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Review of: A Companion to Roman Rhetoric by William Dominik and Jon Hall

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A Companion to Roman Rhetoric by William Dominik: J'on Hall
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At 530d9, when Socrates says that he will make time later to listen to Ion, the mss. present a choice between ἀκροάσθαι and ἀκροασθαί. In an appendix (261–69, one of three dealing in detail with textual questions), Rijksbaron surveys the uses of both infinitives of this verb in prose writers and notes that the aorist infinitive of ἀκροασθαί is not otherwise attested in Plato. As for σχολή + infinitive, elsewhere the aorist only appears when the whole expression is negated (e.g., “I don’t have time to . . .”). He therefore prints ἀκροασθαί, which “presents the listening as an unbounded action”; Socrates “is not interested in anything in particular” which Ion may have to say (269). See the good discussion of the force of the imperfect and aorist indicatives in the contrafactual conditions at 540d5–6 and 540d7–e2, and the note on the pragmatic difference between the present and aorist infinitives of ἔπηγομαι at 531b7–9.

In several places Rijksbaron rescues the text by defending an ms. reading. At 532b4 he prints, with most mss., αὐτὸς ὀμολογεῖ, “he [Ion] himself agrees,” instead of the ὀμολογή ("you yourself agree") of Burnet and many other editors, which has no ms. authority; elsewhere in Plato the middle of ὀμολογεῖω has reciprocal meaning. At 533c8 he prints ἄχρομαι . . . ἀποφαινόμενος with TWSF, rejecting ἔχρομαι, which Cobet and subsequent editors had adopted.

Rijksbaron’s grasp of Plato’s idiom is evident in his extensive note on 535b1, where he prints ἔχε δή τοῦτο μει ἐπέτε with the first imperative separate and, in its context, somewhat rude. Also good are his remarks on word order, e.g., on the phrase σὺ . . . ἦ τῶν μάντεων τίς τῶν ἄγαθων (531b6): “the order places the emphasis on τῶν μάντεων, or rather, in pragmatic terms, it turns τῶν μάντεων into the contrastive Focus of the question, on a par with σὺ.” See 538b5–6, where Rijksbaron chooses the reading περὶ ἔτερων καὶ ἐπιστήμη πραγμάτων ἐστίν “because it is the only one which puts ἔτερων in the Topic, and ἐπιστήμη in the Focus position.”

This is not an edition for beginners, but anyone who has taught Ion or who has tackled Ion while learning Greek will find Rijksbaron’s work invaluable. He wears his considerable learning lightly and is always clear, even when he uses terms which may be unfamiliar. (His The Syntax and Semantics of the Verb in Classical Greek [3rd ed., Amsterdam 2002/Chicago 2006] is a clear and accessible introduction to the insights which linguistics can bring to Greek philology.)

One final comment. At 530a2 and again at 531c2, Socrates asks Ion a follow-up question introduced by ἢ or ἦ, depending on which ms. reading one prefers. Rijksbaron notes (106, 139) that there are good parallels for both readings—and announces that he has decided what to print by flipping a coin. One has to admire the forthrightness of an editor like that.

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This Blackwell Companion successfully communicates the efflorescence of Roman rhetorical practices and the centrality of rhetoric in Roman thought. There are recurring points: the influence of Greek on Latin rhetoric and Rome’s attendant struggle to create her own identity, as well as the contestation of both an evolutionary model (derived primarily from Cicero’s writings) and
a model of decline (drawn principally from Tacitus’ *Dialogus*). Because the approach of the editors is inclusive, dissenting voices do appear, imbuing the volume with an intellectual vibrancy that is rare in this genre.

Following a survey of modern critical approaches, Part One attempts to excavate native Roman rhetoric, even seeking traces in Roman comedy. Despite the attempt here to reach back in time, the temporal range of the collection remains mostly within the first centuries, framed by Cicero on one side, Quintilian, Seneca, and Tacitus on the other. Likewise, although there is a chapter on the Second Sophistic and another on the afterlife of Roman rhetoric, forays into later periods are rare. Part One is rounded out by Sciarrino’s discussion of Cato Maior and Gaius Gracchus in which she quotes a fascinating fragment from *De Sumpto Suo* that appears to show Cato in the act of composition. Stroup treats the way that Latin both influenced and appropriated its Greek models. The overarching themes that emerge are the tensions inherent in imperial expansion and the richness of the cultural ferment in second-century Rome.

Part Two discusses the cultural role and contexts of oratorical performance and opens with a chapter on declamation. Such education was the purview of the elite and Corbell argues that the *Controversiae* were ultimately conservative, reinforcing traditional values. Republican practice, centered upon political and historical themes, contrasts with that of the empire where the focus was instead upon the social hierarchy. Ramsey demonstrates the fungible nature of the written artifact by listing the letters where Cicero contemplated making changes to his speeches. In an elegant chapter, Rees contextualizes panegyric as a mistrusted Greek form during the republic and traces its rise to become a stamp of *Romanitas* in the late antique period. Other offerings explore the anxieties underlying rhetoric’s obsessive discourse on gender or tackle political realities (e.g., *contiones*, patron-client relationships, and senatorial procedure).

The third section maps how rhetoric was approached as “a systematic body of knowledge” (6) and contains chapters on humor, *elocutio*, and delivery. Gaines, covering the handbook tradition, provides a tidy summary of the differences between *De Inventione* and *Rhetorica ad Herennium*. Small points out, in her chapter on mnemotechnics, that rather than disappearing with the advent of writing, the ability to keep records led to a proliferation of memory technologies. Once words could be fixed, the desire for exact reproduction increased, much as modern concertgoers expect a pop star to perform a hit song note for note.

Part Four moves away from the exploration of technical systems to look at language practitioners such as grammarians. Here the idealized orator appears as imagined by men who were orators themselves. Cicero’s desire to crown himself the ideal contrasts with the wistful backward glances of imperial authors. These writings display a certain optimistic insistence upon the marriage of goodness and persuasion.

The closing section demonstrates some of the insights offered by viewing literature through the lens of rhetoric. While not all of the readings were entirely successful, these chapters serve as a thematic bookend to the collection. They revisit again the polarized view of persuasion, well attested in many of the Latin sources, as a medium of Roman power and yet still somehow unsettling, still a bit Greek. Damon, in her chapter on historiography, tests the limits of *inventio* in history and offers a useful corrective to pessimistic views of the genre’s evidential value. The danger is minimization; that recognizing rhetoric becomes a charge of merely rhetoric, and so undermines the foundation of truth upon which historical, political, or even artistic validity...
is felt to rest, as with certain criticisms of Ovid and Lucan. Contrast this with Seneca who, as Wilson argues, had “no language of Reason other than the language provided by Roman rhetoric” (433).

Dominik and Hall have done an excellent job of editing this volume. Each ten-page offering is followed by the author’s suggestions for further reading and achieves the not inconsiderable feat of being clear enough to be understood by students, but meaty enough to provide sustenance for their professors. This volume demonstrates the ubiquity of rhetoric in Rome and, in the best tradition of handbooks, offers concise introductions to current scholarly trends and a firm starting-point for further inquiry.

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