

## BOOK REVIEW

*Cicero, Greek Learning, and the Making of a Roman Classic.* By CAROLINE BISHOP. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2019. Pp. xii + 370. Hardback, \$99.00. ISBN: 978-0-19-882942-3.

The works of Cicero have been considered “classics” since antiquity. In this book Bishop presents a sophisticated case that responsibility for this fact rests predominately with Cicero himself, as he intentionally positioned his literary works as a Latin canon of “classics” mirroring that of the Greeks. The core argument is essentially two-fold: (1) the wider literary and intellectual environment was highly conducive for Cicero to undertake such an endeavour; (2) in Cicero’s oeuvre there is substantial evidence that allows us to appreciate both his intentions and the care he took to present his literary works as Latin “classics.” There is also a significant intertextual element, as Bishop traces the ways in which Cicero engages with “classical” Greek authors and, very significantly, the tradition of reception that had enshrined them as “classics” in the canon. As a result, the book is incredibly rich in coverage: there is plenty of detail on the literary and intellectual culture in which Cicero was immersed, in particular on how certain questions and concerns had become dominant in the reception of canonical texts, and the various strands combine for a compelling and informative account of Cicero’s literary ambitions and practice.

The introduction provides a convincing narrative of why Cicero might be motivated to undertake such an endeavour in the first century BC. First, his education placed him at the heart of Greek and Roman intellectual culture, in which there was a growing interest in the classical past, and he never lost interest in intellectual pursuits across his lifetime. Second, as he began to encounter failure in his political career, he turned more towards literary pursuits as a sphere that offered better opportunities for productive engagement with political concerns, and that also gave him greater control of his reputation and legacy. Finally, the Roman educational curriculum created a demand for model Latin texts, a canon that would exemplify good Latin style and serve as benchmarks in various genres, just as the Greek canon of “classics” offered such model texts.

The rest of the book comprises a series of case studies, with each chapter looking at Cicero's engagement with a particular author or genre. Some of the chapters are more successful than others, but all are impressive examples of how one can trace intellectual traditions and the history of reception so as to make possible particularly incisive intertextual readings. The first focuses on Cicero's youthful Latin translation of Aratus' poem *Phaenomena*. Bishop contends that at a young age Cicero circulated this literary work not only to show off his mastery of Greek intellectual subjects and to develop a prestigious reputation among the ruling elite for his superb command of Latin, but also to serve as a model in the Roman literary canon—it lays claim to the place of the great Greek astronomical poem by Aratus. The case is well made by first tracing the reception and interpretation of Aratus' poem in the Greek tradition and then analysing the ways in which Cicero engaged with the Greek material in composing his own Latin version. Cicero only had partial success in establishing his youthful work as a Roman classic, however, as competing Latin translations, in particular that by Germanicus, supplanted his in later periods.

Cicero had greater success with his philosophical and rhetorical works. The chapter on Plato is engaging while covering fairly familiar territory, but the following chapter on Aristotle tackles a more complicated example. Why should Cicero compose a literary work, his *Topica*, modelled on someone who, unlike Plato, hardly anyone read? Moreover, given the technical nature of Aristotle's work and the demands he placed on the reader, was he even a "classic" worth emulating? Bishop presents a highly persuasive case that in his suite of rhetorical works Cicero emulates Aristotle in joining philosophy with rhetoric and also in playing the role of the educator who guides a pupil through difficult material. Aristotle offers grandeur to an otherwise unattractive role, and the Aristotelian framework allows Cicero to present himself as the ultimate classical model, since he himself achieved such a union of philosophy and oratory. In the next chapter Bishop explores how Cicero modelled himself on Demosthenes, not only with respect to oratorical style and his status as the last true Greek orator, but also as a political figure who was a proponent of free speech standing up to power. The evidence for this is relatively clear and uncontroversial, and of these three chapters the one on Aristotle is the real highlight.

The chapter on letters deals with the particularly fraught issue of Cicero's intentions to publish his correspondence in one form or another, perhaps modelled on Greek letter collections. The argument in this chapter is rightly more speculative, but Bishop makes some intriguing suggestions. First, Cicero was aware of

Greek epistolary theory and so could exploit it when editing and collating letters for publication. Furthermore, Cicero read Greek letters that promised intimate connection with the true thoughts of, for example, Plato and Demosthenes as they grappled with tyrants, personal failure and the travails of politics. With this solid evidence in hand, one can then see that certain of Cicero's letters are modelled on these Greek "classics" and promise the same intimate access to Cicero's private thoughts and concerns.

The chapter on Cicero's self-quotation of his poetry is particularly engrossing. In his philosophical works he often has characters recite long stretches of his verse. Such occurrences can seem embarrassing or shamelessly self-indulgent. Bishop develops the line that this evidence reflects Cicero's deep preoccupations with the reception of his own poetical endeavours, and his attempts to define the nature of that reception. By having distinguished Romans cite his poetry alongside other canonical authors such as Ennius and Terence, it is stressed that Cicero is already a Roman "classic" among such exalted company. The case here is very well made, and the fact that history has been far less kind to Cicero's poetry than to his philosophical works suggests that Cicero's anxieties were well-founded.

All readers of Cicero will find value in this book, as will anyone interested in the impact of Greek intellectual culture on Roman literature. There is a wealth of detail, and Bishop offers a host of fresh insights into the care and effort Cicero took to make his works into Roman "classics."

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