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Review of *A People's History of Classics: Class and Greco-Roman Antiquity in Britain and Ireland 1689 to 1939* by Edith Hall and Henry Stead

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ing to promote the subject might use – including the useful reminder that ‘studying Latin is an extraordinarily rewarding experience in itself. To put it quite simply: Latin is fun’ (pp. 229–230). Gardini also notes that ‘I cannot make you love Latin, nor can any teacher. But I can try to impart some of my own passion, show you why I love it, and try to spark a similar interest in you’ (pp. 232–233). In this book Gardini certainly shows us why he loves Latin; whilst it is likely that the interest of those who choose to read this book will already have been sparked before they read it, its contents could certainly help to re-ignite or sustain a love of the language and its literature.

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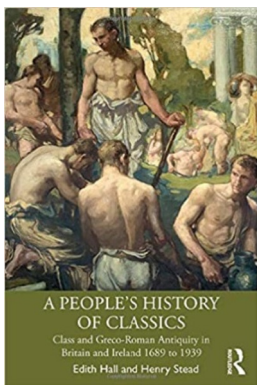
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A People’s History of Classics. Class and Greco-Roman Antiquity in Britain and Ireland 1689 to 1939

Hall (E.), Stead (H.). Pp. xxviii + 642, ill., maps. Oxford: Routledge, 2020. Cased, £120 (Paper, £29.99). ISBN: 978-1-138-21283-1.

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Edith Hall, a Professor of Classics at King’s College London and author or editor of 30 volumes of Classical literature and history, has in recent years been actively engaged in the ACE programme, Advocating Classics Education. This programme has both historical interests and pedagogical commitments; it is interested in how Classics has been taught in Britain and has been advocating for the accessibility of Classics throughout the British secondary education system. Henry Stead, Lecturer in

Latin at the University of St Andrews, author of *A Cockney Catullus* and co-editor of *Greek and Roman Classics in the Struggle for Social Reform*, brings the people to this history of Classics. This comprehensive volume will no doubt come to underpin efforts to encourage and enhance the teaching of Classics wherever it is being discouraged or cut.

As a scholarly project, *A People’s History of Classics* is an exemplary contribution to both Classical Reception and Cultural History. Being interested in the extension of the reception, it commits

itself to the broadening of the concept of culture to cover more than conventional ‘cultivation’. The study of Classics, historically – or, at least, historiographically – has been the preserve of elites, and a preserver of elitism. Mastery of Greek and Latin took time and money, and so was accessible only to gentlemen of leisure; but where Hall and Stead’s historical survey puts the *class* in Classics, it plots the inclusive as well as the exclusive implications. The category of the Classics was enlarged early on to include Greek and Latin works in translation, and then to histories of Greece and Rome written in English. This development is reflected in today’s ACE programme, which acknowledges that most students will not have the opportunity to study the ancient languages, but that all students should still have access to Classical Civilisation.

The book is organised into four parts, comprising 25 chapters. Part I sets forth the ‘Big Picture’ of the history, and sets up the rather elaborate analytical categories of its study. It also indicates the pertinent source materials. Part II surveys working-class communities (the Scottish, Irish, and Welsh among them), but begins with Dissenters. Part III focuses on individuals (the more or less well-known, the heretofore obscure, and the inevitably eccentric). Part IV focuses on particular trades (miners, potters, and shoemakers), and on those who were not only working class but Communist. The book surveys and essays a huge quantity and variety of historical stuff, and there is a fair amount of overlap and reiteration among the parts and chapters. But then that reflects the lived experience that any People’s History will want to represent.

One of the most fascinating and edifying features of this history is its focus on people who, while not of the leisured and learned classes, nevertheless applied themselves to the study of Greek and Latin, and mastered them. The same autodidactic impulse sent others to Pope’s Homer or Gibbon’s *History*. As these people came to be the People, print culture and the publishing industry began to accommodate them. In addition to *Latin Made Easy* and *Lessons in Greek*, Hall and Stead tell us about *Cassell’s Popular Educator*, ‘Bohn’s Classical Library’ and Dent’s ‘Everyman’s Library’. We visit second-hand book shops, libraries, and museums, and attend lectures. We learn of, and from, the Institutes and Colleges that furnished a liberal education to artisanal and industrial workers. Hall and Stead are always interested in how the working classes got access to the Classics, and in what they did with them. In some cases, a classical education was the way to bourgeois respectability; in other cases, it fortified and intensified working-class identities and activities. Many popular classicists left their own writings, which are among this history’s most telling sources. The narrative is illustrated by many striking images, a number of them from Hall’s personal collection. Hall has a particular interest in theatre; here we can see everything from the highbrow to the burlesque. Classical antiquity furnished a number of stories, like that of the Gracchi, which lent themselves to proletarian dramatisation. By the end of the period covered, theatre was one of the most popular sorts of working-class activism, and the classical scholarship informing it was being done by Communist dons.

The authors of this book can persuasively claim that it is ‘the first substantial enquiry into the presence of ancient Greek and Roman culture in British working-class communities ever to have been conducted’. It should be of interest to Classics teachers of today, because it is the history of that endeavour.

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