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Frontmatter
More information

SAINTS AND SYMPOSIASTS

Greek traditions of writing about food and the symposium had a long and rich afterlife in the first to fifth centuries CE, in both Greco-Roman and early Christian culture. This book provides an account of the history of the table-talk tradition, derived from Plato's *Symposium* and other classical texts, focusing on, among other writers, Plutarch, Athenaeus, Methodius and Macrobius. It also deals with the representation of transgressive, degraded, eccentric types of eating and drinking in Greco-Roman and early Christian prose narrative texts, focusing especially on the *Letters* of Alciphron, the Greek and Roman novels, especially Apuleius, the Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles, and the early saints' lives. It argues that writing about consumption and conversation continued to matter: these works communicated distinctive ideas about how to talk and how to think, distinctive models of the relationship between past and present, and distinctive and often destabilising visions of identity and holiness.

JASON KÖNIG is Senior Lecturer in Greek at the University of St Andrews. He is the author of *Athletics and Literature in the Roman Empire* (Cambridge, 2005) and *Greek Literature in the Roman Empire* (2009). He has also edited *Ordering Knowledge in the Roman Empire* (with Tim Whitmarsh, Cambridge, 2007) and *Greek Athletics* (2010).

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More information

Contents

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Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-88685-7 - Saints and Symposiasts: The Literature of Food and the Symposium in Greco-Roman Abou Jeng and Early Christian Culture
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More information

Figures

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More information

Preface

Part I of this book discusses the history of table-talk literature in the Roman empire. Part II deals with the representation of transgressive, degraded, eccentric types of eating and drinking (the other side of the coin from the ideal of the orderly philosophical symposium which lies at the heart of Part I), focusing especially on the Greek and Roman novels, the Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles, and the early saints' lives. The earliest of the texts I examine at length – Plutarch's *Sympotic Questions* – was composed in the early second century CE, the starting-point for the explosion of Greek prose literature which continued to the mid third century. The latest – Macrobius' *Saturnalia* and the collective hagiographies of Palladius and Theodoret – were composed more than three centuries later, in the early fifth century CE, at the end of the long century following the conversion of Constantine, which saw both the embedding of Christian culture in the Greco-Roman elite and also the cementing of asceticism as one of the defining features of Christian practice.

This is of course only a tiny part of the wider picture of the relationship between classical and Christian culture. Nevertheless it is a big subject. I have tried to deal at least briefly with all of the major landmark texts in the late history of symposium literature. I have also tried to set these works in their wider social and religious context, by sketching out the great variety of practices of feasting and fasting which were current within the first five centuries CE. However, this book is not intended as an exhaustive survey of either of those two areas. My main priority, instead, has been to focus on a series of case studies. The texts I discuss are in themselves intriguing artefacts of ancient culture, demanding explanation and contextualisation. The conclusions which interest me most of all in what follows are conclusions about individual texts, about the imaginative worlds they conjure up and the ways in which they might have challenged and engaged their original readers.

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More information

That said, I also use these close readings as starting points for some overarching arguments which tie together the volume as a whole. In Part I, I argue that the appeal of sympotic literature in the Roman imperial period lay partly in its capacity to conjure up fantasy images of community: community between individuals in the present, united by their commitment to shared models of argumentation, and also community with the texts and authors of the past, who are brought into dialogue with the present within the imaginary space of the symposium. I also chart the ways in which sympotic models of argumentation – based on ingenuity, speculation, play – came to be viewed increasingly as problematic within early Christian and late antique culture. In Part II, I aim to show how Greco-Roman and early Christian prose narrative share an interest in the way in which dignified sympotic behaviour always risks being contaminated by negative connotations – perhaps not a surprising conclusion in itself, but the intensity of ancient fascination with that theme is nevertheless remarkable. I argue, furthermore, that early Christian writing sometimes welcomes those contaminating associations in order to advertise in positive terms the transgressive and paradoxical character of the new Christian faith. Throughout the book, then, one of my recurring aims is to examine the way in which Christian authors rewrite their Greco-Roman heritage, and the tension between continuity and defamiliarisation which is central to that process. Of course, many others have addressed those broad issues before, but it is a story that has not been told except in passing for the classical traditions of symposium literature.

