

Modernity's Classics

Sarah C. Humphreys
Rudolf G. Wagner
Editors



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Editors

Sarah C. Humphreys
Oxford
United Kingdom

Rudolf G. Wagner
Exzellenzcluster “Asia and Europe”
Karl Jaspers Centre
Heidelberg
Germany

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Preface

We are most grateful to the Central European University, Budapest, and its Rector Yehuda Elkana, for funding our first workshop, and to the Heidelberg University Cluster of Excellence “Asia and Europe in a Global Context: Shifting Asymmetries in Cultural Flows” for funding the second and third. We also wish to thank those who took part in one or more workshops but for various reasons were unable to contribute to this volume: Aziz al-Azmeh, Gabor Betegh, Rajeev Bhargava, Yaakov Dweck, Nancy Florida, Garth Fowden, Ann Hanson, Joachim Kurtz, and Glenn Most.

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Contributors

Gadi Algazi is teaching at the Department of History, Tel Aviv University, senior editor of *History & Memory*, and member of the editorial board of *Past & Present*. He studied at Tel Aviv and Göttingen and was research fellow at the Max Planck Institute of History before assuming a position at Tel Aviv University's History Department and its graduate program in culture research. He has taught seminars at the Freie Universität Berlin and the Ecoles des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, Paris, and is now associate fellow at the International Research Center "Work and Lifecycle in Global History" in Berlin. His fields of interest are historical anthropology, social and cultural history of late medieval Western Europe, and history and theory of the social sciences. His current research project deals with the making of scholars' habitus in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries and the shaping of their family households. Recent publications include: *Negotiating the Gift: Pre-Modern Figurations of Exchange*, coedited with Valentin Groebner & Bernhard Jussen (Göttingen, 2003); "Scholars in Households: Refiguring the Learned Habitus, 1480–1550," *Science in Context* 16 (2003), pp. 9–42; "Norbert Elias's Motion Pictures: History, Cinema and Gestures in the Process of Civilization," *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science* 39 (2008), pp. 444–458.

Michael Fotiadis has taught at several universities in the U.S.A. and now teaches in the Department of History and Archaeology, University of Ioannina, Greece. A prehistorian by training, with research in Stone Age sites in northern Greece, he also has a sustained interest in, as well as publications on, theoretical questions arising from the practice of archaeology in the nation state (nineteenth and twentieth centuries) and in the contemporary globalized world.

Sarah C. Humphreys studied Greek and Latin language and literature, ancient history, and philosophy at Oxford, and then anthropology at University College London. Four years working as one of the librarians at the Warburg Institute broadened her reading. She has taught history and anthropology at University College London, the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor, and the Central

European University in Budapest. Her latest book is *The Strangeness of Gods: historical perspectives on the interpretation of Athenian religion* (O.U.P. 2004).

Ronald Inden is Professor Emeritus of history and of South Asian languages and civilizations at the University of Chicago. He is also Professorial Research Associate at the Centre for Media and Film Studies, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London. He is working on a global history of the practice of making paradises on earth and performing in them.

Monica Juneja holds the Chair of Global Art History at the Cluster of Excellence “Asia and Europe in a Global Context,” University of Heidelberg. She was professor at the University of Delhi, held visiting professorial positions at the Universities of Hannover, Vienna, and Emory University, Atlanta. Her research and writing focus on transculturality and visual representation, disciplinary practices in the art history of Western Europe and South Asia, gender and political iconography, Christianization and religious identities in early modern South Asia. Her publications include *Peindre le paysan. L’image rurale dans la peinture française de Millet à Van Gogh* (1998), *Architecture in medieval India. Forms, Contexts, Histories* (Reader South Asia. Histories and Interpretations, 2001), *The lives of objects in pre-modern societies* (2006 edited with Gabriela Signori), *Coping with Natural Disasters in the pre-modern World* (2007, edited with Franz Mauelshagen) *BildGeschichten. Das Verhältnis von Bild und Text in den Berichten zu außereuropäischen Welten* (2008, with Barbara Potthast), *Religion und Grenzen in Indien und Deutschland: Auf dem Weg zu einer transnationalen Historiographie* (edited with Margrit Pernau, 2009). She edits the Series *Visual and Media Histories* (Routledge) and is a member of the editorial board of *Transcultural Studies*.

