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Introduction

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Late Hellenistic Literature: Creativity and Diversity

The last few decades have seen an explosion of interest in the Greek literature of the Roman Empire, from the works of Plutarch and Dio Chrysostom in the late first century through to Philostratus in the early third. One starting point has been closer examination of the phenomenon described by Philostratus as the 'Second Sophistic', the flourishing of performance oratory that is such a distinctive feature of that period.[1] The Greek novels have been a major focus of interest for many decades now.[2] More recently that development has been further expanded to cover a wide range of texts and genres, with attention also to links between Greek and Latin prose, and to the wider social and historical context of imperial Greek literature.[3] Much of that work has focused on the way in which imperial Greek literature reflects and performs a complex range of identities and cultural affiliations.

By contrast, interest in late Hellenistic and Augustan Greek literature, and prose literature in particular, has developed much more slowly.[4] The reasons for that are various. One factor is the state of our surviving sources. Many key works do not survive for the second and first centuries BCE. A lot of scholarly energy in the past has understandably gone into reconstructing what is missing, rather than attempting to take a broader view of the literary culture of this period. The situation improves a little in the late

[1] E.g., see Bowersock 1969, Gleason 1995, Schmitz 1997, Korenjak 2000, Whitmarsh 2005; and for good recent overviews, Schmitz 2017 and Pernot 2017, both with further bibliography.

[2] See Whitmarsh 2008 for starting points.

[3] See Swain 1996, Goldhill 2001, Whitmarsh 2001a, König 2009 and more recently Johnson and Richter 2017, which includes discussion of Greek and Latin prose literature side by side.

[4] However, see Schmitz and Wiater 2011a for one exception, esp. Schmitz and Wiater 2011b: 15–16 and 44–5 for some starting points on the relationship between conceptions of Greek identity in the late Hellenistic and imperial periods; Hunter and de Jonge 2019b: 6–17 for discussion along similar lines; and further bibliography on individual authors below; also Meeus 2018c.

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first century BCE and early first century CE under Augustus, but there is then an even more striking absence of surviving texts from the second and especially the third quarter of the first century CE, which has encouraged the perception of a significant break between late Hellenistic and imperial Greek literature – although of course there would have been no rigid dividing line between these two 'periods' of literary production for the inhabitants of the Roman empire (we will have more to say on problems of periodisation below). The connotations of decline and weakness that used to be associated with Greek culture under Roman rule have also been slower to shift for the late Hellenistic world than they have for the later imperial period. The idea, proclaimed even in recent reference works on Hellenistic literature, that 'real' rhetoric ceased to exist with the end of the classical period is a case in point: it stems directly from the (equally mistaken) assumption that 'real' political and cultural life became impossible after the end of the fourth century.[5] That stereotype has been challenged for the wealthy cities of the Greek east in the second century CE, as we shall see further below, but much less so for the first and second centuries BCE.[6]

Late Hellenistic literature has also suffered from competition with the Alexandrian poetry of the third century BCE.[7] The brilliant works of the poet-scholars of Alexandria between them form an unusually coherent body of work, focused around a well-defined set of recurring themes and aesthetic and methodological principles. They were produced over a relatively short period of time within a well-documented historical and cultural context. Hellenistic Alexandria has thus produced nothing short of an intellectual goldmine comparable only to the literary culture of classical Athens in its geographical and intellectual consistency. Add to this the enormous influence these poets have exerted on the literature of subsequent generations, and it is understandable that Alexandrian poetry has attracted the attention and energy of such a large proportion of scholars with an interest in post-classical Greek literature. Compared to the concentrated 'unity' of third-century Alexandrian poetry, other, later Hellenistic poetry has been seen as much less inviting. As we shall see in

[5] E.g., Kühnert and Vogt 2005: 912–13.
[6] There are some signs, though, that the tide is slowly turning: e.g., see Grieb 2008; Canevaro and Gray 2018; cf. Cuypers 2010: 323–4 and Wiater 2014a: 860–1, both with further references; Alcock 1993 for a related attempt to challenge stereotypes of economic decline in mainland Greece in the late Hellenistic and early imperial periods.
[7] Rengakos 2017: 74–5 traces the origins of the tendency to privilege Alexandrian poetry in studies of Hellenistic literature to Wilamowitz and Pfeiffer.

