

Review

Reviewed Work(s): The Satires of Persius by W. S. Merwin

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Rom und Ägypten von 116 bis 51 v. Chr.

By ECKART OLSHAUSEN. (Diss., Friedrich-Alexander-Universität, Erlangen-Nürnberg, 1963.) Erlangen: Wiltrud Hög (printer), 1963. Pp. 3+68.

This is a competent but not a distinguished dissertation. In five chapters it examines five episodes: the visit of L. Memmius to Egypt (112 B.C.); the visit of Lucullus (87/86 B.C.); the will of Ptolemy XI, Alexander II, which bequeathed his kingdom to Rome; the Roman annexation of Cyprus (58 B.C.); and the flight of Ptolemy Auletes from Egypt and his restoration at Roman hands. But the author makes no attempt to see the woods as well as the individual trees. His only general conclusion (p. 63) is that by the death of Auletes in 51 B.C. Egypt had become a Roman dependency; yet it seems unlikely that scholars have ever seriously doubted this anyway. The point is that some scholars have evolved elaborate theories of an anti-Egyptian or anti-Ptolemaic foreign policy on the part of Rome during the century or more before 51 B.C. Does the author believe this view to be right or wrong, and why? What do his researches add up to?

The documentation (of secondary works) of this study is relatively sketchy; one is given no indication, however, that it is an abstract of a longer work, and occasionally the author shows himself to be ill-informed about necessary matters subsidiary to his main purpose. He seems, for example, to be unaware of the subtleties involved in the meaning of such Roman classifications as *socius*, *foederatus*, *amicus*,

the beginning of his work (this is not to argue, of course, that C. Q. was in fact the source of D.'s Roman chronology, or that the former discussed early chronology at all). Again W. seizes upon one possible explanation of a phenomenon without considering alternative possibilities. P. 249: It is by no means improbable in itself that the dedication of the Capitoline temple should have occurred immediately after the expulsion of the kings. Coincidences of this sort do happen commonly. President Johnson in 1963/4 completed many projects initiated by the late President Kennedy. Pp. 455-56: The *quis ignorat* of Cic. *Balb.* 53 shows that the consuls' names were not contained in the text of the *Foedus Cassianum*, but that the consular date was merely *communis opinio*. On the contrary, an unprejudiced reader of Cic. could easily draw the opposite inference.

and their Greek translations (pp. 4-5 for example), although this is a matter of considerable importance to a student of Rome's foreign relations.¹

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The Satires of Persius. Translated by W.

S. MERWILN. Introduction and Notes by WILLIAM S. ANDERSON. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1961. Pp. 119. \$3.50.

Some of Persius' most obvious characteristics can be summarized as follows: In tone, a combination of strict meter with staccato colloquial interchanges, occasional hysterical repetitions of a single word, sudden tonal shifts, parody, bathos, austere elevation, and two kinds of dialogue not always clearly distinguished: internal (stream-of-consciousness interruptions) and external (the interruptions of an imagined protestor). In imagery, kaleidoscopic variations of scene, rapid thumbnail sketches

1. Details: Pp. 6-11: Despite the extensive speculation of eminent scholars cited by O., the visit of Memmius was probably a *libera legatio* of whose purpose nothing is known. P. 14 and n. 16: The question of the rule of Ptolemy Apion over Cyrene is more complicated than O. seems to think; cf. *CP*, LVIII (1963), 22, n. 2; as is also the question of Roman control over the country 96-74 B.C., *ibid.*, pp. 11-25 *passim*; cf. also J. Reynolds, "Cyrenaica, Pompey, and Cn. Cornelius Lentulus," *JRS*, LII (1962), 97-103. Of the tyrants of Cyrene at this time we know the name of Leander (cf. *CP*, *ibid.*, p. 18) as well as that of his brother Niocrates. P. 17 and n. 23: The objection (cf. Cic. *Fam.* 9. 8. 1) of J. van Ooteghem to taking Cic. *Acad.* literally as a source for Lucullus' philosophic activities at Alexandria is well taken, and hardly answered by O. P. 33: By "R. L. Heart, *A Hist. of Cyprus*, Cambridge, 1949, I, 156ff." the author probably intends to refer to Sir George Hill's *Hist.* P. 40, n. 50: I did not say (*CP*, I [1955], 99) that Clodius passed three laws in regard to Cato and Cyprus, but two; on the force of the argument the student will have to judge for himself (*ibid.*, p. 109, n. 11, not n. 12). P. 43 and n. 55, p. 48: One cannot argue that Cyprus was necessarily in effective Roman control by the time Auletes left Egypt (before 11 Aug., 58), because one could understand that the King's subjects were angered at his acquiescence in announced Roman intent, rather than Roman act (Dio 39. 12. 2). No chronology can be built on the sequence of two sentences in Liv. *Ep.* 104, for Plut. *Cat. min.* 35. 2-4, cf. 36. 1, clearly shows that Cato had not had news of Cyprus from the message he had sent ahead at the time when he had his famous interview with Auletes.

of character-types, occasional depreciatory sexual parallels such as that between a poet reciting to poetry-lovers and a homosexual group binge. In subject matter, a continuous flow of sarcastic, jeering attacks on standard moral flaws like laziness, money-grubbing, extravagance, or predatory desires, these attacks being marked by a fertile creation of absurdities (as in the picture of a super-avaricious worshiper whose sacrifices to the God of Wealth impoverish him) and punctuated once or twice per satire by sudden bursts of *Quovadis* ethical exhortation often recalling the cryptic symbolism of an Amos or the laconic asceticism of a Thoreau. Of so individual a satirist Conington, to give some notion of his total effect, well writes that "There is nothing in Horace or Juvenal more striking than the early part of the third satire, where the youthful idler is at first represented by a series of light touches, snoring in broad noon while the harvest is baking in the field and the cattle reposing in the shade, then starting up and calling for his books only to quarrel with them—and afterward as we go further the scene darkens, and we see the figure of the lost profligate blotting the background, and catch an intimation of yet more fearful punishments in store for those who will not be warned in time—punishments as dire as any that the oppressors of mankind have suffered or devised—the beholding of virtue in her beauty when too late, and the consciousness of a corroding secret which no other heart can share."

