interpreted as evidence of the apotheosis of Julius Caesar—an interpretation promoted by Octavian, who was then locked in a struggle for power with the conspirators who had assassinated his adoptive father. *The Comet of 44 B.C. and Caesar’s Funeral Games* is the result of a collaboration between a classicist (John T. Ramsey) and a physicist (A. Lewis Licht). The authors’ goals are to determine as much as they can about the comet, to revise the history of the games, and thereby to link the comet and its astrological interpretations more closely with Octavian’s campaign for power.

Ramsey and Licht adjust the chronology of the games commonly accepted by classicists and correct the date of the comet that has been accepted by astronomers. The astronomers have almost without exception placed the comet in September, because Roman sources date the comet by mentioning its connection with the games, which Edmond Halley mistakenly assigned to September. Nearly all astronomical treatments have relied, through intermediaries, on Halley’s original study. But, as Ramsey and Licht point out, the classicists are virtually unanimous in the opinion that the games of 44 B.C. were held in July. So much for the astronomers.

The authors’ revision of classical history is a little more complicated. According to the traditional chronology, in 46 B.C. Julius Caesar established games to be held in September and called *ludi Veneris Genetricis* (the games of Venus Genetrix—i.e., Venus the ancestor). This designation was a natural ploy, as the Julii claimed to be descended from Venus. In 45, still according to the standard chronology, the games were moved to July and renamed *ludi Victoriae Caesaris*, in celebration of Caesar’s military victories. In 44, after Caesar’s assassination, the *ludi Victoriae Caesaris* were again celebrated in July along with *ludi funebres* (funeral games) for Caesar. Ramsey and Licht adjust the chronology to read like this: the games of 46 B.C. were indeed held in September and called *ludi Veneris Genetricis* (as in the standard account); in 45 they were again held in September, under the same name; but in 44, at the behest of Octavian, the

games were both moved to July and renamed in honor of Caesar. Shifting the games to Caesar's birth month and renaming them in his honor were, then, part of a campaign by Octavian to promote acceptance of Caesar's divinity. The appearance of the comet in the course of the games, Ramsey and Licht argue, must have strongly bolstered Octavian's efforts.

The authors' arguments are often intricate. The historical problem is difficult to resolve because of the paucity of Roman sources linking the comet to the games and because most of the sources are not independent but derive from Octavian's (Augustus's) own account, written two decades after the event. The astronomical problem is rendered more difficult, indeed almost intractable, by the fact that Chinese sources mention a comet only in May–June of 44 B.C., although the Romans saw it only in July. Ramsey and Licht use a good deal of ingenuity to explain this discrepancy, invoking haze from an eruption of Mount Etna. It is not obvious that the Roman and Chinese observers saw the same object, as most of the Roman sources describe the object as starlike, whereas the Chinese sources give it a tail. But assuming they really do have two reported positions of the comet, the authors attempt to calculate orbital parameters for Comet Caesar. As two observations do not suffice to determine an orbit, this effort requires even greater ingenuity.

Few readers will find it easy to follow the line of argument from beginning to end. The least compelling, and the least necessary, part of the book is the effort to determine the elements of the comet's orbit. The most interesting part of the book is the discussion of the political transformation of a comet from a warning of disaster to a sign of Caesar's ascent to the gods. An appendix provides a full collection of all ancient sources that mention either the games or the comet or both.

JAMES EVANS

Guy Serbat (Editor). *Celse de la médecine*. Volume 1: *Livres I–II*. (Collection des Universités de France [Budé].) lxxvi + 179 pp. Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1995.

This reedited Latin text of *De medicina* 1–2 (to be followed in due course by 3–7) is the first revision of Celsus since F. Marx, editor, *A. Cornelii Celsi* (Teubner, 1915 [Corpus Medicorum Latinorum, 1]). Guy Serbat incorporates readings from the Codex Toletanus 97-12 of the fifteenth century (T), adding to the version adduced

by Marx from four other manuscripts: Codex Romanus Vaticanus 5951 (V), Codex Florentinus Laurentianus 73, 1 (F), and Codex Parisinus 7028 (P), all of the ninth and tenth centuries; and Codex Florentinus Laurentianus 73, 7 (J) of the fifteenth century. Serbat's *apparatus criticus* is a great improvement over that of Marx, and one immediately gains specifics on why Serbat has chosen (or emended) readings from T along with V, F, P, and J. Compared to Marx's occasionally muddled readings, those by Serbat are generally models of clarity. This Budé text is a marked improvement over the 1915 CML version in many instances, explicating many puzzling passages also reproduced (from Marx) by W. G. Spencer in his text and translation of Celsus (in 3 vols. [1935–1938], Loeb Classical Library). Manuscript T is, of course, essential for the long-sought fill-in of the lacuna in *De medicina* 4.27 (Marx, p. 181; Spencer, Vol. 1, pp. 448–449), and Serbat's commentary on these sections will be anticipated with some interest. One must note, however, that the text and commentary on the famous Prooemium by Philippe Mudry, *La préface du De medicina de Celse* (Institut Suisse de Rome, 1982), is far fuller and often more precise than that offered by Serbat, and students of ancient medicine desiring lucid analysis on the numerous problems in the Prooemium should employ Mudry's painstaking commentary.

Very controversial will be Serbat's opinion that Celsus belongs securely in the company of the "followers" of Asclepiades of Bithynia. In her incisive and convincing "The Life and Death of Asclepiades of Bithynia" (*Classical Quarterly*, 1982, 32:358–370, rpt. in *Roman Culture and Society: Collected Papers* [Clarendon, 1991], pp. 427–443), Elizabeth Rawson quite effectively showed that Asclepiades was dead by 92 B.C., using the basic reference of Cicero's *De oratore* 1.62. The Bithynian was active in Rome circa 120 B.C., whether or not he switched from rhetoric to medicine as related by Pliny the Elder. J. T. Vallance, in his masterful *The Lost Theory of Asclepiades of Bithynia* (Clarendon, 1990), demonstrates clear links with aspects of a "medical atomism" rather distant from the solidly empirical approaches of Celsus in *De medicina* (however one ranks Celsus's abilities as a writer or presumed *medicus* who flourished in the reign of Tiberius [A.D. 14–37]). Serbat is unaware of Rawson's fundamental essay, and he does not know Vallance, so that the mushiness of any "Asclepiadean" medicine in the *De medicina* remains inchoate. And in spite of firm evidence to the contrary, Serbat presumes direct