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Greek Epigram in Reception: J. A. Symonds, Oscar Wilde, and the Invention of Desire, 1805-1929 (Classical Presences)

Gideon Nisbet

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Greek Epigram in Reception is a chronological survey of the reception history of the Greek Anthology, a Byzantine collection of ancient Greek short poems known as epigrams. Tracing the strange evolution of the Greek Anthology from the early nineteenth century to the years after the first World War, the volume analyses the complex webs of rhetoric that are spun as writers and translators bring their different agendas to bear on the Anthology's text, pruning it to meet their needs. As so little was known about its poets, and because it stood for the "Anthology" of the Greeks and their culture, the text became the battleground during the 1870s-90s on which normative and dissident interpretations of Ancient Greece were fought out. An emergent mass readership became caught between opposing and rhetorically loaded accounts, casting the Anthology and thus the ancient race on whom the British were supposed to be modelling themselves as patriots and doting spouses or lovers of male Beauty, like the Decadent sensation Oscar Wilde. The after-effects of this cultural war were to stretch into the 1920s, and still echo today.

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