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DECIMUS LABERIUS:
THE FRAGMENTS

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Edited by Costas Panayotakis
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DECIMUS LABERIUS

THE FRAGMENTS

EDITED WITH INTRODUCTION,
TRANSLATION, AND COMMENTARY

BY
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PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My interest in the Roman mime originated in the early 1990s when, as a PhD student at the University of Glasgow, I studied under the supervision of P. G. Walsh the episodic novel of Petronius from a theatrical point of view (a revised version of my PhD Thesis appeared with the title *Theatrum Arbitri: Theatrical elements in the Satyrিকা of Petronius* (Leiden 1995)). During my analysis of theatricality in Petronius I realised how important to the author of the *Satyrিকা*, and to ancient novelists in general, mime was as a structural device, and how inadequate our primary sources were for an understanding of this unique theatrical form. Its significance can be seen both in the frequent exploitation of various mime-motifs by authors of widely divergent literary genres such as love-elegy, satire, and the novel, and in the prominent role mime played in the shaping of medieval and modern popular theatre.

What survives from the scripts of the Roman literary mime today comprises some 55 titles of plays, a number of literary fragments (not all of them considered to be genuine extracts) which amount to about 200 lines, and a collection of over 730 *sententiae*, some of which are attributed to the mimographer Publilius. It is far from certain that all of these one-line apophthegms, which lack a theatrical context and were composed in iambic or trochaic metres, were written by him. The length of the remaining mime-fragments, composed usually in *senarii* or *septenarii*, varies from one word to 27 lines. The fragments are cited mainly by grammarians and lexicographers on account of their linguistic features and their literary value. The overwhelming majority of these mime-fragments, 44 titles and about 150 lines, is currently attributed to the Roman knight and mimographer Decimus Laberius, a contemporary of Cicero and Caesar, both of whom Laberius is reported to have confronted in public. It is therefore unsurprising that Laberius' work, which

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almost eclipses in number all the other Latin mime-fragments put together, forms the foundation on which many of the generalisations made by scholars in relation to mime are based. However representative Laberius' plays are of the Roman mime as a whole, any sweeping statements based on his fragments alone are potentially misleading, because they illuminate only to a small extent our understanding of the development of mime as a literary and theatrical phenomenon; for this reason his work needs to be complemented by careful consideration of the documentary evidence on the Greco-Roman mime. About 100 documents of material culture survive and shed light on the geographical expansion of this type of theatre and on the mechanics of the mime-profession with its acting specialisations, financial arrangements, and honourable rewards. These documents have been usefully edited, translated, and thoroughly commented on in the invaluable but unpublished PhD Thesis of R. L. Maxwell, *The documentary evidence for ancient mime* (Department of Classical Studies, University of Toronto 1993); a small number of literary and archaeological sources on mime is also included in E. Csapo and W. J. Slater, *The context of ancient drama* (Ann Arbor 1995) 369–78. The inscriptions on tombstones of mime-actors and mime-actresses, the graffiti on the walls of temples visited by mimes, the receipts of payment made out to mime-troupes, the dedicatory monuments set up to honour distinguished mime-players, and the visual images of scenes apparently pertaining to mime-plays should function as a salutary reminder that the fragments of the literary plays of Laberius and Publilius, as well as the titles and fragments of many other unspecified Roman mimographers, should be appropriately viewed as extracts of scripts destined for live performance.

However, in spite of its profound influence on the cultural and political spheres of classical and late antiquity, the literary Roman mime has been unduly neglected by modern scholars. The most recent critical edition (M. Bonaria, *Romani mimi* (Rome 1965)), with a translation into Italian, and a brief commentary on the genre's scanty remains, leaves a lot to be desired,

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especially in linguistic analysis and in the discussion of the fragments as parts of theatrical scripts now lost. The only English monograph on mime as a literary and theatrical genre is more than half a century old (A. Nicoll, *Masks, mimes and miracles: Studies in the popular theatre* (London, Sydney, and Bombay 1931)). E. Wüst's concise entry on mime, in *RE* xv.2.1727–64, is admittedly much more accurate and useful than H. Reich's detailed but confusing monograph on the subject (*Der Mimus* (Berlin 1903)); but even Wüst's scholarly contribution is outdated now. By the end of the twentieth century all the Greek mime-texts found in literary papyri had been re-edited and studied by D. L. Page (*Select papyri* III (Cambridge, Mass. and London 1950²)), H. Wiemken (*Der griechische Mimus* (Bremen 1972)), I. C. Cunningham (*Herodae mimiambi cum appendice fragmentorum mimorum papyraceorum* (Leipzig 1987)), and M. Andreassi (*Mimi greci in Egitto* (Bari 2001)), while many works on the literary history of the Roman mime and its influence (especially by L. Cicu, R. E. Fantham, and T. P. Wiseman) called for a re-examination of this theatrical form. Special mention should also be made of the unpublished PhD Thesis of P. E. Kehoe, *Studies in the Roman mime* (University of Cincinnati 1969).

