

JOHN EDWARD ATKINSON: AN APPRECIATION

Immediately upon graduating from the University of Durham in 1961 with a BA (Hons) in Classical and General Literature, John Atkinson set off for the former Rhodesia, where he served for two years as assistant lecturer in the then University College of Rhodesia and Nyasaland. There T.F. Carney's ideas and interests exercised a powerful, long-lasting influence on him. After a short stay of 18 months as a lecturer at the University of South Africa (Unisa), the honorand took up another lectureship at the University of Cape Town in January 1965. In the following forty years he progressed through the ranks to full professor and was the last Dean of the Faculty of Arts, before its amalgamation into the Faculty of Humanities.

John's initial responsibilities at UCT included the teaching of Greek and Roman history in the language courses, but he also taught a wide range of literary authors both in the original and in translation. His signal contribution has been the development of Ancient History as an academic discipline in South Africa. Ancient History has always been the central focus of John's teaching and research, but he can, in the British tradition, be considered first and foremost as a Classicist. This is borne out by the breadth of his research output: in the forty years since his first article, 'Démocratie manquée: fourth century Athens', appeared in *Historia* (SA) in 1964, he has published some forty articles in a range of national and international journals on subjects ranging from Senecan drama to Byzantine hooliganism, from fifth-century BC Athenian politics to tenth-century AD iconoclasm. He supervised MA and PhD theses over a similar range: from *Textual Studies in the Shepherd of Hermas*, through *Plague in the Ancient World* to *The Role of the Traditional Mediterranean Diet in the Development of Minoan Crete*.

At every stage of his career the influence of living, working and studying in South Africa manifests itself in his academic output. The experience of living under the Apartheid state sharpened his appreciation of the difficulties faced by intelligent authors under ancient autocracies and of the strategies they could employ to express dissent. An acute appreciation of the possibilities of irony, for example, marks his study of Seneca's *Consolatio ad Polybium* (ANW 1985). The follies of censorship are reflected in 'Curbing the comedians: Cleon versus Aristophanes and Syracosios' decree' (CQ 1992). The traumatic process of emerging from tyranny and of dealing with the past lies behind 'Truth and reconciliation the Athenian way: the reconciliation agreement of

403 BC' (*ACI* 1999), and 'Justinian and the trials of Transformation' (*ACI* 2000).

It is, however, in the field of Alexander studies that John has made his greatest contribution, as was perhaps foreshadowed by his marrying an 'Alexander'. As the subject for his doctoral thesis in the 1960s he chose a very ambitious project, a commentary on Q. Curtius Rufus' *Historiae Alexandri*, Book III and engaged the assistance of the most demanding of supervisors, Prof. Ernst Badian (at Leeds and then Harvard). This undertaking required a detailed knowledge of both the history of the 4th century BC and of the early Roman Empire in order to make sense of a reading of Macedonian history that was deeply influenced by the perspective of the 1st century AD; there were no helpful predecessors working on Curtius on whom John could lean. This research was highly valuable and resulted in his first book, *A Commentary on Q. Curtius Rufus' Historiae Alexandri Magni* (Amsterdam 1980). Having decided to continue this pioneering work, John published a second volume of commentary in 1994, covering Books V-VII.2. These two books established John as the world expert on Curtius, so that the indomitable editors of the *ANW* commissioned him to produce a *Forschungsbericht* (1997), the Fondazione Lorenzo Valla commissioned a text, Italian translation and commentary of the whole of Curtius (1998, 2000), and Gallimard of Paris commissioned an abridged version to appear in French. His long devotion to Curtius will end with a commentary on Book X for the Clarendon Ancient History Series to be published by Oxford University Press - unless he summons the energy for a full-scale English commentary on Books VII to IX. John's work on Curtius Rufus has led to a new academic interest in this author, as seen, for example, in the recent monographs by Elizabeth Baynham and Diana Spencer.

John has also played an active role in, first the Classical Association of Rhodesia and Nyasaland (1961-63), where he was Assistant Editor of the *Proceedings (PACA)*, and subsequently the Classical Association of South Africa, where he started off as a committee member of the Transvaal Regional Branch and assisted with the editorial work of *Acta Classica* (1963-64). He served as Secretary of the Western Cape Regional Branch (1966-67), as Treasurer (1967-68) and as Chairperson (1977-80). He was elected to the national Executive Committee as Treasurer (1981-83), Vice-Chairperson (1999-2001) and as Chairperson (2001-03). In between he was the organiser of a national colloquium on elementary Greek and Latin courses at university level (1982), a member of the Editorial Board of *Acta Classica* (1985-2003) and of *Akroterion* (1985-present).

Despite his undoubted academic excellence and international reputation, recognition has been slow in coming: he was rewarded with a full professor-

ship at UCT only in 2000, and elected as Chairperson of the Classical Association of South Africa only in 2001. To his colleagues in Classics at UCT for 40 years he has proved a tireless and energetic promoter of our discipline, a thorough and demanding teacher and an administrator who made both his department and the faculty of which he was Dean run smoothly. For many years John was the effective head of the Department of Classics, although denied the title, and because of his skill as a leader and organiser was chosen as the first Head of the Department of Modern and Classical Languages at UCT, when Classics, French, German and Italian were merged in 1999. Perhaps his toughest assignment was to be Head of Hebrew and Jewish Studies at UCT during one of their not infrequent bouts of internecine strife and to emerge respected by all combatants.

