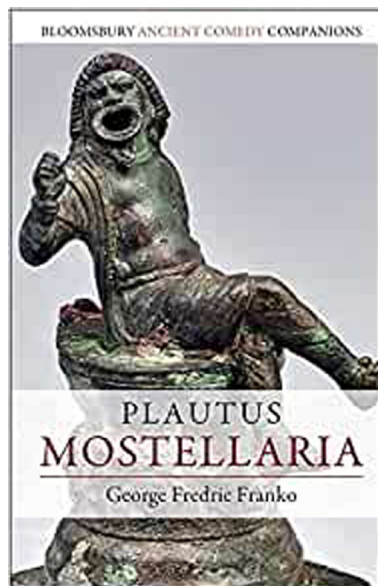


## Plautus: Mostellaria

Franko (G.F.) Pp. xvi + 159. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2022. Cased, £70. ISBN: 978-1-350-18841-9

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The book forms part of a series of Ancient Comedy Companions from this publisher and it presumes neither a knowledge of Latin nor a familiarity with Roman Comedy. However, it does assume an interest in dramaturgy and an interest in ancient Roman society and culture.

A brief *Plot Summary*, *Dramatis Personae*, and a metrical synopsis which describes the play's *arcs* (units of action defined by metre) introduce a breezy first section which covers the play's background, translation/adaptation and what might be called

Homeric echoes. It is here the Franko stretches his brief somewhat, I think; the *Mostellaria* is surely not a deliberate reversal of the *Odyssey*, even if Plautus might have had Livius Andronicus in mind. However, there is, as always in this book, food for thought.

The second section, *Foundations and Frames*, deals with slavery and the precarious position, in particular, of slave women. Franko perhaps leans a little too heavily on modern sensibilities here; whilst one can import today's attitudes, a Roman comedy must stand on its own merits and is, of course, a product of its own society. Nevertheless, there is much that is informative, including the hybrid nature of the *palliata* and the role played by money in the play.

It is in the third section, *Staging Mostellaria*, where Franko seems to be at his most comfortable and it shows in his writing. He ranges across song (and dance), metatheatre, topical reference and the ambitious interplay of metre, farce and improvisation and stage-play. I learnt much from this section, even though I have produced and directed the play.

A briefer fourth section, *Afterlife and Ghost Lights*, alludes to what we can tease from the text about the play's transmission, but also usefully introduces comparison with *The Taming of the Shrew* (its Tranio-Grumio prologue), Heywood's *The English Traveller* (which contains pastiche of the *Mostellaria*) and Jonson's *The Alchemist*. Franko neatly elucidates the debt owed to Plautus by the three English playwrights. He finishes this section with a disquisition on *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum* (how could he not?), which may be much better known to most than early English drama. This leads nicely to a section (Tranio Trickster) which draws the many strands together.

There are four Appendices, copious Notes, an 11-page Bibliography and an Index, all invaluable. They are the cherry on top of a very digestible cake. This study would certainly be a very valuable resource for anyone studying the play in Latin or in translation.

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## Aristophanes: Peace

Fraser (G.) Pp. 249, Independently published, 2022. Paper, £12.50. ISBN: 978-0-9775933-5-4

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This is an intriguing volume, produced as a labour of love by – I think – a non-classicist. Nevertheless, it displays throughout a thoroughly academic familiarity with the play. Fraser's original plan was a to produce an interlinear translation, the better to elucidate the play's 'mysteries' to students and other readers. The awkwardnesses inherent in this task then encouraged Fraser to produce a verse translation which is modern, colloquial and, for the most part, comically effective. Why not put both in the same book, he concluded.

Fraser clearly found the verse translation congenial; it romps along with its hero, Trygaeus, at some pace, and it achieves its purpose of elucidating the play for the modern reader. Fraser is Australian, so we get a mixture of British and American colloquialism, but little really jars. The rhymes are occasionally a little forced, but sometimes, it might be argued, for comic effect.

Fraser has elided or smoothed over some of the political/historical references, in the interest of readability; one cannot blame him. He is also refreshingly direct, so be prepared for some words not normally found in English translations.

The interlinear (*sic*) translation will be a positive boon for anyone wanting to get closer to the Greek original; it manages – just – to stay faithful and make good or adequate sense, despite the occasional harshness. The ascription of parts is in Greek capitals throughout, so Greekless readers will have to learn the alphabet or find themselves constantly checking the *dramatis personae* (which is bilingual).

There is a short bibliography, of which half the volumes consulted were published in the 19th century. There is also a bilingual glossary. The latter is occasionally deficient in detail.

The book could have done with one, final proofreading: there are a few spelling slips; *Cleonymous* is thus often spelled (except in the Glossary); Apollo is said to have been born on Naxos; *Aggro* is said to be short for 'aggressor', which is news to me; the city of Megara is confused with its Sicilian namesake. However, most readers may not spot, nor mind, these small lapses; they will be charmed by the care taken to enliven the play and will find the whole enterprise a useful introduction to Aristophanes.

