

# thersites

18/2024



## **Imprint**

### **Universität Potsdam 2024**

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

### **Editors**

Apl. Prof. Dr. Annemarie Ambühl (Johannes Gutenberg-Universität Mainz)  
Prof. Dr. Filippo Carlà-Uhink (Universität Potsdam)  
PD 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](mailto:thersitesjournal@uni-potsdam.de)

#### **Support Contact**

PD Dr. Christian Rollinger  
Email: [thersitesjournal@uni-potsdam.de](mailto:thersitesjournal@uni-potsdam.de)

### **Layout and Typesetting**

text plus form, Dresden

Cover pictures:

Left – „The Minotaur“. Used by permission of Jonathan Muroya

Right – „Dionysus“. Used by permission of Jonathan Muroya

### **Published online at:**

<https://doi.org/10.34679/thersites.vol18>

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/>

DAVID SERRANO LOZANO

(Universidad de Santiago de Compostela)

## Review of Antonio Duplá-Ansuategui, Amalia Emborujó Salgado and Oskar Aguado-Cantabrana: *Del clasicismo de élite al clasicismo de masas*

Ediciones Polifemo (Madrid 2022), 322 pp., 37 fig.  
ISBN: 978-84-16335-77-0, € 25,00 (paperback)

This volume presents the proceedings of the eponymous conference held in Vitoria, Spain, in November 2019. All the contributions are written in Spanish, except for the chapter 11 by Tiphaine Annabelle Besnard.<sup>1</sup> The leitmotiv of this work is the evolution of classics from their status as a field associated primarily with intellectual, economic or political elites, to the current pres-

ence of classical references in works for popular consumption. The eleven contributions tackle different case studies as milestones in the progressive approach of classical references towards an ever-wider audience, whether through arts, politics or heritage.

In the introduction, the editors outline the main goal of the book through a well-documented analysis of the changes in the public attitude towards classical references undergone during the last century, from traditional classical studies to the current discipline of classical reception: invariability versus

---

<sup>1</sup> Every direct quotation from the book is translated into English by the author of the review.

interpretation, original content versus contemporary recipient, model versus re-elaboration, or classical authority versus contemporary revision.

Additionally, the introduction reflects on the possibility that classical reception (as it is currently understood) has always, if subtly, been present through the last hundred years, so that the 21<sup>st</sup> century would not be but a moment of remarkable emergence of classical referents in all types of expressions. This notion strongly connects with the celebrated concept of a democratic turn<sup>2</sup> towards a less hierarchical and less Eurocentric perception in formats and contents as well as in recipients and researchers.

In the first chapter, Francisco García Jurado proposes an uncommon approach to the change in the perception of classical references through the semantic history of the concept of 'classic' (*classicus*) and its evolution. From its use by Aulus Gellius in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century CE, up to the celebrated work by Hardwick and Harrison,<sup>3</sup> the chapter analyses different examples of *classicus* in the Renaissance (Luis Vives), the early 19<sup>th</sup> century (Madame de Staël), the early Cold

War (Harry Levin) or the 1960s (Italo Calvino). The chapter reflects on how the concept of 'classic' has always been associated with the notion of hierarchy, so that the evolution in its use reflects the changes in the perception of antiquity: a hierarchical organisation, 'proletarianisation', a popular approach or a democratic one.

In the second chapter, Jonatan Pérez Mostazo deals with small-scale cases which reflect the contrast between popular and scholarly perception of Latin inscriptions in northern Spain from the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century until 1883. This topic, deriving from Pérez Mostazo's doctoral research, has been scarcely analysed before the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The author identifies different popular reactions towards Latin inscriptions, which range from their reuse in secondary contexts due to lack of knowledge about their content to genuine curiosity and interest, or even generational memory of their finding and removal. Additionally, the author points out particular cases in which the ideological or symbolic interpretation of inscriptions changed based on different historical referents, backgrounds or even the simple passage of time, which distorted the oral tradition.

Moving slightly forward in time, in the third chapter, Gloria Mora analyses an early example of the approach of mass culture towards antiquity: It includes the attraction of bourgeoisie and middle class towards the aesthetic of copies, reproductions or forgeries of

<sup>2</sup> L. Hardwick & S. Harrison, 'Introduction', in Lorna Hardwick and Stephen Harrison (eds.), *Classics in the Modern World. A Democratic Turn?* (Oxford 2013) (= *Classical Presences*), xix–xxvii, here: xx.