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Greensmith's chapter, late Hellenistic verse texts are constantly at risk of being ignored – viewed as culturally and aesthetically marginal, by comparison with their Alexandrian equivalents, and harder to categorise and confine within a set of common concerns and approaches (to some extent the same goes for the Greek poetry of the imperial period, although that long-standing misconception is increasingly being dismantled by important works on imperial and late antique Greek epic in particular).[8]

Hellenistic prose has also had a bad deal within the scholarship of the last century, with the exception of a few key ancient authors. Chapter 3 ('Authors and Genres') of Kathryn Gutzwiller's excellent *Guide to Hellenistic Literature* devotes only two out of nine sections, or 23 out of 117 pages, to prose authors, with one section on Polybius and another on 'technical prose writing' (also a few pages on philosophical prose writing in a section on 'parodic and philosophical literature' that is primarily concerned with verse).[9] The rest of the chapter deals exclusively with Hellenistic poets. Hellenistic prose appears to be 'all over the place', with a huge diversity of different, often highly specialised works,[10] including a staggering range of different types of historical narratives covering events in an enormous range of periods and geographical locations;[11] technical

[8] For surveys of the main landmarks of imperial Greek verse, see Bowie 1989b and 1990, and Baumbach 2017; and for recent developments in the scholarship see Greensmith's chapter below, esp. p. 185, n. 25.

[9] Gutzwiller 2007: 50–167. Three years later, Martine Cuypers stated that 'Hellenistic prose typically fills little space in surveys of Greek literature' (2010: 317). This has changed somewhat thanks to the publication, in the meantime, of Zimmermann and Rengakos 2014, but Cuypers' statement does still ring true today. On the state of the history of Hellenistic literature see also Rengakos 2017; and cf. Meeus 2018b: esp. 1–4 (with a particular emphasis on historiography).

[10] As Cuypers 2010: 317 points out, not all of these different kinds of texts are treated equally: philosophical authors and Polybius, for example, tend to receive more scholarly attention than technical and scientific writers.

[11] To name only a few, Polybius' 'universal' history, covering the rise of Rome from the First Roman–Carthaginian War (264–241 BCE) to the fall of Carthage and Corinth in 146 BCE in forty books; the history of the Diadochs, covering the time from the death of Pyrrhus (272) to the death of Cleomenes (220–219), in twenty-eight books by Phylarchus; the histories focusing on the deeds of Antiochus III and Eumenes II by the same author; the large number of historians describing the deeds of Alexander the Great; the various local historians, including the Atthidographers such as Philochorus of Athens (340–262), the most important representative of the genre; the Σαμίων ὧροι, a history centred on Samos but including extended characterisations of important historical characters (and, hence, overlapping with biography) by Duris (from 350–340 to 280–270), and the *Sicilian Histories* of Timaeus (350–260) in thirty-eight books; related, but with a more ethnographic focus, are the *Babylonian History* by Berossus of Babylon (early third century), the *Aegyptiaka* by Manetho and the *Asiatika* (ten books on the history of the Diadochs), *Europiaka* (forty-nine books) and the treatise *On the Red Sea* (five books) by Agatharchides of Cnidus (200–120); and the increasing number of historians focusing on various aspects of Roman history, such as Polybius (mentioned above), whose work was continued in the first century by the Stoic philosopher, historian and scientist Posidonius of Apameia (covering the years from 145 to

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treatises on medicine, music, biology, astronomy, mechanics and strategy as well as grammar;[12] writings on rhetoric and literary criticism;[13] and the works of the influential philosophical schools, the Peripatetics, Stoics, Epicureans and Sceptics.[14] The later Hellenistic period also sees many inscriptions with a strongly 'literary' character, especially long honorary decrees which draw on biographical, rhetorical and philosophical motifs: they need to be counted as part of the late Hellenistic literary landscape, rather than as a background to 'literature' proper.[15]

