

JOURNAL FOR TRANSCULTURAL PRESENCES &
DIACHRONIC IDENTITIES FROM ANTIQUITY TO DATE

thersites

10/2019

Filippo Carlà-Uhink & Maja Gori (Eds.)

Modern Identities and Classical Antiquity



www.thersites-journal.de

Imprint

Universität Potsdam 2020

Historisches Institut, Professur Geschichte des Altertums
Am Neuen Palais 10, 14469 Potsdam (Germany)
<https://www.thersites-journal.de/>

Editors

PD Dr. Annemarie Ambühl (Johannes Gutenberg-Universität Mainz)
Prof. Dr. Filippo Carlà-Uhink (Universität Potsdam)
Dr. Christian Rollinger (Universität Trier)
Prof. Dr. Christine Walde (Johannes Gutenberg-Universität Mainz)

ISSN 2364-7612

Contact

Principal Contact

Prof. Dr. Filippo Carlà-Uhink
Email: thersitesjournal@uni-potsdam.de

Support Contact

Dr. phil. Christian Rollinger
Email: thersitesjournal@uni-potsdam.de

Layout and Typesetting

text plus form, Dresden

Cover pictures:

1 – The Archaeological Museum of the Republic of North Macedonia in Skopje at the time of its construction. Photo by Maja Gori, 2008.
2 – Roman gladiator. Part of a statuary group in Rruga Taulantia, Durrës, Albania. Photo by Filippo Carlà-Uhink, September 2019.

Published online at:

<https://doi.org/10.34679/thersites.vol10>

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons License:
Attribution 4.0 International (CC BY 4.0).
This does not apply to quoted content from other authors.
To view a copy of this license visit
<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>

FILIPPO CARLÀ-UHINK

(Universität Potsdam)

Review of Helen Roche & Kyriakos Demetriou: *Brill's Companion to the Classics, Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany*

Brill (Leiden and Boston 2018) = Brill's Companions
to Classical Reception 12, p. 471. ISBN 0789004246041,
€ 182.00 hb

Studies about the importance of Classical Antiquity, and more specifically of ancient Rome within the Fascist myth of the *Romanità* were among the first in the field of the political significance and use of Classical receptions. Starting with the 1970s,¹ Italian scholars first, the international community afterwards, have been discussing for almost forty years the role played by the imagined, reconstructed and discursively produced ancient Rome in the genesis and propaganda of the “new” national identity

created by Fascism. Likewise, the role of individual Classicists in the development of the regime has been thoroughly studied in exemplary studies.² German philhellenism, as summarized in the title of Eliza Marina Butler's 1935 monograph *The Tyranny of Greece over Germany*, has also been investigated on many occasions, highlighting the role of Classical Antiquity—but this time with a stronger focus on Classical Greece, and particularly on Sparta and Athens—in the ideology and propaganda of the Third

1 E.g. AAVV (1977); Cagnetta (1979).

2 E.g. Canfora (2005).

Reich. Particular attention has been dedicated in this context to the idea, established already in the 19th century, that the Greeks were an “Aryan” people, and to the value attributed to the Olympic Games held in Berlin in 1936.³

Considering the amount of scholarship on the topic, therefore, it is to be welcomed that the series *Brill's Companions to Classical Reception* has decided to dedicate a volume to it. As it is meant to be in a companion, the volume does not aim to offer new readings and interpretations, as much as it wants to give a broad and systematic introduction to the existing research and the actual scholarly debates.

In her introduction (pp. 3–28), which provides a very efficient and incisive overview of the main aspects connected to the role of Classical tradition in Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany, Helen Roche indicates as the aim of the volume “to present an illuminating (if necessarily inexhaustive) survey of the whys and wherefores of this phenomenon of totalitarian Classicism” (p. 3). As it would be impossible to provide a complete overview, the chapters try—thus Roche—to provide a varied set of case studies, ranging from the reception of the Classics in academic and intellectual circles to more popular manifestations.

These two points represent also the two main weaknesses of the volume. Starting with the latter, while it is obviously true that a completely systematic overview would have needed much more space than the sixteen chapters of the companion, the selection appears sometimes unbalanced and not always apt for the scope and readership of a companion. A very strong focus on architecture, dealt with in four chapters (two of which by the same author, Flavia Marcello), is accompanied by just one chapter on cinema, albeit an excellent contribution by Arthur Pomeroy, pp. 264–285, that provides a fantastic introduction to cinema, propaganda and Classics in totalitarian Italy and Germany, understandable to a public of students and non-specialists. Only one very specific chapter deals, too, with University politics and administration: Stefan Altekamp's analysis of the discipline of Classical Archaeology in Germany during the Third Reich, that displays a prosopography of those who served as professors during that time and their position towards the regime, pp. 289–324. One further chapter deals with school teaching (Helen Roche on Latin and Greek in Nazi schools)—both the latter aspects have been neglected for Fascist Italy. Dino Piovan's chapter on Gaetano De Sanctis, Aldo Ferrabino, Arnaldo Momigliano and Claudio Treves does not balance this picture—nor does it aim to, as it deals (excellently) with how these four scholars positioned them-

³ See e.g. Wildmann (1998); Sünderhauf (2004).

selves in the debate about freedom in ancient Greece, reading those positions against their political and biographical background (pp. 82–105).