André Laks is professor of ancient philosophy at the Université Paris-Sorbonne, honorary member of the Institut Universitaire de France and professor at the Universidad Panamericana, Mexico, and currently director of the Centre Léon Robin de recherche sur la pensée antique. He taught for a long time at the University Charles de Gaulle, Lille, France, and at Princeton University from 1990 to 1994. He is also a former fellow of the Center for Hellenic Studies (1988/89) and of the *Institut for Advanced Studies* (Wissenschaftskolleg) at Berlin. He has recently published a book on Plato’s Laws (*Médiation et coercition. Pour une lecture des ‘Lois’ de Platon*, 2005); an essay on the emergence of negativity in archaic philosophy (*Le Vide et la haine*, 2004); an introduction to the concept of Presocratic philosophy (*Introduction à la “philosophie présocratique,”* 2006; Spanish translation 2010); and a collection of some of his articles on Aristotle, Theophrastus, and Presocratic philosophy (*Histoire, doxographie, vérité*, 2007). A second, revised and augmented version of his edition of Diogenes of Apollonia (1983) was published in 2008. He is the coeditor, with Michel Narcy, of the journal *Philosophie antique*.

Nicholas de Lange left Christ Church, Oxford with a B.A. (Litterae humaniores) 1966, and a D.Phil 1970. His current position is as professor of Hebrew and Jewish studies, University of Cambridge. His main publications are: *Apocrypha: Jewish*

Literature of the Hellenistic Age, New York: Viking Press, 1978. *Atlas of the Jewish World*, Oxford: Phaidon Press, 1984. *Greek Jewish Texts from the Cairo Genizah*, Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1996. (Ed. with Julia G. Krivorucho and Cameron Boyd-Taylor) *Jewish Reception of Greek Bible Versions. Studies in their use in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages*, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009.

Setrag Manoukian (Ph.D. in anthropology and history, University of Michigan) is Associate professor at the Institute of Islamic Studies and the Department of Anthropology at McGill University. He is the author of *City of Knowledge: History, Poetry and Subject Formation in Iran* (Routledge 2012).

Mustapha Kamal Pasha is Sixth Century Chair and Head of International Relations at the University of Aberdeen, United Kingdom. His principal areas of research are: critical theory, international relations, and Islam and international relations. He is the author/co-author and co-editor of several books, including *International Relations and the New Inequality*, *Protecting Human Security*, and *Colonial Political Economy*. He has published widely in peer-reviewed journals, including *International Political Sociology*, *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy*, *International Politics*, *Globalizations*, and *Global Society*. He is vice president-elect of the International Studies Association.

Peter E. Pormann studied classics, Islamic studies, and French at the universities of Paris (Sorbonne), Hamburg, Tübingen, Leiden, and Oxford (Corpus Christi College). He obtained his D. Phil. in classical languages and literature from the University of Oxford in 2002; his thesis won the Hellenic Foundation's 2003 Award for the best doctoral thesis in the United Kingdom, in the Byzantine/medieval history category. After being a junior research fellow in oriental studies at Merton College, Oxford, and a Frances A. Yates Long-Term Research Fellow at the Warburg Institute, London, he moved to the Department of Classics and Ancient History at the University of Warwick as a Wellcome Trust University Award holder, and is now professor of classics and Graeco-Arabic Studies at the University of Manchester. Recent publications include: with Peter Adamson, *The Philosophical Works of al-Kindī* (OUP, 2011); *Islamic Medical and Scientific Tradition*, *Critical Concepts in Islamic Studies*, 4 vols (Routledge, 2012); *Rufus of Ephesus' On Melancholy* (Mohr Siebeck, 2008); and, with E. Savage-Smith, *Medieval Islamic Medicine* (EUP, 2007). The last monograph won the British-Kuwait Friendship Society Prize in Middle Eastern Studies 2008.

James I. Porter studied comparative literature (specializing in Greek, Latin, and German) at Swarthmore College, the University of Tübingen, and the University of California, Berkeley. He has taught at the University of Michigan and at Princeton University, and is currently professor of classics and comparative literature at the University of California, Irvine. His main publications are *The Invention of Dionysus* (Stanford University Press 2000), *Nietzsche and the Philology of the*

Future (Stanford 2000) and *The Origins of Aesthetic Inquiry in Antiquity* (Cambridge University Press, 2010). He also edited *Classical Pasts: the classical traditions of Greece and Rome* (Princeton, University Press 2006).

Denis Thouard born in Paris, is “Directeur de recherches” at the French Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (CNRS), 2008 - at the Centre Marc Bloch (Berlin), French-German Centre for Research in the Social Sciences in Berlin. His main fields of interest are Philosophy: Hermeneutics—Philosophy of social sciences. He held several visiting positions in Germany (Heidelberg at the FEST, Munich at the LMU, Berlin at the Wissenschaftskolleg), received his Ph.D. in 1997, and wrote his Habilitation (2004) on Critique and Hermeneutics. He authored books on Kant (2001), “Le partage des idées” (2007), Schleiermacher (2007). His latest publications are: *Philologie als Wissensmodel*, ed. with Friedrich Vollhardt and Fosca Mariani Zini, Berlin, New York, 2010 ; *La philologie au présent. Pour Jean Bollack*, ed. with Christoph König, Lille, 2010 ; *Herméneutique contemporaine. Comprendre, interpréter, connaître*, Paris, 2011.