Despite these developments in the field of the Greco-Roman mime, there was no monograph that would offer an up-to-date introduction to the Roman mime and its main issues from a theatrical perspective, a new edition of Laberius' literary fragments, their first-ever English translation, and a detailed commentary on them. This was a scholarly gap that needed immediate attention. Therefore, at one of the meetings of the Classical Association of Scotland (in Aberdeen), I suggested to W. S. Watt, who had by then retired from the Chair of Humanity in the University of Aberdeen, that he might produce a new critical edition of the mime-fragments. He responded jovially but firmly that, having edited Cicero's letters, he would never undertake the edition of an author whose text was transmitted in fragments (he held the same opinion in a note sent to me on 28 July 1998). He then recommended, with a smile on his face,

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that I embark on this task. I foolishly accepted the challenge immediately.

When I began the project, I was extremely ambitious in my demands, even though I had decided quite early on not to deal with the *sententiae* attributed to Publilius, both for reasons of space and because of the different problems inherent in an examination of these apophthegms, which had their own MSS tradition. But, setting the *sententiae* aside, I wanted in my project to cover everything in relation to mime and to solve all the problems associated with it. Now I see that I cannot account for all the stages of the development of the mime from an artless dramatic form into a fully-fledged theatrical genre which ousted the plays of Plautus and Terence from the Roman stage; nor can I provide definite answers to the questions posed by the interpretation of many mime-fragments. I have more often raised questions than answered them, and the reader ought not to be irritated that I use the verbs ‘may’ and ‘seem’ excessively. My aims in this volume were to offer a comprehensive as well as concise account of the development of the Roman mime, to consider why it occupied an undignified position in the literary and dramatic hierarchy of the Roman republican and early imperial eras, to situate the mimographer Decimus Laberius and his work within the relevant historical and literary context, to speculate (when-ever possible) on the meaning of the mime-fragments from a theatrical perspective (an original approach to the study of this literary corpus), and to make available to a wide audience material that has never before been presented in English. I will be happy if scholars and students of Latin literature, language, and popular culture are alerted through my work to what we do *not* know about mime, and if I convey the message that most of our literary evidence is precarious, and needs to be treated with extreme caution. A lot of work remains to be done in order for us to understand fully the reciprocal influence of mime and other forms of Greco-Roman literary and material culture. This book is only a small contribution towards the achievement of this larger goal.

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My researches on mime have been made possible with the award of both the Snell Visitorship for Martinmas Term 1999, which enabled me to spend my period of study leave at Balliol College, Oxford, and an Arts and Humanities Research Board grant for Candlemas Term 2000. I am grateful to the librarians of several colleges at Oxford (Balliol, Pembroke, Christ Church) and Cambridge (Clare, Trinity), as well as to the staff in the Bodleian Library (especially, Duke Humfrey) and the British Library, for dealing with my requests to see MSS and early editions of authors who cited mime-fragments. J. N. Adams at All Souls was generous both with his hospitality and with his feedback on an early draft of this book, while Anthony Esposito of the *OED* devoted a lot of his time to the scrutiny of the translation of Laberius' fragments. Various aspects of the project were discussed with Mario Andreassi, Ilias Arnaoutoglou, Susanna Morton Braund, Peter Brown, Adrian Gratwick (who kindly allowed me to cite his unpublished translation of the lines Macrobius attributes to Laberius (= 90), and gave me invaluable guidance in matters of Latin orthography), Roger Green, Stephen Harrison, Leofranc Holford-Strevens, the late Harry Jocelyn, Matthew Leigh, the late Oliver Lyne, Eric Martin, Jonathan Powell, Michael Sharp, Niall Slater, William Slater, Friedrich Spoth, Catherine Steel, Peter Walsh, David West, and Peter Wiseman. I thank them all for their encouragement, guidance, and helpful comments. Michael Sharp, Elizabeth Hanlon, and Jodie Barnes at Cambridge University Press have been very efficient and supportive throughout the production of this volume, and Malcolm Todd was careful, alert, and effective as copy-editor; he helped greatly in improving the presentation of the material in the book and in correcting many infelicities in the commentary. I am especially grateful to Michael Reeve, whose vigorous criticism urged me to revise the layout of the text and to clear the *apparatus criticus* of readings and conjectures which need not be recorded. His acute observations saved me from many glaring errors and his opinion on the presentation of the material in the volume helped me to position the

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commentary in an effective way. Many of the views that appear in the introduction and the commentary were originally aired in papers I gave at Cambridge, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Lampeter, Leeds, Manchester, Maynooth, Montreal, Munich, Newcastle, Nicosia, and Pretoria. The contribution of the audience of these meetings to my understanding of Roman mime and of Laberius' work is gratefully acknowledged here, but any factual and interpretative errors are entirely my own. My twin brother, Stelios Panayotakis, kindly provided me with copies of works on the mime which were not easily accessible to me. My former colleague Douglas MacDowell gave me a lot of sensible advice and vigorous encouragement throughout the various stages of this long and frustrating project. He has also read the whole typescript and made various helpful suggestions. I thank him for his unfailing support during the past 19 years, and I dedicate this volume to him.