



eCOMMONS

Loyola University Chicago
Loyola eCommons

Classical Studies: Faculty Publications and
Other Works

Faculty Publications

9-1991

Review: Senecan Drama and Stoic Cosmology

John F. Makowski

Loyola University Chicago, jmakow1@luc.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://ecommons.luc.edu/classicalstudies_facpubs



Part of the [Classics Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Makowski, JF. "Review: Senecan drama and stoic cosmology" in *The Classical World* 85(1), 1991. 63-64.

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Faculty Publications at Loyola eCommons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Classical Studies: Faculty Publications and Other Works by an authorized administrator of Loyola eCommons. For more information, please contact ecommons@luc.edu.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 License](#).
© Classical Association of the Atlantic States, 1991.

defended military frontier. He seeks to refute all the conclusions that Edward Luttwak in *The Grand Strategy of the Roman Empire from the First Century A.D. to the Third* (Baltimore 1976) reached. Isaac treats the main ancient literary sources that deal with the eastern borders and offers an interpretation of the wars Rome and Constantinople waged against Parthians and Sassanids, but most of his work interprets the archaeological finds and descriptions of military buildings and sites found in what are today the Soviet republics of Georgia and Armenia, Turkey, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, and Israel.

Isaac has made two great contributions. He has ably and succinctly stated his conclusions in a form that even someone not familiar with archaeological data or the uses they can be put to can understand. For example, every chapter but one ends with a section called "Conclusions", and at times individual sections of chapters have a subsection called "Conclusions", although each reader will have to decide if Isaac's conclusions are convincing. More important, Isaac has summed up and brought up to date the vast amount of archaeological data about the eastern frontier. His book is where to start looking to find information and bibliography about individual sites and their relation to other sites.

Besides the price of the book, there is one other complaint. The maps are awful. They are not attractive; they do not help the reader distinguish legionary camps from smaller *castella*, imperial roads with milestones from caravan routes, caravan stops from cities; there is no gazetteer; sites discussed in the text do not appear on the maps. If you truly want to follow the geographical descriptions, have a good ancient atlas.

Rutgers University, Camden
CW 85.1 (1991)

GERALD P. VERBRUGGHE

Thomas G. Rosenmeyer. *Senecan Drama and Stoic Cosmology*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1989. Pp. xix, 230. \$32.00. ISBN 0-520-06445-3.

This is a difficult book, at times distracting in style and organization and at others brimming with original insights. The dust-cover announces a double goal: to explore stoic cosmology in the tragedies of Seneca and to relate these dramas to subsequent European theater. The book is in two parts. The first, perplexingly entitled "The Canon at Risk" (what canon? what risk?), reviews earlier studies of stoicism in the plays of Seneca, while the second analyzes in the tragedies themselves elements of stoic cosmology such as *sumpatheia*, *krasis*, and *ekpyrosis*. Rosenmeyer provides a needed balance to earlier studies that have focused almost exclusively on stoic ethics and psychology, and his often acute analyses of cosmological passages in the dramas succeed in illuminating the character and *Weltanschauung* of Senecan tragedy.

This book is not for the layman, as it is dense, erudite, subtle, and at times overwritten. The book appears to be aimed both at the professional student of comparative literature and at the specialist in Seneca. However, one is left wondering if the scholar of Renaissance drama will find the vagaries of stoic cosmological thought as overwhelming as the classicist will find the abundant *passim* references to later and often esoteric drama intrusive. Perhaps a separate chapter on Senecan influence on later drama would have been

preferable. Also, it would have been useful to include an in-depth analysis of a single play from the perspective of stoic cosmology.

In the end, however, Rosenmeyer has done a service in pointing out the interpenetration of stoic thought and Senecan drama. In the process, he demonstrates the vast distance of Seneca tragedy from Greek antecedents as well as its striking originality.

Loyola University of Chicago
CW 85.1 (1991)

JOHN F. MAKOWSKI

Miriam Griffin and Jonathan Barnes (edd.). *Philosophia Togata: Essays on Philosophy and Roman Society*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989. Pp. vi, 302. \$55.00. ISBN 0-19-814884-4.

This anthology contains a variety of fine papers, and its main contribution is an attempt to place philosophy and the philosopher within the proper context of Roman society. Too often philosophy is studied apart from its historical context, and too often philosophers are presented as if they had no other activity than the production of treatises for the consumption of other philosophers. This volume is a corrective to such an approach.

Two of these essays are primarily philosophical in focus (Jonathan Barnes, "Antiochus of Ascalon" and Julia Annas, "Cicero on Stoic Moral Philosophy and Private Property"). The former is an overview of the historical and philosophical evidence for Antiochus. Scholars have tended to associate numerous doctrines with this thinker, and Barnes provides a judicious and sober account of what can reasonably be attributed to him. Annas undertakes an interesting study of the (quite modern) concern with private property and the nature of rights and obligations (as distinguished from moral duties). She rejects the interpretation of Cicero and returns to a plausible and philosophically interesting presentation of the Stoic Diogenes of Babylon and his compatriots.

Two other essays explore the political role of the philosopher. Miriam Griffin ("Philosophy, Politics, and Politicians at Rome") considers the influence of philosophy on Roman politics and politicians. While she does allow for the impact of philosophy in this area, often that influence seems to be verbal; philosophy provides the moral vocabulary for discussion, but rarely do political issues seem to turn (at least exclusively) on philosophical points. Elizabeth Rawson ("Roman Rulers and the Philosophical Advisor") comes to a similar, negative conclusion about the influence of the philosophical advisor on the Roman ruler.

Among the other studies one might also note that of David Sedley ("Philosophical Allegiance in the Greco-Roman World") who argues that what gives unity to a philosophical movement is often allegiance to the founding figure(s) of a school (or at least to the letter of their 'canonical' writings). Other contributions include I. G. Kidd on Posidonius, D. P. Fowler on Lucretius, P. A. Brunt on philosophy and religion, and Christopher Pelling on Plutarch.

The Catholic University of America
CW 85.1 (1991)

LAWRENCE P. SCHRENK