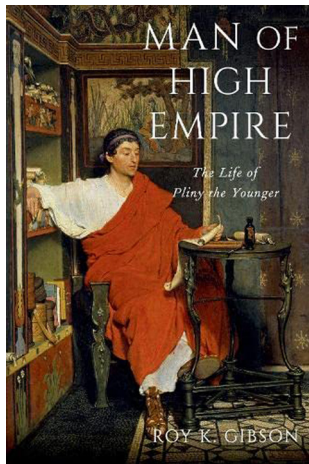
doi: 10.1017/S2058631023000338

## Man of High Empire

Gibson (R.K.) Pp. 320. Oxford University Press, 2022. Paper, £16.99. ISBN: 9780197654834.

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Roy Gibson's *Man of High Empire* is a biography about Pliny the Younger. Pliny's *Letters* are a useful source for topics such as Roman slavery, the roles of men and women in the Roman Empire, the emergence of Christianity, the political climate of the imperial senate, and of course the eruption of Vesuvius. Gibson is a world class expert on Pliny and so the book is detailed and scholarly. Yet what really separates Gibson from other Classicists is his accessible writing style. This book is thankfully free of the usual academic clichés such

as an abundance of semi-colons and obscurantist scholarly jargon. It is therefore realistic for busy teachers and students to read this text and learn something new about the Roman world.

The first chapter is an introduction and Gibson goes on to outline his argument in the second chapter. At the heart of Gibson's biography is his claim that Pliny presents himself in a variety of ways through his association with different geographical places. The chapters of Gibson's biography are structured along the lines of Pliny's different geographical *personae*. However, the book is also written in such a way that the chapters generally follow Pliny's life chronologically. This approach is unique and is useful for authors such as Pliny, where a great deal of pointless speculation would be employed in relation to Pliny's early life. Instead, the biography is fixed in the historical information which we can uncover from the *Letters* themselves. This structuring is also helpful in telling us about the ways in which various locations of the Roman world were associated with different virtues and vices. Gibson hopes that his work can inspire other biographies to take a geographical approach and the merits of doing so are in full display in this book.

In the third chapter, Gibson examines Pliny's association with his hometown of Comum and his early life. Particularly interesting is Gibson's comments on Pliny's elders. As Gibson states, Pliny's father died in his youth and so he was raised by older men such as Pliny the Elder, Spurinna, Corellius Rufus, Verginius Rufus, as well as the older woman Calpurnia Hispulla. Pliny's portrait of his life in Comum is therefore rooted in this fond memory of his 'elder network', which gives us an insight into the early lives of the many Roman men who did not have the traditional upbringing of the father.

The fourth chapter is dedicated to Pliny's time in Campania and the famous Vesuvius letters, where Pliny tells us how he survived the eruption of Vesuvius as a young man. It is important to keep in mind that Pliny wrote his Vesuvius letters around a quarter of a century after the eruption. Gibson demonstrates that the letters are reflective in nature and Pliny is not shy in critiquing his poor past conduct. In fact, Gibson argues that the main purpose of the Vesuvius letters is to show the importance which Pliny the Elder had in helping to raise Pliny as a young man. Gibson contends that Pliny presents his uncle and adoptive father Pliny the Elder as a heroic figure who attempted to save stranded Romans from the eruption of Vesuvius, even if he was unsuccessful in doing so. As Gibson goes on to argue, the Vesuvius letters are part of a larger series of letters where Pliny reflects upon his uncle's exemplary conduct and hopes to meet and even exceed his dedication to study and virtue.

Chapter five shifts to Pliny's political career in Rome. Of most interest is Gibson's argument that Pliny has anxieties about the future of Rome under Trajan. Pliny has often been considered overwhelmingly optimistic about Trajan and it is not uncommon for classicists to consider him a sycophantic supporter of the Trajanic regime. Yet as Gibson convincingly argues, Pliny ceases to promote Trajan from Book 6 and Books 7–9 instead express doubt about the senate's ability to learn correct conduct after Domitian's tyranny and are filled with pessimistic letters about illness and death. Ultimately, Gibson contends that Pliny is optimistic about his own literary output and status but is surprisingly pessimistic politically despite Trajan returning to Rome from his Dacian conquests. This argument challenges the ways in which Pliny has commonly been considered politically.

In chapter six, Gibson considers Pliny's association with Umbria. Gibson demonstrates that Pliny had many friends from this region and that it was closer to him in Rome than Comum. Consequently, Pliny travelled to Umbria more frequently than to his hometown. However, Gibson contends that Umbria was not as advantageous to Pliny as Comum since it was not associated with the traditional Roman values which Pliny hoped to promote in his *Letters*. Gibson returns to Comum in chapter seven and examines Pliny's association with the town in his adult life. As Gibson outlines, Pliny presents Comum as possessing traditional virtues such as *frugalitas* (frugality) and *verecundia* (modesty). Pliny's marriage to the Comum-born Calpurnia was a way for him to promote his connections to the values of the Transpadane region.

Finally, chapter eight examines Pliny's time as a governor in the province of Bithynia-Pontus. As Gibson demonstrates, Pliny is often considered an incompetent and subservient governor of Trajan. However, Pliny had entered a province with a bad history of corrupt governing and past governors had even been brought to court by provincials. Pliny needed to exercise extreme caution and his letters to Trajan were well within the bounds of what was typically expected in imperial correspondence. Gibson details how Pliny had to take care when dealing with the elite of Bithynia-Pontus, delegate many matters to local officials, respect local