

Gabiele Marasco, ed., *Political Autobiographies and Memoirs in Antiquity*. A Brill Companion. Leiden, 2011. ISBN13: 9789004182998. Pp. 461 + x. €155.00.

The goal of the Brill companions in classical studies is to provide graduate level synthesis of debate and the state of scholarship on key authors and subjects from Antiquity. This book certainly does that, with eleven substantial essays covering almost the entire time-period of Greek and Roman literature, from Classical Greece to the late Roman Empire. In the regrettably short Preface, Marasco lays out the volume's aim, to "fill a void" and provide "mostly something new" because the only general study (Misch) dates from 1907 (1950 for the English translation) and was written by a non-classicist.

"This book aims at clarifying what it meant in antiquity to write about oneself, analyzing both the autobiographies and the memoirs, in which, however, the author granted a predominant space to his own action" (vii), and in pursuit of this aim, Marasco identifies three themes addressed by this volume's authors: 1) birth and development of autobiography; 2) the problem of finalities; 3) the development and evolution of the genre in the times. The actual division of essays seems more chronological than thematic, but it is true that these themes appear in the different essays. For instance, finality as described on p. x of the preface has a lot to do with the reliability of the written works in that propaganda was an unavoidable factor in subjects' hardly agenda-free self-presentations. The development of autobiography is traced through all kinds of documents—letters, diaries, court journals, inscriptions—in an effort to illuminate the biographical outlook, or special perspective of autobiography.

"Classical Greece" (Vivien J. Gray) provides an excellent introduction to the particular challenges associated with the nature of autobiography and memoirs, investigating Autobiographical Travel Literature; Memoirs of Famous Men (Ion of Chios); Defensive Autobiographical Rhetoric (Isocrates' *Antidosis*; Demosthenes' *On the Crown*); Plato's *Letters* 7–8; and Historical Memoir and Autobiography (Xenophon's *Anabasis*; Sophocles of Stymphalos; Ctesias).

In "Royal Autobiography in the Hellenistic Age" Cinzia Bearzot, arguing that "autobiography has had in fact a long history in Greek historiography," pursues the nature of the "biographical perspective" through hypomnemata (personal memoirs) and ephemerides (court journals).

"The Hellenistic Age: Autobiography and Political Struggles" (Gabriele Marasco) suggests that the relative lack of autobiographic texts by Hellenistic kings compared with the Roman emperors results from a lack of preservation of "local" texts on travel (Nearchus) and political biography (Demetrius of Phaleron).

"Republican Rome: Autobiography and Political Struggles" (José M. Candau) examines the role of political life, particularly in the late Roman Republic in the development of ancient autobiography. The writings of Scipio Nasica, Aemilius Scaurus, Rutilius Rufus, and (probably) Scipio Africanus seem to have been "political

pamphlets” (155) of some kind whose influence waned quickly in the wake of these pamphlets’ quick demise, possibly due at least partly to the poor quality of their writings.

“The Late Republic: Autobiographies and Memoirs in the Age of the Civil Wars” (Jeffrey Tatum) examines the figures of Sulla, L. Lucullus and L. Cotta, Cicero, Varro, and finally Marcus Iunius Brutus and Quintus Dellius. Having argued convincingly that autobiography was designed to affect the present as much as the future, and that military achievement constituted the best autobiographical backdrop, Tatum concludes “Although Varro and Cicero excelled Sulla as literary types, their autobiographies lacked the military luster of their violent predecessor. In the late republic, only Caesar could outshine Sulla” (184).

“Caesar and the *Corpus Caesarianum*” (Marc Mayer). Mayer undertakes “to analyze a still unresolved problem: what Caesar’s aim is in writing his commentarii and the value of the continuations of the same, which make up the body of the *corpus Caesarianum*.” Close consideration of the *Bellum Gallicum* and *Bellum Civile* is connected specifically to the historic, not biographical tradition (194), which is quite interesting, but not as connected to the volume’s main themes.

“The Augustan Age” (Joseph Geiger) suggests that Augustus’ writing of his own memoirs influenced the development of the tradition by provoking a rash of other such “biographies of living people”, which he considers almost the same as autobiography. Nicolaus of Damascus and his *Life of Augustus* come in for special analysis, as do writings by Agrippa and Herod.

“Augustus: The Emperor Writes His Own Account” (Ronald Thomas Ridley) examines Augustus’ *Res Gestae* very closely against a context of parallels made up of tomb inscriptions, funerary eulogies, the statues and texts of the Augustan Forum, Caesar’s commentaries, and autobiography itself. Ridley concludes that it was through the *Res Gestae* that Augustus planned to, and arguably did, control his self-presentation even after death.

“The Early Empire” (Pere Villalba Varneda) deals largely with the Vita of Flavius Josephus after a useful summary of known or purported writings like Personal Memoirs by Tiberius, Caligula, and Claudius, Messalina, Agrippina the Younger, as well as Agrippina the Elder (on the strength of her representation holding a scroll on a cameo with Germanicus, p. 318). Also included is a summary of memoirs by Corbulo, L. Antonius Verus, Suetonius Paulinus, M. Vipsanius Messala, C. Licinius Mucianus, Tiberius Claudius Balbillus, Vespasian, Titus, and Domitian. V. credits Josephus with the creation of a new style of writing, presenting himself as an individual worth imitating.

“The Second and Third Century” (Richard Westfall and Frederick Brenk) constructs a tradition represented by Julius Caesar, Augustus, and Flavius Josephus, and followed by Trajan, Hadrian, Appian, Septimius Severus, and Caracalla who “represent a continuing tradition of autobiographical literature in various subgenres of history,

including not only the commentaries (Trajan and Caracalla) but also the, possibly, epistolary autobiography (Hadrian) and the apologia (Appian, Septimius Severus)” (364). The authors conclude by observing that these works disappeared first from the academic curriculum, and ultimately the classical tradition itself.

“The Late Empire” (Hartmut Leppin) reflects on the fact that with the development of Christianity, autobiography probably became more popular as a way of thinking about the world and humans’ place in it, and that by this time, non-Christian autobiographical texts almost fail to exist. The one that does, Libanius, and his orations from an “outsider” (in this case, pagan) viewpoint, occupy the majority of this discussion on where and how humans fit in.

Some infelicities: as noted by other reviewers, the price of Brill companions (this one is over \$200) is a definite barrier, but this is hardly the fault of the authors. Individual articles have their own bibliographies, ranging from sparse to extremely thorough, and from up-to-date to somewhat mired in the past. But the lack of a cumulative or “master” bibliography is frustrating; likewise the lack of general index or cited passages (there is an “Index of Ancient Names). Another problem is the non-idiomatic English, particularly in the Preface and also some of the translated articles. This makes some arguments very difficult to follow. There are the inevitable typos, such as the dates given for C. Marius (158–186) (270).

Those are fairly minor complaints, and these are serious discussions of serious questions, conducted at a high level of scholarly discourse, almost all well-argued and thought provoking. Marasco’s preface ends “I hope therefore that this work can fill a void in the studies that seems today felt and, together, that it can give us back, as much as possible, the authentic voice of the main characters of history, with their passions, their personal aims, their points of view; because the political struggle and the vision of the history itself are, above anything else, a matter of point of view” (x). This is a wonderful description of the special nature of the genres of biography and autobiography, and the essays in this *Companion* show that the authors were up to the challenge.

FRANCES B. TITCHENER
UTAH STATE UNIVERSITY