Rudolf G. Wagner is senior professor of Chinese studies at the Institute of Chinese Studies and a director of the Cluster “Asia and Europe in a Global Context: Shifting Asymmetries in Cultural Flows.” He is an intellectual historian of China with a strong focus on transcultural interactions. His research interests range from philology and political philosophy in early and medieval China to millennial and revolutionary movements and the development of the press, the public sphere, and propaganda in China since the middle of the nineteenth century. He is a recipient of the Leibniz-Preis, the highest German scholarly award. His main book publications are *Reenacting the Heavenly Vision: The Role of Religion in the Taiping Rebellion* (1984); *The Contemporary Chinese Historical Drama* (1990); *Inside a Service Trade. Studies in Contemporary Chinese Prose* (1992); *The Craft of a Chinese Commentator: Wang Bi on the Laozi* (2000); *Language, Ontology, and Political Philosophy: Wang Bi’s Scholarly Exploration of the Dark (Xuanxue)* (2003); *A Chinese Reading of the Daodejing* (2003); (ed.) *Joining the Global Public: Word, Image, and City in Early Chinese Newspapers, 1870–1910* (2007).

Tao Wang was born in Kunming, China in 1962. He studied Chinese language and literature in the Yunnan Normal University (Kunming), then art theory at the graduate school of the Chinese Academy of Arts (Beijing) before coming to London in 1986. In 1993, he obtained a Ph.D. from the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), University of London with a dissertation on *Colour Symbolism in Late Shang China*, and in the same year was appointed as lecturer and later senior lecturer in Chinese archaeology at the department of art and archaeology of SOAS. He now holds the position of reader in Chinese archaeology and heritage at University College London. He has published more than fifty academic papers and several monographs, including *Ancient Chinese Bronzes in the Meiyintang Collections* (2009), *Unpublished Chinese Wooden Slips in the British Library* (2007, ed. with Frances Wood and Hu Pingsheng), *A Selection of*

Inscribed Early Chinese Bronzes from Sotheby's and Christie's (2007, with Liu Yu), *A Complete Collection of Chinese Wooden and Bamboo Documents*, vol. 20 (2005, ed. with Hu Pingsheng), *Exploring China's Past: New Discoveries and Studies in Chinese Art and Archaeology* (1999, trans. and ed. with Roderick Whitfield), *Origins of the Wuxing Theory and Modes of Thought in Early China* (1998, ed. with Sarah Allan, and Fan Yuzhou), *Exploration into China* (1995), and *Dunhuang Manuscripts in British Collections (Non-Buddhist Scriptures)* (1990–1997, ed. with others). He has organized a number of conferences and workshops and is academic adviser and contributor to four television documentaries on Chinese history and archaeology.

Chapter 1

Introduction

Sarah C. Humphreys and Rudolf G. Wagner

The Theme

Modernity's Classics deals with tensions in modern thought between travelling into the future and keeping the best from the past; with the frictions between political-social realities and the sociocultural imaginaire; with the global circulation of ambitious dreams and the local realities of practice. Opening up an international debate about the role of 'classics' and 'cultural heritage' in modern constructions of knowledge and of education, this volume has grown out of an extended conversation among scholars from many different fields over 3 years and three conferences. Their varied national and disciplinary backgrounds have shaped their questions and concerns. The reconfiguration of 'classics' in the modern period was a global phenomenon, with the restructuring of disciplines in modern educational systems exerting a major influence. However, there has as yet been no sustained effort to study this interlinked process across the whole range of civilizations and disciplines. A single volume could not possibly provide a comprehensive analysis; what we aim to do, instead, is to present a collection of provocative case-studies that raises new questions and suggests directions for further research.

The term used for a 'classic' in imperial China, for example, was "jing." Translated by Europeans as 'classics' or 'canon', the word is a live metaphor taken from silk weaving,¹ which commentators explain as being the woof of the cloth on which the warp forms the specific pattern. The "jing" is thus the eternal all-pervasive element shot through with all the specificities of place and time—most importantly for the Chinese imperial context, all meaningful thought on state,

¹ Cf. Ganeri 2011, 108–110 on commentary as re-weaving in India (and, of course, "text" itself).

S.C. Humphreys
Oxford, United Kingdom

R.G. Wagner (✉)
Exzellenzcluster "Asia and Europe" Karl Jasper Centre, Heidelberg, Germany
e-mail: wagner@asia-europe.uni-heidelberg.de