It would not have been possible to bring this project to completion without a considerable amount of advice and guidance. Many areas of early Christian and late antique literature were relatively new to me when I started work on this book, and there are still some areas which are less familiar to me than I would like. Nevertheless I hope that the attempt to look beyond the classical literature of the Roman empire will seem to have been worthwhile and that my classicist's perspective has helped me to generate some fresh questions about the early Christian texts I discuss here. My impression is that early Christian literature is still sometimes treated in a slightly cursory fashion by classicists who work on the imperial period (although with many important exceptions, increasingly so) and that studies which choose not to engage with early Christian writing in detail sometimes end up missing out on material that could enrich and nuance their treatment of Roman imperial culture, broadly defined. That goes, at any rate, for many of my own earlier publications. I am very grateful to the many people who have helped me to get as far as I have.

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More information

I am even less able to claim any great expertise on Jewish literature. I have discussed Jewish writing where it is relevant to the comparison between Greco-Roman and Christian literature, but a comprehensive discussion of Jewish representations of eating and drinking and sympotic conversation is well beyond the scope of this book.

I am grateful to the many friends and colleagues who have read, discussed, encouraged and advised (not least by giving help with images), especially Ewen Bowie, Kevin Butcher, Katherine Dunbabin, Jaś Elsner, Richard Finn, Simon Goldhill, Lucy Grig, Stephen Halliwell, Jill Harries, Jon Hesk, Fiona Hobden, Joe Howley, Fergus King, Christine Kondoleon, Alice König, Eugenia Lao, Jane McLarty, Katerina Oikonomopoulou, Judith Perkins, Helene Sader, Rebecca Sweetman, Tim Whitmarsh, Nicolas Wiater, John Wilkins, Greg Woolf, Alexei Zadorojnyi; also to audiences in Ann Arbor, Athens, Birmingham, Cambridge, Geneva, Glasgow, Lampeter, Lisbon, London, Manchester, Oxford, Paris, Rethymnon, St Andrews and Warwick. I wish to thank the St Andrews University Library Inter-Library Loans department. Thanks also to Michael Sharp as Classics Editor at Cambridge University Press, to the series editors, and to Gill Cloke for all her work on copy-editing. I am grateful in addition to the Loeb Classical Library Foundation for the funding which made possible a full year of research leave at an important time in the project; and to the Leverhulme Trust for their funding of a collaborative research project in St Andrews on 'Science and empire in the Roman world' which helped me to think through many of the questions addressed in Part I on the functions of miscellanistic writing in imperial culture.

All dates are CE unless otherwise specified. I have followed standard periodisations for Greek history and literature: archaic (roughly 800–479 BCE); classical (479–323 BCE); Hellenistic (323–31 BCE); imperial (31 BCE to roughly 300 CE); late antique (roughly 300 CE onwards). All translations are my own unless otherwise specified. In transcribing Greek words into English I have generally preferred the original Greek form, but I have used Latinate versions where these seemed to me to be so widely accepted that the Greek version would look out of place.

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Abbreviations

Abbreviations for journals follow *Année Philologique*. Other abbreviations, especially for authors and texts, where used, follow the *Greek-English Lexicon* (LSJ), the *Oxford Latin Dictionary* and the *Greek Patristic Lexicon*. Some of these abbreviations are reproduced below for convenience, along with one or two others which are not listed in those sources.

AAA	Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles
AAMt	*Acts of Andrew and Matthias*
AN	*Ancient Narrative*
Anth. Pal.	*Anthologia Palatina*
ATh	*Acts of Thomas*
CIL	T. Mommsen, *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum*
DL	Diogenes Laertius
GCN	*Groningen Colloquia on the Novel*
HM	*History of the Monks in Egypt*
IEG	M. L. West, *Iambi et Elegi Graeci* (1989–92, second edition)
IG	*Inscriptiones Graecae*
ILS	H. Dessau, *Inscriptiones Latinae Selectae*
K	K. G. Kühn, *Opera omnia Claudii Galeni*
LCL	Loeb Classical Library series
LSCG	F. Sokolowski, *Lois Sacrées des Cités grecques*
LSJ	H. G. Liddell and R. Scott *et al. A Greek-English Lexicon* (ninth edition, with supplement, 1996)
PG	J.-P. Migne, *Patrologia Graeca* (*Patrologiae cursus completus, series Graeca*)
PL	J.-P. Migne, *Patrologia Latina* (*Patrologiae cursus completus, series Latina*)
P.Oxy.	*The Oxyrhynchus Papyri*
QC	Plutarch, *Sympotic Questions* (*Quaestiones Convivales*)

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RE	A. Pauly, G. Wissowa and W. Kroll, *Real-Encyclopädie d. klassischen Altertumswissenschaft*
SC	Sources Chrétiennes
*SIG*³	W. Dittenberger, *Sylloge Inscriptionum Graecarum* (third edition)
VS	Philostratus, *Lives of the Sophists*

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