The reader is also left to wonder why the companion chose to deal with Fascist Italy *and* Nazi Germany—apart from factors such as the Rome-Berlin Axis of 1936 and the common responsibility of both states in World War II, two aspects which are quite irrelevant to the point of Classical receptions. If the point of the volume was to investigate the role of Classics in totalitarianisms—or more specifically in right-wing ones—the exclusion of any analysis on the role of Classics in Francoist Spain, or in Salazar's Portugal, or in Greece under Metaxas, is inexplicable (and this, too, would mean keeping only to Europe, and only to the first half of the 20th century).

The individual chapters included in the collection are excellent in quality, accounting for the obvious fluctuation implicit in every collective volume, and many of them will represent the reference publication on their specific topic for the next years. Particularly successful is the introduction of a balanced approach, as presented by Roche in the introduction, that tries to keep away both from the assumption that anything connected with Classics in Fascism and Nazism was completely compromised by dictatorship, and the post-war self-justification of the Classicists—the claim that they and their colleagues had mostly

been “pure intellectuals”, eventually compromising with the regimes, but almost never true collaborators.

Exactly for this reason, however, a bit of a bitter taste remains when thinking that a focus on one of the two dictatorships (or, alternatively, the planning of two separate volumes!) would have allowed for a more systematic and comprehensive overview. On the other hand, a volume on “totalitarian Classics” including not only Italy and Germany would have meant less depth on single aspects, but offering finally an overview of the role of Classical antiquity in right-wing authoritarianism and thus allowing to better identify international trends, scholarly networks, and also the evolution of cultural memory and history politics in right-wing dictatorships after the end of World War II (for instance in Spain and Portugal). Is it to be hoped that the series will close this gap soon.

Table of Contents

Front Matter
i–xiii

“Distant Models”? Italian Fascism,
National Socialism, and the Lure
of the Classics
(Helen Roche)
3–28

- The Aryans: Ideology and Historical Narrative Types in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries
(Felix Wiedemann)
31–59
- Desired Bodies: Leni Riefenstahl's Olympia, Aryan Masculinity and the Classical Body
(Daniel Wildmann)
60–81
- Ancient Historians and Fascism: How to React Intellectually to Totalitarianism (or Not)
(Dino Piovan)
82–105
- Philology in Exile: Adorno, Auerbach, and Klemperer
(James I. Porter)
106–129
- Fascist Modernity, Religion, and the Myth of Rome
(Jan Nelis)
133–156
- Bathing in the Spirit of Eternal Rome: The Mostra Augustea della Romanità
(Joshua Arthurs)
157–177
- “May a Ray from Hellas Shine upon Us”: Plato in the George-Circle
(Stefan Rebenich)
178–204
- An Antique Echo: Plato and the Nazis
(Alan Kim)
205–237
- Classics and Education in the Third Reich: Die Alten Sprachen and the Nazification of Latin- and Greek-Teaching in Secondary Schools
(Helen Roche)
238–263
- Classical Antiquity, Cinema and Propaganda
(Arthur J. Pomeroy)
264–285
- Classical Archaeology in Nazi Germany
(Stefan Altekamp)
289–324
- Building the Image of Power: Images of Romanità in the Civic Architecture of Fascist Italy
(Flavia Marcello)
325–369
- Forma urbis Mussolinii: Vision and Rhetoric in the Designs for Fascist Rome
(Flavia Marcello)
370–403
- National Socialism, Classicism, and Architecture
(Iain Boyd Whyte)
404–434

Neoclassical Form and the Construction of Power in Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany

(James J. Fortuna)

435–456

Indexes

457–471

Bibliography

AAVV (1977). – AAVV, *Matrici culturali del fascismo* (Bari: Università di Bari 1977).

Cagnetta (1979). – Mariella Cagnetta, *Antichisti e impero fascista* (Bari: Dedalo 1979).

Canfora (2005). – Luciano Canfora, *Il papiro di Dongo* (Milano: Adelphi 2005).

Sünderhauf (2004). – Esther Sophia Sünderhauf, *Griechensehnsucht und Kulturkritik. Die deutsche Rezeption von Winckelmanns Antikenideal 1840–1945* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag 2004).

Wildmann (1998). – Daniel Wildmann, *Begehrte Körper. Konstruktion und Inszenierung des "arischen" Männerkörpers im "Dritten Reich"* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann 1998).

Filippo Carlà-Uhink

Universität Potsdam

Historisches Institut

Am Neuen Palais 10

14469 Potsdam

Email: filippo.carla-uhink@uni-potsdam.de

Suggested citation:

Filippo Carlà-Uhink: Review of Helen Roche & Kyriakos Demetriou: Brill's Companion to the Classics, Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany. In: *thersites 10* (2019): Modern Identities and Classical Antiquity, pp. 234–238.

<https://doi.org/10.34679/thersites.vol10.144>