

BOOK REVIEW

Handbook for Classical Research. By David M. SCHAPS. London and New York: Routledge, 2011. Pp. xxii + 466. Paperback, £22.99/\$37.95. ISBN 978-0-415-42623-0.

Many graduate programs in Classical Studies require a proseminar that introduces the basic tools and methods of classical philology and of its subdisciplines and closely related fields, so that students will have some general sense of the whole field. They will know why epigraphy, papyrology, archaeology, and numismatics matter even for literary scholars, and have some idea of how to go about reading publications in these fields. They will, we hope, understand also why they need to read the apparatus even if they have no ambitions as textual critics, and know how to read it. No proseminar can possibly accomplish all these aims, and other programs do not have such a course, but expect their students to pick up this knowledge as they go. Schaps' handbook is a textbook for a proseminar, or a substitute for one.

Schaps explains in the preface that he wrote the book himself instead of collecting chapters from specialists because he thought unity of tone and a consistent approach were important. He is aware of the danger that the work will seem inadequate to specialists in particular subfields, but he also obviously wants to defend general knowledge. The book is divided into sections: the first is about research as such and bibliography. The second, "language," includes a guide to lexica and grammars, a quick summary of the state of linguistics more broadly, an introduction to actually reading classical texts, including a lesson on how to understand the apparatus. The third deals with Philosophy, Oratory/Rhetoric, Literature, and History. Section IV concerns "Physical Remains" (subdivided into Archaeology, Mycenaean Studies, and Numismatics). "The Written Word," V, addresses epigraphy, papyrology, palaeography, and editing. VI covers "Classics and Related Disciplines"—Art, Music and Dance, Science and Technology, Ancient Religion and Mythology, Law, and the social sciences. Finally, a last section concerns reception, the history of scholarship, reconstruction (efforts like trying to play ancient music, or build a trireme), and translation.

I would not generally expect a work that calls itself a “handbook” to express a vivid personality, but there is an unmistakable voice in this book. The implied author is a constant and immensely amiable presence. He has broad interests and a sense of humor, often directed at himself. He is forthright in talking about how he feels, as a Jew, about the relief of the Temple spoils on the Arch of Titus. Often he is gently witty (noting, for example, that those who cite scholia tend to use the Latin names of the texts), and he often cites those who have provided him with a neat expression or made a good point. The result is consistently enjoyable as well as informative, and it makes the book valuable not just for its content, but as a model for scholarly practice—the author we see is the kind of scholar we want our students to become and the kind most of us aspire to be ourselves—by no means uncritical, but fair-minded.

The best parts of the book have a beautiful, simple, and practical approach. By going through a single example of each kind of publication—a critical text of a literary work, a coin, an inscription, and a papyrus—it teaches the relevant conventions clearly, and Schaps explains why things are done this way.

I am no more an expert on all branches of the field than Schaps claims to be, so when I say that I did not see distortions of particular fields or outdated bibliography, I have probably missed something somewhere. But the quality seems high. There are a few places where I wish he had said more, and a few where he could have been briefer. In the section on critical editions, for example, I would have liked a discussion of the positive and negative apparatus, and the different kinds of information different editions provide, such as how to use an apparatus of parallels and testimonia when there is one. Also, I would have liked some treatment of postmodernist editing: he states on p. 257 that the editor’s job is “to try to print, as far as possible, what the author wrote,” but that has become a more complicated question than it used to be. The section on psychology is vague and unsatisfactory. Quibbles aside, though, this book does an impossible job very well.

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University of Michigan, rscodel@umich.edu