<sup>3</sup> See footnote 1.

mass-produced ancient-like objects (such as ceramics or paintings). These pieces were made with cheap industrial materials, and their consumption did not imply knowledge of or even attachment to the historical referents. Phenomena like the Grand Tour in the 18<sup>th</sup> century or the evolution of industrial reproduction techniques in the 19<sup>th</sup> century led to the disappearance of the Renaissance notion of prestige in the original piece, in favour of the use of prestigious social goods due to their appearance *all'antica*.

Moving on to the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Jordi Cortadella analyses a case in which this dynamic of aesthetic prestige operates in the political sphere. It concerns the so-called Venus of Barcelona, a figurine found in 1952 on the outskirts of that city. The piece has had a very limited impact in specialised publications, since it was identified as a modern *bronzetto*. However, its use as a symbol of the city was promoted from 1958 until the 1980s/90s, both institutionally and in the media. Copies were made, with public funding, which were given as gifts at institutional events, and the image of the figurine was used in posters for cultural events (theatre, music, fashion), or as the image of awards' statues.

Also in the sphere of political uses of antiquity, Ricardo del Molino presents in chapter five a case of much greater scope, in which the historical referent was once again ignored. This is the exploitation of the figure of the goddess Minerva by the government of Manuel

Estrada Cabrera in Guatemala (1898–1920). The goddess was linked to the developmentalist ideals of reason, science and the arts, and led to the establishment of an annual national festival: the *Minervalias*. At first, these celebrations were strongly linked to the political interests of Cabrera and his circle of intellectual supporters, influenced by the work of Comte. Over the next twenty years, however, they were increasingly celebrated in the main Guatemalan cities.

From the field of political philosophy, Salvador Mas analyses in chapter six Ernesto Giménez Caballero's use of the Roman past and its influence on Spanish fascism in the 1930s. On the basis of the country's national myth as a trans-historical reality alien to any other, Giménez Caballero understands a (non-historical) Rome as the harmonisation of two souls (Eastern vs. Western). In Giménez Caballero's vision, Fascism/Falangism had the opportunity to emulate this referent by harmonising antagonistic external influences, such as modernity, Catholicism, or the vanguards. The analysis of this political philosophy is completed with the depiction of Giménez Caballero as representative of a fascist/falangist intellectual collective that was nullified, exiled or minimised in post-war Francoist Spain.

Immediately following this, Antonio Duplá tackles in chapter seven a case of the use of classicist architecture in

Fascist Spain: the so-called *Arco de la Victoria* (Victory Arch) in Madrid. This chapter examines how the arch is embedded in the fascist use of neoclassical architecture in the 1930s/40s. It further explains in detail the development of the project up to 1956. Interestingly, Duplá concludes that the lengthy extension of the construction would have made the arch a monument too closely linked to the post-war falangist spirit for the regime of Franco by the late 1950s. This factor could explain the absence of an official inauguration or a significant use of the arch after its completion.

Moving on to the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Eleonora Dell'Elicine investigates in chapter eight the evolution of the presence of antiquity in Argentinian school textbooks from the end of Peronism (1955) to the neoliberal policies of Carlos Menem (1993). On the constant premise of the American continent as inheriting and expanding the best contributions delivered by the 'old world', the relationship between present and ancient past in the official school discourse reflects the interests of the different governments, regimes and ideologies: elimination of the past, whitewashing of the figure of tyrants, patriotism, defence of militarism, or a central role of the middle class/bourgeoisie as representatives of the common good (or political centre). As a consequence, the contents moved away from historiographical currents for decades, and moved closer to historical es-

says without the support of sources or references.

The last section of the book delves into popular culture, beginning with Luis Unceta Gómez's analysis of the comic *Chroniques de l'Antiquité Galactique*, by Valérie Mangin and Thierry Démarez, which combines the works of Homer and Virgil, blended through science fiction and space opera. The chapter identifies elements and resources of science fiction and classical reception in the work under analysis, highlighting the use of pastiche, the explicit aesthetic use of classical referents and the increase in the importance of female characters. Unceta Gómez also reflects on how the hypotext and metatext interact with their respective referents, leading him to define this comic work as a case of "epitome as a representation of the original" (p. 247) in which antiquity and science fiction come into contact through the founding myth as a point of contact.

