

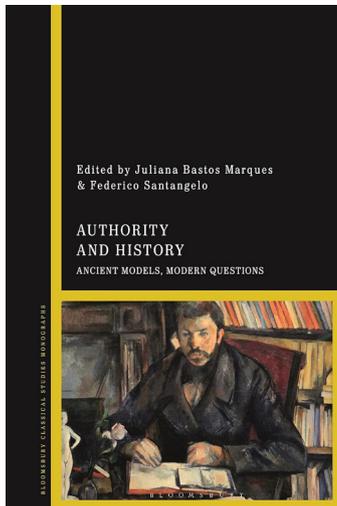
Book Review

Authority and History. Ancient Models, Modern Questions

Bastos Marques (J.), Santangelo (F.) (edd.) Pp. viii + 196. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2023. Cased, £85. ISBN: 978-1-350-26944-6

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In this anthology of essays from Ancient to Modern Scholars, the central driving force behind the creation of *Authority and History* has been the bitter disputes of the 21st century. And Marques correctly states in the book's introduction that the most bitter and often the most poisonous disputes in this century have happened in the field of Classics. From issues of race and gender to the ideologies of the modern Classical writers, all have been brought into question. Ultimately though this must be seen from the angle of truth

and legitimacy, how those definitions have changed in the course of the 21st century and who gets to establish what Classical studies are.

This anthology goes a long way to prove the point that while many other disciplines within or outside the Humanities have tried to say that the Classics are no longer relevant, given the level and intensity of debate in the field it must make them one of the most intellectually active fields of study in the entire world today. Even if the debates are centred on controversy, the importance to modern times and the individual cannot be underestimated. The editors have gone a long way also to provide such a diverse perspective on the ethos of Classical Studies, but they certainly have also not neglected the traditional perspectives of Classics. This is why this anthology is such a compelling read for anyone in the field, whether you are a tenured professor or a teacher in Classics in whichever curriculum.

The editors of this anthology have also included amongst the essays several which directly mention the subversion of the Classical ethos and the ways and instances that this has happened. Many of the authors would argue subversion of this ethos in the modern world is made far easier than it once was, because of the ease in which your audience can be influenced. Any audience reading a piece on the Classics is at the mercy of manipulation because the modern audience in all likelihood had no idea which

authority on a Classical subject was indeed truthful. Any reader of this anthology does not have to go far to think of television programmes like *Ancient Aliens* or dubious sources that exist on the internet. From quotations to monuments, nothing is left unaffected.

My one fault with this anthology, and it is certainly not with the quality of scholarship involved in compiling the volume from some very illustrious authors, would be that the active goal to provide authority or new thinking on the truth will be missed by the vast majority of people who have an interest in Classics. In most instances they won't know of this Bloomsbury edition because it is too academic. Thus, the target audience of this anthology will always remain classical scholars themselves. And most of them already know which side of the authority debate they are on, or that a broad sense of consensus has already been reached on the subject of Authority in History.

The anthology is an excellent example of the reception of ancient rhetoric with modern modifications and the various debates around those modifications. And it presents to the reader views that, in whichever side of the profession they may fall, they can agree on one thing: that subversion of the facts must be weighed against the author's own claim of legitimacy. If in this equation the former is found to be true, then it deserves to be discarded. Although it can always be said that no one holds a monopoly on the truth, this equation will at least give the reader the comfort of a certain legitimacy for whatever truth of subject matter they were reading or watching. I don't think that it will ever be really possible to end all subversion of facts or even the perpetuation of certain ideologies in their entirety. The world has become too wired up for that to ever happen. And it was most certainly the reason why so few arguments and debate about controversies existed in the Classics in the last century. They might have been there or somewhere under the surface, but you never got wind of them, because the community was too close-knit to air dirty laundry in public.

The editors and the authors of the many essays in this anthology have proved that, in the world of social media and the internet, the reader has become as important as the writer. And that this relationship might not always be symbiotic. The anthology proves that both modern readers and writers can also be parasitic with the thoughts and writings of each other and that the Classical field probably has a greater share of parasites than other fields of study. However, this should not be an overwhelming cause for despair, even though classical terminology might change its meaning from one decade to another. This modern to-and-fro between reader and writer should also have the effect of creating a more open mind.

It is this open mind, that, in the end, will always be responsible for the shedding of light into every corner of Classical Studies, and where such studies have proven themselves to be segregated and insular this anthology proves that the individual reader who derives the most pleasure will in the end force even the most insular and controversial studies or departments into the light of day. This I believe is the original ethos of the writings of the Greeks and the Romans that was carried over into modern writing, this ethos being one of openness towards the individual and the individual's experience of language, mythology and history. *Authority and History*, with its multiple contributors, shows the classical teaching world how this is both relevant to truth and to the development of the field. All serious teachers and thinkers should take note of this anthology.

doi: 10.1017/S205863102300082X