It is a fitting honour that the journal on whose editorial board he served for 25 years should dedicate a volume to him, and that this tribute should be paid him by eminent colleagues from across the world as well as by those who have worked with him and known him in South Africa.

List of publications

A. Books

Storie di Alessandro di Curzio Rufo, 2 vols. Milan: Fondazione Lorenza Valla Mandadori, 1998, 2000.

A Commentary on Q. Curtius Rufus' Historiae Alexandri Magni, Books 5-7.2. Amsterdam: Hakkert, 1994.

A Commentary on Q. Curtius Rufus' Historiae Alexandri Magni, Books 3 and 4. Amsterdam: Gieben, 1980.

B. Chapters in books

'Originality and the limits of the Alexander sources of the Julio-Claudian era', in A.B. Bosworth & E.J. Baynham (edd.), *Alexander the Great in Fact and Fiction* (Oxford 2000) 307-325.

'Curtius Rufus, *Historia Alexandri Magni*: a Forschungsbericht', in H. Temporini & W. Haase (edd.), *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt* 2 Band, Teil 34 (Berlin 1997) 3447-3483.

'Troubled spirits in Persepolis', in U. Vogel-Weidemann (ed.), *Charistion: Festschrift C.P.T. Naudé* (Pretoria 1993) 5-15.

'The infantry commissions awarded by Alexander at the end of 331 BC', in W. Will (ed.), *Zu Alexander der Grosse: Festschrift G. Wirth* (Amsterdam 1986, 1988) 413-436.

- 'Seneca's *Consolatio ad Polybium*', in *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt* 2 Band, Teil 32,1 (Berlin 1985) 860-884.
- 'Curtius Rufus' *Historiae Alexandri* and the Principate', in *Actes de la XIIIe Conférence Internationale d'Études Classiques 'Eirene'* (Bucharest & Amsterdam 1975) 363-367.
- 'Myth in Greek politics', in *Myth in Greek Life* (Cape Town 1974) 1-16.

C. Articles and Review Articles

- 'Athenian law and the will of the people in the fourth century BC', *Acta Classica* 46 (2003) 21-47.
- 'The historical background to Euripides' *Bacchae*', *Akroterion* 48 (2003) 5-15.
- 'The plague of 542: not the birth of the clinic', *Acta Classica* 45 (2002) 1-18.
- 'Getting to know Justinian', *Fundamina: A Journal of Legal History* 7 (2002) 19-29.
- 'Turning crises into drama: the management of epidemics in Classical Antiquity', *Acta Classica* 44 (2001) 35-52.
- 'Justinian and the tribulations of transformation', *Acta Classica* 43 (2000) 15-32.
- 'Truth and reconciliation the Athenian way: the reconciliation agreement of 403 BC', *Acta Classica* 42 (1999) 5-13.
- 'Nicias and the fear of failure syndrome', *Ancient History Bulletin* 9 (1995) 55-63.
- 'Cicero and the trial of Verres', *Akroterion* 37 (1992) 91-97.
- 'Out of order: the Circumcellions and the Codex Theodosianus xvi, 5.52', *Historia* 41 (1992) 488-499.
- 'Curbing the comedians: Cleon versus Aristophanes and Syracosius' decree', *Classical Quarterly* 42 (1992) 56-64.
- 'The Nika riots and hooliganism', *Acta Patristica et Byzantina* 1 (1990) 119-133.
- 'Macedon and Athenian politics in the period 338-323 BC', *Acta Classica* 24 (1981) 37-48.
- 'Seneca and his Oedipus', *Akroterion* 26/1-2 (1981) 22-29.
- 'Murder at Larinum: a commentary on extracts from Cicero's *Pro Cluentio*', *Akroterion* 24/3 (1979) 14-25 (with A. Thompson & M. Catacousinos).
- 'Cicero, *In Verrem* IV', *Akroterion* 24/1 (1979) 2-7 (with E. Cartwright, M. Robins & M. Wilson).
- 'Hints for a provincial governor', *Akroterion* 23/3 (1978) 28-33 (with E. Cartwright & M. Robins).
- 'Cicero, *In Catilinam* I', *Akroterion* 23/1-2 (1978) 48-58 (with B. Keelson & P. Collins).
- 'Catullus: the historical background', *Akroterion* 20/2-3 (1975) 38-53.

- 'Tomi', *Akroterion* 19/1-2 (1974) 50-58.
- 'The Curtii Rufi again', *Acta Classica* 16 (1973) 129-133.
- 'Leo III and iconoclasm', *Theoria* 41 (1973) 51-62.
- 'Ancient History: course design and assessment', *Akroterion* 18/3-4 (1973) 6-10.
- 'Augustan poets and Augustan propaganda', *Nuusbrief/Newsletter* (Stellenbosch) 9 (1964) 19-34.
- 'Démocratie manquée: fourth century Athens', *Historia* (SA) 9 (1964) 59-64.
- 'Ancient History and the Classical languages', *Nuusbrief/Newsletter* (Stellenbosch) 8 (1964) 20-24.
- 'An approach to Vergil, *Aeneid* IV', *Journal of the Teachers of Classics in the Federation* 1 (1963) 1-10.
- 'Primary sources and the Alexanderreich', *Acta Classica* 6 (1963) 125-137.

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ACTA CLASSICA



Acta Classica is published annually by the Classical Association of South Africa. The journal has been in production since 1958. It is listed on both the ISI and the SAPSE list of approved publications.

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