treatment of letters of the first type, see Patricia Rosenmeyer, *Ancient Epistolary Fictions: The Letter in Greek Literature* (Cambridge, 2001), though she discusses much of the material in C.'s categories 2 and 3 in some depth as well (see especially pp. 193–322).

Amongst the comic letters, we find compositions here by second sophistic authors Aelian, Alciphron, and Philostratus, and a few by one Aristaenetus, about whom little is known beyond the fact that he is late (perhaps 500 C.E.). The philosophical letters—all of uncertain authorship—include ones attributed to Anacharsis the Scythian, the Cynics Diogenes and Crates, Socrates, Aeschines, Euripides, Themistocles, Hippocrates, and Chion of Heraclea, an associate of Plato.

As C.'s commentary brings out so well, all the letters collected in this volume are exercises in literary ethopoeia and imitation. The influences of declamation, New Comedy, and mime are pronounced throughout: these letters are replete with farmers, fathers, pirates, parasites, courtesans, doctors, fishermen, and slaves. Topics involving dilemmas and antitheses also abound: the urban or the rustic life (Aelian 20; Alciphron 1.4, 11; 2.8, 38)? The practical or contemplative life (Chion 3)? Sophistry or sex (Aristaenetus 2.3)?

While the comic letters revel in stock characters and situations, the philosophical ones tend to take a known, historical association or event as their point of imaginative departure—even to the point of contradicting the historical account or supplying a motivation for the actions of some glamorous protagonist: Themistocles' politicking from exile during the Persian Wars; Euripides' friendship and alleged collaboration with Cephisophon; Socrates' mentoring of Xenophon about serving as a mercenary for Cyrus.

Both types of letter, comic and philosophical, often form part of a connected series, making them ancient precursors to the early modern epistolary novels of Richardson and Rousseau, and to the *Imaginary Conversations* of Walter Savage Landor. What perhaps makes C.'s volume so attractive—even useful as a resource—is that many of the *topoi* found in these letters also crop up in major authors like Horace, Ovid, Juvenal, and Lucian, reinforcing our appreciation of the extent to which their material was traditional.

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PHILO THE ACADEMIC

C. BRITTAIN: *Philo of Larissa. The Last of the Academic Sceptics*. Pp. xii + 406. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001. Cased, £40. ISBN: 0-19-815298-1.

The sceptical phase of the Academy's history has attracted much scholarly attention in recent years. Philo himself, sometimes called the founder of the Fourth Academy, is the subject of H. Tarrant's monograph *Scepticism or Platonism?* (Cambridge, 1985), and Philo's epistemology is discussed by many of the authors of *Assent & Argument: Studies in Cicero's Academic Books* (Leiden, 1997) edited by B. Inwood and J. Mansfeld. But Brittain's large book is much the most comprehensive treatment that this elusive and intriguing figure has ever been given. Philo made contributions to ethics and rhetorical theory. This largely neglected material, as well as the more familiar evidence for his epistemological stance, is scrupulously analysed in B.'s hefty book. In a final appendix he collects and translates all the ancient texts mentioning

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Philo that he has found. His study will prove to be a fine resource not only for historians of later ancient philosophy but also for those interested in the obscure history of rhetoric in the period 140–80 B.C.E. Since most of what we know about Philo stems from Cicero's *Academica*, this book is also a valuable commentary on much of that important and difficult work.

The most contested questions about Philo concern the position he adopted towards the end of his life when he was teaching in Rome, from 88 to *c*. 84 B.C.E. At this time he published two so-called 'Roman books' in which (according to the little that is directly attested about them) he maintained two highly controversial theses: first, contrary to previous Academic authorities, including his own earlier self, he claimed that knowledge of some kind is possible; and secondly, he claimed that his new position had been substantially the unitary view of the Academy from Plato onward. After an introduction, laying out the scholarly issues, and a long chapter on Philo's life, B. devotes the bulk of his book to elucidating and interpreting the tangled evidence for these two theses.

His principal results are as follows. Philo began his career as a radical 'Clitomachean' sceptic, upholding *akatalepsia*, the thesis that nothing can be known, and universal *epoche*; he then, along with Metrodorus, continued to uphold *akatalepsia*, but rejected universal *epoche* and countenanced the rationality of provisional beliefs; finally, while remaining sceptical about theoretical knowledge, he defended the possibility of perceptual, albeit fallible, knowledge, thus abandoning the unconditional *akatalepsia* that had characterized the Academy from the time of Arcesilaus down to himself. As to Philo's claims concerning the unity of the Academy, B. proposes that they should be explained as a deliberate correction of earlier Academic 'history', according to which the unity of the Academy, from Plato onward, consisted in the thesis of *akatalepsia*. Philo, in line with his final support for perceptual, though fallible, knowledge, attributed this newly formulated position to all his Academic forebears, restricting their unmitigated scepticism to philosophical theories, especially the Stoic theory that infallible knowledge of perceptual reality is possible.