In the tenth chapter, Oskar Aguado-Cantabrana carries out a transmedia analysis in novels and cinema of the disappearance of *Legio IX Hispana* in the 1<sup>st</sup> century CE. After a review of the academic historiography on the subject, he tackles the different fictional works that have constructed the reception of the lost legion. Among these works, Rosemary Sutcliff's *The Eagle of the Ninth* stands out, due to the introduction of the element of the eagle and the creation of the popular (and even academic)

appeal of the story, with iterations in radio, television literature, and in cinema. The different iterations reflect the story of the lost legion as a modern myth, more linked to the concerns of the moment of creation than to academic research.

Finally, in the eleventh chapter (the only one in French) Tiphaine Annabelle Besnard moves on to the classical reception in the world of latest contemporary art (produced after 2010), or *néo-néo* art. Through a collection and analysis of pieces and exhibitions, the author shows how the use of classical material is still employed in creations that are accessible to the general public, even in limited series. The referential universe of antiquity continues to be exploited, but the elitist or exclusivist layer traditionally associated with the classical world disappears: *néo-néo* art and classical reception attract creators and consumers of high purchasing power as well as the general public. This leads the author to speak of a possible phenomenon of 'middlebrow culture' (p. 298).

The volume consistently features a profuse use of primary and secondary sources as well as interesting and comprehensive analyses in each of the chapters. The volume is worth the attention of any specialist in classical reception, even those focused on a field outside any of the contexts analysed in the work. This is so due to the originality of the approach the book proposes: the leitmotiv of the volume, the demo-

cratic turn in classical reception, is investigated and shown through multiple historical examples as a large-scale process.

Almost inevitably, the volume is uneven. The great variety of contents among the different chapters is incompatible with any fluent reading. However, since this is not the aim of the book – nor is it to display a disconnected series of contributions –, it succeeds in building up the common thread of all contributions, even when their contents or conclusions have not been (re)arranged to explicitly address the 'democratic turn' or any similar notion. As a consequence, the book allows modular reading, without becoming an erratic one, a reading which doesn't necessarily require following the strict sequence of chapters. Finally, this work invites the specialist reader to develop connections, parallels or contrasts with other fields of classical reception. The interrelationship in a common process (the democratic turn) helps in identifying factors and characteristics of the evolution of the perception of the ancient past that can be traced in other fields of study.

## Table of contents

Agradecimientos – 9

Del clasicismo de élite al clasicismo de masas. Nota introductoria – Antonio Duplá-Ansuategui, Amalia Emborujó Salgado y Oskar Aguado-Cantabrana – 11

De *classicus* a *proletarius*: jerarquía y literatura. Un ensayo de historia semántica – Francisco García Jurado – 29

Piedras con letreros. Los sectores populares frente al patrimonio epigráfico antiguo (siglos XVIII–XIX) – Jonatan Pérez Mostazo – 51

Faunos, tanagras y otros souvenirs del mundo clásico: sobre la popularización de la Antigüedad en la época contemporánea – Gloria Mora – 77

La Venus de Barcelona, del *glamour* al olvido – Jordi Cortadella – 101

Minerva en Guatemala. El papel de las élites y el pueblo en el clasicismo estradacabrerista (1898–1920) – Ricardo del Molino – 129

La Roma imperial de Ernesto Giménez Caballero. Notas sobre la recepción de la Antigüedad clásica en el fascismo español – Salvador Mas – 155

El Arco de la Victoria de Madrid como paradigma del clasicismo franquista – Antonio Duplá-Ansuategui – 177

Historia Antigua y Escuela Media en Argentina. La crisis de una representación (1960–2003) – Eleonora Dell’Elicine – 209

Una epopeya espacial: recepción clásica y ciencia ficción en *Chroniques de l’Antiquité Galactique de Valérie Mangin* y *Thierry Démarez* – Luis Unceta – 227

El destino de la *Legio IX* entre la élite académica y los medios de masas: historiografía, novela y cine – Oskar Aguado-Cantabrana – 253

L’Art néo-néo. Un art accessible à tous? – Tiphaine Annabelle Besnard – 285

Índice de Nombres y Lugares – 301

Relación de Autoras y Autores – 313



Del clasicismo de élite al clasicismo de masas

---

David Serrano Lozano  
Universidad de Santiago de Compostela

**Suggested citation**

Serrano Lozano, David: Review of Antonio Duplá-Ansuategui, Amalia Emborujó Salgado and Oskar Aguado-Cantabrana: *Del clasicismo de élite al clasicismo de masas*. In: *thersites* 18 (2024), pp. 132–138.  
<https://doi.org/10.34679/thersites.vol18.265>