

# APOREMATA

Kritische Studien zur Philologiegeschichte

Herausgegeben von  
Glenn W. Most

Band 4:  
Commentaries –  
Kommentare

Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht in Göttingen

# Commentaries –

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# Kommentare

Edited by  
Glenn W. Most

Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht in Göttingen

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## Preface

What is a commentary? One way of attempting to answer this question would be to draw up a catalogue of purely formal discursive features which would define the members of this class. For example, one could indicate certain modes of secondariness which are characteristic of one text with reference to another one: e.g., the one text is always composed later than the other one, is usually organized not so much in terms of its own autonomous textual logic (narrative, argumentative, etc.) as rather by reference to the articulations of the other one (most often, but certainly not always, by an alternation between lemmata consisting of brief citations of the commented text and explanations or comments of its own), allegedly derives its own justification entirely from its clarification and hence justification of the fundamental and detailed meaning of the other one, and so forth. Such an approach would certainly be of some value, but it may be doubted whether a purely formal inventory of this sort would be able to do full justice to the complexities of the phenomenon. After all, at least some of the criteria just indicated would apply no less well to the genre of parodies than to that of commentaries; and — while some commentaries do indeed strike the reader as unintentional parodies — the very existence of a few literary works which were intended by their authors to be understood as parodies of commentaries (Alexander Pope's *Dunciad* and Vladimir Nabokov's *Pale Fire* are perhaps the most celebrated examples) suggests the advisability of distinguishing, at least provisionally, between these two textual forms.

Another approach, which seems potentially to be at least as promising with a view towards isolating the differentia specifica of commentaries and ought therefore both to be worked through in greater detail than can be sketched out here and correlated systematically with an analysis of their formal characteristics, would involve focusing upon the cultural institutions involved in their production and consumption and inquiring into just what social and psychological aims they serve and what functions they fill. For commentary is not a natural type but is always constructed variously in various social formations, and may therefore be expected to respond differently to different kinds of identifiable exigencies. This constructedness of the form of commentary may well be disguised to a certain extent from its producers and consumers by its very ubiquity, both within their own work and across the boundaries of cultures available for historical and geographical comparison; and this

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ROY K. GIBSON AND CHRISTINA SHUTTLEWORTH KRAUS

THE CLASSICAL COMMENTARY



# THE CLASSICAL COMMENTARY

## HISTORIES, PRACTICES, THEORY

EDITED BY

ROY K. GIBSON

AND

CHRISTINA SHUTTLEWORTH KRAUS



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ὁ Σαγχουνιάθων, ἀνὴρ πολυμαθῆς καὶ πολυπράγμων γενόμενος . . . πολυφροντιστικῶς ἐξεμάστευσεν τὰ Τααύτου, εἰδὼς ὅτι τῶν ὑφ' ἥλιον γεγονότων πρῶτός ἐστι Τάαυτος ὁ τῶν γραμμάτων τὴν εὐρεσιν ἐπινοήσας καὶ τῆς τῶν ὑπομνημάτων γραφῆς κατάρξας καὶ ἀπὸ τοῦδε ὡς περ κρηπίδα βαλόμενος τοῦ λόγου, ὃν Αἰγύπτιοι μὲν ἐκάλεσαν Θωῦθ, Ἀλεξανδρεῖς δὲ Θάθ, Ἑρμῆν δὲ Ἑλληνας μετέφρασαν.

Sanchuniathon, a very learned and curious man, most carefully examined the books of Taaut, knowing that of all those under the sun it was Taaut who first conceived of the invention of letters and inaugurated the writing of commentaries, and making him as it were the foundation of his narrative, the man whom the Egyptians called Thouth, the Alexandrians Thoth, but whom the Greeks have translated as Hermes.

Philo of Byblos, 790 F 1 Jacoby (Eusebius, *Praep. Evan.* 1.9.24)

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## EDITORS' PREFACE

Who writes commentaries? Who reads them? Why? And perhaps most importantly, what for? These questions lie behind the current project, which assembles 16 contributions, primarily by practising commentators, on the classical commentary. Despite the wealth of studies on ancient commentators (especially the Homeric and Vergilian scholia), and on the medieval commentary tradition, contemporary readers and authors of commentaries on Greek and Latin texts have largely allowed this characteristic academic practice to go unexamined—except, that is, in the pages of review periodicals. Though a consensus seems to have grown up about what commentaries 'should be like,'<sup>1</sup> issues of scope, production, readership, authority, and the implications of such a traditional format (among others) are only now beginning to be addressed. It is our hope that these papers—which examine both specific historical examples of the genre and current (and future) practices in commentary writing—will continue, and broaden, recent interest in the classical commentary, and perhaps start some new directions of research.

But first, what is meant in this collection by 'commentary'? James O'Donnell has identified a range of uses of the term, including but not limited to:

- (1) Transcription (with or without editing) of an oral exposition of a text read aloud to a broad public: e.g., many Christian sermons;
- (2) Marginal notes and interlineations in an authoritative text (themselves often later extracted and made the center of a book, with the authoritative text reduced to lemmata): e.g., Pelagius on Paul;

<sup>1</sup> Cf., e.g., F. Cairns, *JRS* 61 (1971) 306, "It is . . . instantly recognizable as a great commentary of lasting importance"; C. E. Murgia, *CP* 79 (1984) 314, "the overall estimate of a detailed commentary's worth must be based on its scholarly contribution: will the readers have much to learn from it? . . . A good commentary needs or aims at accuracy, good judgment, completeness, concision, and, where possible, originality"; D. Wardle, *CR* 45 (1995) 171, "one can have expectations of a good commentary"; and J. Holoka, *BMCR* 2001.08.06, "The commentary . . . is a model of its genre."

## FURTHER READING

A list of works cited will be found at the end of each contribution to this collection. We offer below a select core bibliography drawn from those lists. We have not cited individual reviews of commentaries here, though as a class they are an important source of theorizing about commentaries.

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