B. is certainly correct to interpret Philo's distinctive positions with reference to his attitude to Stoic epistemology. Academic scepticism always defined itself in opposition to the Stoics' doctrine that infallible knowledge is delivered by the so-called *phantasia kataleptike*. The one certain and essential detail concerning Philo's denial of *akatalepsia* is his rejection of the Stoic condition that a *kataleptic* impression is such that it could not be false. Otherwise, B. proposes, Philo endorsed the Stoic doctrine. It follows from this that, according to Philo, we do experience objectively veridical impressions that warrant our assent, and deliver knowledge of their objects. Yet, in any given case, though such impressions are true, they do not provide conclusive evidence of their truth; for, *contra* Stoicism, I might, in completely similar circumstances to the present ones, experience an impression that is subjectively identical to the presently true one (as caused by the object) but is in fact false (not caused by the object).

B.'s conclusion that this fallibilist epistemology was Philo's position in his 'Roman books' is not a new interpretation. His achievement chiefly consists in the detail with which he supports it, including a most tenacious dissection of the relevant passages of Cicero's *Academica*. He also devotes close attention to Philo's intermediate position, showing how he and Metrodorus arrived at the view that there are normal perceptions 'which are neither merely subjectively "persuasive" (the Carneadean form of "clarity") nor self-evidently true (the Stoic form of "clarity")' (p. 105). Given this antecedent upgrading of perceptual evidence, Philo's final concession to fallibilist knowledge of

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empirical reality becomes less startling than its ancient and modern reception has generally made it appear to be.

The irony of Philo's position, as so reconstructed, is the way it recalls the debate between Arcesilaus and Zeno that launched Academic Scepticism (Cicero, *Acad.* 2.76–8). It was under pressure from Arcesilaus that Zeno had been persuaded to give the Stoics' *kataleptic* impression the contentious property of infallibility. By dropping that property, Philo made the Stoics' *kataleptic* impression a criterion of probable truth. If Zeno had been willing to settle for that, rather than insist on the incompatibility of wisdom with error, Academic Scepticism would have lost the principal basis for its 200 years of contention with Stoicism.

By carefully fixing the terms of this debate, B. exhibits Philo's fallibilist epistemology as an effective compromise between radical scepticism and unattainable certainty. In his ground-breaking treatment of Philo's ethics and rhetoric, B. argues that empiricism (working from provisional beliefs), as distinct from dogmatic theory, is the guiding principle, and thus consistent with the general thrust of Philo's philosophy. Notwithstanding the severe limitations of the evidence, Philo emerges from this book as a thinker whose work we would dearly like to read in a complete form.

Yet, should Philo be called, as he is here, 'The last of the Academic Sceptics'? He appears to have had no official successor as head of the Sceptical Academy, and B. argues persuasively that no later Platonists supported his account of the unity of the Academy from Plato onward; but Philo's death did not signal the sudden demise of Academic Scepticism in a broader sense. As B. recognizes, a history of that movement needs to include such later figures as Plutarch and Favorinus, and (I would add) Cicero himself, who outlived Philo by some forty years. Moreover, Academic Scepticism appears to be still a live issue for Epictetus (1.5, 2.20).

Apart from this small reservation, I register only one complaint in conclusion. While B. serves his readers admirably in terms of scholarship, he makes them work hard to garner his book's most salient findings. Many thickets of detail, some of them not fully necessary, have to be negotiated, and I wish he had tempered his liking for dashes and parentheses.

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STRABO VII–IX

†F. Sbordone: *Strabonis* Geographica. *Vol. III: Libri VII–IX*. Pp. 437. Rome: Typis Officinae Polygraphicae, 2002. Paper, €21.70. ISBN: 88-240-3621-X.

On 29 May 2002, a fire in the warehouse of Les Belles Lettres destroyed all Budé volumes in print. The ambitious programme of reprinting does not, as yet, include Strabo's geography. Perhaps this tragedy, and the lack of enthusiasm in making the Budé edition available again, is symbolic for what has happened to the text of Strabo's geography over the centuries.

The textual transmission of the work, which was hardly read in antiquity, is sadly complicated; some parts—notably the latter part of Book 7—were already lost in late antiquity (a fragment of the lost portion is preserved in the second/third-century Papyrus Köln 5861). The earliest manuscript we have is the late fifth-century Grottaferrata palimpsest, which, however, only transmits fragments of about one-seventh of the text. At some later stage, then, Strabo's geography, probably in view

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