This plurality is one of the defining features of Hellenistic prose. 'Hellenistic prose' is best imagined as a dynamic, constantly shifting field, with authors re-working, adopting and adapting the works of their predecessors in the light of their own social, cultural and political circumstances, and in many cases pushing the boundaries of literary and generic conventions. Many of these authors are just as polymathic as their poetic counterparts in Alexandria. Think of Posidonius, for example, who wrote on history, philosophy and the sciences; of Strabo, who wrote geography and history; Polybius, who is the author of a biography and a technical military treatise as well as his famous historical work and a treatise on the habitability of the equatorial zones; Dionysius of Halicarnassus, who taught 'classical' style and aesthetics as well as being the author of the *Early Roman History*; and Agatharchides, whose works crossed the boundaries between history and ethnography, to name only a few.[16]

The plethora of different approaches to historical writing in Hellenistic literature illustrates this well. Theopompus, for example, initially followed well-established models of historical narrative in his *Hellenika* (designed to continue Thucydides' work and, as such, a direct competitor of Xenophon's work with the same title) but then abandoned this design

86/5 in fifty-two books), and the *Early Roman History* by Dionysius of Halicarnassus, which treated the history of Rome from the ethnic origins of the Romans and the foundation of the city to the beginning of the First Roman–Carthaginian War originally in twenty books; the 'universal' history of Diodorus of Sicily, which narrated the history of the entire *oikoumene* from mythical times down to the Britannic expedition of Julius Caesar originally in forty books; the 'Hannibal historians' Silenus and Sosylus (on the Second Roman–Carthaginian War); the 'world history' by Nicolaus of Damascus (born c. 64 BCE) in 144 books from the earliest times to the death of Herodes (4 BCE); and the 'universal history' (*Hypomnemata Historika*) by Strabo of Amaseia (64 BCE–23/27 CE) originally in forty-three books. This list is far from exhaustive and meant merely to give an impression of the incredible variety of Hellenistic prose literature even just within the field of historiography; for a helpful overview see Zimmermann and Rengakos 2014: 617–77.

[12] Zimmermann and Rengakos 2014: 453–616.

[13] Zimmermann and Rengakos 2014: 860–6.

[14] Zimmermann and Rengakos 2014: 392–452.

[15] See Benjamin Gray's chapter below, with Robert 1960: 213. Angelos Chaniotis has done much pioneering work in this field, e.g., Chaniotis 1987, 2013a, 2013b.

[16] Cf. also Cuypers 2010: 332 with further examples.

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'midway through' to centre his historical narrative on the person of Philip of Macedon, thus producing his *Philippika*. The fragmentary nature of what little remains of Theopompus' works makes it impossible for us to assess the effect of this change precisely, but the inventive and controversial nature of Theopompus' move is still perceptible in Polybius' harsh criticism, that Theopompus should have kept history and biography neatly separate (8.11.3–6 = BNJ 115 T19). As Polybius' objection makes clear, Theopompus' change could be seen as a radical (and, in Polybius' view, failed and morally questionable) experiment that challenged conventional narrative modes and conventional views on the relationship between genres, specifically the relationship between history and biography, which Polybius believes ought to be kept strictly separate.[17] At the same time, it is possible to recapture a more positive impression of Theopompus' creativeness: for example the preserved fragments of the *Philippika* show that Theopompus supplemented his bio-historiographical approach with long topographical, geographical and ethnographical digressions, anecdotes, and *thaumasia*, while covering the deeds of Greeks as well as non-Greeks, thus aligning his narrative more with a Herodotean type of historical writing and combining a personalised, biographical focus with a more universalising one.[18]

It is too simplistic to view Polybius' extensive engagement with Theopompus and other historical predecessors (most prominently Timaeus, but Ephorus, Phylarchus, Fabius Pictor and many others also feature heavily in Polybius' methodological passages)[19] simply as an expression of his peculiar penchant for belligerent criticism. Polybius' critical passages testify to the power of multiple approaches and the drive for constant innovation in prose narrative in this period. Moreover, Polybius himself shares some aspects of Theopompus' inventiveness by, for example, seeking to establish the idea of the *symploke*, the 'weaving together' of the entire Mediterranean under Roman power, as the 'key' to understanding past and present,[20] but also by engaging with a wide range of different kinds of writing such as inscriptions in order to inscribe his work into larger political contexts of Greek arbitration and Roman political discussion.[21]

[17] Cf. Polybius 10.21.8, where he refers to his biography of Philopoemen as an *enkomion*.
[18] Cf. Zimmermann and Rengakos 2014: 634, with further bibliography.
[19] Meister 1975 is still the most comprehensive treatment; cf., more recently, Scardino 2018 on Polybius' engagement with his historical predecessors; Parmeggiani 2018 on fourth-century historiography in particular.
[20] Cf. Wiater 2017 and in this volume.
[21] See Wiater 2018b.

