

BOOK REVIEW

Language and Society in the Greek and Roman Worlds. By JAMES CLACKSON. Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2015. Pp. xiv + 210. Paper, \$29.99. ISBN 978-0-521-14066-9.

The stated goal of this welcome new work is to explore how ancient languages function as a window into the history of the ancient world (1). The bulk of the book is concerned with the explanation of how linguistic evidence can illuminate topics such as imperialism, ethnicity, religion, and gender and focuses primarily on Greece and Rome from the Archaic to the Late Antique periods.

Coherently organized, the volume starts with a concise introduction (1–2). The first chapter describes the linguistic landscape of the ancient world. As Clackson discusses the language families and extant evidence for each, he emphasizes the great variety of languages and dialects spoken throughout the ancient Mediterranean, including the “non-affiliated ancient languages” and the still undeciphered inscriptions. After painting a clear picture of the language map of the area, the chapter explains the difficulties and controversies surrounding current models of language diversity. Clackson describes helpful models for thinking about language spread around the Mediterranean and draws on analogous developments in the Near East. Chapter Two tackles the question of language standardization and national languages with examples drawn from Old Persian, Latin, and Greek. This discussion dovetails into an investigation of the development of Greek and its dialects.

The third chapter begins with a description of linguistic phenomena from the twentieth-century Wales. Chapter Three concentrates on the relationship between language and identity and how this relationship is affected by conquest, colonization, minority/majority languages, and bilingualism. Clackson uncovers the side-effects of these phenomena in Ancient Greece and Rome. He explains how bilingualism and specifically the use of a minority language can be read as a resistance to authority and an identifier of a societal subgroup.

Chapter Four focuses on language variation and dialect. Clackson recounts the conclusions of William Labov’s famous study of rhoticism in English speak-

ers of New York City, and in the same section, he explains the difference between diatopic, diastratic, and diachronic language variation. Chapter Four is a good introduction to the genre-specific language of Greek and Roman comedy. The chapter closes with a section on language change and challenges faced by historical sociolinguistics.

In Chapter Five, we read about the effects of gender on language. Much of the chapter is spent identifying the difficulties in drawing conclusions about gendered speech in the ancient world. This chapter finishes with a brief treatment of obscenity with citations drawn mostly from Aristophanes and Petronius.

Clackson's final chapter, "The Languages of Christianity," introduces the linguistic shift brought on by Christianity. Clackson outlines the history of various translations of scripture as a foundation for a discussion of the sociolinguistic effects of language plurality and "sacred idioms." In his discussion of the self-consciousness of Latin- and Greek-speaking Christians regarding their hybrid use of language, Clackson cites heavily from the Church Fathers. Here Clackson returns to the theme of language register by citing Augustine's homilies. The second subsection of this chapter, entitled *What would Jesus Say?*, explores the question of Jesus' linguistic facility. The final section of the chapter unravels the interplay between Christianity and local languages. Here Clackson treats the effect of *Christian* vocabulary on Romance. He concludes the chapter by noting that Latin's victory over its competitors was gradual, taking place over many generations and involving lengthy periods of bilingualism.

The book's conclusion recapitulates the role of evidence given by ancient literature, documents, and inscriptions augmenting the study of physical evidence. Scholars, Clackson claims, can gain insight into historical investigations through a careful consideration of diction, lexical items, syntactical constructions, and idioms. He reminds the reader that the examination of remains from antiquity bears greater fruit when integrated with a panoramic view, which must include a careful investigation of the written remains of antiquity.

A welcome feature of the work is the inclusion of four full-color maps documenting the distribution of languages in Greece and the Mediterranean at different periods. Clackson's text is not encumbered by an unwieldy number of footnotes, but those that appear are carefully chosen and will help the student who wants to delve deeper into the subject matter. A brief but important bibliographic essay (176–177) precedes the bibliography itself, and an index (somewhat disappointing and not comprehensive) closes the volume. The standard of proof-reading is very high.

Clackson's historical narrations are sometimes humorous and never tedious; he seamlessly introduces analogs from the modern era, refers to contemporary sociological issues, and even throws in a movie reference (154). These elements help bring the ancient and pre-historic into sharper focus by reducing the abyss between us and them which appears in many similar scholarly texts.

My only criticism is that the intended audience is slightly ambiguous. Classical authors are frequently referenced without their dates or genre. Readers can be expected to know who Cleopatra and Caesar were, but it would be advantageous to give some sort of background information on Aristophanes, Aulus Gellius, Valerius Maximus, etc. If the audience of the work is primarily students of the Classics, it would seem some fundamental elements of classical orthography and the most basic vocabulary of Latin and Greek would not require treatment (as on page 107). This is ultimately not the fault of the author, but rather of the nature of the series *Key Themes in Ancient History*. The rear cover boasts that does not assume "the reader has any knowledge of Greek or Latin, or of linguistic jargon."

In summary, James Clackson has written a rich and engaging study of the role language played in the ancient Mediterranean, which would be a beneficial addition to an introductory course on Philology or a reading list for ancient history and archaeology students. The well-documented survey of sociolinguistic issues spanning nearly three thousand years of language history is founded in a simple exhortation: the linguistic history of the Mediterranean is complicated, and a scholar of antiquity must take its linguistic environment seriously in order to arrive at reliable conclusions.

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