

John Van Sickle Recalls

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This gift of books—representative of how Hellenic poetica, rhetorica, and bucolica were welcomed, initially in Italy—comes to Harvard’s Center for Hellenic Studies in grateful recognition of its main purpose “to benefit young classicists” as “a community of scholars similar to the Society of Fellows at Harvard.”¹ For me, the fellowship at CHS (1974-1975) capped a formative phase,² from which I went on to settle in New York, where I encountered Fred Schreiber,³ first as a fellow teacher in the city colleges, soon as a mentor and scout for books; he introduced me to the Estiennes and advised me to design the Exlibris (drawing Sicelides Musae from Virgil’s messianic eclogue in a paronomastic version of my name). Fred also persuaded me to collect the Anacreon that now graces the gift—my first acquisition from E. K. Schreiber and the first editorial initiative by Henri Estienne.

My recollections trace back at least to the [Grolier poetry book](#) shop of Gordon Cairnie in Cambridge (early 1960s. still there on Plimpton street) where another of the regulars (often aspiring poets) offered to sell me a Virgil (hefty quarto, Giunta, Venice 1544), bracketed with commentaries by old Servius and new Mancinellus, Badius, illustrated in gothic style by Sebastian Brandt. I could accept the book with means just acquired from a Bowdoin prize for Latin composition. But when collation at home discovered that not *omnia* of the *opera* were there, the seller refunded half: [Arthur Freeman](#), then a Junior Fellow, later distinguished in the world of books.

Another Junior fellow proffered a book that would prompt my scholarly work:⁴ David Kuhn gave me his version of an eclogue book, arguing that Virgil had composed an eclogue book to preface a career in epic, hence his fourth eclogue. Thus David, not aiming for epic, omitted a fourth from his own eclogues. His program provoked me to write my doctoral dissertation on the fourth of Virgil,⁵ then go on to study the concept of epic that started with Sicilian bucolic and claimed a new origin in Arcadian pastoral.⁶

My collecting would gain impetus & focus from a postdoctoral year at Johns Hopkins in Charles Singleton’s Humanities Center (late 1960s),⁷ where scholarship flourished with bibliophily—to mention only a theoretical cohort in my growing bucolic query⁸ also friendship with a peerless bibliophile, Richard Macksey; as my bucolic pursuits ripened. He would nominate me to the Hopkins Society of Scholars, citing some of my work done at the CHS;⁹ and would shepherd through JHU press my eventual commentary and verse translation of Virgil’s eclogue book.¹⁰

Mindfulness of my own postdoctoral good fortunes motivates this gift to an alma mater which was conceived to foster postdoctoral work. Here books assembled in diverse wanderings may find a sort of nostos in an exemplary biblioteca beyond bibliophile’s urge and bibliopole’s craft, of which some traces discernible in the trove may well want study of provenance.

One item arrives with a peculiar tale: Πινδαρου Ολύμπια. Πύθια. Νέμεα. Ισθμία. Καλλιμάχου ὕμνοι, οἱ εὗρισκόμενοι. Διονυσίου περιήγησις. Λυκόφρονος ἄλεχάνδρα,

σκοτεινὸν ποίημα. Pindari. Olympia, Pythia, Nemea, Ishmia. Callimachi Hymni Qui Inveniuntur, Dionysius de Situ Orbis. Lycophronis Alexandra, Obscurum Poema. (Venice: Aldus Manutius and Andrea Asulano, 1513 [first edition]).

Having braved an April blizzard blowing off Monte Amiata and skirted Montalcino with its famed vintage, arriving in Politian's Montepulciano we were drawn by the window of an antiquary, displaying a slim vellum binding labeled Pindari Comoediae. Pressures on the bell got no answer; but next day from Rome una telefonata got an almost grudging reply, "Sì. Ci'ò qualche libro in greco." The Tuscan aspirate for Italian greco would have delighted Singleton, who liked to say he could speak like a vintner from the Chianti, which indeed he emulated with his vines on the Maryland hills. The next day we drove back from Rome via Viterbo and the 'Via Hassia.'

Notes

¹Statements of purpose articulated in 1960 by Harvard's president Nathan Marsh Pusey, that set the Center's course, quoted from Eric N. Lindquist, *The Origins of the Center for Hellenic Studies* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 43. 'Mr. Pusey,' as one would greet him walking across the yard, was himself in the autumn of 1954 freshly arrived from the middle west (like Bill Nethercut and me from Rockford West), when he advised our assembled class of '58 to pursue with passion our interests—a focus that came only later, some eight or nine more years.***

²(CHS Junior Fellow, 1974-1975; AB cl, 1958; PhD Classical Philology, 1966); at [CUNY commons](#). [See also](#).

³(PhD Classical Philology, 1970). [For Schreiber's account of himself](#).

⁴David Kuhn [aka David Mus], *The Arminarm Eclogues with the Hexercises (For the Heclogues) Pieces*. (La Quercia, Roma: John Van Sickle & Giulia Battaglia, 1971); Dossier David Mus, *La Revue* (Vitry-sur-Seine: Julien Negre, 2023).

⁵“The Unnamed Child: A Reading of Virgil's Messianic Eclogue,” Dissertation Abstract,” *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 71 (1966): 350–51; *A Reading of Virgil's Messianic Eclogue* (New York: Garland, 1992) in a series edited by Gregory Nagy.

⁶*The Design of Virgil's Bucolics* (London: Duckworth, 2004a [Second Edition]).

⁷Directed by Charles Singleton, after his contretemps with President Pusey, returned to the Hopkins and his artfully cultivated vines on the Maryland slopes.

⁸“Is Theocritus a Version of Pastoral?” *Modern Language Notes* 84 (1969): 942–46; “Dialectical Methodology in the Virgilian Tradition,” *Modern Language Notes* 85

(1970): 884–92. “Poetica Teocritea,” *Quaderni Urbinati Di Cultura Classica* 9 (1970): 82–97.

⁹“Archilochus: A New Fragment of an Epode,” *Classical Journal* 71 (1975): 1–15;
“Archilochus: The Hasty Emendation,” *Bulletin of the American Society of Papyrologists* 15 (1978): 171–73.

¹⁰*Virgil’s Book of Bucolics. The Ten Eclogues Translated into English Verse Framed by Cues for Reading Aloud and Clues for Threading Texts and Themes* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011).

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