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We argue, then, that generic inventiveness and multiplicity are hallmarks of literary production, in prose as well as poetry, for the Hellenistic period as a whole. Conventional accounts of Hellenistic literature, focused on third-century Alexandrian verse, have tended to foreground the first of those features, but to underestimate the second.[22] In the same way in which we now prefer to speak of 'cultures' and 'identities', we ought to think of Hellenistic 'literatures' in the plural, rather than the singular. In that sense Hellenistic literature defies any attempt at a unifying, 'Great Story' type of approach. This has important implications for scholarly works like this one which set out to take a broad view of the literature of these centuries. What 'Hellenistic literature' is lies in the eye of the beholder to an even greater extent than for the literature of the archaic and classical periods.

Because of the extraordinary diversity of Hellenistic literary production, a selective and hence to some degree arbitrary approach is unavoidable. No discussion of Hellenistic literature can ever lay a claim to being comprehensive or uncovering some sort of 'essence' of Hellenistic literary production. Although we cover many of the key genres and authors of late Hellenistic Greek literature – the most obvious exception is scientific or technical writing –[23] the approach adopted in this volume is, therefore, deliberately selective. The chapters collected here are intended as samples and stimuli; they do not add up to a fully comprehensive discussion of Hellenistic literature; instead they showcase and explore the viability and profitability of many different approaches. Maier in this volume discusses the technique of 'sideshadowing' in Polybius and Plutarch, which allows them to draw attention to possible pathways not taken in the unfolding historical events they describe. This volume too invites a kind of sideshadowing. It is possible to imagine versions of this project or even this introduction that give their main attention to a very different selection of texts, for example moving Polybius or Strabo or Dionysius of Halicarnassus more into the background, and giving more weight in turn to late Hellenistic philosophical writing, to some of the other late Hellenistic historiographical texts that are covered only in passing in this volume, or to the late Hellenistic Jewish literature whose importance is sketched briefly at a later stage in this introduction, and then in the chapters by Greensmith and Goldhill. We hope that others will take up

[22] Cf. Rengakos 2017.
[23] For a helpful, concise overview of this aspect of Hellenistic literary production, with further literature, see Cuypers 2010: 330–4.

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the opportunity to explore quite different combinations of texts in future, and in doing so to open up fresh perspectives on the landscape of late Hellenistic literature.

Re-bounding the Late Hellenistic

We argued in the preceding section that any unifying approach to the themes and genres of 'late Hellenistic literature' is likely to be inadequate, given the diversity and multiplicity of that material. The same holds true for any attempt to define 'late Hellenistic' texts by clear-cut and rigid temporal boundaries. In this section we offer a more extensive discussion of issues of periodisation, in order to explore what is at stake in the term 'late Hellenistic' as we use it in this volume, before moving on to examine the way in which our view of the multiplicity of Hellenistic literature and the difficulty of demarcating it within well-defined temporal boundaries informs our approach to individual texts and authors.

What constitutes the 'Hellenistic' period of Greek literature has always been a matter of contention.[24] The concept of a 'Hellenistic' period of Greek literature itself does not, as Rudolf Kassel has shown, originate with Droysen, who offered preciously little concrete discussion of literature and literary history.[25] It is found already in Friedrich August Wolf's lectures on the history of Greek literature at the end of the eighteenth century. Wolf distinguished six periods of Greek literature, the fourth of which begins in 323/2 BCE with the deaths of Alexander and Aristotle – the end of the period of *Attica elegantia litterarum et artium* – and ends with Augustus' victory at Actium in 31 BCE and the arrival of Dionysius of Halicarnassus in Rome a year later.[26] Wolf calls it the *aetas studiorum Alexandrinorum seu polymathiae Alexandrinae*, with 'Alexandrian' being synonymous with 'Hellenistic' (i.e., covering all forms of literary production of that period), as it remained until Wilamowitz.[27] It was Wilamowitz who first