Modern translation of Persius from Dryden's time to our own has generally taken one of two forms: in Dryden (1693), Drummond (1799), Gifford (1821), and Tate (1930), pentameter couplets seek to parallel the regularities of the Latin dactylic hexameters; in Conington (1874) and Ramsay (1918), prose follows more closely than is possible with strict meter and rime the syntactical contours and exact verbal denotations of the Latin.

The translation of W.S. Merwin evidently has two aims, both new (at any rate, the second is new and the first has scarcely

been attempted since Dryden): to use a diction as contemporary and reasonably colloquial as Persius' itself presumably was for a first-century Roman audience, and to steer a middle course between out-and-out prose and a pentameter or hexameter line.

Here is Merwin's conclusion of Satire 5, in which Persius, having just fired a four-line salvo at ambitious political canvassing, suddenly veers to an attack on religious superstitions followed by a brief warning that his imported philosophy will have little popular appeal:

... littering the place with
Chick-pea tickets for the crowd to scrap over,
so that
Basking gaffers may keep harking back to
the gorgeous
Floral Games of our day. Isn't that a pretty
ambition?
But on Herod's birthday, when the violet-
garlanded
Lamps arrayed at their greasy windows have
puked out
Fat clouds of smoke, when the tails of
swimming tuna
Embrace the red bowls, and the white wine-
jugs brim over,
Your lips twitch in silence and you turn pale
at the sabbath
Of the circumcised. Other times there are
black ghosts,
Dangers attendant on broken eggs, the
looming
Emasculate priests of Ceres and the one-
eyed priestess
With her rattle, to hammer demons into your
frame
If you don't take the prescribed three heads
of garlic
Upon rising.

However, bring up such things among
Those varicose centurions and you'll fetch a
horse-laugh
Out of some muscle-bound Pulfenius and
hear how he'd
Not give a clipped coin for a hundred of your
highbrow Greeks.

For me, this is among the most satisfactory renderings yet achieved of the negative Persius. Merwin's alternations (if this is what they are) between break-

downs into prose and regular or ragged rhythms: "EmBRACE the red BOWLS, and the WHITE wine-JUGS brim OVER" or "NOT give a CLIPPED COIN for a HUNDred of your HIGHbrow GREEKS" fit the content in which chains of images skirt, without plunging past, the edges of incoherence.

The opening of Satire 6 provides as good a sustained example as I have found of Merwin's Persius in an opposite mood:

Has the season, descending into winter,
 Fetched you, by now, Bassus, to your Sabine
 fireside?
 Is your strung harp alive to the chastening
 plectrum,
 Oh artisan without peer at ordering in verse
 The primal elements of our language and
 waking
 The virile tones of the Latin lyre, oh mar-
 vellous
 Old man, alive with the merriment of youth
 and with
 Songs, besides, which are gay without being
 dirty.

Merwin, like many poets a good mimic, suggests in his last line one of the manners of Ezra Pound, perhaps a presiding genius behind these versions.

No one can read a page of Persius in the Latin without feeling that the old truism applied to so many classical poets is even truer in his case: obviously no single rendering, no single method of rendering, can be expected to exhaust him. Read aloud, Merwin's versions turn out to be inventive and energetic. It is good to have them.

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Die "Europa" des Moschos. By WINFRIED BÜHLER. ("Hermes, Einzelschriften," Heft 13.) Text, Übersetzung und Kommentar. Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag GMBH, 1960. Pp. 7+247. Mk. 22.

In this volume, which is an elaboration of his Munich doctoral dissertation, Dr. Bühler provides a complete modern edition of Moschus' major work. The introduction discusses the MS tradition of the poem and

the principal treatments of the Europa theme both before and after Moschus. The text is accompanied by a full apparatus criticus and a close though very readable translation. There follow an extensive commentary and a series of seven excursuses on grammatical and stylistic matters. A bibliography and three indices close the work.

This poem, like others in the Greek bucolic corpus, originally circulated independently and only in the Middle Ages came finally to be incorporated into one or another bucolic collection. Its MS tradition therefore can—indeed must—be investigated independently.

B. sets out by enumerating all the evidence for the text. He finds fourteen MS witnesses, plus the Aldine, Juntine, and Calliergian editions, the emendations of F. Núñez, and some insignificant handwritten emendations of unknown origin in two copies of printed editions. Except for the last-mentioned category, these had all been known to Gallavotti and are listed or alluded to in his critical edition of the Bucolic poets. Gallavotti, however, like previous editors, based his text on the four oldest MSS (FBMS), apparently without completely collating or classifying the *recentiores*. This task, laborious though it be, should of course be performed once and for all, however meager the prospect of any gains. This B. has done. His collations were made mainly from photographic copies; only one (A) was made directly from the MS.

B. classifies the MSS into two principal groups on the basis of the omission of lines. One group, consisting of FBM, contains the entire text, relatively well preserved; the other group, which he designates σ after S, the MS which was heretofore regarded as the most important representative of the group, is characterized by four lacunae as well as by various alterations and corruptions. Within the first group F, long recognized as the single best MS, represents one line of transmission, and BM another. In this B.'s work confirms the classification of Galla-