[24] Our remarks here are influenced by the crucial contribution of Kassel 1987.
[25] See Kassel 1987: esp. 10 on Droysen and literary history; also Bichler 1983 on the concept of 'Hellenismus', which was well-established, in a plethora of different meanings, before Droysen published the first volume of his *Geschichte des Hellenismus* in 1836, and which was immediately criticised after the publication of Droysen's work and has remained controversial ever since. Cf. Bonnet 2015: 19–23, with further literature.
[26] It is worth pointing out that Wolf is here adopting Dionysius' own periodisation; see *Orat. vett.* 1.1.2 with Wiater 2011: 60–5 (with further literature); cf. also Kim's chapter in this volume.
[27] Kassel 198: 10–11. Susemihl's two-volume *Geschichte der griechischen Litteratur in der Alexandrinerzeit* (1891–2), which remains the best overview of the staggering variety and sheer mass of Hellenistic literature, is a case in point.

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systematically and programmatically associated the 'Hellenistic' period of Greek literature with Droysen's concept of 'Hellenismus' because he shared with Droysen – in stark contrast to most of his scholarly precursors – a positive view of this period and an enthusiasm for what we would call today the 'globalisation' of Greek culture.[28]

Wolf's definition of the start and end points of his 'Alexandrian' (as we would call it, 'Hellenistic') period, 323/2–30 BCE, happen to be identical with the ones commonly accepted today but were, in fact, never uncontroversial. In his *Grundriß der griechischen Litteratur* (vol. 1: 1836, vol. 2: 1845) Wolf's disciple Bernhardy took the beginning of Alexander's reign, rather than his death as the starting point for the period. Theodor Bergk, by contrast, argued in his treatise 'When Did the Alexandrian Period of Greek Literature Begin' (1872) for 300 BCE, because only the time of peace after the battle of Ipsus could have provided the environment essential for the thriving academic culture that Bergk, like many others, regarded as the defining characteristic of 'Alexandrian' literature. A more radical approach was proposed in 1925 by Richard Laqueur, who argued for 400 BCE, while Kenneth Dover suggested in the introduction to his commented selection of Theocritus' poems (1971) that 'Hellenistic' poetry began as early as the deaths of Sophocles and Euripides.[29]

A similar picture emerges from an examination of the proposed end dates of the period. In Bergk's *Griechische Literaturgeschichte*, published some twenty years after the treatise mentioned above, it stretches down to 146 BCE (incidentally also the end point of the final edition of Polybius' *Histories*), followed by an 'unproductive' period down to 44 BCE (the death of Caesar); both these periods, however, are part of a larger, bipartite division of Greek literature into a 'classical period in the sense proper', from the beginnings to 300 BCE, and the 'afterlife', a period generally devoid of originality, from 300 BCE to 527 CE![30] Along similar lines, Bernhardy had treated 'Alexandrian poetry' and Greek literature of the imperial period together. Wilamowitz, by contrast, distinguished a 'Hellenistic' period, lasting from 320 to 30 BCE, from the preceding 'Attic' and the following 'Roman' ones. Within that 'Hellenistic period', however, he identified, with reference to poetry in particular, a 'productive' and an 'unproductive' phase, with the latter beginning in 200, in later editions even in 250 BCE.[31]

[28] See Kassel 1987: 11 on Wilamowitz and Droysen, and 1–11 on scholarly views (usually negative) of Hellenistic literature and culture; Bichler 1983: 55–109 on Droysen.
[29] Kassel 1987: 5–16. [30] Kassel 1987: 7. [31] Kassel 1987: 8–9.

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To finish this survey with the two most recent standard treatments of Greek literary history, von Christ, Schmid and Stählin distinguish 'the creative period of post-classical literature', which they additionally define as 'Hellenistic literature', from 320 to 146 BCE, from the 'period of the transition to neo-classicism', from 146 BCE to 100 CE.[32] Zimmermann and Rengakos, by contrast, treat the literature of the archaic, classical and Hellenistic periods in two volumes. The first one, entitled *The Literature of Archaic and Classical Times*, ends at around 400 BCE – a time, the editors claim, that was perceived by contemporaries, for example, Aristophanes in the *Frogs* (405 BCE), as an 'epochal break' ('Epocheneinschnitt').[33] The second volume, entitled *The Literature of Classical and Hellenistic Times* covers literature from 400 BCE to the Augustan and even Tiberian periods (both Strabo and Dionysius of Halicarnassus, for example, are included among the historians), but begins with a characterisation of the Hellenistic period and 'Hellenistic poetry', thus leaving the fourth century, despite the volume's title, strangely undefined: is it part of the 'classical' or the 'Hellenistic' period, or does it, in some ways, belong to both?

This brief survey confirms – if any such confirmation was necessary – that periodisations are artificial constructs that respond to their creators' needs and reflect their prejudices rather than being based on any kind of 'objective' criteria. Our time has settled on 323 to 30 BCE, not least, one suspects, because those dates mark symbolically charged, significant political events.[34] They appeal because they are convenient, but many others could be and have, indeed, been chosen, and usually with good reason. The best approach thus seems to be the one adopted by Zimmermann and Rengakos (even though they never make this explicit) of operating with fluid concepts of period 'boundaries'.[35] Ways of writing and thinking did not suddenly and radically change in 323/2 BCE or, for that matter, 30 BCE. Recent studies on Dionysius of Halicarnassus, for example, have shown that both his historical and his critical works are firmly rooted in Hellenistic and, indeed, classical Greek (but also Roman Republican) traditions of thinking and writing, while also reflecting crucial aspects of his Augustan present.[36] Polybius, on the other hand, foreshadows in

[32] von Christ, Schmid and Stählin 1920: I, Table of Contents.
[33] Zimmermann and Rengakos 2011: vii.
[34] Cf. Kassel 1987: 15–16.
[35] Cf. also Prag and Quinn 2013b: 3–10; Whitmarsh 2017 for a challenge to the perception of a clear dividing line between the Hellenistic and imperial periods; and A. König and Whitton 2018b: 3–9 and 14–16 for parallel reflections on periodisation in relation to 'Nervan, Trajanic and Hadrianic literary culture' (4).
[36] See, e.g., de Jonge 2008 and the contributions in Hunter and de Jonge 2019a; Wiater 2018c, 2019.

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significant ways views of space and empire that are often associated with the imperial period.[37]

Looking at literature other than Greek problematises the boundary between Hellenistic and imperial still further. From the perspective of Jewish authors, for example, there is no clear dividing line between 'Hellenistic' and 'imperial'.[38] The word 'Hellenistic' is often used by researchers who work on Jewish and even early Christian literature to cover what most classicists would see as a combination of 'Hellenistic' and 'early imperial' material, without reference to the conventional classicist's end date of the late 30s BCE. That is partly because many works are not securely dateable. Scholars of this literature are used to looking at them together partly because they have no choice, and that necessity has given them the freedom to understand connections and common features.[39] Jewish literature also does not see the gap in literary production in the second and third quarters of the first century CE that in non-Jewish literature contributes to the impression (itself, as we have seen, not uncontroversial) of a clean break between 'Hellenistic' and 'imperial' literature. Philo and Josephus are among the most important writers in Greek from those decades: they bridge us smoothly from Augustus to the Flavians.[40]

With that background in mind it is clear that any attempt to define a late Hellenistic 'period' rigidly would be counter-productive. That is not to say that we should reject periodisation entirely. Individual authors and their works will always need to be discussed in terms of the literary and intellectual traditions on which they draw as well as the ways in which they respond to specific cultural, social, political and literary developments of their own time. All of the chapters that follow draw among others on texts that were written in the second and/or first centuries BCE, and we use 'late Hellenistic' as a convenient shorthand for that time-span. It is not meant, however, to carry any 'essentialist' meaning of the kind ascribed to it by Droysen.[41] Neither in terms of dates, nor in terms of 'contents', as we

[37] See Wiater in this volume. [38] Cf. Gruen 1998a: xvii; Siegert 2016.
[39] For example, see further p. 18 below on the work of Erich Gruen.
[40] See Niehoff 2018: esp. 18–22 on the way in which Philo's work anticipates many of the features of later imperial Greek literature.
[41] Jameson 1981: 27 writes about the 'fatally reductive' quality of periodisation, and the way in which it gives 'an impression of facile totalization, a seamless web of phenomena each of which, in its own way, "expresses" some inner truth – a world view or a period style or a set of structural categories which marks the whole length and breadth of the "period" in question'; at the same time even Jameson himself acknowledges the necessity and the potential rewards of periodisation; see also

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